

GENDER IDENTITY THREAT AND COMPENSATION IN YOUNG AMERICAN MEN

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# GENDER IDENTITY THREAT AND COMPENSATION IN YOUNG AMERICAN MEN

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This dissertation addresses why young men are disproportionately more likely than young women to engage in a host of adverse behaviors including violence, infidelity, drinking and risk-taking. I refer to these behaviors as gendered behaviors. Drawing on social identity theory and theories of gendered interaction, I develop an interactional theory of gendered behavior and suggest that challenges to one's status as a prototypical man, otherwise known as gender identity threat, leads young, heterosexual men to engage in stereotypically male-typed behaviors. Study 1 examines the effect of gender identity threat on infidelity. Using panel data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, I examine the role of economic dependency, a proxy for gender identity threat, on infidelity in young men. I find that economic dependency increases the odds that married men will engage in extramarital sex. Economic dependency does not increase the odds of cheating for cohabiting men. Study 2 experimentally investigates the effect of gender identity threat on anti-gay aggression. Findings show moderate support for the theory. While not all threatened men display more anti-gay aggression, certain marginalized groups of men do. This study also makes a unique methodological contribution in that it cultivates a new paradigm for the study of aggression in laboratory settings. Study 3 seeks to understand the ways young men define masculinity, experience threats to masculinity, and respond to emasculation. Analysis of 44 in-depth interviews with undergraduate men reveals a core of characterizations and behaviors these men use to define masculinity. When they fail to

live up to this definition of masculinity, or are held accountable by their peers for failing to live up to this definition of masculinity, they experience gender identity threat. The majority of young men use healthy strategies to deal with these threats. However, less often, young men respond to gender identity threat by engaging in adverse gendered behaviors including drinking and drug use, risk-taking, violence, aggression towards women, and sexual coercion. Together, these studies suggest that many of the deleterious behaviors associated with young masculinity stem from identity insecurity and cultural definitions of “appropriately” masculine behavior.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christin L. Munsch was born near Pittsburgh, PA and grew up in Chester, VA. She received a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature from the University of Virginia in 2001 and a Master of Arts in Sociology from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2004. Her research and teaching interests include gender, sexuality, social psychology, violence and inequality.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom, Carol Munsch.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Previous research finds that men, more than women, engage in a host of adverse behaviors. For example, men are more likely than women to have sex at an early age, have multiple sexual partners (Abma, Martinez, Mosher & Dawson, 2004; Singh, Wulf, Samara & Cuca, 2000), and engage in casual sex, extramarital sex, and cybersex (Peterson & Hyde, 2010). Men are more likely than women to drink (White, Raskin, Huselid, & Farmer, 1997; Wilsnack, Vogeltanz, Wilsnack & Harris, 2000), binge drink (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010; Naimi et al., 2003), and develop alcohol dependencies (Hasin, Stinson, Ogburn & Grant, 2007). Men are disproportionately more likely to be in motor vehicle accidents, alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents, and fatal motor vehicle accidents (Cerrelli, 1998; Li, Baker, Langlois & Kelen, 1998). Men are more likely than women to commit suicide (Kessler, Borges & Walters, 1999; Moscicki, 1997; National Institute of Mental Health, 2012), and to commit violent crimes (Steffensmeier, 1995) including rape (Greenfield, 1997), intimate partner violence (Greenfield et al., 1998), and bias-motivated crimes (Berrill, 1992; Gerstenfield, 2011). And, men are more likely than women to take risks (Byrnes, Miller & Schafer, 1999; Ginsburg & Miller, 1982, Morrongiello & Rennie, 1998) and consequently suffer injury or premature death (Ely & Meyerson, 2008, 2010; Faul, Xu, Wald, & Coronado, 2010).

Of course, the extent to which gender differences are found in these behaviors vary. For example, men are only slightly more likely than women to engage in sexual infidelity (Peterson & Hyde, 2010), whereas they are much more likely to commit violent crimes (Gerstenfield, 2011; Greenfield et al., 1998; Steffensmeier, 1995). Nonetheless, these behaviors share two characteristics: 1) men disproportionately engage in them and 2) they are culturally associated with masculinity. Throughout this dissertation, I refer to behaviors such as these as “gendered

behaviors.”

Scholars have identified a number of personal, social, and cultural influences across a variety of gendered behaviors. Among the various approaches, the two most widely cited are theories of evolution and theories of socialization. Evolutionary psychologists suggest that gendered behaviors evolved as features of natural and sexual selection (Bjorklund & Shackelford, 1999; Buss, 1996; Kenrick et al., 1996; Symons, 1979; Thornhill & Palmer, 2000; Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983; Wilson & Daly, 1996; Wilson & Daly, 1998). For example, Daly and Wilson (1999) explain that historically violence and risk-taking served to signal prowess and resilience increasing one’s likelihood of being chosen as a reproductive partner. Because violent males were more likely to reproduce than passive males, they were able to pass their affinity for violence onto future generations. Similarly, Thornhill and Palmer (2000) contend that rape developed as a strategy to ensure males’ successful reproduction when reproduction by other means was unlikely, whereas others (Bjorklund & Shackelford, 1999; Buss, 1995; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Symons, 1979) argue that the ability to minimally invest in offspring has led men to desire sexual variety, promiscuity and infidelity.

These theories explain gendered behavior in terms of ultimate causation. Theories of socialization, on the other hand, point to more proximate causes. Children model behavior – and receive positive and negative reinforcement for behavior – leading boys and men to engage in masculine-typed behavior and girls and women to engage in feminine-typed behavior. Socializing agents include the family, peers, schools, religious institutions and the mass media. For example, boys who witness family violence as children are more likely to engage in family violence as adults (Bandura, 1973, Kalmuss, 1984; O’Leary & Murphy, 1988; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980) and boys who grow up in homophobic homes are more likely to perpetrate anti-

gay violence as young adults (Ehrlich, 1992; Franklin, 2000; Gerstenfeld, 2003). Others purport that socialization practices teach boys to value agency, exploration, and independence and that these values may lead to experimentation with drugs, alcohol, unsafe driving practices, and risk taking (Bandura, 1969; Maisto, Carey & Bradizza, 1999; Morrongiella, Zszieborski & Normand, 2010). Avoidant coping styles, characterized by efforts to escape rather than deal with stressors, are also socialized in boys. This personality characteristic has been linked to both alcohol dependency and suicide (Cooper, Russell, Skillner, Frone & Mudar, 1992; Evans & Dunn, 1995).

The role of evolution compared to socialization in human behavior – more commonly referred to as “nature versus nurture” – is a long-standing debate and won’t be solved here. However, these theories frame contemporary thinking regarding gendered behavior. For example, in her book *The Purity Myth*, Jessica Valenti (2010) notes the tendency for parents to explain young men’s behavior with the quip, “boys will be boys.” This tendency chalks gendered behavior up to natural and innate differences between the sexes and is grounded in evolutionary thinking. On the other hand, organizations rooted in reformist feminist values like *Futures without Violence*, *Gender Justice* and *Safe and Healthy Relationships for All*, advocate teaching boys to love, care and respect for themselves and others. In other words, they imply that socialization leads to gendered behavior and that changes in socialization practices will lead to changes in the behavior of boys and men.

Yet, evolution and socialization are rather distal explanations. In both cases, it seems that men are at the mercy of their past – either their ancestral past or their childhood and the culture into which they were born. But, if these behaviors are so pre-determined, why do some men choose to engage in them whereas others do not? Moreover, why do some men choose to engage



in them at times, and choose not to at other times? Given these questions, it seems that more immediate and contextual factors are at play, even if theories of evolution and socialization have some explanatory power.

In this dissertation, I adopt an interactional approach to the study of gendered behavior. Interactional explanations highlight the dynamic and changing sequence of events in social interaction and suggest that people modify their actions in response to contexts, situations, and the actions of others. Thus, I focus on the immediate causes and contextual factors that lead to gendered behavior. I argue that gendered behaviors arise in response to situations and experiences that call men's gender identity into question. I refer to these situations and experiences as "gender identity threats" or "masculinity threats." In response to gender identity threat, I assert that men are likely to engage in behaviors designed to reinstate a positive, adequately masculine gender identity and that these behaviors come in the form of activities culturally associated with masculinity. I test this assertion across a series of three methodologically diverse studies to examine the effect of gender identity threat in young, heterosexual, American men.

### ***Why Study Young, Heterosexual, U.S. Men?***

There is tremendous diversity in men's behavior across time, space and the life course (Connell, 2005) making it important for masculinity scholars to specify the particular group of men about whom their research investigates. I am interested in the construction of masculinity, and have chosen to investigate gender identity threat and compensation in young, heterosexual men living in the United States between the ages 18 to 30. The reasons for this choice are twofold. First, many of the behaviors associated with young masculinity are particularly deleterious. Whereas leadership, success and competence are associated with more mature forms

of masculinity, the adverse gendered behaviors described above are particularly common among younger men. For example, the majority of anti-gay violence perpetrators are men under the age of 22 (Berrill, 1992), and research shows that infidelity is particularly common in younger individuals (Treas & Giesen, 2000). Therefore, although the theory is applicable to a variety of social groups, this dissertation investigates the perpetration of gendered behavior in young, heterosexual American men. In the concluding chapter I suggest useful extensions of this research including the investigation of gendered behavior in diverse populations.

### *Description of Chapters*

In chapter 2 of the dissertation, I draw on social identity theory (SIT) (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and theories of gendered interaction (Correll, Thebaud & Benard, 2007; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999; Risman, 1998; West & Zimmerman, 1987; West & Fenstermaker, 1995) to develop the theoretical argument. I then apply the theory, and discuss relevant literature regarding infidelity and anti-gay aggression. This application leads to a series of hypotheses that I empirically examine in chapters 3 and 4.

In chapter 3, I argue that economic dependency threatens men's gender identity by calling into question their breadwinning ability (Anderson, 1997; Atkinson, Greenstein, & Lang, 2005; Brines, 1994). Using economic dependency as a proxy for gender identity threat, I utilize a large, nationally representative data set (the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, NLSY97) to investigate the effect of economic dependency on young men's likelihood of engaging in infidelity controlling for a host of individual and relationship characteristics. I then present the results of my analyses and discuss interesting differences by marital status.

Chapter 4 begins with a presentation of results from two pilot studies designed to test a new paradigm for the study of violence and aggression in laboratory settings. The technique

employs immersive virtual environment (IVE) technology and accelerometers which allow for subjects to engage in violence toward a specified target without actually hurting or endangering the target. After detailing this new paradigm for the study of violence and aggression, I then employ this technique to examine the effect of gender identity threat on a second gendered behavior, anti-gay violence, in a sample of young, heterosexual men at Cornell University. I also examine the effect of gender identity importance on the relationship between gender identity threat and anti-gay violence. I end the chapter with a discussion of racial differences I find in the gender identity threat and compensation process. Together studies 1 and 2 further our understanding of how gendered behaviors emerge by isolating a particular mechanism (Chapter 4) – gender identity threat – and investigating the effect of this mechanism in a nationally representative sample of young people (Chapter 3).

In chapter 5, I present qualitative data from 44 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with heterosexual, Cornell undergraduate men. This study was undertaken in order to develop an in-depth understanding of how young men define masculinity and experience gender identity threat. In this chapter I discuss the informants' perceptions of "typical or average" masculinity, personality traits and characteristics they associate with masculinity, situations and events they experience as threatening, and their responses to gender identity threat. Lastly, in chapter 6, I draw conclusions from the findings of each analysis, discuss the broader implications of the research for theory and practice, and suggest fruitful avenues for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORY

Gender is a structural property of society deeply embedded in our individual personalities, in the unwritten rules of social interaction, and in our institutions (Risman 2004). Theorists typically focus on one aspect or level of this set of three in their explanations of gendered phenomena. Individual-level explanations point to the traits and characteristics that people bring into particular situations, and imply that these characteristics have a direct or indirect influence on behavior. The evolutionary theories and theories of socialization discussed in Chapter 1 both operate at the level of individuals. Interactional explanations, on the other hand, highlight the dynamic and changing sequence of social interaction and suggest that people modify their actions in response to the actions and expectations of others. Institutional explanations point to the distribution of material resources, formal organizational schemas, and ideological cultural discourse to explain social behavior. Risman argues that gender stratification and inequality operate simultaneously across these three levels, making social change especially difficult. For example, even if individuals could be raised to have absolutely no gender biases, the influence of gender in social interaction and institutions would serve to perpetuate gender inequality.

I build on Risman's notion of gender as structure and maintain that gendered behaviors are the product of individuals, interactions and institutions. However, because individual accounts are more common while interactional accounts have been largely overlooked, one of the theoretical contributions of this dissertation is the development of an interactional theory of gendered behavior.

### ***Social Identity Theory***

My theoretical framework draws on the tradition of social identity theory (SIT) (Hogg 2006; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) and theories of gendered interaction (Correll, Thebaud & Benard, 2007; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999; Risman, 1998; West & Zimmerman, 1987; West & Fenstermaker, 1995). Both SIT and theories of gendered interaction take into account the everyday negotiations that occur between individuals, and see these negotiations as a dynamic process in which people interpret the world around them and respond.

Fundamentally, the process of gender identity threat and compensation outlined in this chapter is rooted in self-esteem or one's overall positive or negative self evaluation. Evolutionary theorists suggest that self-esteem evolved in order to ascertain one's level of status and acceptance in social groups (Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2003; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary & Downs, 1995; Leary, Tambor, & Downs, 1995) and as a protective mechanism to buffer mortality anxiety (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004). Regardless of its origins, it is generally accepted that individuals are motivated to seek and maintain positive self views (Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2003; Leary & Downs, 1995).

According to SIT, one of the ways people maintain positive self-esteem is through their identification with social groups that are important and meaningful (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Smith & Tyler, 1997). Because the self is reflexive, it can take itself as an object and categorize, classify and name itself in relation to other social categories. Through this process of self-categorization, the self comes to identify social identities, or "in-groups," with which it sees itself as similar (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994; Turner, Hogg, Oakes,

Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). Yet, social identities can only form in relation to other contrasting groups, or “out-groups.” Out-groups are groups to which people feel a sense of dissimilarity and opposition (for example, black/white, democrat/republican, Cornell student/other university students). SIT research consistently finds that self-esteem motivates both in-group favoritism (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and out-group derogation (e.g., Fein & Spencer, 1997; Willis, 1981). For example, Fein and Spencer (1997) found that people who had positive self-views were more likely to use negative stereotypes to judge out-group members when they were threatened by negative performance feedback. To the extent that they judged out-group members, they felt better about themselves. In line with this research, I argue that gendered behaviors may serve to enhance self-esteem in response to social identity threat.

At any given moment in time, each of one’s social identities is more or less salient and the extent of identity salience greatly affects human behavior (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000, 2005, 2010; McLeish & Oxoby, 2007, 2011; Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999). A salient, or “activated” (Stets & Burke, 2000) social identity simply means the identity is functioning psychologically. The salience of an identity in a situation depends on context: different identities become active as the situation changes and as relevant stimuli influence how one self-categorizes. Scholars have conceptualized race, political affiliation, and even sports teams as meaningful social identities (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Hogg, 1992, 1993; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982). Yet, gender is one of the most important, salient, and pervasive social categories (Brewer & Lui, 1989; Fiske, 1992; Ridgeway, 2010; Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992).

Identity salience can be primed in a number of ways, including the receipt of information regarding a particular social identity. When an individual receives a threat in the form of

information that challenges his or her status as a “good” or prototypical member in a group that is meaningful, identity is simultaneously activated (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1999) leading to decreased self-esteem (Jetten, Branscombe, & Spears, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In an effort to re-establish the legitimacy of their in-group status and restore a positive self view, people behave in ways representative of the relevant in-group (Branscombe et al., 2002; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001, Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri & Grasselli, 2003) and in ways that distance relevant out-group members (Branscombe et al., 1993; Maass et al. 2003; Quillian 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

I am interested in gender as a social identity and how gender identity threat affects the behavior of young, heterosexual men. R.W. Connell (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) conceives of masculinity as a hierarchy of differently-valued masculinities. “Hegemonic masculinity” occupies the most esteemed position, and as such, it serves as a monolithic prototype or ideal to which men strive (Lusher & Robins, 2009). Hegemonic masculinity, like a prototype of masculinity, is not representative of any one person, but rather is the most socially endorsed type of masculinity and represents an ideal set of prescriptive norms. The qualities associated with hegemonic masculinity vary historically and culturally. In contemporary Western society, the hegemonic ideal includes the traits of being heterosexual, white, monied, and self-possessed (Donaldson, 1993; Johnson, 2005; Kimmel 1994; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). In other words, it is a reflection of the characteristics of the most prestigious and powerful. Moreover, for young men, the current rules of masculinity call for sexual virility, violence, homophobia, excessive drinking, and power over women (Connell 2005; Kimmel 1994, 2008; Lorber 1994; Pascoe 2007; Perlata 2007; Perry 2001). Of course, not all men subscribe to these norms or hold other men accountable to these norms. There are

certainly sub-groups that explicitly eschew hegemonic definitions of masculinity (for example, see Anderson, 2008). It is important to note, however, that the majority of men do not need to engage in these behaviors in order for them to be held up as culturally normative ideals of male behavior (Connell, 2005). In addition, although the powerful shape the standard, all men benefit (to varying degrees) from the prestige associated with this ideal when they act in ways that signify a masculine self. Thus, I suspect that men who receive a threat to their gender identity will compensate by expressing behaviors associated with hegemonic masculinity.

The ways in which different groups of boys and men in different social locations signify masculine selves vary. For example, African American boys learn to signify masculine selves by breaking rules and talking back to teachers (H. Ferguson, 2001), whereas business students learn to signify masculinity by appearing to be instrumentally oriented, rational, and able to manage subordinates (Sinclair, 1995). What these acts have in common is the ability to exert control and resist being controlled (Johnson, 2005). Fundamentally, hegemonic masculinity is marked by a tendency for men to dominate other men and subordinate women (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Given that hegemonic masculinity encourages the domination and subordination of others, coupled with the fact that threats to social identity encourage distancing behaviors targeted toward relevant out-group members, I expect threatened men to engage in hypermasculine behaviors representative of hegemonic masculinity that simultaneously serve to punish relevant out-group members. In particular, two relevant out-groups are likely. First, women constitute a relevant out-group in that masculinity and femininity are relational and defined in opposition to one another. In other words, to be masculine is to not be feminine. Second, gay men constitute a relevant out-group in that heterosexuality and homophobia are defining features of masculinity (Kimmel, 1994). In fact, epithets like “gay” and “fag” are used to question masculinity more so



than sexual orientation (Pascoe 2005, 2007). Thus, homosexual men are likely to be seen as out-group rather than in-group members.

### ***Gender as the Rules of the Game***

Social Identity Theory predicts that individuals experiencing a threat to a meaningful social identity will engage in compensatory action in the form of prototypical behaviors related to the social identity in question, as well as distancing behaviors toward relevant out-group members. Regarding gender and gender identity threat, Ridgeway and Correll's (2004) conception of "gender as the rules of the game" is useful in that it helps predict more precisely which compensatory and distancing behaviors to expect. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) argue that gender beliefs are the "rules of the game" to which men and women are held accountable. Or, as West and Zimmerman (1987) have written, gender is something we do. Behaviors, such as dressing, speaking, sitting and walking, produce and confirm one's gender identity when they are performed in accordance with dominant gender definitions (Lorber, 1994; Risman 1998, West & Zimmerman, 1987).

The way we learn which behaviors are culturally accepted for our gender is by accountability. Gender appropriate behaviors are expected, and when we do not "do" gender in these culturally accepted ways we "engage in behavior at the risk of gender assessment" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 136). This not only means that when we violate gender scripts we are called out for not playing by the rules of the game, it also means that we anticipate others will hold us accountable to these hegemonic beliefs. As a result, we modify our behavior to avoid being called out. As noted above, for young men, the rules of masculinity call for sexual virility, violence, homophobia, excessive drinking, and power over women (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 1994, 2008; Lorber, 1994; Pascoe, 2007; Perlata, 2007; Perry, 2001).

This approach also explains why certain individuals are the targets of gendered behaviors whereas others are not. Individuals may hold accountable those who they view as violating cultural gender scripts. For example, gender norms dictate that men have sexual relationships with women and women have sexual relationships with men. Gay men and lesbians, by choosing same-sex partners, are not “doing gender” according to these cultural rules (Herek, 1992; Perry, 2001). Violence may be one way of holding these men and women accountable for gender script violations (Perry, 2001). Similarly, the assumption of separate spheres dictates that women – even women who work full-time – place their husband’s career above their own and contribute only in a supplemental fashion (Deutsch & Saxon, 1998; Potuchek, 1997). Therefore, in addition to reproducing traditional notions of gender, infidelity may also serve to hold breadwinning women accountable for “doing gender” incorrectly.

It is worth reiterating that SIT is most applicable when individuals are members of groups they perceive to be important and meaningful. Thus, I propose that the importance one places on their gender identity will moderate the relationship between threat and gendered behavior such that men who highly value their masculinity will be more likely to engage in gendered behaviors when under gender identity threat.

In sum, the interactional theory of gendered behavior explicated here borrows strongly from both SIT and theories of gendered interaction. SIT predicts that threats to gender identity will result in compensatory behaviors and behaviors that punish relevant out-group members, whereas the “doing gender” approach sheds light on what these compensatory actions will look like. Both approaches predict likely “targets.” The theory helps us better understand the situational circumstances under which gendered behavior occurs.

## *Gender and Infidelity*

Infidelity means different things to different people, and what constitutes infidelity in one relationship may not constitute infidelity in another. Therefore, it will be helpful to define infidelity as it will be used throughout this dissertation. I use the terms “infidelity” and “extramarital sex” interchangeably to refer to vaginal intercourse with someone other than one’s spouse. Although this definition does not include sexual minorities historically denied marriage rights, the indiscretions of dating or cohabiting couples, or “mild” sexual acts like kissing or flirting, the majority of sociological research on infidelity adheres to this definition. Occasionally, I discuss literature that departs from this definition. In such instances, I note this in the text.

While the majority of intimate, committed relationships either explicitly or implicitly imply sexual fidelity, a handful of studies based on nationally representative data reveal that between 20% and 25% of U.S. married men and between 10% and 15% of U.S. married women report having engaged in extramarital sex at some point during their marriage (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael & Michaels, 1994; Wiederman, 1997). Despite these estimates, few sociologists have examined this relatively common phenomenon. On the surface, it seems that few decisions are more private than the decision to engage in an affair. Yet, in this section, I argue that individual, interactional and institutional forces shape these very private decisions.

One of the most consistent findings across studies is that men engage in sexual infidelity more than women (Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001; Laumann et al., 1994; Petersen & Hyde 2010; Wiederman, 1997). The majority of theorizing about this difference has remained at the level of individuals and come from the field of evolutionary psychology. The focus of this research has been on elicitations of jealousy in response to emotional and sexual infidelity. This

framework argues that men and women face different adaptive problems stemming from reproductive differences. Because females have internal fertilization and gestation, there is virtually no maternal uncertainty. Males, on the other hand, can never be fully certain of the paternity of the children their partners birth. These reproductive differences are associated with different risks. Men risk both lowered paternity probability and investment in children that are not their own should their partner have sexual contact with someone else. Women risk the diversion of their mate's commitment and resources should their mate become emotionally involved with someone else. As a result, these risks have imposed selection pressures on men to defend against sexual infidelity and on women to defend against emotional infidelity (Buss et al., 1992; Buss et al., 1999; Buunk, Angleitner, Oubaid & Buss, 1996).

Although the evolutionary psychology approach has primarily been used to explain reactions to infidelity, implicit in the perspective is an argument regarding fundamental gender differences in mating strategies. Specifically, it implies that because women are more biologically bound to the reproduction of their offspring they are more adapted to long-term mating strategies. Men, on the other hand, are less invested in the rearing of their offspring and, as a result, are more adapted to short-term mating behaviors (Buss 1996; Kenrick et al., 1996). In other words, the evolutionary approach assumes men are innately predisposed to want sexual variety and therefore engage in sexual infidelity (Symons, 1979).

Evolutionary explanations for infidelity operate at the level of individuals. Sociological research, on the other hand, has largely relied on institutional explanations for men's disproportionate involvement in sexual infidelity. Recall that institutional explanations point to the distribution of material resources, formal organizational schemas, and ideological cultural discourses that constrain or enable infidelity. For example, men have traditionally had greater

power and control in intimate relationships, allowing them to engage in extramarital sex without the risk of reprisal. Men have also historically had a greater presence in the workforce and been more financially independent than women. Hence, men have had more opportunities to meet potential sex partners, more financial resources to engage in (and hide) extramarital behavior, and the capability to support themselves should their partners find out about their extramarital encounters and leave (Greeley, 1994; Schwartz & Rutter, 1998). Interestingly, recent studies find that men's and women's rates of infidelity are converging in younger adults. This finding can be attributed to women's greater presence in the workforce, their increased financial independence, and more accepting sexual norms for women since the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. (Atkins et al., 2001; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Wiederman, 1997; Willetts, Sprecher & Beck, 2004).

Gender further operates as at the level of institutions in that different beliefs and values are transmitted to men and women. These beliefs and values either encourage or discourage engagement in extramarital sex. According to traditional gender scripts, men are – and should be – more interested in sex and sex with multiple partners, than women (Byers, 1996; Zilbergeld, 1996). Consequently, men are more likely to believe that infidelity is normative or at least acceptable. Providing evidence for this argument, Treas and Giesen (2000) found that when interest in sex and permissiveness of sexual values was controlled, the main effect of gender on infidelity was markedly reduced.

I argue that the evolutionary and institutional explanations for infidelity outlined above are insufficient due to their inability to account for within gender variation. Not all women are faithful and not all men cheat. In fact, most men do not cheat. Why are infidelity rates so low if there are evolutionary payoffs for men? And, why do some men engage in infidelity whereas

others do not despite having been exposed to similar cultural beliefs, despite similar financial backgrounds, and despite similar opportunities for such behavior? The interactional argument put forth in this chapter addresses these concerns.

Interactional explanations direct our attention to the social experiences of individuals and suggest that people modify their actions in response to the actions of others. Several scholars have put forth interactional explanations for infidelity. Namely, social exchange theorists maintain that underbenefitted<sup>1</sup> partners use infidelity to restore equity in their relationships (Prins, Buunk & VanYperen, 1993; Sprecher, Regan, McKinney, Maxwell & Wazienski, 1997; Walster et al., 1978). A handful of others have argued that religious attendance decreases infidelity by embedding men and women in social networks that promote accountability (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Atkins & Kessel, 2008; Burdette, Ellison, Sherkat & Gore, 2007; Liu, 2000). Yet, these interactional processes are not gender-neutral. It is likely that men and women will react differently in similar situational contexts according to gender normative expectations. Thus, in this dissertation, I put forth an interactional explanation for infidelity that takes into account the ways in which gender beliefs and gendered expectations shape decisions. As a result, the theory is the first to address both between gender and within gender variability in infidelity.

Gendered beliefs and expectations are particularly useful in thinking about infidelity. Not only does gender frame interaction (West & Zimmerman, 1987, Ridgeway, 1997), gender theorists argue that stereotypical beliefs are especially likely to shape interaction under conditions of frequent contact and cooperative interdependence (Glick & Fiske, 1999; Ridgeway, 2001; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). Heterosexual relationships, by definition, necessitate

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<sup>1</sup> Social exchange theorists use the term “underbenefitted” to describe unequal relationships, yet have operationalized the term differently. For example, Walster et al. (1978) found that individuals were more likely to have an affair if they felt “more desirable” than their partner, whereas Prins and colleagues (1993) found that women (but not men) who felt “deprived” in their primary relationship were more likely to have an affair.

these conditions: men and women interact constantly and mutually depend on one another to accomplish relationship and family goals. As a result, it is especially likely that stereotypical beliefs regarding gender will organize heterosexual interaction.

Specifically, I argue that sex is a highly symbolic act that serves as an indicator of “appropriate” masculinity. For men – particularly young, American men – the dominant definition of masculinity is scripted in terms of sexual virility and conquest, particularly with respect to multiple sexual partners (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 1993, 2008; Pascoe, 2007, Sanday, 2007). Given the overarching theory put forth in this dissertation – that is, that threatened gender identity in men will lead to compensatory behavior in the form of culturally normative ideals of male behavior – I hypothesize that married men undergoing a threat to their gender identity will be more likely to engage in sex with multiple partners.

The dataset used for this investigation, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97), does not contain direct measures of gender identity threat. Previous research, however, suggests an alternative measure. Breadwinning ability is one of the most consistent and central components of masculine identity for married men in industrialized countries (Gerson, 1993; Kimmel, 1993, Thebaud, 2010, Tichenor, 2005a, 2005b.) Cultural norms dictate that married men financially provide for their families, despite increases in women’s labor force participation (Martin, 2003; Potuchek, 1997; Townsend, 2002). Because being a breadwinner is an important “rule of masculinity” (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) or way that married men “do gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987), the inability to achieve breadwinner status may constitute a threat to men’s gender identity (Atkinson, Greenstein, & Lang, 2005; Brines, 1994; McCloskey 1996; Springer, 2010). Therefore, I hypothesize that the more economically dependent a married man is on his partner, the greater his likelihood of engaging in infidelity. Not only does infidelity

allow threatened men to engage in behaviors culturally associated with masculinity (i.e., sex, sex with multiple partners), it simultaneously serves to distance threatened men from relevant out-group members (i.e., their breadwinning spouses). In this way, engaging in infidelity may be a way of doing gender and reestablishing masculine identity for married men. This theory is empirically tested in chapter 3.

***Infidelity and cohabitation.*** A secondary goal of chapter 3 is to explore whether or not economic dependency is a form of gender identity threat that is unique to married men. For married men, economic dependency represents a threat to gender identity due to culturally mainstream ideas about men's and women's roles in marriage. Yet, more and more couples are choosing to cohabit before marriage and instead of marriage. Might cohabiting men also experience economic dependency as threatening? On the one hand, increasing rates of cohabitation suggest cohabitation may be an emerging substitute for marriage (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Bumpass, Raley, & Sweet, 1995; Raley, 2000; Graefe & Lichter, 1999). On the other hand, it is also likely that marriage is a uniquely gendered institution in which husbands and wives share an understanding of the behaviors expected of them (Brines, 1994; Potuchek, 1997), whereas cohabiters do not. Compared to married individuals, cohabiters generally express more egalitarian attitudes (Brines & Joyner, 1999; Clarkberg, Stolzenberg & White, 1995; Miller & Sassler, 2010; Shelton & John, 1993). Perhaps cohabitation provides the benefits of intimacy without strong expectations for adherence to traditional gender roles. Alternatively, couples may stave off marriage until they can fulfill the gendered expectations associated with it (Brown 2000; Sanchez, Manning, & Smock, 1998; Smock & Manning, 1997). As evidence of this, couples who are economically unstable are more likely to cohabit (Clarkberg, 1999) and cohabiting couples are more likely to marry when the male partner has high earnings (Brown,



2000; Sanchez, Manning, & Smock, 1998; Smock & Manning, 1997).

Moreover, there may be something about marriage, but not cohabitation, that compels men and women to engage in gender normative behavior. Economists have argued that marriage is the point at which individual goals are replaced by joint utility-maximization (Becker 1991; Parsons & Bales, 1955; Murphy, 2002). As evidence of this, married couples typically pool their resources and income (Treas, 1993; Heimdal & Houseknecht, 2003; Hamplova & LeBourdais, 2009), whereas cohabiters do not (Addo & Sassler, 2010; Heimdal & Houseknecht, 2003). Thus, men's economic dependence may be especially threatening in the context of marriage, but not in the context of cohabitation. Thus, I do not predict economic dependency will be related to infidelity in cohabiting men.

***Women's infidelity.*** The above theory outlines an interactional approach to predicting men's infidelity. However, given that masculinity and femininity are relational – meaning that each is defined in terms of what the other is not – breadwinner status is not a marker of femininity. If a woman is unemployed or makes less money than her partner, her femininity is not called into question. Similarly, sexual encounters are a defining feature of masculinity, not femininity. In fact, women who have multiple sexual partners, even if they have not engaged in infidelity, are often held accountable for breaking gender norms. There is ample popular literature (for example, Valenti, 2008, 2010) and scientific evidence (Gentry, 1998; Hynie & Lydon, 1995; Sprecher et al., 1997) of a sexual double standard. Thus, even if women were threatened by unemployment or economic dependency, there is no reason to believe that women would seek to restore threatened gender identity by engaging in extradyadic or extramarital sex. I therefore do not predict economic dependency to be related to women's fidelity.

To recapitulate, the following hypotheses will be examined in chapter 3:

**H1:** For married men, economic dependency will be related to the likelihood of engaging in infidelity such that the more economically dependent a married man is on his wife, the greater his likelihood of engaging in infidelity.

**H2:** For cohabiting men, economic dependency will be unrelated to the likelihood of engaging in infidelity.

**H3:** For cohabiting and married women, economic dependency will be unrelated to the likelihood of engaging in infidelity.

I test these predictions using data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. The analysis and results are discussed in chapter 3.

### ***Gender Identity Threat and Anti-Gay Violence***

In chapter 4, I further examine the effect of gender identity threat on a second gendered behavior: anti-gay violence. The extent of anti-gay violence depends on a variety of factors including differences in sampling, data-gathering techniques, and measurement tools.

Nonetheless, even conservative estimates reveal a substantial problem. A study of over 2000 gay men and lesbians in eight U.S. cities found that 19% had been punched, hit, kicked or beaten at least once in their lives because of their sexual orientation; 42% had been threatened; and 92% had been verbally harassed (Herek & Berrill, 1992). While these numbers shed light on the scope of anti-gay violence, government agencies and advocacy groups conduct the majority of these studies. As a result, the intent is not to develop theories of anti-gay violence or empirically test mechanisms contributing to hate crimes. Academic research, on the other hand, has generally focused on hate crime victims, as opposed to perpetrators, and the little work that has explored perpetrator motives is largely theoretical but not empirical.

Recall that individual explanations posit that violence is the result of biological, psychological, or social factors that exist within individuals. Within the field of sociology, social learning theory has emerged as the chief individual-level explanation for anti-gay violence. This literature argues that individuals immersed in homophobic and heterosexist environments may be especially likely to engage in hate crimes as adolescents and adults (Ehrlich, 1992; Franklin, 2000; Gerstenfeld, 2003). While this account has some explanatory utility, the question remains: why do some individuals having been exposed to anti-gay violence engage in violence whereas others do not?

Others have pointed to the role of institutions in perpetrating anti-gay sentiment. These scholars suggest that, just as institutions devalue women, the majority of institutions are heterosexist. For example, Herek (1992a) points to the condemnation of homosexuality in Christianity and Judaism, and the absence of legal protection under the law. He argues that the institutional oppression of gays and lesbians, in combination with a cultural ideology of heterosexuality as normal, breeds hostility that manifests in the form of aggression against gays and lesbians. Yet, this explanation lacks explanatory power. The theory relies heavily on broad statements about homophobia and heterosexism without adequately identifying the mechanisms through which anti-gay violence is enacted. In other words, why do some individuals enact violence whereas others, under similar institutional circumstances, do not?

I argue that anti-gay violence, like other gendered behaviors, is likely a multilevel phenomenon that is created and recreated at the individual, institutional, and interactional levels (Correll, Thebaud, & Benard, 2007; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Risman, 1998). While several scholars have pointed to potential individual (Ehrlich, 1992; Franklin, 2000; Gerstenfeld, 2003)

and institutional factors (Herek, 1992a) that contribute to anti-gay violence, we know very little about the interactional processes that increase or dampen incidences of these crimes.

Drawing on the interactional theory of gendered behavior explicated in this chapter, I believe that anti-gay violence may stem from gender identity threat and compensation. Because violence is associated with masculinity, because gay men constitute a relevant out-group for straight men, and because sex with a same-sex partner might be perceived as gender deviant, I suspect that anti-gay aggression emerges in contexts in which a perpetrator has experienced a threat to his gender identity and serves to reinstate the perpetrator's perception of himself as adequately masculine. The source of this threat may be twofold. On the one hand, gay men and women may threaten dominant heterosexual definitions of masculinity by presenting competing definitions of gender that highlight sexual confusion and doubt in heterosexual men. On the other, perpetrators may feel threatened by a sense of powerlessness due to their age. The majority of anti-gay violence perpetrators are under the age of 22 (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993; Berrill, 1992; Moore, 2001). Young men may experience feelings of masculine insecurity because they are less likely than older men to have achieved independence and financial stability – two markers of traditional masculinity. As a result, young men may exert violence against those they see as less manly in order to compensate and reaffirm their masculinity (Harry, 1992; Levin & McDevitt, 2002). The interactional theory described above leads me to make the following predictions:

**H1:** Men experiencing a threat to their gender identity will display more anti-gay aggression than men not experiencing a threat to their gender identity.

**H2:** The relationship between threat and anti-gay aggression will be affected by the importance participants place on their masculinity: the less importance a man places on masculinity, the less likely he will be to enact anti-gay aggression in response to a threat.

I test these predictions with a controlled laboratory experiment described in Chapter 4.

In summary, building on social identity theory and theories of gendered interaction, I expect that gendered behavior emerges in response to gender identity threat and serves to reinstate a positive self view with respect to masculinity. Based on this theoretical approach, I explore the effect of gender identity threat on two gendered behaviors: infidelity and anti-gay violence. The controlled laboratory experiment (Chapter 4) will serve to isolate gender identity threat as a mechanism for anti-gay violence while controlling for unobservables. Of course, like most laboratory experiments, the results will not be generalizable. However, coupled with the analysis of nationally representative data presented Chapter 3 which investigates the effect of gender identity threat on infidelity, these two studies have the potential to provide strong evidence in support of the interactional theory of gendered behavior explicated here.

## CHAPTER 3

### GENDER IDENTITY THREAT AND INFIDELITY

In this chapter, I argue that gender identity threat in the context of marriage increases the odds that men will engage in infidelity. Specifically, economic dependency may serve as a threat to married men's gender identity by calling into question the traditional notion of men as providers or breadwinners. Given the symbolic importance of virility and sexual conquest to cultural definitions of masculinity, I suggest that, for married men, having multiple sexual partners may be an attempt to restore gender identity in response to these threats. Given that previous research on cohabitation suggests that cohabiting men and women adopt less traditional gender roles, I do not expect economic dependency to threaten cohabiting men's gender identity. Therefore, I do not predict that economic dependency will increase the odds of engaging in infidelity for cohabiting men. Moreover, because femininity is not defined by breadwinner status or sexual conquest, I do not expect that economic dependency will increase the odds of engaging in infidelity for women, as I predict for married men.

#### *Gender Identity Threat, Infidelity, and Race*

It is worth noting that there may be interesting racial and ethnic differences in response to gender identity threat. Multicultural feminist scholars argue that subgroups of the population based on race, class, sexuality, ability and other social categories experience the world differently because of the institutionalization of majority status prerogatives. Because the majority of American institutions – including gender, the family, and the paid labor market – were established by the ruling elite, they generally reflect the values and beliefs of heterosexual, white, upper-class men (Collins, 2000; Baca Zinn & Dill, 2001). As a result, majority status and minority status people experience these institutions quite differently. For example, a series of

ethnographic studies have found differences in the ways men of color define and enact hegemonic masculinity compared to white men (Archer, 2001, Baca Zinn, 1982, Cheng, 1996, A. Ferguson, 2001). Thus, an additional goal of this chapter is to begin to explore the intersection of race in the process of gender identity threat and compensation.

Specifically, I explore differences in the role of gender identity threat on infidelity between black; Hispanic; mixed race; and non-black, non-Hispanic men. I am particularly interested in the role of economic dependency in infidelity among black men. Representative survey data from the 1990/91 AIDS Behavioral Survey found that African-Americans reported the highest incidence of extramarital sex in the past year (6.1%), followed by Hispanics (4.0%) and then Whites (2.5%) (Choi, Catania, & Dolcini, 1994). Other research confirms elevated rates of infidelity among African Americans (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Burdette et al., 2007; Cochran et al., 2004; Smith, 1998; Treas & Giesen, 2000; Weinburg & Williams, 1988; Wiederman, 1997). Weinburg and Williams (1988) contend that higher rates of infidelity among African-Americans stem from a distinct and sexually liberal subculture less subject to moralistic dictates. Others have argued that African-American men and women might be more likely than white men and women to engage in infidelity because of ethnic differences in the gender ratio. That is, there is a relative shortage of unmarried black men (Tucker & Taylor, 1989). As a result, married black men may have greater opportunities to have sex with single black women (e.g., Choi et al. 1994; Greeley 1991, 1994; Treas & Giesen, 2000; Wiederman, 1997; Weinburg & Williams, 1988).

These interesting racial differences are likely to intersect with notions of masculinity as defined by young, African-American men. For example, given elevated unemployment rates among black men, they may be especially likely to experience gender identity threat in the form

of economic dependency and to engage in compensatory behaviors like infidelity. On the other hand, it is equally plausible that young, black, married men will be less likely than white men to engage in infidelity as a response to gender identity threat. Wilson (1987) contends that high unemployment and underemployment have led to declines in marriage rates among African Americans. Thus, economically dependent black men who do marry may be especially confident in their gender identity or consciously disavow contemporary definitions of masculinity that call for breadwinning. In short, it is unclear whether African American men will experience economic dependence as threatening and engage in infidelity in response. Thus, an additional goal of this chapter is to explore variation in the likelihood of engaging in infidelity in response to economic dependency by race.

### ***Data and Measures***

I pooled the 2001 – 2008 waves of the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97). The NLSY97 is a nationally representative sample of approximately 9000 individuals surveyed annually who were ages 12 – 16 years old as of December 31, 1996. Black and Hispanic individuals were oversampled. The survey contains questions about work status and experience, income, dating and marital history, and sexual behavior. Respondents under the age of 16 were not asked some of the sexual activity questions. I make use of the 2001 through 2008 waves of data: 2001 is the first year that all respondents were eligible to answer all questions, 2008 is the most recent wave of data available.

Given the original purpose of the NLSY, the respondents are young compared to the overall population. The individuals in my sample range in age from 18 to 29. On the one hand, one of the advantages of using a younger sample is that sexual virility is associated with young masculinity as opposed to masculinity in general (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 1993, 2008; Pascoe,



2007, Sanday, 2007). On the other hand, the generalizability of the findings is limited with respect to age. Further, in line with the theoretical argument, I limit the sample to heterosexual<sup>2</sup> men and women who are either married or cohabiting, report being in the same relationship for more than one year, and who are not full-time students<sup>3</sup> at the time of the interview. Given that only 51% of men between the ages of 15-44 have ever married and only 49% of men between the ages of 15-44 have ever cohabitated (Goodwin, Mosher & Chandra, 2010), it is important to caution readers that the effects I capture generalize to a specific population: heterosexual American men who have married or cohabited at a relatively young age. These men – particularly these married men – may have more traditional ideas about gender, breadwinning and the division of labor. Hence, they may be more threatened when their wives significantly out-earn them as compared to men who marry later in life.

These restrictions result in a sample of 3251 individuals and 8543 person-years. However, the models call for complete data on all variables. The baseline (conservative) treatment of missing data is list-wise deletion (Allison, 2001). As a result, I deleted 1047 (12.3%) person-years with missing values on one or more variables, 754 cases (8.8%) of which were missing income or spousal income data. The analyses are therefore based on 7496 person-years (3006 individuals) as units of analysis. This represents 33.0% of the total NLSY97 sample. To examine the impact of missing data on the analyses, I also ran the analyses using multiple imputation techniques for missing observations<sup>4</sup>. I got substantially similar results when multiply imputing the missing observations and therefore present the non-imputed results here. Models

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<sup>2</sup>A key component of the theoretical argument is that men might feel threatened, not by making little money, but by making less money than a female partner. I, therefore, eliminated person-years in which the respondent indicated a marital or cohabiting same-sex partner (n = 126, 1.2%).

<sup>3</sup>Additionally, it is likely that full-time students see their economic status as temporary. The temporary status of their economic position may keep these individuals from experiencing a threat in response to dependency. Excluding cases in which the respondent is a full-time student results the deletion of 1852 (17.6%) person-years.

<sup>4</sup>I used ten imputed datasets to fill in missing values and performed the analyses of the statistical models on each of the imputed datasets, which were then combined to yield a single set of results (Royston 2004).

using multiple imputations for missing data are available upon request.

***Dependent variable.*** The dependent variable of interest is infidelity. The NLSY97 does not ask participants whether they have engaged in infidelity. Instead several other questions were asked that allowed me to create an infidelity variable. Specifically, each respondent reported his or her marital/cohabitation status for every month of the year for each year the survey was administered. Using this information, I located each participant's marital/cohabitation status for the month and year the survey was administered. Marital/cohabitation status was indicated as follows: cohabiting with first partner; cohabiting with second partner; cohabiting with third partner, etc. and married to first spouse, married to second spouse; married to third spouse, etc. This coding enabled me to create a variable that was coded 1 if the respondent's marital/cohabitation status in two subsequent years was the same, and a 0 if it was not.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the number of sexual partners they have had since the date of the last interview and if they have had sex with a stranger since the date of the last interview. Respondents who had the same partner as the previous year and indicated more than one sexual partner or having engaged in sex with a stranger were given a 1 on the dichotomous variable, "infidelity." All others were coded as 0. Note that this construction of the infidelity variable excludes participants who divorce or separate from their partners in between survey years. This is one of the limitations of the study; however, this is not especially problematic given that this construction likely underestimates infidelity and thus constitutes a conservative test of my hypotheses.

It is also worth noting that some individuals in the sample may be in open or non-monogamous relationships. Because the overwhelming majority of cohabiting and married relationships are assumed to be exclusive by the persons in them (Jenks, 1998), I assume that

few, if any, respondents fall into this category.

***Independent variable.*** The primary independent variable is a set of categories that measure economic dependency. The measure is based on the respondents' yearly income, as well as the yearly income of his or her partner. A number of participants did not know their income (14%) or their partner's income (14%). These respondents were asked to select the range in which their income fell (\$1 - \$5000; \$5001 - \$10,000; \$10,001 - \$25,000; \$25,001 - \$50,000; \$50,001 - \$100,000; \$100,001- \$250,000; more than \$250,000). For these participants, I used the mean of the range selected to indicate their income or their partners' income, and \$250,000 for those that indicated they made more than \$250,000.

I calculated the total household income ("family income") as the total income obtained by both the respondent and his or her partner during the previous year from wages, salaries, commissions and tips, including income earned from a business, partnership or professional practice. I then calculated the percentage contributed by the respondent to the total household income. The model includes two dummy variables that indicate whether the respondent's income is (1) less than 40% of the overall household income ("contribute < 40%") or (2) more than 60% of the overall household income ("contribute > 60%"). The baseline category is "contribute 40-60%." I use categorical variables because the effect of dependency on infidelity may increase in a nonlinear fashion. This conceptualization is consistent with other household income studies (for example, see Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre & Matheson, 2003; Miller & Sassler, 2010; Raley, Mattingly, & Bianchi 2006). I also used a continuous measure for economic dependency with its quadratic term (not shown). The results, available upon request, are substantively similar; however interpreting the results is less intuitive.

***Race/Ethnicity.*** Previous research has found that African Americans engage in infidelity

more than other racial groups (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Burdette et al., 2007; Treas & Giesen, 2000; Wiederman, 1997). Other research suggests this relationship may be mediated by low-to-moderate education levels, and that gender and race may interact such that African American men, not women, are more likely to engage in infidelity (Choi et al., 1994). Therefore, I include race by incorporating three indicator variables in the models that identify respondents' as black, Hispanic, and mixed race. Non-black, non-Hispanic, non-mixed race is the reference category ("non-black, non-Hispanic"). Moreover, given my interest in racial differences in gender identity threat and compensation, I also constructed a series of interaction terms for black, Hispanic, and mixed racial or ethnic identification with the economic dependency variables. I did not investigate the interaction of Asian-American men and economic dependency as they were not oversampled. There were too few Asian-American men in the sample to justify doing so; however Asian-Americans are included in the models in the referent (non-black, non-Hispanic) category.

***Control variables.*** In the models that follow, I include variables that may affect the relationship between economic dependency and infidelity. First, I include respondent's age (in years) because age may protect persons from gender identity threat such that older men are more secure in their gender identity and less likely to compensate than younger men.

Second, education and income were included in the models because these variables may temper the effect of economic dependency on infidelity. For example, if higher levels of education expose men to alternative definitions of masculinity, they may care less about breadwinning compared to their less educated counterparts and feel less inclined to compensate in response to economic dependence. Similarly, high earning men may be less likely to compensate if a certain standard of living buffers the effect of economic dependence on

infidelity. That is, it is possible that once a man's income reaches a certain threshold, making less money than his spouse will no longer be threatening because his wife's income can be viewed as supplemental. Given these suppositions, I included measures of yearly income ("respondent income") described above. Moreover, to ensure that any effects of economic dependency on infidelity are not solely the result of unemployed respondents, I also employed a dummy variable ("no income") that indicates whether the respondent reported making any income at all over the past year. Four categorical measures for the highest level of educational attainment are also included: 1) less than a high school education, 2) high school diploma or GED, 3) associate's degree or 2-year degree, and 4) bachelor's degree, 4-year degree or advanced degree. I combined bachelor's degrees and graduate degrees into one category due to the small percentage of participants with advanced degrees. These variables are respectively named "less than high school diploma," "high school diploma," "associate's," and "bachelor's or advanced degree." Those with less than a high school diploma constitute the reference category ("less than high school").

It is also possible that economically dependent men may work less hours and have more time to pursue extramarital relationships. To control for the possibility that both economic dependence and infidelity may be a function of free-time, I included a measure of the amount of time individuals' spend working. This variable constitutes the number of weeks over the past year the respondent reported working for income ("weeks worked/year").<sup>5</sup>

Previous cohabitation and marriage may also affect the relationship between economic dependence and infidelity. For example, it is possible that individuals who are particularly fickle

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<sup>5</sup>I also calculated the average number of hours the respondent worked per week by dividing the total number of hours he or she reported working over the past year, by the total number of weeks. The results are similar; however, I chose to use the "weeks worked" variable as opposed to the "hours per week" variable because of the large amount of missing data for the total number of hours worked in the past year.

or partner switch (indicated by previous cohabitation or marriage) will be more likely to cheat in response to gender identity threat than individuals who are more committed. As a result, I included two dummy variables “previously cohabitated” and “previously married” that indicate whether the respondent has been in a cohabiting relationship prior to their current relationship and whether the respondent has been previously married.

One of the most consistent findings in the infidelity literature is that religious attendance is inversely related to one’s likelihood of engaging in infidelity (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Atkins & Kessel, 2008; Atkins et al., 2001; Burdette et al., 2007; Choi et al., 1994; Forste & Tanfer, 1996; Liu, 2000; Treas & Giesen, 2000). It is also possible that religious attendance will affect the relationship between economic dependency and infidelity. If economic dependency leads to infidelity, it is possible that this will be less true for highly religious men or men deeply embedded in religious organizations. I therefore incorporate religious attendance over the past year in the models by including a “religious attendance” variable coded as follows: 1 = never; 2 = once/twice; 3 = less than once a month/3-12 times per year; 4 = about once a month/ 12 times per year; 5 = about twice a month/24 times per year; 6 = about once a week; 7 = several times a week; 8 = everyday.

Finally, marital satisfaction has also been shown to inversely effect engagement in infidelity (Prins, Buunk, & Van Yperen, 1993) and may also buffer the effects of economic dependence on infidelity. Therefore, I incorporated a measure of relationship satisfaction in the models. Specifically, I use the following composite of two variables, both on a 10-point scale: how close the respondent feels towards his or her partner (0 = not close at all; 10 = very close) and how much does the respondent feel his or her partner care about him or her (0 = does not care at all; 10 = cares very much) Chronbach’s alpha for relationship satisfaction was .74,

indicating that the scale has acceptable internal consistency. I also include a measure of how much conflict is in the relationship with the partner (0 = no conflict; 10 = a lot of conflict).

### ***Method***

The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether economic dependency increases the odds of engaging in infidelity. I use logistic regression models to estimate the effect of economic dependency on the log odds of engaging in infidelity net of adjustment factors. Because the data include multiple observations per individual as a result of the panel structure, I introduce a random intercept term to address the dependence among repeated observations for the same individual. The models take the following form:

$$\log(p_{it}|1 - p_{it}) = x_{it}\beta + \alpha_i + \varepsilon_{it},$$

Where  $p_{it}$  is the probability of engaging in infidelity by the next year,  $x_{it}$  is a row vector of variables for individual  $i$  and time  $t$ , and  $\beta$  is a column vector of regression coefficients.

Residuals are composed of two parts:  $\alpha_i$  represents random intercepts for persons, assumed to be uncorrelated with  $x_{it}$  and normally distributed with a mean of zero and constant variance;  $\varepsilon_{it}$  is a random disturbance term. I estimated the models using the xtlogit procedure in Stata 10, which employs an adaptive Gauss-Hermite quadrature to calculate the parameters.<sup>6</sup>

I estimate the effects separately by gender and by marital status, which is useful not only for comparing the size of the economic dependency coefficients, but also for avoiding the bias that can be introduced by assuming that all other variables have the same effect on men and women and on married persons and cohabiters (Sprague, 2005). Furthermore, because the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that dependency significantly increases the likelihood of

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<sup>6</sup>This procedure works particularly well for models with binary outcomes and small to moderate clusters (Rabe-Hesketh, Skrondal, and Pickles 2002). Estimating models using this procedure is appropriate for the data because the number of observations per person is relatively small (maximum cluster size is 7; average cluster size is 2.5).

engaging in infidelity for men but not women, and to examine if the effects of dependency are similar for married persons and cohabiting persons, rather than to show that the effect of dependency is significantly different from zero for these different groups, examining the effects in separate models is appropriate.

## ***Results***

***Descriptive statistics of key variables.*** Table 1 presents means and standard deviations at the level of person-years for the variables used in the analysis by gender and marital status. I used *t*-tests for paired means to test for differences between men and women and between married respondents and cohabiting respondents. Because of the person-year structure of the data, I do not use survey weights; however, I also conducted *t*-tests for paired means using the survey weights provided in the NLSY97 data (results available upon request) and the results were virtually identical.<sup>7</sup> The first row of Table 1 presents data that shows men typically have higher infidelity rates than women, as do cohabiting persons as opposed to married persons. Overall, 8% of the sample engaged in infidelity at least once during the 6 year period, with married women engaging in infidelity the least (4.7%) and cohabiting men engaging in infidelity the most (13%).

Looking at the economic contribution variables, I find that approximately 39% of the sample contributes less than 40% to the overall household income; however, this is a clearly gendered phenomenon. Both married and cohabiting women are much more likely than their male counterparts are to contribute less than 40% of the total family income and to contribute

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<sup>7</sup> The weighed data revealed a significant difference between men and women on the variable “high school diploma” with more men than women receiving a high school diploma. Additionally, there was not a significant difference between married individuals and cohabiting individuals on the “weeks worked/year” variable using the weighted data.



40% to 60% of the total family income. Conversely, men are more likely than women are to report contributing more than 60% to the family income.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for the Variables Used in the Analysis by Marital Status and Gender, NLSY 1997

	Married			Cohabiting	
	Total	Men	Women	Men	Women
Infidelity <sup>ab</sup>	.08	.079	.047	.13	.09
Economic Dependency Variables:					
Contribute < 40% <sup>ab</sup>	.39	.09	.60	.13	.53
Contribute 40-60% <sup>ab</sup>	.30	.26	.29	.32	.33
Contribute > 60% <sup>a</sup>	.31	.65	.11	.55	.14
Non-Black, Non-Hispanic	.53	.54	.49	.53	.54
Black <sup>a</sup>	.24	.24	.23	.27	.22
Hispanic	.18	.16	.18	.18	.18
Mixed Race	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01
Age <sup>ab</sup>	24.17 (2.11)	24.70 (1.94)	24.28 (2.05)	24.05 (2.13)	23.57 (2.19)
Education					
Less than High School Diploma <sup>ab</sup>	.14	.12	.09	.23	.18
High School Diploma	.66	.67	.66	.68	.65
Associate's <sup>ab</sup>	.06	.05	.07	.04	.05
Bachelor's or Advanced Degree <sup>ab</sup>	.14	.15	.17	.06	.12
Respondent Income (in thousands) <sup>ab</sup>	20.11 (17.83)	31.62 (20.73)	15.32 (15.29)	23.05 (16.27)	14.23 (13.14)
No Income <sup>a</sup>	.13	.03	.20	.04	.16
Weeks Worked /Year <sup>b</sup>	26.99 (22.96)	27.14 (22.80)	26.15 (23.12)	27.55 (22.86)	27.68 (22.94)
Previously Cohabited <sup>ab</sup>	.18	.10	.12	.12	.30
Previously Married <sup>b</sup>	.01	.02 <sup>b</sup>	.02 <sup>b</sup>	0 <sup>b</sup>	0 <sup>b</sup>
Religious Attendance <sup>ab</sup>	2.90 (2.01)	3.32 (2.58)	3.43 (2.11)	2.08 (1.45)	2.29 (1.61)
Family Income <sup>ab</sup>	44.76 (32.85)	47.16 (29.70)	48.83 (34.49)	37.66 (27.50)	41.35 (35.43)
Relationship Satisfaction <sup>b</sup>	9.31 (1.22)	9.36 (1.17)	9.38 (1.17)	9.2 (1.24)	9.22 (1.31)
Conflict <sup>b</sup>	3.49 (2.69)	3.23 (2.58)	3.37 (2.70)	3.80 (2.69)	3.69 (2.71)
Person-Years	7496	1715	2714	1286	1781
Persons	3294	703	999	686	906

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (2002-2008)

Note: Standard deviations in parentheses where appropriate.

<sup>a</sup>p ≤ .05 between men and women, two-tailed test.

<sup>b</sup>p ≤ .05 between married persons and cohabiting persons, two-tailed test.

With respect to demographic characteristics, approximately 53% of the sample is non-black, non-Hispanic and non-mixed race; 24% of the sample is black; 18% is Hispanic, and 1%

is mixed race.<sup>8</sup> There is a significant difference between the proportion of the men's sample that is black and the proportion of the women's sample that is black. This is likely due to the NLSY oversampling black men.

Men in the sample are slightly older than women in the sample, and married respondents are slightly older than cohabiting respondents. Men are more likely than women to report not attaining a high school diploma or GED, whereas women are more likely than men to report attaining an associate's degree or a bachelor's or advanced degree. Moreover, cohabiting persons seem to have less education than married persons. Cohabitors are more likely to report not having a high school diploma, whereas married persons are more likely to report attaining an associate's or a bachelor's or advanced degree. It is worth noting that due to the young sample, the majority of respondents (66%) in the sample have secured only a high school diploma.

The overall average income of the sample is quite low, around \$20,000/year. Not surprisingly, men report higher incomes than women, and married persons report higher incomes than cohabiting persons. Although 13% of the sample reported having brought in no income at all during the previous year, women were much more likely than men to report no income. Moreover, the average respondent reported working approximately 27 weeks during the year. Cohabiting persons report working slightly more weeks per year than married persons. While average income and average weeks worked may seem low, this is likely due to the young sample. For example, many of these people may attend school part-time and work part-time. (Part-time students were not excluded from the sample.) Young persons may also be more likely to switch jobs, resulting in employment and income lapses.

Approximately 18% of the sample reported that they previously cohabited with someone prior to their current relationship, and 1.4% reported previously marrying someone prior to their

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<sup>8</sup>This does not add up to 100% because approximately 4% of the sample was missing data on this variable.

current relationship. Women report having previously cohabited with another partner more often than men, with a full 30% of the cohabiting women sample having lived with someone else prior to their current relationship. Men in cohabiting relationships report having previously cohabited approximately 12% of the time. Married persons report having cohabited with someone prior to their current relationship less often than cohabiting persons, and married persons report having been married before more often than cohabiting persons.

With respect to religious attendance, the average respondent attended a religious service somewhere between once or twice and 3-12 times per year. Both married persons and women report attending more religious services per year, compared to cohabiters and men. The average family income was around \$45,000/year. Married people reported higher family incomes than cohabiters did; however, perhaps surprisingly, women reported higher family incomes than men.

Average relationship satisfaction was high and conflict was low. There were no gender differences on these measures; however, there were differences between married and cohabiting persons. Married persons report being more satisfied and report less conflict.

***The effect of economic dependency on infidelity for married men.*** The models in Table 2 present the results for married and cohabiting men. The first three models address the primary hypothesis that economic dependency increases the likelihood that married men will engage in infidelity. The table presents raw coefficients, but in the text I discuss the magnitude of effects in terms of exponentiated coefficients. Model 1 estimates the effect of economic dependency on the log odds of engaging in infidelity. Results support the hypothesis: the coefficient for “Contribute < 40%” is strongly positive and highly significant. Contributing less than 40% of the total household income increases the odds of engaging in infidelity by a factor of 3.18 ( $\exp[1.157] = 3.18$ ) compared to contributing 40-60% of the household income.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models for the Effects of Economic Dependency on the Log Odds of Engaging in Infidelity for Married and Cohabiting Men, NLSY97

	Married			Cohabiting		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Economic Dependency Variables (contribute 40-60% omitted)						
Contribute < 40%	1.157*** (0.431)	0.959** (0.465)	0.865* (0.483)	-0.718* (0.388)	-1.099** (0.463)	-1.197** (0.475)
Contribute > 60%	0.301 (0.303)	0.150 (0.310)	-0.00598 (0.347)	-0.431* (0.247)	-0.509** (0.251)	-0.637** (0.291)
Individual-Level Variables						
Race/Ethnicity						
Black		0.308 (0.319)	0.366 (0.329)		0.0148 (0.290)	-0.0218 (0.288)
Hispanic		0.580* (0.352)	0.456 (0.364)		0.0660 (0.331)	0.0386 (0.329)
Mixed Race		0.0629 (1.477)	-0.254 (1.522)		1.573 (1.223)	1.388 (1.275)
Age		-0.126* (0.0668)	-0.136* (0.0699)		-0.0610 (0.0587)	-0.0759 (0.0589)
Education (< high school omitted)						
High School		-0.587 (0.388)	-0.431 (0.401)		-0.213 (0.300)	-0.127 (0.300)
Associate's		-0.557 (0.677)	-0.342 (0.693)		-0.127 (0.689)	0.130 (0.684)
Bachelor's or Advanced Degree		-1.092* (0.592)	-0.749 (0.608)		-1.265* (0.718)	-1.040 (0.720)
No Income		0.0679 (0.646)	0.232 (0.688)		0.631 (0.617)	0.621 (0.624)
Weeks Worked /Year		-0.00284 (0.00535)	-0.00203 (0.00549)		0.00515 (0.00494)	0.00621 (0.00495)
Previously Cohabited		0.295 (0.438)	0.321 (0.454)		0.455 (0.284)	0.397 (0.282)
Previously Married		-0.244 (0.893)	-0.192 (0.936)		- -	- -
Religious Attendance		-0.250*** (0.0688)	-0.240*** (0.0707)		0.0250 (0.0774)	0.0424 (0.0776)
Relationship-Level Variables						
Family Income (in 1000s)			-0.00733 (0.00793)			-0.000685 (0.00882)
Relationship Satisfaction			-0.334*** (0.0883)			-0.355*** (0.0805)
Conflict			0.110** (0.0455)			0.0443 (0.0431)
Constant	-3.990*** (0.369)	0.575 (1.660)	3.415* (1.936)	-2.375*** (0.255)	-0.791 (1.373)	2.593 (1.593)
Log Likelihood	-437.63	-420.66	-406.65	-490.76	-483.55	-470.63
Person-Years	1,715	1,715	1,715	1,286	1,286	1,286
Persons	703	703	703	686	686	686

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Model 2 estimates the effect of economic dependency on the log odds of engaging in infidelity, net of one's individual-level characteristics such as race/ethnicity, age, educational attainment, income, the number of weeks worked in the previous year, whether or not this is the respondent's first cohabiting relationship and first marital relationship, and religious attendance.

For married men, the odds of engaging in infidelity are 2.60 times greater ( $\exp[.959] = 2.60$ ) for those who contribute less than 40% to the household income, than those who contribute more equally (40%-60% of the household income).

Model 3 estimates the effect of economic dependency on the log odds of engaging in infidelity, net of the individual-level characteristics included in Model 2, as well as relationship characteristics such as household income, relationship satisfaction and the amount of conflict in the relationship. With the addition of these variables, the predicted odds for economically dependent men (i.e. those who contribute less than 40% to the overall household income) are 2.38 times ( $\exp[.865] = 2.38$ ) the odds for equal contributors (i.e. those who contribute 40%-60% of the household income). However, note that as I control for individual characteristics and relationship characteristics, the effect becomes marginally significant ( $p = .073$ ). This is a particularly interesting finding. Despite the findings in models 1 and 2, which find that being in a position of economic dependency increases likelihood of engaging in infidelity, model 3 indicates that relationship characteristics can buffer the effect of economic dependence on cheating for married men.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to examining the relationship between economic dependency and infidelity, models 1-3 also examine the relationship between having an economically dependent partner and engaging in infidelity. Across the first three models in Table 2, the relationship between having an economically dependent spouse (contributing more than 60% of the household income) and infidelity was not significant for married men.

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<sup>9</sup> I conducted the following additional diagnostic analysis in order to ensure that the results were robust. Because people who appear multiple times as cheaters might affect the estimation, I identified participants who had cheated more than once and ran the regression without these participants. If each cheater appears just once, the idea of "influential points" is much less relevant. The results substantiate the random effects logistic regression results in Table 2 and are available upon request.

*The effect of economic dependency on infidelity for cohabiting men.* A second goal of the analysis is to examine the effect of economic dependency on infidelity for cohabiting men. Given evidence that cohabiting couples behave significantly different than married couples, particularly when it comes to financial arrangements (Addo & Sassler, 2010; Heimdal & Houseknecht, 2003) and traditional gender roles (Brines & Joyner, 1999; Clarkberg et al., 1995; Miller & Sassler, 2010; Shelton & John, 1993), I predicted that cohabiting men who are economically dependent would not engage in infidelity more than equal earners.

Models on the right side of Table 2 examine this relationship. Model 1 shows the effect of contributing less than 40% of the household income, compared to more equal earners, on the log odds of engaging in infidelity for cohabiting men. The result is negatively and marginally significant. Contrary to married men, contributing less than 40% to the household income *decreases* men's odds of engaging in infidelity. The odds of engaging in infidelity for dependents compared to equal earners is .49 to 1 ( $\exp[-0.718] = .488$ ). The odds an economically dependent cohabiting man will cheat are 51% less than the chances an equal earner will cheat. This finding supports the argument that economic dependency has a differential effect on men's likelihood of engaging in infidelity depending on one's marital status.

With the addition of the individual-level characteristics in model 2, the effect of contributing less than 40% to the household income is even stronger: the odds of engaging in infidelity for dependents compared to equal earners is .33 to 1 ( $\exp[-1.099] = .333$ ). In other words, the odds of engaging in infidelity for economically dependent partners are 67% percent lower than the odds of equal earners. Model 3 shows that this pattern remains consistent even after adjusting for the individual variables in Model 2 and relationship characteristics. These results suggest that economic dependency is an important predictor of infidelity for both married

and cohabiting men; however, for married men, economic dependency is associated with increased odds of engaging in infidelity whereas for cohabiting men, economic dependency is associated with decreased odds of engaging in infidelity. This is a puzzling finding; however, I propose two possible explanations both rooted in institutional differences between marriage and cohabitation. First, because marriage is a legal contract between two people, it is significantly more difficult to dissolve than a cohabiting relationship. Thus, cohabiting men may be more likely than married men to act in rational, self-interested ways in response to gender identity threat. It makes little sense to jeopardize a relationship in which one over-benefits, especially when that relationship can easily be dissolved. Second, because the construction of the infidelity variable necessitates remaining in the same relationship for more than one year, coupled with the fact that cohabiting relationships are more likely than married relationships to dissolve, it is possible that economically dependent cohabiting men who have cheated are more likely to drop out of the sample (because they are no longer in the relationship) than economically dependent married men who have cheated.

In addition to economic dependence, I also examined the relationship between having an economically dependent partner and engaging in infidelity for cohabiting men. This analysis reveals an interesting pattern. Model 1 estimates the effect of having an economically dependent partner on the log odds of engaging in infidelity. Results indicate that the effect of contributing more than 60% of the household income, compared to men who contribute 40%-60% of the household income, also decreases men's odds of engaging in infidelity. The odds of engaging in infidelity for cohabiting men who contribute more than 60% to the total family income compared to equal earners is .65 to 1 ( $\exp[-0.431] = .65$ ). To say the same thing another way, the odds of engaging in infidelity for high contributors are approximately 35% less than those of partners

who make about the same. This result is approaching significance ( $p = .065$ ); however, with the addition of the individual-level characteristics in model 2, the effect of contributing more than 60% to the household income is even stronger: the odds that a cohabiting man with an economically dependent partner will cheat are 40% ( $\exp[-0.509] = .60$ ) less than the odds that an equal earner will cheat. In other words, equal earners are more likely to cheat than cohabiting men with economically dependent partners. Model 3 adjusts for relationship-level characteristics. The odds of engaging in infidelity for dependents compared to equal earners is now .53 to 1 ( $\exp[-0.637] = .53$ ): the odds of cohabiting men who contribute more than 60% of the total household income cheating are 47% less than the odds of cohabiting men who contribute between 40% and 60% of the household income. This, too, is a puzzling finding. One possible explanation is that cohabiting, breadwinning men are more traditional. Not only do they value their status as breadwinners, they may also be more likely to view cohabitation as a pathway to marriage. In other words, if respondents had been asked how likely they were to marry their cohabiting partners, breadwinning men as opposed to equal earners might be more likely to intend on marrying the person with whom they are living. Conversely, perhaps men who live with women who are equal earners are more egalitarian, but also take their cohabiting relationships less seriously and therefore be more likely to cheat.

*The effect of economic dependency on infidelity for women.* I now turn to the analysis of married and cohabiting women (Table 3). Models 1, 2 and 3 in Table 3 show the effect of economic dependency on the log odds of engaging in infidelity adjusting for individual-level factors (model 2) and relationship factors (model 3) known to affect infidelity. Results support the primary hypotheses that economic dependence does not influence the likelihood of engaging in infidelity for married women as it does for married men. Similarly, economic dependence



Table 3. Logistic Regression Models for the Effects of Economic Dependency on the Log Odds of Engaging in Infidelity for Married and Cohabiting Women, NLSY97

	Married			Cohabiting		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Economic Dependency Variables (contribute 40-60% omitted)						
Contribute < 40%	-0.0785 (0.246)	0.0305 (0.290)	0.169 (0.322)	0.169 (0.235)	-0.0356 (0.267)	-0.0785 (0.286)
Contribute > 60%	0.0905 (0.384)	0.187 (0.390)	-0.00963 (0.417)	0.327 (0.322)	0.280 (0.320)	0.224 (0.322)
Individual-Level Variables						
Race/Ethnicity						
Black		0.594** (0.284)	0.753*** (0.292)		-0.205 (0.273)	-0.141 (0.270)
Hispanic		0.187 (0.325)	0.205 (0.337)		-0.120 (0.291)	-0.161 (0.289)
Mixed Race		0.309 (1.258)	0.496 (1.294)		-0.725 (1.254)	-0.704 (1.242)
Age		0.0269 (0.0578)	-0.0188 (0.0613)		-0.0554 (0.0531)	-0.108** (0.0536)
Education (< high school omitted)						
High School		-0.914** (0.364)	-0.848** (0.375)		0.140 (0.307)	0.147 (0.301)
Associate's		-0.435 (0.542)	-0.485 (0.572)		-0.0476 (0.584)	0.0550 (0.576)
Bachelor's or Advanced Degree		-1.604*** (0.545)	-1.260** (0.556)		0.179 (0.478)	0.366 (0.471)
No Income		0.00765 (0.0101)	0.0173 (0.0146)		-0.0150 (0.0117)	-0.0145 (0.0142)
Weeks Worked /Year		-0.205 (0.326)	-0.317 (0.341)		0.0320 (0.315)	-0.0451 (0.317)
Previously Cohabited		-0.00464 (0.00484)	-0.00655 (0.00506)		0.000599 (0.00452)	0.00173 (0.00450)
Previously Married		0.112 (0.369)	0.0888 (0.379)		0.427* (0.246)	0.479** (0.243)
Religious Attendance		0.638 (0.626)	0.803 (0.646)		0.939 (1.535)	0.390 (1.637)
Relationship-Level Variables						
Family Income (in 1000s)			-0.00444 (0.00608)			0.00235 (0.00385)
Relationship Satisfaction			-0.435*** (0.0730)			-0.305*** (0.0660)
Conflict			0.115*** (0.0439)			0.145*** (0.0384)
Constant	-4.027*** (0.328)	-3.203** (1.401)	1.319 (1.631)	-3.200*** (0.277)	-1.481 (1.222)	1.863 (1.399)
Log Likelihood	-500.09	-478.69	-444.04	-539.38	-534.026	-505.28
Person-Years	2,714	2,714	2,714	1,781	1,781	1,781
Person	999	999	999	906	906	906

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

appears to have no effect on the odds of engaging in infidelity for cohabiting women. It is also evident that the effect of having an economically dependent partner on the log odds of engaging in infidelity for both married and cohabiting and women does not impact the likelihood of engaging in infidelity.

***Interactions with race and ethnicity.*** As noted in the beginning of this chapter, a subsequent goal of this research was to examine how race and ethnicity intersect in the process of gender identity threat and compensation. I ran interactions for each of the racial and ethnic categories with the dependency variables. In addition to shedding light on potential avenues for future research, these interaction terms would reveal if it were primarily a particular racial or ethnic group that is more likely to cheat under conditions of economic dependence. The results of this analysis were virtually identical to the models presented above, and none of the interaction terms were significant. Thus, it seems that gender identity threat as it relates to infidelity operates similarly across the racial and ethnical categories investigated here. (Because the interaction terms were insignificant, I chose to present the simpler models above.)

***Other predictors of infidelity.*** While the main point of this chapter is to explain infidelity in terms of economic dependency, the analyses presented above have the ability to bolster previous findings and speak to inconsistencies in earlier infidelity research. In this section, I report the effects of other significant predictors of infidelity, as well as results that speak to previous research.

First, although previous research suggests that African Americans engage in infidelity more than their white counterparts (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Burdette et al., 2007; Treas & Giesen, 2000; Wiederman, 1997) or that African American men, not women, are more likely to engage in infidelity (Choi et al., 1994), my findings suggest that black, married women are significantly more likely to cheat compared to non-black, non-Hispanic women. Black, cohabiting women; black, married men; and black, cohabiting men are not more likely to cheat than their non-black counterparts. However, this result should be interpreted with caution given

the nature of my sample and its inability to generalize beyond young, heterosexual, American men.

Second, for both cohabiting and married men, there are significant education effects such that having a Bachelor's or advanced degree is weakly associated with lower odds of engaging in infidelity; however, this effect goes away after adjusting for family income, relationship satisfaction and conflict. For married women; those whose highest level of education is a high school degree (or GED) are significantly less likely to engage in infidelity compared to individuals who have not finished high school. Those who have obtained a Bachelor's or an advanced degree are also significantly less likely to cheat, compared to those who have not finished high school.

Finally, although a number of factors operate differently by gender in predicting infidelity, it is noteworthy that worship attendance, relationship satisfaction and conflict seem to operate similarly for both men and women. The more religious services a married man or a married woman attends, the less likely he or she is to cheat. Although some have suggested that religious behavior affects infidelity by way of marital happiness (Atkins et al., 2001), my models control for relationship satisfaction. Instead, this relationship may exist because attendants are exposed to messages condemning extramarital sex, or because religious organizations embed attendants in tighter social networks that reinforce community norms and promote accountability (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Burdette et al., 2007; Liu, 2000). Religious attendance is not a significant predictor of cheating in cohabiting relationships.

The most consistent and strong effects have to do with relationship satisfaction and conflict. Substantiating the relationship between relationship satisfaction and infidelity (Prins et al., 1993), results across all four groups (married men, cohabiting men, married women,

cohabiting women) show that as relationship satisfaction increases, the likelihood of engaging in infidelity decreases, net of individual and relationship factors. Similarly, across three of the four groups (married men, married women, cohabiting women), as conflict in the relationship increases, so does the odds of cheating.

### ***Relationship to Previous Research***

My analyses add to a growing body of research on infidelity and the discrepancies between my findings and those of previous scholars point to areas of inquiry worthy of future investigation. First, in contrast to previous research, the annual infidelity rates reported here are slightly higher. Previous research estimates that between 1.5 and 4% of married persons report having had sex with someone other than their spouse within the past year (Choi, Catania, & Dolcini, 1994; Leigh, Temple, & Trocki, 1993; Smith, 1991). This may be due to one or more of the following reasons. First, infidelity may be increasing. Second, respondents were not directly asked if they have engaged in infidelity, therefore minimizing impression management. Previous research has found that social desirability and impression management lowers reporting on infidelity (Whisman & Snyder, 2007). Thus, I suspect that the infidelity rates reported here are more accurate than those reported in previous research. Third, the rates of annual infidelity in this project may be slightly higher than other research because of the young sample. Previous research has found that young people are more likely to commit infidelity than middle-aged people (Atkins et al., 2001). My analyses confirm this finding in that age was a moderately significant negative predictor of infidelity for married men and a significant negative predictor of infidelity for cohabiting women.

A second discrepancy worth noting is that I do not substantiate previous findings regarding race and infidelity. Previous research has found African Americans to engage in infidelity more

than other racial groups (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Burdette et al., 2007; Treas & Giesen, 2000; Wiederman, 1997), or that African American men engage in infidelity more than other groups (Choi et al., 1994). I found no significant racial or ethnic effects for men. I did, however, find that African American women were more likely to engage in infidelity than women of other racial or ethnic groups. Given the discrepancy between my findings and other research, the role of specific intersections of race and gender in infidelity warrants additional research.

Another area of inconsistency in the literature has been the relationship between education, income, and infidelity. Some research shows that individuals with higher levels of education and income are more likely to engage in infidelity (Atkins et al., 2001; Atkins & Kessel, 2008; Forste & Tanfer, 1996), whereas other research reports that education is negatively correlated with infidelity (Treas & Giesen, 2000). My findings may shed some light on this inconsistency. By running separate models by gender and marital status, I find that education is a significant, negative, predictor of infidelity for married women. Both having a high school diploma and having a bachelors or advanced degree are associated with lower odds of engaging in infidelity compared to those who have not graduated from high school. There are also effects for men (both married and cohabiting) such that having a bachelors' or advanced degree is weakly associated with lower odds of engaging in infidelity; however, this effect goes away after adjusting for family income, relationship satisfaction and conflict. In short, education may be associated with infidelity for some groups of people and not others. Future research should consider this. I found no significant effects of income (including respondent income, no income, and family income) on infidelity.

Previous research has also found a relationship between divorce and infidelity, such that divorced individuals are more likely to engage in infidelity (Atkins et al., 2001). I found no

significant effects of being previously married on infidelity. This is likely due to the young sample and the fact that very few respondents in the sample are divorced.

Despite some differences, my findings are largely consistent with previous work with respect to several variables. First, I find infidelity to be more common among men than among women (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Atkins et al., 2001; Choi et al., 1994; Laumann et al., 1994; Wiederman, 1997), and among cohabiters than among married individuals (Forste & Tanfer, 1996; Treas & Giesen, 2000; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). Additionally, I substantiate previous research findings that relationship satisfaction (Prins et al., 1993) and religious attendance (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Atkins & Kessel, 2008; Atkins et al., 2001; Burdette et al., 2007; Choi et al., 1994; Forste & Tanfer, 1996; Liu, 2000; Treas & Giesen, 2000) negatively affect one's likelihood of engaging in infidelity.

### ***Discussion***

This chapter examines the interactional process of gender identity threat and infidelity. The theory draws on social identity theory (Hogg 2006; Hogg & Abrams 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and interactional theories of gender (Correll, Thebaud, & Benard, 2007; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999; Risman, 1998; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and provides evidence that interactional mechanisms influence decisions to engage in infidelity. Specifically, I find that economic dependence increases married men's odds of engaging in infidelity controlling for a host of factors. This is a significant finding given that over 30% of wives earn more than their husbands (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009) and approximately 12% of wives earn more than 60% of the total family income (Raley et al., 2006).

At this time it is worth noting the limitations associated with this study. First, these effects were found in a sample of young, heterosexual, men who were not enrolled full-time as

students. Researchers should therefore be cautious in assuming that older men, men who marry later in life, gay men, or full-time students will behave in similar ways. Additional data is needed to more fully understand the process of gender identity threat and infidelity in these populations.

A second limitation involves the construction of the infidelity variable. Infidelity was determined in situations in which a respondent had the same partner in two consecutive years and indicated more than one sexual partner during that time period (or having engaged in sex with a stranger). As a result, individuals whose relationships ended as a result of infidelity are not likely to be in the analyses. Of course, marital relationships are more difficult to dissolve than cohabiting relationships. Thus, if economic dependency is associated with infidelity in cohabiting partners, we may not be able to detect it here. In other words, although the results indicate that economically dependent cohabiting men are not more likely to engage in infidelity, this may not be the case if cheating in cohabiting relationships typically leads to relationship dissolution.

Third, if economic dependency is associated with over-reporting of sexual partners, we might see similar results even if economically dependent participants did not actually engage in infidelity at a higher rate than their non-dependent counterparts. Fourth, there are, of course, additional variables that likely influence the relationship between economic dependency and cheating that have not been taken into account in these models. For example, how does the presence of children and the age of children influence this process? On the one hand, it is possible that children might protect couples from infidelity regardless of economic arrangements. On the other hand, children may exacerbate the effects of economic dependence on infidelity because men may feel the need to provide for their families even more acutely after the birth of a child.

Fifth, it is worth noting that there are several alternative explanations for my findings regarding gender identity threat and infidelity in married men, which cannot be addressed with the data at hand. First, the findings may be driven by personality characteristics not captured in the NLSY97 data. For example, persons with low impulse control may be more likely cheat *and* may be more likely to quit or switch jobs frequently rendering them economically dependent on their partners. While this explanation cannot be directly tested with the data, the fact that only married men responded to economic dependence in this way makes this explanation unlikely. In other words, if low impulse control accounts for both economic dependence and cheating, we would expect it to do so across all four groups: married men, cohabiting men, married women, and married men. Second, it is possible that men who have a propensity to cheat also have an affinity for women who work long hours, are committed to their jobs, and make a lot of money. If this is the case, economically dependent men might also have more opportunities to cheat by way of less time spent with their partners. While this is plausible, in order to test this hypothesis, I would need a measure of the amount of time couples spend together. This information is not captured by the NLSY97, however, I do control for time spent at work. Although it is an imperfect measure, given that there are precisely 24 hours in a day (and 52 weeks in a year) – and that time spent at work is likely time couples do not spend together – one could argue that time spent at work may be inversely related to the amount of time couples spend together. Thus, indirectly, I may have controlled for this possibility.

Setting these limitations aside, this chapter makes several important contributions. First, in contrast to previous work, I move beyond a focus on the individual and consider the importance of both gender and social interaction in predicting sexual behavior. Specifically, this chapter provides a new way of conceptualizing infidelity and makes clear that infidelity is an



interactional process steeped in gendered expectations. Second, I was able to identify several relationship characteristics that buffer the tendency for married men to cheat in response to economic dependency. In short, relationship quality matters: greater family income, greater relationship satisfaction, and less conflict appear to temper the effects of economic dependence on infidelity.

Third, for family scholars, the present study sheds light on differences in gendered expectations for men and women in married and cohabiting relationships. I find evidence that the institution of marriage, as opposed to committed relationships more generally, comes with specific gendered expectations for men. Married men – but not cohabiting men – are expected to be the primary economic provider within the family. When married men fail to obtain breadwinner status, they may feel threatened and compensate by engaging in infidelity. For cohabiting men, economic dependence decreases the odds of engaging in infidelity. Interestingly, cohabiting men who are equal earners are more likely to engage in infidelity than cohabiting men who make more than their partners. One possible explanation for this finding is that breadwinning cohabiting men may be more traditional on several counts including cohabitation. In other words, these men may be likely than equal earners to plan on marrying the person with whom they are living. Conversely, perhaps equal earning men are more egalitarian, but also take cohabitation less seriously and are therefore more likely to engage in infidelity. In other words, traditional and egalitarian men who cohabit may select into different relative earning patterns, and egalitarian cohabiting men may simply be more likely to cheat. Unfortunately, the NLSY97 data does not contain questions that will allow for an empirical test of this hypothesis.

Finally, returning to the question of potential racial and ethnic differences in response to masculinity threat and compensation, I explored differences in the role of gender identity threat

on infidelity between black; Hispanic; mixed race; and non-black, non-Hispanic men. I suspected that this line of inquiry might reveal interesting racial or ethnic group differences regarding infidelity in response to economic dependence. Instead, my analysis revealed that gender identity threat operates similarly across black, Hispanic, mixed race and non-black, non-Hispanic men. This is interesting and noteworthy; however, the data only allowed for some racial and ethnic categories to be examined. For example, I was unable to examine the effect of gender identity threat and compensation in Asian-American men. Fortunately, in the following chapter, I further examine racial differences in this process.

## CHAPTER 4

### GENDER IDENTITY THREAT AND ANTI-GAY VIOLENCE

Anti-gay violence is a serious problem. A study of over 2,000 gay men and lesbians in eight U.S. cities found that 19% had been punched, hit, kicked or beaten at least once in their lives because of their sexual orientation (Herek, 1992; Berrill, 1992). These numbers increase substantially (to 42% and 92% respectively) when threats and verbal harassment are included. In this chapter, I examine the effect of gender identity threat on anti-gay violence and the effect of gender identity importance on the relationship between gender identity threat and violence in a sample of young, heterosexual men. Specifically, I hypothesize that threats to gender identity will increase violence and aggression toward gay men and that this relationship will be mediated by the importance participants place on gender identity: the less importance a man places on masculinity, the less likely he will be to enact anti-gay violence in response to gender identity threat. Unlike the analysis presented in Chapter 3, the controlled experimental design of this research allows for testing of the causal impact of threatened gender identity by isolating a particular mechanism and allows for the control of unobservables, furthering our understanding of how this kind of violence is generated.

Like the previous chapter, an additional goal of this chapter is to explore variation in the likelihood of engaging in compensatory behavior in response to gender identity threat by race. In contrast to the previous chapter, I began to speculate about racial differences in gender identity threat *after* collecting the majority of experiment data. My preliminary analyses revealed interesting differences in the gender identity threat and compensation process between white and Asian-American men. In order to further explore this difference, I then purposefully recruited more Asian-American men to participate in the study. I present the results of these interactional

analyses following the presentation of the models that test my primary hypotheses. Because only a handful of empirical research articles have investigated anti-gay violence perpetrators, and this literature says virtually nothing about potential racial differences particularly between white and Asian-American men, I do not outline specific predictions based on race at this time. Rather, I speculate on the effect of race on gender identity threat and compensation post hoc, and bring in potentially relevant literature at that time.

A third goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the utility of an innovative new approach for studying violence in laboratory settings. The approach employs recent video game technology to simulate realistic scenarios that allow subjects to engage in violence toward a specified target without actually hurting the target, and utilizes accelerometers to track participant movement. In this chapter, I present the results of two pilot studies designed to examine the utility of this new approach in measuring the same underlying constructs as other, previously validated measures of aggression. I then use the method to measure anti-gay aggression in the dissertation experiment.

### ***Research Design***

In order to evaluate the role of gender identity threat on anti-gay violence, Cornell University students were recruited to participate in the following experiment. First, participants created an avatar, or digital representation of themselves, using the Nintendo Wii. Avatars created using the Nintendo Wii allow participants to create cartoon-like version of themselves by selecting from a multitude of face shapes, hairstyles, hair colors, eye shapes, eyebrows, and accessories. They also allow players to change the size and location of these features on their avatar's face, and modify the height and size of their avatar. Avatars are especially useful in experimental research, in that they elicit co-presence, an experience of being with other people and of acting and reacting to other humans (Bailenson et al. 2006; Heeter 1992).

Avatars can be created to look very similar to or very different from their creator. It is this dimension of realism that is referred to as the avatar's photographic realism. An avatar's behavioral realism, on the other hand, refers to the digital representation of actual human behaviors. Wii avatars have low photographic realism, but high behavioral realism in that they mimic specific gestures in real time. Behavioral realism is more important than photographic realism in producing high levels of copresence (Garau et al., 2003) and even low levels of photographic realism have succeeded in establishing copresence (Bailenson et al., 2001).

After creating their avatar, participants were then exposed to the gender identity threat manipulation described below. After that, they interacted with a confederate whom they believed to be a gay male participant in the study. They then played a boxing game against the confederate using their avatar while wearing accelerometers that captured movement data.

### ***Equipment and Laboratory Setup***

I purchased 2 G-Link® wireless accelerometer nodes from Microstrain®, 2 receivers, and a software development kit. The two wireless accelerometer nodes were sewn into elastic and Velcro-reinforced wrist straps. The software development kit, which includes fully commented source code and a compiled executable for Microsoft® programs, was installed on computers in the Biomechanics Laboratory at Ithaca College and the Business Simulation Lab at Cornell University where pilot testing of the equipment took place. It was also installed on a computer in the Social Science Research Laboratory at Cornell University where the experiment was conducted. Among other things, this program collects the accelerometer data and allows it to be saved in Excel files. The experimenter sat at the computer to collect the accelerometer data.

Two additional computer stations were set up and separated by a cubicle wall. This design allowed the experimenter to interact with both the participant and the confederate without

them seeing one another. The Wii game was played on a 32 inch flat screen television approximately 6 feet away from the participant and the confederate. Both the participant and the confederate held a primary controller (nicknamed “Wiimote”) and a smaller controller (or “Nunchuk”) when playing the boxing game. They literally boxed (i.e., punched with their hands) to play the game. As the player boxed, the Wiimote and Nunchuk transmitted data to the Wii console, which translated into avatar movements on the screen virtually identical to the movement of the players. While the participant and the confederate played the boxing game, they each wore a tri-axial accelerometer on the wrist of their dominant hand. The accelerometers collected x-, y- and z-axial data and recorded the motion time and acceleration for the participant and the confederate more than 500 times/second.

***Participants and procedure.*** Sixty-five young men at Cornell University were recruited using flyers and email lists. Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate how various personality types play video games and that they would be paid based on performance. In the interest of fairness, participants were paid the same amount of money (\$15). One participant was scheduled at a time; however, participants were led to believe that their opponent was also a participant. In actuality, the participant’s opponent was an undergraduate research assistant trained as a confederate. The confederate arrived early to ensure that the participant did not see or interact with the confederate outside of the scripted procedure. Both the participant and the confederate consented. The experimenter then explained to both that they would be completing several personality surveys, creating an avatar, and playing a game using the Nintendo Wii. The experimenter also explained that they would not be doing these activities in the same order because only one avatar could be created at a time. The experimenter then led the participant through a short tutorial on how to create an avatar and gave him 8 minutes to

create his avatar. Meanwhile, the confederate completed the survey portion of the study. The participant and the confederate then switched tasks. The confederate created an identical avatar across conditions while the participant completed the surveys.

The first survey, a traditional paper-and-pen style survey entitled “Information Sheet,” contained several demographic questions followed by a series of questions about the participant’s age, major, circle of friends, and leisurely activities. This survey served several functions. First, it was used to relay important information about the confederate when the experimenter exchanged the participant’s and the confederate’s information sheets. That is, immediately before playing the game, the experimenter gave the participant the confederate’s information sheet, which indicated that his opponent was gay and male. All confederate information sheets were identical in that they always indicated the confederate was named Ben, had a boyfriend named John, and spent his time on weekends participating in activities sponsored by a student-run LGBT organization on campus. The only information manipulated on the confederate information sheets was Wii experience. In order to control for Wii experience as a specific status characteristic, the questionnaire asked how much Wii experience the participant had, as indicated on a 1 (no Wii experience) to 10 scale (very much Wii experience) and was manipulated to always indicate that the confederate had slightly less experience (i.e., confederate score = participant score - 1 when participant score > 1, confederate score = 1 when participant score = 1). This information was also used to statistically control for Wii experience in the analysis.

After filling out the information sheet, the participant filled out 3 online surveys administered through Qualtrics ostensibly measuring various aspects of his personality: the “Personality Evaluation Assessment” (PEA), the “Dot Estimation Task,” and the “Gender

Identity Survey.” The primary purpose of the first survey was to assess participants’ trait aggression; the second survey served to bolster the cover story that the experiment was about personality and video game performance; the third survey created the opportunity to administer gender identity feedback in order to manipulate gender identity threat across conditions. Each of these surveys will be described in more detail below. Qualtrics was particularly useful because it allowed the gender identity feedback to be randomly determined and it allowed the experimenter to be blind to condition. Before beginning, the participant was given a paper-and-pen form entitled “Personality Feedback” and was asked to record his scores on each of the personality measures. By asking the participant to record his personality scores, I was able to ensure that each participant was exposed to, and took note of, the manipulation that was administered in the feedback on the last personality test.

The first personality test was actually a combination 50 randomly selected items from an actual personality test (for example, “I spend time reflecting on things,” “I have a rich vocabulary”) (Goldberg, 1999). All participants received the same ambiguous feedback on the first personality test. They were given “raw scores” and told that their scores on the following (A through E) components could not be compared to one another: Affiliation, Breadth, Complexity, DePTH, and Experiential. Because the feedback was so ambiguous, there is no reason to believe that it affected participants’ behavior later in the study.

The second “personality measure” was actually Shrauger’s (1975) “Dot Estimation Task.” Participants were asked to look at a picture consisting of a number of colored dots and estimate the number of dots in each picture. The sole purpose of this test was to bolster the cover story that the study was about personality measures. All participants were informed that they were “overestimators” and that whether or not someone is an over- or underestimator may be a



predictor of other characteristics and behaviors. Again, given the ambiguity of the feedback, it is unlikely that it affected participants' behavior later in the study.

The third questionnaire was Bem's (1974) Sex Roles Inventory. It included sixty adjectives thought to possess cultural associations with masculinity (for example, "competitive"), femininity (for example, "compassionate"), or neither. The participant indicated how much he could be described by each word. The survey also contained a scale of 8 items used to measure the importance each participant placed on his gender identity (Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri & Grasselli, 2003). This scale allowed for the examination of the effect of gender identity importance on anti-gay aggression. The participant then received fictitious gender identity feedback: participants assigned to the gender identity confirming condition received a score at the midpoint of the average male range (33), as noted on their feedback sheet, and those assigned to the gender identity disconfirming condition received a score slightly within the average female range (11). Similar methods have been used to threaten gender identity (see, for example, Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001; Maass et al., 2003, Munsch & Willer, forthcoming; Willer, 2005). Recall that the participant was asked to record his personality feedback on each of the three tests. For this final test, the participant was asked not only to write down his numerical score, but to place an "x" on a number line from 0 to 50 representing his score. In so doing, I was able to ensure that the participant read and comprehended the information given to him on the last personality test, which served to either threaten or confirm his gender identity.

At this point in the study, the experimenter then explained, "research shows it is helpful for people to know something about their competitors before playing" and then shared the confederate's and participant's information sheets with one other. After a short Wii boxing tutorial, the participant and the confederate then boxed using their avatars. It was essential that

all participants competed against opponents of similar ability. Therefore, the confederate repeated the same 3 moves (one move/second) to the tune of “Hot Cross Buns,” an approach that was pilot tested for believability as well as similarity across confederates using their accelerometer data. Moreover, a *t* test was used to confirm that there were no differences by condition in confederate game play as measured by the average peak acceleration of their punches,  $t(89) = 0.24$ ,  $p = 0.81$ , and the number of punches thrown,  $t(89) = -0.91$ ,  $p = 0.37$ .

After playing the game, the participant completed a “Post-Study Questionnaire” that asked questions about how much the participant identified with his avatar, his desire to do well on the boxing task, and his perception of his overall performance. The questionnaire also asked participants about their suspicions about the true nature of the study (for example, “Is there anything that you found hard to believe about the study?”) This information was used to detect participants who may have been aware that the gender identity feedback was false.

### ***Analysis***

***Pilot Study.*** While the use of the Nintendo Wii is unconventional in social psychological research, I believe that virtual technologies like the Wii have the potential to transform the study of violence in laboratory settings. Virtual reality research consistently finds that the brain has a difficult time differentiating between virtual and real experiences (Blascovich & Bailenson, 2011) and that people socialize with virtual people (like avatars) in ways similar to the ways they socialize with real people in physical, face-to-face interaction (for example, see Bailenson et al., 2003; Blascovich, 2010; Swinth & Blascovich, 2001). While the Nintendo Wii does not offer complete emersion in virtual reality, the ability of the Wii to track participant movement and respond in real time emulates some elements of virtual reality. Thus, I expected violence and aggression expressed while playing the Nintendo Wii might provide social psychological

researchers the opportunity to observe and measure violence and aggression toward others without endangering the violence targets. In order to test the utility of this approach, I conducted two pilot tests using the Nintendo Wii and accelerometers to measure the same underlying constructs as other violence measures. Accelerometers are simply instruments that measure acceleration. The accelerometers used in this research are tri-axial accelerometers, meaning they measure x-, y- and z-axial data (i.e., acceleration and motion time) and record this data by communicating with the receivers more than 500 times/second<sup>10</sup>.

The purpose of the first pilot test was to examine the capacity of the method to capture differences in levels of aggression. Twenty-eight faculty, staff and students at Ithaca College (8 men; 20 women), all with at least some Wii experience, were recruited to participate. Participants were instructed to play the boxing game that comes with the Nintendo Wii two times: once in an “aggressive way” and once in a “normal way” while wearing the accelerometers. The order in which the participants were instructed to play was counter-balanced. Participants did not create avatars, nor did they play against a human opponent. Each participant used the same pre-selected, gender-neutral character to represent him or herself and played against the machine. All participants played the game on a 32 inch flat screen television from roughly 6 feet away.

The accelerometers captured 610 “sweeps” or data points on the x-, y- and z-axes per second. I captured 30 seconds of accelerometer data for each participant, for each hand, in each condition. Data collection began 5 seconds into each game and ended 35 seconds into each game. The data was saved in Excel files. Then, using LabVIEW®, a graphical programming

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<sup>10</sup> The Wiimote and Nunchuk are also equipped with accelerometers. It is accelerometer data that is transmitted to the Wii Console that is then translated into the avatar movements seen on the screen during game play. However, it is not feasible at this time to gather the accelerometer data directly from the Wii. After exploring this option, it became clear that using accelerometers that participants can wear on their wrists was the best way to collect the motion data.

environment that allows users to write programs for data analysis, I condensed the data into a series of useful measures of aggression. The program 1) computed a resultant of the three acceleration vectors ( $x^2+y^2+z^2$ ) for each sweep, 2) graphed resultant acceleration for each participant, 3) identified and totaled the number of “peaks” (i.e., punches) in the resultant graphs, 4) averaged the maximum acceleration point of each punch across all punches, 5) detected knockouts by identifying a lack of peaks over an extended period of time, 6) noted the time that each knockout occurred.

Table 4. Performance Data between Normal and Aggressive Playing Conditions (Paired Samples *t* test).

Measure	Condition	Mean	SD	Standard Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Average Peak Acceleration (Dominant Hand)	Aggressive	9.229	2.345	.4432	6.057	27	<.001
	Normal	6.172	2.585	.4886			
Number of Punches/Sec (Dominant Hand)	Aggressive	1.500	.7047	.1331	3.045	27	.002
	Normal	1.136	.4906	.0927			
Average Peak Acceleration (Non-Dominant Hand)	Aggressive	9.187	2.224	.4204	6.417	27	<.001
	Normal	6.313	2.499	.4723			
Number of Punches/Sec (Non-Dominant Hand)	Aggressive	1.264	.5729	.1082	3.750	27	.001
	Normal	.8912	.3293	.0622			
Time Until Knockout	Aggressive	19.37	4.082	1.824	1.600	5	.091
	Normal	22.64	4.764	2.128			

The results of a paired samples *t* test for the normal and aggressive playing conditions reveal statistically significant differences between the normal and aggressive conditions on the

first four variables of interest at the .01 level of confidence (Table 4). The final measure in the table, time until knockout, was only assessed for those participants who knocked their opponent out in both the normal and aggressive conditions ( $n = 6$ ). Due to small degrees of freedom, the difference between conditions is not significant, although the average times are in the predicted directions. In short, the results of the first pilot study demonstrated that accelerometers can be used to capture different levels of aggression across participants.

The purpose of the second pilot test was to evaluate the relationship between these new violence measures and a previously validated measure of trait aggression. Sixty-six participants (33 men and 33 women) at Ithaca College ( $N = 34$ ) and Cornell University ( $N = 32$ ) were recruited to participate. Participants created an avatar (or digital representation of themselves) using the Nintendo Wii, completed a survey containing previously validated measures of trait aggression, and played the boxing game against a confederate using their avatar while the accelerometer measures of violence were collected. Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate how various personality types play video games.

The Biomechanics Laboratory at Ithaca College and the Business Simulation Lab at Cornell University were set up in the following way. Two computer stations were created and separated by a large curtain. A large table was placed roughly 6 feet from the curtain in order to hold the Nintendo Wii console and the 32 inch flat screen television. One participant was scheduled to participate at a time; however, participants were led to believe that their opponent was also a participant. In actuality, the participant's opponent was an undergraduate research assistant trained as a confederate. The confederate sat at one computer station; the participant sat on the other side of the curtain at the other computer station. The confederate arrived early to ensure that the participant did not see or interact with the confederate outside of the scripted

procedure. After consenting to participate, the experimenter explained that both “participants” (i.e., the participant and the confederate) would be completing several personality surveys, creating an avatar, and playing a game using the Nintendo Wii, but that they would not be doing these activities in the same order because only one avatar could be created at a time. The experimenter then instructed the participant to create his or her avatar first. The experimenter then led the participant through a short tutorial on how to create an avatar using the WiiMote and gave the participant 8 minutes to create his avatar. Meanwhile, the confederate completed the survey portion of the study. The main purpose of the survey portion of the study was to collect trait aggression measures to correlate with the accelerometer data.

The survey portion of the study consisted of a demographic questionnaire and what he or she believed to be a personality test. The personality test was actually a combination of Buss and Perry’s (1992) 29-item Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) and 71 randomly selected items from an actual personality test (Goldberg, 1999). By including the AQ in the personality test, I was able to correlate the measures of aggression captured by the accelerometers with an established measure of trait aggression. The AQ consists of 4 aggression subscales: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. The relevant subscale for my purposes is the physical aggression questionnaire as the accelerometers capture physical aggression as opposed to verbal aggression, anger, or hostility, although I did explore correlations between the accelerometer measures and all four scales. Although the AQ is not a behavioral measure, meta-analysis reveals strong congruency between the larger survey from which the AQ was designed (the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory, Buss & Durkee, 1957) and various behavioral laboratory measures (Bushman & Anderson, 1998). The 71 additional items served to bolster the cover story and conceal the fact that the pilot study was about aggression.

The participant and the confederate then switched tasks: the participant completed the surveys and the confederate completed the tutorial and created his avatar. The confederate created an identical avatar each time to ensure consistency across participants. The experimenter then instructed the participant and the confederate to put on the accelerometers using the adjustable wrist straps that were affixed to the accelerometers. The participant and confederate then completed a short tutorial explaining how to use the Wiimote to punch the opponent's body and head, as well as block and dodge punches. The participant and the confederate then boxed one another using their avatars.

In order to test the utility of the accelerometers to measure laboratory violence, it was essential that all participants compete against opponents of similar ability. To control for this, the confederate repeated the same 3 moves (one move/second) to the tune of "Hot Cross Buns" for the duration of each round. The players then boxed for the next 35 seconds while the experimenter collected the accelerometer data between seconds 5 and 35. After playing the game, the participant returned to the computer to complete a "Post-Study Questionnaire." The questionnaire also asked participants several questions about their desire to do well on the task, their feelings regarding their avatar, and their suspicions about the true nature of the study. Finally, the participant was debriefed and paid \$10 for his or her participation.

The same variables of aggression captured by the accelerometer in the first pilot study were assessed in relation to Buss and Perry's (1992) 4 subscales of aggression. To recap, these were average peak acceleration in both the dominant and non-dominant hand, number of punches per second in both the dominant and non-dominant, and time until knockout. I also constructed a dichotomous variable, to examine the relationship between whether or not participants knocked out their boxing opponent and previous measures of aggression. As expected, none of the

accelerometer measures were significantly correlated with verbal aggression, anger, or hostility. Surprisingly however, at first glance, none of the accelerometer measures were correlated with physical aggression either. I then ran separate analyses for men and women and discovered that the relationship between dominant hand average peak acceleration and physical aggression differed by gender.

For men, average peak acceleration in the dominant hand and physical aggression were significantly and positively correlated,  $r(31) = 0.41, p < .05$ . In other words, more physically aggressive men were more physically aggressive in the game as measured by average peak acceleration. For women, average peak acceleration and physical aggression were negatively (but not significantly) correlated,  $r(31) = -0.17, p = .21$ . More physically aggressive women were less physically aggressive in the game as measured by average peak acceleration in the dominant hand<sup>11</sup>. Given that my dissertation experiment seeks only to determine the relationship between gender identity threat and anti-gay violence in men, dominant hand average peak acceleration suffices as a measure of aggression and was used to measure the main dependent variable in the dissertation experiment.

None of the remaining accelerometer measures were correlated with physical aggression for men or for women. This is understandable given that the other accelerometer measures are likely less reliable measures of aggression than dominant hand average peak acceleration. For example, people are less dexterous with their non-dominant hand as opposed to their dominant

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<sup>11</sup> I suspect this inverse relationship stems from the large number of questions regarding aggression in the personality test. Twenty-nine of the 100 questions were specifically related to violence or aggression. No other discernible theme existed within the questionnaire. In all likelihood, this design made violence and aggression salient for both men and women. But, because violence and aggression are affiliated with masculinity and not femininity, I believe that women who reported being more violent and aggressive during the personality portion of the experiment compensated for their departure from acceptable displays of femininity by playing the game less aggressively. In order to test this hypothesis, and potentially validate dominant hand average peak acceleration as an satisfactory measure of aggression for both men and women, a third study is underway. This study collects the accelerometer measures before the trait aggression measures and only contains the nine questions that comprise the physical aggression subscale interspersed among 141 random personality questions.



hand. For more dexterous participants, non-dominant hand average peak acceleration may correlate highly with trait aggression, but for less dexterous participants these items are likely uncorrelated. Similarly, the accelerometer measures that rely on punch counts are likely to be uncorrelated with physical aggression. Some people may throw many soft punches whereas others may throw just a few hard punches. Who is more aggressive? Quick, soft punchers would score higher on a punch count variable, although the infrequent, hard puncher is arguably the more aggressive of the two. Lastly, the knockout variables (i.e., whether or not the participant knocked his opponent out, time until knockout) are likely functions of Wii experience rather than aggression. Further, only 15 participants in the sample actually produced a knockout. The small  $n$  on the “time until knockout” variable makes achieving statistically significant correlations between this variable and trait aggression particularly unlikely.

In short, the results of these two pilot tests find the use of the Nintendo Wii and accelerometers to be an innovative methodological approach that correlates with a previously validated measure of aggression in men, allowing me to safely measure violent behavior in the laboratory setting.

***Dependent variable.*** Based on these pilot tests, the main dependent variable in the dissertation experiment was participants’ aggression during game play as measured by average peak acceleration across the punches thrown by participants’ dominant hand. As was done in the pilot study, average peak acceleration was calculated by 1) computing a resultant of the three acceleration vectors ( $x^2+y^2+z^2$ ) for each sweep, 2) graphing resultant acceleration for each participant, 3) identifying and totaling the number of “peaks” or punches in the resultant graphs, and 4) averaging the maximum acceleration point of each punch across all peaks.

***Independent and additional variables.*** The independent variable in this experiment is gender identity threat. Gender identity threat is a dichotomous variable labeled “1” for men who randomly received gender identity feedback indicating they were feminine and labeled “0” for men who randomly received gender identity feedback indicating they were masculine. Given my prediction that gender identity importance will moderate the relationship between gender identity threat and anti-gay aggression, I incorporated Maass’ and colleagues’ (2003) scale designed to assess gender identity importance. This scale consists of 8 items like “In general, I am happy to be a male” and “Overall, being male has very little to do with how I feel about myself” (reverse-scored). Participant rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with these statements on a scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”) and their responses are averaged for all 8 items. Chronbach’s alpha for these items was .75, indicating that the scale had acceptable internal consistency.

In order to examine differential effects of gender identity threat on anti-gay violence by race, I utilize a series of dummy and interaction variables. The sample included white, black, Asian-American and mixed race participants. The models that examine the effect of race include dummy variables for Asian-American and African-American participants. Only two participants were of mixed race and they were both in the threat condition, thus white and mixed race participants were combined to form the referent category, non-black, non-Asian, which I also refer to as “mostly white.” I then constructed interaction terms for the racial category variables and threat.

In addition to these variables, I control for several variables likely to influence the relationship between gender identity threat and compensation. Wii experience was assessed on the participant “Information Sheet.” The questionnaire asked how much Wii experience the

participant had on a 1 (no Wii experience) to 10 scale (very much Wii experience) scale. Recall that this information was also used to control for Wii experience as a status characteristic by manipulating confederate Wii experience in light of participant experience.

I also control for how much the participant identified with his avatar, his desire to do well on the boxing task, and his perception of his overall performance. These questions were assessed on the post-study questionnaire. Participants read the following statements:

I feel like my avatar is an extension of myself.

- My avatar looks like me.
- I desired to do well on the boxing task.
- I tried my best to do well on the boxing task.
- I did well on the boxing task.

Participants then indicated how accurately they felt each sentence described them on the following scale: 1 = very accurately, 2 = moderately accurately, 3 = neither accurately or inaccurately, 4 = moderately inaccurately, 5 = very inaccurately.

**Sample description.** Participants were young, heterosexual, Cornell University students. Given this convenience sample, the study findings are not directly, statistically generalizable to larger populations. Yet, this is a reasonable population in which to begin investigating the effect of gender identity threat on anti-gay violence as a number of studies have documented elevated rates of anti-gay violence in younger men compared to older men (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993; Berrill, 1992; Moore, 2001). Moreover, I contend that an experimental test of gender identity threat and anti-gay violence in this population may constitute a conservative test of my hypothesis given that university students are perhaps less likely than less educated men to commit bias-motivated crimes. Previous research has consistently found college education to be

related to more accepting attitudes towards both gay men and lesbians (Ohlander, Batalova, & Treas, 2005; Herek & Capitanio, 1995; Loftus, 2001; Treas, 2002). If I do find evidence of anti-gay violence in response to gender identity threat in this sample, more research on the effect of masculinity threat on anti-gay violence across a more diverse sample will certainly be warranted.

Ninety-six heterosexual, undergraduate and first-year graduate men<sup>12</sup> at Cornell University participated in the study in exchange for \$15. One participant requested his data not be used in the research. Another participant was unable to recall the sexual orientation of the confederate during debriefing<sup>13</sup> and 3 participants acknowledged during debriefing that they knew their gender identity feedback was false. These 5 participants were removed from analysis, yielding a total of 91 participants. All 5 of these participants were in the gender identity threat condition, yielding more participants in the threat condition (n = 40) than the non-threatened condition (n = 51). First-year students made up 24.2 % of the sample (n = 22), 25.3% were sophomores (n = 23), 24.2% were juniors (n = 22), 22.0% were seniors (n = 20), 1.1% (n = 1) were fifth-year undergraduates, and 3.3% were first-year graduate students (n = 3). Of the sample, 48 participants (52.7%) were white or European American, 14 (15.4%) were African American, 27 (29.7%) were Asian-American and 2 (2.2%) reported being of mixed racial background. The participants represented a wide range of disciplines including animal science, architecture, biology, business, computer science, economics, engineering, hotel administration, human development, industrial and labor relations, literature, math, physics, policy analysis and

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<sup>12</sup> I explicitly recruited undergraduate participants, however, the experiment sign-up system (SONA) I used to recruit participants does not prevent students from signing up for studies based on graduate school status. Thus, 3 graduate students signed up and are included in my sample. All three graduate students were in their first year of graduate school and were under the age of 25.

<sup>13</sup> This is problematic because, unlike the other participants, he did not take note of the fact that his opponent was gay. Recognizing the target of one's aggression as gay is imperative in order to enact anti-gay violence.

management, psychology and sociology. Nineteen people, or 19.8%, were members of a social fraternity.

### ***Results***

First, I performed a series of comparisons for each of the items in the Gender Identity Survey to make sure that experimental conditions were equivalent with regard to gender identity. There were significant differences on only two of the 60 items (based on a  $p < .05$  standard of statistical significance). These items were “unsystematic” and “analytical,” neither of which are likely to affect the relationship between gender identity threat and anti-gay violence. Moreover, by this standard, by chance I expected three of the 60 items to be significantly different by condition. Therefore, I can be reasonably sure that gender identity prior to the experiment was distributed randomly across conditions.

I then examined the results of a  $t$  test in order to compare participant aggression means (as measured by dominant hand average peak acceleration) across conditions. I present these means in the text, rather than in a table, due to the single measure of aggression used to assess the hypothesis. At this stage, I pooled the data of African-American, Asian-American, white and mixed race respondents to highlight the main comparison motivating this dissertation – the comparison of gender identity threatened and non-threatened men. I predicted threatened men would display significantly greater aggression toward the gay confederate than men who did not receive threatening gender identity feedback. This hypothesis was not confirmed. Threatened men ( $M = 7.35$ ,  $SD = 2.70$ ) did not display significantly more aggression than men who did not receive gender identity threatening feedback ( $M = 7.08$ ,  $SD = 3.03$ ),  $t(89) = -0.44$ ,  $p = .66$ .

Next, I estimated the effects of gender identity threat, gender identity importance, and the interaction of threat and importance on the dependent variable, anti-gay aggression, using

standard multivariate regression models. Table 5 presents the estimated regression coefficients for these models. I do not present the regression coefficients for threat on anti-gay aggression as the underlying statistical model is essentially the same as the two-sample *t* test discussed above. Model 1 examines the main effects of gender identity threat and gender identity importance on anti-gay aggression. Neither variable is significant, implying that gender identity threat did not affect levels of anti-gay aggression controlling for gender identity importance. And, gender identity importance has little effect anti-gay aggression taking into account experimental condition.<sup>14</sup>

Table 5. Estimated Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Gender Identity Threat, Gender Identity Importance, and Race on Anti-Gay Aggression.

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Threat	.261 (.615)	3.089 (3.557)	.239 (.614)	-.634 (.807)
Gender Identity Importance	.144 (.440)	.529 (.650)		
Gender Identity Importance x Threat		-.715 (.885)		
Asian-American			-.704 (.694)	-2.010** (.898)
African-American			-.662 (.878)	-.614 (1.145)
Asian-American x Threat				3.092** (1.376)
African-American x Threat				-.176 (1.736)
Constant	6.516*** (1.776)	5.007* (2.581)	7.405*** (.498)	7.808*** (.548)

Standard errors in parentheses. *N* = 91 participants. See text for variable descriptions.

\*\*\* *p*<0.01, \*\* *p*<0.05, \* *p*<0.1

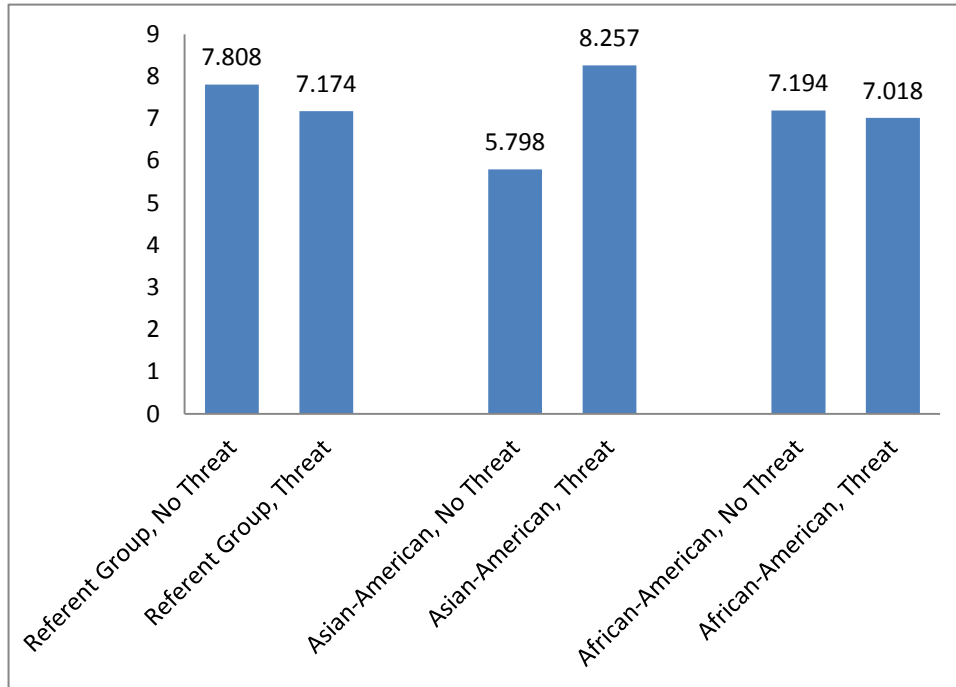
It is possible that gender identity threat could influence anti-gay aggression, but remain undetected in model 1 if the effect of gender identity importance operates differently depending

<sup>14</sup> I also ran the analysis controlling for Wii experience, the extent to which participants identified with their avatars, participant desire to do well on the boxing task, and participant perceptions of their overall performance. None of these factors influenced the effect of threatened gender identity on anti-gay aggression.; however, not surprisingly, Wii experience was significantly and positively related to anti-gay aggression. I do not present the results of these analyses here, although they are available upon request.

on condition. For example, we can imagine that individuals who highly value their masculinity could be less aggressive when they are not experiencing gender identity threat but more aggressive under threatening conditions. Although this is unlikely, I am reminded of *American Psycho* wholesome, unassuming boy next door turned serial killer Patrick Bateman. In order to examine this possibility, I conducted the analysis including an interaction term for the product of gender identity threat and gender identity importance (Model 2). This possibility was not confirmed.

Although my primary hypotheses were not confirmed, a secondary goal of this chapter was to explore differences in compensatory aggression in response to gender identity threat by race. I first examined the main effects of gender identity threat and the two indicator variables (Asian-American, African-American) on anti-gay aggression. These main effects were insignificant. However, I was particularly interested in the interaction between race and gender identity threat given that the pooled data in Models 1 and 2 might have obscured different relationships between gender identity threat and compensation by race. In other words, I suspect that gender identity threat might influence anti-gay aggression for some racial categories of men but not others. These results are presented in model 4. The significant, positive interaction effect for Asian-American and threat indicates that the relationship between gender identity threat and aggression is different for Asian-American men and men in the referent category. In order to assess the magnitude of the difference between conditions for each race, I used the estimated regression coefficients to calculate the predicted values for each condition. These estimates are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Predicted Aggression Values by Race and Condition, N = 91



The figure shows that men in the referent category (mostly white men) not under gender identity threat have a predicted average peak acceleration of 7.808. This is not significantly different than the predicted average peak acceleration for threatened men in the referent category. It is interesting to note, however, that in opposition to my original hypothesis, gender identity threat actually decreases aggression in the referent category, although not significantly. Asian-American men, on the other hand, have significantly lower predicted average peak acceleration rates than men in the referent category. Notice that the difference in predicted accelerometer-measured aggression is about 2.0 points, or 25%, lower for non-threatened Asian-American compared to referent category men. In other words, in general, the Asian-American men in my sample played the game less aggressively than the white and mixed race men.

Turning to the interaction effects, what is particularly interesting is the significant, positive interaction effect for Asian-American men and threat (Table 4, model 4). This indicates that the



relationship between gender identity threat and anti-gay aggression is different for Asian-American men and men in the referent category. This analysis and figure 1 make clear that both the direction and the magnitude of the effect of gender identity threat between Asian-American men and (mostly) white men differ. While men in the referent category responded to gender identity threat by playing the game slightly less aggressively (again, not significantly), Asian-American men responded to gender identity threat by playing the game much more aggressively. The difference in predicted accelerometer-measured aggression is about 2.5 points higher for threatened Asian-American compared to non-threatened Asian-American men. African-American men responded in much the same way as their mostly white counterparts as indicated by the lack of significant main and interactional effects.

I can think of two related explanations for this interesting finding. First, in addition to experiencing gender threat, threatened Asian-American men were likely undergoing a stereotype threat. The stereotype literature reveals that individuals react to stereotypic information about groups in which they a part in a variety of ways (see, for example, Maass, D'Eltole, & Cadinu, 2008; Steele & Aronson, 1995). For example, Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) found that when Asian-American women were primed to think about race, they performed better on a math test because they were present to stereotypes about Asian-Americans as a “model minority.” This stereotype characterizes Asian-Americans as intelligent and mathematically inclined. When Asian-American women were primed to think about gender; however, they performed worse on the math test. The participants began to think about gender stereotypes that claim women are less analytical, logical and good at math. Applying similar logic, despite significant heterogeneity, stereotypes often depict Asian-American men as weak, passive, and unmasculine (Espiritu, 2008). Therefore, in the present study, they may have reacted to this stereotype and

compensating by playing the game more aggressively.

It is worth noting that, in the stereotype threat literature, stereotype threat leads people to confirm negative stereotypes, whereas in the present study the findings suggest that stereotype threat might lead to behavior that disconfirms stereotypes of Asian-American men as weak and passive. I suspect that this difference is a function of the tasks under investigation and the different cognitive processes required to perform these tasks. Typically, the tasks under investigation in the stereotype literature require higher level cognition (like math). Stereotype threats are believed to cause anxiety and concern which then interferes with the cognitive processes required to perform the task. In this study, however, the task requires very few, if any higher-level or executive functioning processes. The ability to throw punches, then, is not likely to be hindered by concern or anxiety. In fact, it is possible that threat decreased thinking and that more automatic processes associated with the limbic system took over in response to the threat, increasing violence and aggression.

A related explanation for these findings is that prototypical and marginalized men react differently to gender identity threat. Asian-American men occupy a more peripheral status with regard to hegemonic masculinity. For white men, receiving a threat to their gender identity – or receiving information that they are more feminine – may not actually threaten their gender identity because of their more central position with regard to hegemonic masculinity. Conversations with the experimenters revealed that many of threatened white men who participated in this study explicitly noted during debriefing that they were surprised to learn they were more feminine, but that they were not upset. In other words, being told they were more feminine might not have necessarily meant that that white men viewed themselves as less masculine. On the other hand, Asian-American men may have interpreted the threat to mean they

were both feminine and less masculine than their peers.

At this time, it is important to note that it is highly unlikely that threatened Asian-American men executed more *anti-gay* violence, per say. In other words, I suspect that these men would have reacted to gender identity threat in a similar way had the confederate been heterosexual. I cannot test this supposition at this time, and future research will need to discern between anti-gay violence and more general violence in response to gender identity threat.

### ***Discussion***

There are several limitations of this study worth mentioning. First, like most experimental research, the findings are based on a non-random sample and are not statistically generalizable. Second, because the interesting interaction effects of race and gender identity threat were discovered after the data collection was well underway, recruiting men of color resulted in the addition of only 25 more participants. Thus, the cell sizes for threatened and non-threatened Asian-American men and African-American men are quite small with 16 Asian-American men in the no threat condition and 11 Asian-American men in the threat condition. (Eight black men were in the no threat condition and only 6 black men were in the threat condition. This compares to the referent category which contained 27 unthreatened men and 23 threatened men.)

Third, because boxing is a task that requires hitting, the accelerometer data may capture one's desire to do well on the task, rather than actual aggression toward the target. To address this concern, the post-study questionnaire contained items designed to capture the participant's desire to do well on the task. Therefore, I was able to statistically control for this desire; however, the inclusion of this variable did not affect the results. Therefore, I chose to present the simpler models above.

Fourth, there may be concern whether lab violence can inform real world violence. A meta-analytic review of laboratory and real world studies shows that a number of individual and situational factors consistently influence aggressive behavior in the real world and in the laboratory (Bushman & Anderson, 1998). Moreover, I conducted two pilot studies to answer this question. The results of these studies indicate that the method developed for use in the dissertation experiment does have the ability to speak to real world violence. Namely, pilot testing revealed that average peak acceleration in the dominant hand correlates with “aggressive” participant game play as opposed to “normal” game play (pilot 1) and that average peak acceleration in the dominant hand correlates with men’s reported physical aggression in the real world (pilot 2). This convergence of findings confirms the ability of this new method to capture measurements of violence and aggression in laboratory settings that accurately reflect one’s propensity for violence in the real world. This is an important methodological contribution. The primary goal of most laboratory research is the development of theories designed to uncover underlying processes and mechanisms, yet few behavioral measures of violence have been used in experimental research limiting the advancement of social psychological theories of violence and aggression. I offer this new approach with the hope that it will encourage desperately needed experimental research that aids in our understanding of these behaviors.

In summary, the main empirical predictions regarding the effect of gender identity threat on anti-gay violence, as well as the predicted relationship between gender identity threat and gender identity importance, were not supported. This chapter, however, does aid in the formulation of a more nuanced interactional theory of gendered behavior and serves as a starting point for additional empirical research explicitly designed to confirm or disconfirm these nuances. Specifically, the analysis suggests that gender identity threat likely affects racial groups

differently. There may be cultural constructions regarding some racialized masculinities that, when threatened, are especially likely to lead to compensatory behavior. Similarly, it may be that some people occupy marginalized position with respect to hegemonic masculinity. (And, Asian-American men may be more likely to feel this way than white men). Other men (including some Asian-American men), may feel quite similar to idealized constructions of masculinity. If one's gender identity closely aligns with hegemonic masculinity, he may be less likely to respond to gender identity threat because the threat is not severe enough to lead to serious masculine insecurity. In other words, imagine a white, heterosexual, young, wealthy, Cornell student. Receiving information that indicates he is feminine may cause the student to question the gender identity test itself, rather than his own ability to live up to traditional notions of masculinity.

These are important distinctions to consider in future theorizing regarding masculinity threat and compensation. Not only do they shed light on particular types of people who may be more or less likely to compensate, they shed light on strategies that might be employed to reduce engagement in compensatory gendered behaviors. In the next chapter, through a series of qualitative interviews with men who occupy both central and periphery positions in relation to hegemonic masculinity, I investigate these questions further.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE MEANING OF MASCULINITY

The survey data used in chapter 3 was used to investigate the process of gender identity threat and compensation in a large, nationally representative sample, whereas the laboratory experiment of chapter 4 evaluated the causal impact of threatened gender identity. Chapter 3 suggests that infidelity may arise in reaction to threatened gender identity. Similarly, for some men, violence and aggression may also stem from identity insecurity and cultural definitions of “appropriately” masculine behavior. Might this process also explain other male-typed behaviors? This is a particularly important question given that many of the behaviors associated with young masculinity are particularly damaging. For example, young men are overwhelmingly more likely than young women to commit suicide (Kessler, Borges & Walters, 1999; Moscicki, 1997), commit violent crimes (Steffensmeier, 1995), and be the victims of violent crimes (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012). Young men are disproportionately more likely to be involved in motor vehicle accidents and accidents involving alcohol (Cerrelli, 1998; Li, Baker, & Kelen, 1998). And, young men are more likely to take risks that result in injury and premature death (Byrnes, Miller & Schafer, 1999; Ely & Meyerson, 2008, 2010; Faul, Xu, Wald & Coronado, 2010; Morrongiello & Rennie, 1998). In order to gain a more detailed understanding of the causes and consequences of gender identity threat and compensation, my research team and I conducted a series of 44 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with heterosexual undergraduate men.

#### ***Research Design***

The central method used was semi-structured, in-depth interviewing. I conducted approximately one-third of the interviews and two undergraduate research assistants conducted the remaining interviews. There is a longstanding debate regarding the advantages and

disadvantages of both insider and outsider status in qualitative research. I do not resolve this debate here, however, I take the perspective that advantages and disadvantages are associated with both statuses (Merton, 1972; Naples, 1996; Zavella, 1993) and I view these statuses as end points on a continuum rather than as dichotomous positions (Anderson & Jones, 2000; Bulmer, 1982; Carter, 2004; Hockey, 1993; Kelleher & Hillier, 1996; Labaree, 2002; Narayan, 1993, Surra & Ridley, 1991) Moreover, researchers are simultaneously members of multiple social categories making them both insiders and outsiders to varying degrees (Deutsch, 1981). Guided by this perspective, I selected two undergraduate research assistants – one man and one woman – to assist in conducting the interviews. Thus, each interviewer occupied a different position on the insider/outsider continuum. I occupied the most “outside” position. I was similar to the young men in this study in terms of nationality, but different with respect to gender and age. The undergraduate man occupied the most “inside” position in that he shared nationality, gender and age with the informants. The undergraduate woman occupied a place somewhere in between: she was similar in terms of nationality and age, but differed in terms of gender. Fifteen of the interviews were conducted by me, 15 were conducted by the undergraduate woman (Stephanie) and 14 were conducted by the undergraduate man (Thomas).

*Insider and outsider effects.* My preliminary observations suggest that the interviewers did elicit different responses based on their gender and age. For example, Thomas’s interview transcripts averaged 31.5 pages (11,149 words); my transcripts averaged 24.5 pages (10,567 words); and Stephanie’s transcripts averaged 24 pages (9,151 words). Note that Thomas’s interviews were much longer than Stephanie’s and mine in terms of pages, but only slightly longer in terms of words. This is because informants were especially likely to respond to Thomas’s questions with short, one word answers. This may be due to his insider status.

Informants may have neglected to explain certain perspectives in detail assuming a certain level of understanding given his age and gender. It is also possible that informants were hesitant to discuss their insecurities and vulnerabilities with Thomas for fear of reprisal. I suspect this was true for some respondents. However, despite the plethora of one-word answers, Thomas did elicit more text than either Stephanie or me (in terms of both pages and words). Moreover, informants who spoke with Thomas expressed some of the most interesting, nuanced and controversial perspectives on masculinity, gender identity threat and compensation. Without a doubt, Thomas's in-group status was beneficial in garnering more explicit, and perhaps more honest, responses from the informants.

Stephanie's interviews, on the other hand, were the most brief. I suspect this is also related to interviewer gender and age. Because Stephanie is a young, heterosexual, and conventionally attractive undergraduate student, some participants likely viewed Stephanie as a potential sexual partner and altered their responses in light of this perception. A close reading of Stephanie's transcripts reveal what appears to be flirting – or at the very least, heightened interest in Stephanie – on the part of several informants. For example, at the end of each interview, the informants were asked if they had any questions for the interviewer. Casey replied, "Did you enjoy the interview?" Stephanie affirmed that she did, to which Casey responded, "Okay, well, that's it. I just wanted to know if you enjoyed it." Neither Thomas nor I were ever asked if we enjoyed the interview. Another informant (Yakim) began his interview with Stephanie by asking whether or not she is in a sorority. He proceeded to ask if she knew a series of people that he knew in Stephanie's sorority. At the end of the interview, Yakim asked Stephanie to turn off the recorder in order to have a conversation about something seemingly unrelated to the interview.



The transcript ends as Yakim says, “Am I allowed to ask....” He does not finish the question and the transcript as Stephanie says, “Sure, okay. Let me turn this off first.”

Of course, it is possible that I am misinterpreting Casey’s and Yakim’s intentions given that sexual or romantic interest may be especially difficult to recognize in transcribed text. Nonetheless, there is a distinct possibility that Stephanie’s age and gender triggered responses designed to manage Stephanie’s impression of the informant as opposed to more open and honest responses.

A more detailed analysis of interviewer effects by gender and age is outside the scope of this dissertation; however, at times throughout the presentation of results – particularly when I suspect interviewer status is relevant – I note the interviewer who elicited the response and suggest how his or her status as an insider or outsider may have influenced the informants’ speaking.

***Participant recruitment.*** The participants were recruited via flyers posted around campus advertising an interview study about masculinity paying \$15 for participation. Due to variations in how masculinity is defined cross-culturally (Gilmore, 1990) and across racial and ethnic subgroups within cultures (Levant, 1996; Thompson & Pleck, 1995), the materials specifically recruited heterosexual black and white participants, born and raised in the United States. Informants could be of any ethnic background; however, the materials specifically asked about Hispanic or Latino heritage. In hindsight, a more open-ended question regarding ethnic background would have allowed for a more nuanced analysis of ethnicity and masculinity.

The interviews were carried out between January 2010 and August 2010 and lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours. All interviews were conducted in the Business Simulation Laboratory in Sage Hall in Ithaca, New York at a time of the informant’s choosing.

***Interview questions.*** In this chapter, I present the results of three lines of inquiry. First, participants were asked questions intended to illicit definitions and perceptions of contemporary young masculinity. Second, participants were asked questions about threatened masculinity, including the ways in which gender identity might be threatened. Participants were also asked to discuss a specific time in which their own masculinity was called into question. Third, the participants were probed for their reactions to these instances. The majority of each interview was devoted to these three lines of inquiry; however, informants were also asked about their perceptions of contemporary femininity. I do not systematically discuss findings from this portion of the interviews; however, occasionally I draw on this data in order to compare the informants' perceptions of masculinity and femininity. The list below presents a selection of the interview questions discussed in this chapter:

- In thinking about your guy<sup>15</sup> friends, would you say that your friends are typical or average guys?
- Do you think of yourself as a typical or average guy?
- When I say “typical guy” or “average guy” what comes to mind?
- I want you to think about masculinity in general. Please name 5 characteristics or personality traits that you associate with masculinity.
- The [first/second/third, etc.] trait you listed was \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me about that trait.
- Can you give me an example from your life about a time when you possessed this trait?
- Tell me some ways in which a guy might be made to feel like he is not good enough, particularly when it comes to masculinity.

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<sup>15</sup> Throughout the interviews, I referred to the participants and their peers as “guys” instead of “men.” A focus group pilot study designed to get young men’s opinions regarding the interview questions revealed that individuals in the population of interest refer to themselves as “guys” instead of “men.” Moreover, the term is less formal, which had the advantage of promoting rapport between the interviewer and the informants.

- Think of a time when you did not feel like you were manly enough or felt like your masculinity was called into question. Please walk me through the event.
- Think back on this event and tell me what happened immediately afterwards. What did you do? What did other people do?
- Did you do anything in particular that maybe you wouldn't have done if the event hadn't have happened?
- People do all kinds of things to deal with external events and make themselves feel better. Did you do anything like this?

*Saturation.* All interviews were digitally recorded with the participant's permission. Each participant was then assigned a pseudonym and their interview was immediately transcribed. Because data collection and transcription took place simultaneously, I was able to read transcripts from interviews conducted by other members of the research team shortly after the conclusion of each interview. Thus, I was able to compare this information to the information gleaned from my own interviews. We eventually reached a point where the informants repeated the same information that we had already heard numerous times. Duplication therefore indicated a logical stopping point in our questioning (Duneier, 1994; Goffman, 1989). The final sample consisted of 44 undergraduate men who described their perceptions of masculinity and their experiences of threatened masculinity in their own words.

### *Data Analysis*

The data analysis procedure was twofold. First, I began by reading the transcripts twice and using the qualitative software analysis program ATLAS.ti to code for emerging themes. Writing analytic memos on these themes helped make sense of how the participants defined masculinity, experienced threats to masculinity and reported responding to these threats. As data

analysis progressed, I combined themes and refined my focus deciding on a set number of codes related to conceptions of masculinity, experiences of gender identity threat, and responses to threatened gender identity. I then reexamined the transcripts and re-coded the data to see how these themes were used.

Second, a portion of the questions were subjected to what Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) call “simultaneous meaning categorization and condensation”. As noted above, participants were asked to name 5 characteristics or personality traits they associated with masculinity. Their recorded responses amounted to a list of characterizations. I read through these and established categories so that virtually every characterization could be classified under a category.<sup>16</sup> These categories were not established in advance but developed from the transcribed lists provided by the informants. Then, after all the characterizations had been categorized, some of the categories were combined resulting in 24 categories or traits associated with masculinity. The categories were given one-word labels and I counted the number of occurrences in each category to find the most frequent characterizations. Those categories mentioned by five or more participants are discussed below.

### ***Sample Characteristics***

Only black and white men born and raised in the United States and who identified as heterosexual, were recruited for the study. Table 6 displays the demographic characteristics of the overall sample and Table 7 displays the demographic characteristics of each interview participant. The final sample included 31 (70.5%) non-Hispanic white informants, 3 (6.8%) Hispanic white informants, 7 (15.9%) African American informants and 3 (6.8%) informants who were both African American and white. The sample consisted of 7 (15.9%) freshman, 11

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<sup>16</sup> A small number of words were not used in the analysis because they were tautological (e.g., masculinity, manly) or unrelated to personality (e.g. hairy, tall).

(25.0%) sophomores, 10 (22.7%) juniors, 13 (29.5%) seniors and 3 (6.8%) fifth-year students.

All participants were between the ages of 18 and 23. The average age of the informants was 20.5.

Table 6. Demographic Characteristics of the Interview Sample

Characteristic	# of participants	% of participants
Race/Ethnicity		
White	34	77.2%
African-American	8	18.2%
African-American & White	2	4.5%
Hispanic	3	6.8%
Year in School		
Freshman	7	15.9%
Sophomore	11	25.0%
Junior	10	22.7%
Senior	13	29.5%
Fifth-Year	3	6.8%
Major		
Agriculture	2	4.5%
Business/Management	22	50.0%
Engineering	4	9.0%
Humanities	1	2.3%
Life/Physical Sciences	10	22.7%
Social Sciences	9	20.4%
Social Fraternity Membership	14	31.8%
Cornell Football Player	7	15.9%

With regard to majors, the participants represented a wide range of disciplines. Several participants reported majoring in particularly small fields. In an effort to protect the anonymity of the informants, I therefore collapsed majors into the following categories: agriculture (e.g., animal science, food science, plant science, viticulture and enology); business/management (e.g., applied economics management, hotel administration, industrial and labor relations); engineering (e.g., chemical engineering, civil engineering, computer science, mechanical engineering), humanities (e.g., American studies, English language and literature, foreign language, history, linguistics), life/physical sciences (e.g., physics, chemistry, geology, biology) and social sciences (e.g., anthropology, economics, sociology, psychology). Although these categories are not all encompassing, each of the majors listed by the participants fell into one of these categories.

Table 7. Demographic Characteristics by Participant

Pseudonym	Age	Year in School	Self-Reported Race	Major
Aaron	21	Senior	White	Business/Management
Adam	19	Freshman	White	Business/Management
Aiden	22	Senior	White	Business/Management
Andrew	22	Senior	White	Business/Management
Austin	21	Junior	White	Engineering
Ben	22	Senior	White	Agriculture
Brandon	20	Junior	White	Business/Management
Brian	19	Freshman	White	Social Science (double major)
Casey	20	Sophomore	African American	Business/Management
Christian	21	Senior	White	Business/Management
Christopher	20	Sophomore	African American	Social Sciences
Colin	21	Junior	White	Life/Physical Sciences
Connor	20	Junior	White	Engineering
Curtis	20	Sophomore	White	Life/Physical Sciences & Business/Management
Dale	19	Sophomore	White	Business/Management
Daniel	22	Senior	White	Business/Management
David	19	Freshman	African American and White	Life/Physical Sciences
Dean	21	Junior	African American	Social Sciences
Derik	20	Junior	White	Life/Physical Sciences
Duane	20	Sophomore	White	Social Sciences & Business/Management
Dylan	21	Junior	White	Agriculture & Life/Physical Sciences
Ethan	20	Sophomore	White	Business/Management
Gabe	22	Fifth-Year	White	Business/Management
Julian	21	Senior	White	Social Sciences (double major)
Kenneth	21	Senior	African American and White	Social Sciences (double major)
Kevin	18	Freshman	White	Business/Management
Kyle	20	Sophomore	White	Business/Management
Mario	21	Junior	White, Hispanic	Business/Management
Mark	22	Senior	White	Business/Management
Michael	19	Freshman	White	Social Sciences
Nerone	23	Fifth-Year	African American	Life/Physical Sciences
Oliver	23	Fifth-Year	White	Life/Physical Sciences
Oswald	19	Freshman	African American	Life/Physical Sciences
Paul	21	Junior	White, Hispanic	Engineering
Richard	20	Sophomore	White	Business/Management
Robert	19	Freshman	African American	Engineering
Scott	21	Senior	White	Humanities
Seth	20	Sophomore	White	Business/Management
Shawn	22	Senior	White	Business/Management
Solomon	20	Sophomore	African American	Social Sciences
Spencer	19	Sophomore	White	Life/Physical Sciences & Business/Management
Steven	21	Junior	White, Hispanic	Social Sciences
Timothy	20	Junior	African American and White	Life/Physical Sciences
Yakim	21	Senior	White	Business/Management

Students with double majors in the same category are listed as double majors in that category; students with double majors in different categories are listed as majors in both categories.

Twenty-two of the 44 (50%) students reported a major in the business/management category. This is because I used the Business Simulation Lab's online recruitment system (SONA) to attain participants. Although business/management is overrepresented in the sample, business is the most popular majors in the United States<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, Connell (2005) suggests that globalization has led to a new global hegemonic masculinity defined and represented by international businessmen. Therefore, this overrepresentation might shed light on one of the most powerful forms of young masculinity.

Of the 44 men interviewed, 14 (32%) were in social fraternities and 7 (16%) played on the varsity football team<sup>18</sup> with 2 informants overlapping between the two groups. Although I did not intentionally recruit fraternity members or football players, their representation in the sample was fortunate. Comparisons between fraternity and non-fraternity men, and comparisons between football players and non-football players, may be important. By definition, fraternity brothers and football players spend inordinate amounts of time in groups comprised almost exclusively of men. Moreover, membership in these groups calls for participation in activities traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity. Competition and athletic ability are required of football players, whereas drinking and the pursuit of sexual relationships with women are encouraged in social fraternities. Thus, in the analysis that follows, I carefully compare the perceptions of fraternity members to non-fraternity members, as well as the perceptions of football players and non-football players.

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<sup>17</sup> Based on an analysis of NLSY97 data of years 1997 – 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Only one other informant participated in varsity athletics. This participant ran track.

### *The Typical or Average Young Man*

First, we asked informants to think about their friends and indicate whether they felt their friends were typical or average guys. Then, we asked them to think about themselves and indicate whether they felt like a typical or average guy. The majority of the informants indicated that they felt typical in general, or that they felt typical compared to other Cornell University undergraduate men (n = 28, 64%). A substantial minority, however, revealed they did not feel typical (n = 13, 30%). The remaining participants (n = 3, 6%) indicated they were typical in some respects and atypical in other respects.

Similarly, the majority of informants thought of their friends as typical or as typical of other Cornell men (n = 29, 66%). Eleven participants (25%) did not feel their friends were typical or average. An additional 4 (9%) felt that some of their friends were typical whereas others were not or that their friends had some typical characteristics as well as other qualities that set them apart.

We then asked the informants to describe the average or typical guy. For these young men, watching and participating in sports, drinking or partying, heterosexuality, and sexual prowess were definitive of the typical or average guy.

**Sports.** The most common way the informants defined typical masculinity was through watching and participating in sports. Forty-two of the 44 men (95%) explicitly mentioned sports in their description of the typical guy. For example, Daniel said, “They like sports, they like to play sports, they like to watch sports.” Mario commented that some men may not be particularly invested in sports, yet he emphasized a necessary minimum level of interest. He said, “I feel like even if he’s not paying close attention to professional sports, he’s aware of sports. He has a favorite team or something like that.”



Although the overwhelming majority of informants described the typical guy in terms of sports, several comments revealed that some sports were more definitive of masculinity than others. For example, implicit in Mario's statement above is an interest in team sports as opposed to individual sports. Ethan also shed light on which sports are typical and which are not. Ethan said that he does not think of himself as typical. When asked why, he responded, "Well, I think I have a very weird type interest in sports. It's not like the usual like football and basketball and baseball. I'm not interested in the big three kind of sports." When asked to elaborate, he continued, "I have my interests in niche sports, tennis and some Olympic events. I enjoy watching the skiing and the short track and the swimming in the summer." Similarly, Colin said he felt atypical compared to other young men because he is "not great at sports. In high school I ran track. That's not really a man's man sport." Despite the fact that the majority of informants referenced sports in their descriptions, it seems that only a handful of sporting activities are truly definitive of masculinity. Interest in alternative sporting activities, on the other hand, contributed to perceptions of oneself as atypical.

***Drinking and partying.*** The majority of the participants (24, 55%) alluded to some aspect of drinking or partying in their descriptions of the average or typical guy. For example, when asked to describe the typical guy, Brian said, "I guess they just do the same stuff as me, like going to bars and parties." Christian, who also feels typical, said, "We like to go out on the weekends." When pressed to be more specific, he continued, "You know, drink a lot."

If one thing was evident in my interviews, it is that there is considerable pressure for young men to drink and party. Multiple participants reported drinking three, four and five nights a week. Throughout reading the transcripts, I learned where to purchase \$1 domestic bottles on Tuesdays, how to "get trashed for \$6" on Wednesdays, where to find \$3 Long Island Ice Teas on

Thursdays, and that on weekends fishbowls full of alcohol are for sale at a local dance club. Clearly, for many of these men, the ability to consume alcohol was a “source of masculine pride” (Paul).

Yet, just as participants relied on the vague notion of “sports” to refer to certain appropriately masculine sports, the terms “partying” and “drinking” were used to describe specific types of activities. In particular, only certain alcoholic beverages denoted masculinity. Dale said, “You always think of a guy like watching football and drinking beer and eating pizza.” Parroting Dale, Colin, the young man who ran track in high school mentioned above, said: “We like ordering pizza, drinking beers, and chilling.” Dale’s and Colin’s comments explicitly mention drinking beer, as opposed to other alcoholic beverages suggesting that certain drinks are more acceptable for men to consume than others. Aiden made this more explicit. When asked to describe the average or typical guy, he replied, “Let’s see, he drinks beer instead of wine.” Like Dale and Colin, Aiden linked beer drinking with masculinity, and juxtaposed the consumption of beer to the consumption of wine.

***Heterosexuality.*** Nineteen of the 44 informants (43%) explicitly described the average or typical guy in terms of romantic or sexual interest in “girls.” (Without exception, the informants referred to their women peers as “girls.”) An additional 6 (14%) explicitly equated typical masculinity with heterosexuality. Kyle’s description of the typical guy is representative of his peers’ descriptions. Kyle, a fraternity member who felt he and his friends were typical, said, “People who are like looking to hook up with girls on the weekends.” Colin, more explicitly, expressed the belief that masculinity and heterosexuality are synonymous: “The average guy would be heterosexual. Well, I mean, not there’s anything like weird about gay guys. I would just say that the average male most likely has a girlfriend or – not most likely has girlfriend, but

you know – is the kind of dude that would have a girlfriend.” Colin is careful not to come across as homophobic, yet he unambiguously equates typical or average masculinity with romantic interest in women. Similarly, Dean said, “So I think if we’re talking about popular discourse around women or sexuality, I think the average guy is heterosexual.”

*Sexual prowess.* Related to heterosexuality, is the notion of sexual prowess. Sexual prowess implies the ability to “hook up” with multiple women. Recent literature on university “hook up” culture defines “hooking up” as almost any sexual action from making out to sexual intercourse (Armstrong, England, & Fogarty, 2010; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). Twenty of the 44 informants (45%) described the average or typical guy in terms of sexual prowess. For example, David was asked to describe the average guy. He said, “He does his work during the week, has fun on the weekends, hooks up with girls on the weekends, stuff like that.” In response to the same question, Kenneth said “I guess the average guy is probably thinking about sex a lot, especially with hormones raging.” As an example of typical masculinity, he goes on to describe the weekend activities of he and his friends: “Most of my fraternity brothers, as well as myself, are pretty good with the ladies so to speak. We’re definitely always thinking about girls, and that’s one of the reasons that we have the parties. It’s usually in the pursuit of... (laugh) female companionship.” Kenneth is hesitant to explicitly say that he and his friends host parties with the intention of having sex, but it is clearly insinuated. It is worth noting that Kenneth said this to Thomas, and that he may have been less forthcoming had Stephanie or I interviewed him.

While some men acknowledged that hooking up was an important part of their lives, others described the average guy in terms of sexual prowess, but acknowledged their indifference or distaste for casual sexual encounters. For example, Shawn said, “The typical guy in that sense is that he’ll go for one-night stands. Those kind of things just don’t flow with me.” Similarly,

Dean, who is a Christian and is waiting to have sex until he is married, described the typical guy as “be[ing] pursuant of women and your status in your relationship with a female. It’s like, ‘How many females have you had?’” In short, sexual prowess equates to numbers: the more women you hook up with, the more likely you are to be perceived as typical or average. Note that this does not mean that the average or typical guy *is* hooking up extensively. Rather, undergraduate men largely *believe* that the average or typical guy is hooking up extensively.

***Atypical men.*** It is important to note that informants who did not feel typical or average shared a definition of young masculinity largely consistent with those who did feel typical. For example, Oliver did not consider himself or his friends typical. When asked why, he said, “I don’t know, I really don’t like Cornell football. That doesn’t really do it for me. Who wants to go to Dunbar’s and Ruloff’s? I’ve never been to those places.” Although Scott is not interested in these activities, Scott understands that the typical guy is interested in sports and drinking (Dunbar’s and Ruloff’s are two bars frequented by undergraduates).

Together, these descriptions constitute a normative definition of young masculinity. Connell (1990, 1990; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and others (Donaldson, 1993) refer to this form of masculinity as “hegemonic.” Hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally normative ideal of male behavior to which men are strongly encouraged to subscribe. It is not necessarily the most prevalent form of male expression, but it is the most socially endorsed. Scott’s description is telling. Elaborating on his statement above, he said, “I’d say that most of my guy friends aren’t like your typical alpha male kind of guys, they’re a little bit more laid back.” In this statement, Oliver equates average masculinity with the “alpha male.” Yet, by definition, alpha males are not average: they are those men who occupy a position of superiority and dominance over other men. Thus, it is questionable as to whether it is even possible for the

majority of young men to subscribe to the description of young masculinity that emerged as normative.

Shawn, who also said he was atypical, provided a second example. When asked what comes to mind when he thinks of the typical guy, he said, “The frat guys. They’re really typical I think. To me, the frat guys are constantly partying...it’s always, you have to chug the beer, you have to play the sports harder, that kind of stuff. And in terms of girls, I think they sweeten up their talk when it comes to talking to females.” Shawn’s description of the typical guy mirrors Oliver’s – he references drinking, sports, and notions of heterosexuality and sexual prowess. Yet, Shawn assigned the label “frat guy” to the average or typical guy. Shawn is not alone in thinking fraternity men embody typical or average masculinity. Almost a quarter of the informants (10, 23%) – some fraternity members and others not – referenced fraternity men in their descriptions of typical masculinity. Yet, the majority of Cornell men are not in fraternities. While fraternity brothers do make up a substantial portion of the Cornell undergraduate population with 24% of undergraduate men involved in the Greek system (U.S. News and World Report, 2012), it is interesting that a characteristic shared by a minority of the population (U.S. News and World Report, 2012) is seen as normative.

In short, whether men felt typical or atypical, the informants in this study shared a common definition of masculinity that has come to define the archetypal young man at Cornell. This definition involves athleticism, drinking, heterosexuality and sexual prowess. These categories are associated with fraternity membership and often membership in a fraternity is used as a short-hand descriptor of young masculinity. Yet, this definition refers to a culturally normative ideal of male behavior that only some men embrace.

### ***Who is Typical?***

As noted earlier, the majority of the overall sample indicated that they felt like typical young men. However, my sample included a disproportionate number of varsity football players ( $n = 7$ , 16%) and members of social fraternities ( $n = 14$ , 32%) with some overlap between these groups ( $n = 2$ , 5%) Who is most likely to feel like a typical or average guy? Conversely, who feels relegated to the margins with regard to masculinity?

***Football players.*** Seven of the 44 (16%) informants were members of the varsity football team. Returning to the question of whether or not the informant felt like a “typical or average guy,” of the 7 football players interviewed, 4 (57%) indicated they and their friends were typical. For example, Dylan said, “I’m typical, I guess, because I like doing all the things like drinking and just hanging out. And I like sports a lot. I just hang out with normal guys.” Another 2 football players (29%) indicated that they and their friends were largely typical or average – particularly when it came to sports and competition – yet offered one caveat. Christian indicated that he and his friends were less self-conscious about their appearance than other young men: “I think of the average guy, at least here, as they like to impress people. Like make sure they get some sort of attention, that people say good things about them. They are really self-conscious, and like to make sure that other people think good things about them.” Similarly, Christopher felt that he and his friends were largely typical, but felt atypical in his disregard for securing the attention of young women. Christopher said:

I’m a typical guy because like if it has to do with sports or video games, I’m very competitive....But I guess for other things like, I guess, girls, I find it better to just be yourself, and like if the girl likes you, she’ll let you know. And see, that’s I guess where I claim that I’m different. An average guy, they feel they need to, I guess, show off and be this, you know, spectacular guy and that’s what’ll catch the girl’s attention.

Setting these caveats aside momentarily, six of the seven (87%) football players interviewed felt they and their friends were representative or – or largely representative – of other young men. Only one of the football players, Aaron, explicitly stated that he and his friends were atypical. Interestingly, his rationale for being atypical mirrored the caveats given by Christian and Christopher. According to Aaron, what is atypical about he and his friends is that they don't place much stock in the opinions of other people:

Like we're not trying to go out and like wear the nicest clothes and look real cool all the time. We're not politically correct most of the time. A lot of people who don't know us, that sit in a room with us, they probably think we're the worst people ever just because we joke about all kinds of unusual crude stuff, and like to really have fun. Like we found a balance with like having fun in, and doing work, and not being too consumed in one or the other. We just don't mind people that say, "Oh, these guys are weird, playing *Madden*, yelling all the time, and walking around wearing sweatpants, never dressing up."

Like Christian and Christopher, Aaron feels that what makes him atypical is his lack of concern for the admiration and approval of others.

Although these young men describe this aspect of their lives as atypical, I contend that their indifference regarding the perceptions of other people is a privilege. Because of their status as members of the varsity football team, these men can wear sweatpants without worrying that they will be perceived as unattractive, slovenly, or undesirable. They can play video games without worrying that their status at the university is in jeopardy. (Academic monitoring, counseling and tutoring are available to all Cornell student-athletes.) They can tell crude jokes without worrying about whether or not people will respect them. Christian, Christopher and Aaron are right – they are atypical – although they are not atypical in the sense that other

participants felt atypical. That is, their atypicalities did not illicit judgment or foster a sense of insecurity as they did in other men.<sup>19</sup>

**Fraternity men.** Of the 44 participants, 14 (32%) were in social fraternities. Of these 14 men, 9 (64%) explicitly stated that they felt like typical guys and 2 (14%) stated they felt typical of other young guys at the university. One informant (7%) felt largely typical with the caveat that he was intensely self-conscious around women, and one informant (7%) felt largely typical with the caveat that he was a minority student in a minority fraternity. Thus, 13 of the 14 fraternity men (93%) felt like typical or largely typical young men.

Regarding their friends, most of the men in social fraternities also felt that their friends were typical. Eight (57%) of the informants explicitly said that their friends were typical or typical as defined at Cornell. Five students (38%), on the other hand, felt torn indicating that some of their friends were typical whereas others were not or that their friends were typical in some respects and atypical in others. Only one fraternity member (7%) felt his friends were largely unrepresentative of other young men.

**Non-football players and non-fraternity members.** If football players and fraternity men feel largely typical, how do students feel who are not involved in either football or fraternities? Do they feel representative of young masculinity or are they more likely to feel atypical? Of the 25 men who did not play a varsity sport and were not members of a social fraternity, 9 (36%) felt typical, 3 (12%) felt largely typical, and 13 (52%) explicitly stated that they were atypical. With respect to their friends, 13 (52%) indicated their friends were typical or largely typical, and 12

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<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that unlike other universities, Cornell football players may not be the most high status student athletes on campus. At Cornell, ice hockey is more popular than football. Given the elite status hockey at Cornell players, I suspect that had I interviewed Cornell ice hockey players, I would have found similar results. Nonetheless, I believe that Cornell football players garner respect and are afforded certain privileges due to their athletic ability in a highly revered sport.



(48%) reported feeling that their friends were atypical. Clearly, football players and fraternity men are more likely to feel typical, whereas non-athletes and non-fraternity members are more likely to feel atypical.

Of the non-football, non-fraternity men, those who did feel typical cited reasons similar to those cited by football players and fraternities members. On the other hand, those who felt atypical cited their lack of interest in the activities and characteristics listed above – that is, sports, drinking/partying, heterosexuality and sexual prowess – as the reason for their atypicality. For example, when asked why he felt atypical, Julian said, “You heard my average weekend. It wasn’t a normal weekend for a college student. I think to a much more extent people go out partying Friday and Saturday nights.”

Some informants reported feeling atypical rather matter-of-factly. For example, Julian – whose quotation appears above – simply acknowledged the disparity between his interests and what he perceived to be the interests of other men. On the other hand, some informants spoke venomously about the activities they associated with typical guys and the young men who engaged in these activities. For example, Derik, visibly agitated, repeated my question and quipped, “What comes to mind when I say those words [average or typical guy]? Pretty retarded, that’s what.” When asked to elaborate he added, “[That means] will act on impulse, will do things that he shouldn’t do such as abuse people, abuse women. Physically and verbally. Will do stupid things to stand out, macho stuff, that kind of stuff.” Only a handful of informants took such a virulent stance against “typical” masculinity. Nonetheless, the disdain in these participants was palpable.

***Race and ethnicity.*** Only two interviewees (5%) explicitly described the average or typical guy as white: Adam said, “I mean the average guy would definitely be white, probably

middle-class, and skinny,” and Dean said, “I wouldn’t be completely honest if I didn’t say middle-class and white.” Yet, there seemed to be an implicit assumption that the typical guy is white. This was apparent given what was not said during the interviews. In other words, issues of race and ethnicity almost exclusively emerged in reference to men of color. Moreover, race surfaced as a reason for informants to feel they or their friends were atypical. For example, Paul who is a white man and a member of a social fraternity, felt that some of his friends were unrepresentative of typical masculinity: “I guess a few of them are not exactly average guys because one of them, actually his parents, came from I think it was Ukraine.” Later, Paul mentioned race again, “Even though it’s the fraternity system, we have a pretty diverse house. We have, I mean more Hispanics than normal, Indian people as well, and people who are Asian.”

Minority students also spoke about the ways in which race distanced them from typical masculinity. For example, Nerone, said of his friends, “They aren’t typical because they’re predominantly black and Latino and they’re involved in the black and Latino community. Not only are they involved, they try to keep the black and Latino community stable and together through programs or leadership positions.” In other words, Nerone’s friends’ interest in minority culture and programming served as an indicator that they were atypical. Similarly, Kenneth expressed that his status as a minority explicitly set him apart from the typical or average guy.

He said:

I guess some of the things we do might be typical but at the same time I guess it’s taken from the perspective that we’re minorities, like most of my fraternity brothers are Latino. I myself am half black and half Italian, and so we definitely have a minority perspective on things. Like certainly when we go to the bars, there’s some looks we get that are like, “Oh, the minority crowds are going through now” and things like that. I would say that we probably do some of the same activities that I guess the average guy probably does, but it’s certainly understood as well that just coming from a minority perspective, most of us come from situations of financial difficulty and so on and so forth, so we kind of come with I guess that minority baggage if you will.

For Kenneth, although he feels typical in some respects, being a man of color separates him from typical masculinity. This separation is partially because of race, and partially because race corresponds with particular economic realities that further distance these men from what they perceive to be typical.

In short, the descriptions given by both typical and atypical men coalesce and form an image of masculinity that dominates and overshadows alternative forms of masculinity. This image of athletic, beer-drinking, sexually promiscuous, white, middle-class masculinity serves as a measure against which to compare other forms of masculinity and render them inferior. Men who subscribe to this hegemonic ideal feel typical, whereas men who do not feel atypical.

### *Characterizations of Masculinity*

The informants were next asked to list five characteristics or personality traits they associate with masculinity. Some participants had difficulty generating five words, in which case we asked them to stop after listing three or four characteristics. These characteristics were then subjected to the meaning categorization and condensation task described above. This analysis revealed a core of characterizations these men use to understand masculinity. The categories comprising this core are strength, confidence, responsibility, competition, determination, sociability, courage, power, competence, and risk.

For the sake of clarity, I empirically describe these traits as distinct categories; however, this presentation oversimplifies the vision of masculinity that emerged. First, linkages exist between virtually all of the traits. Thus, some words might easily have been classified under more than one category. Second, in isolation, none of the categories adequately describe masculinity as understood by the informants. Instead, each of the categories must be understood

simultaneously and with comprehension of the others. My interest here is not to create arbitrary distinctions between the characteristics, but rather to understand how these traits coalesce and create a picture of masculinity as it is understood by the young men in my sample.

**Strength.** The characteristics most often mentioned by the informants were those related to strength. Twenty-eight participants (64%) explicitly listed “strength,” “strong,” “tough,” or “toughness” and 20 participants (45%) listed one of these 4 words as their first characteristic. In order to understand the meaning of the traits listed, each participant was asked to provide an example from his own life that demonstrated the trait. If the participant could not think of an example, he was asked to think of an example demonstrating the trait’s absence. During this line of questioning, it became apparent that strength encapsulated two constructs, one physical and one emotional. For example, when asked to provide an example of strength, Christian said, “I guess I meant two things with the strength part, one actually physically strong, but also strong in the sense that you are thick-skinned and don’t let too much get to you.”

Because a number of participants had similar revelations once they were asked to expound on the trait, it was impossible to provide separate counts and analyses of physical and emotional strength. Thus, I expanded the category to include other traits related to physical strength (e.g., “athletic,” “muscles”) and emotional strength (e.g., “emotionally strong,” “not a worrier,” “emotionless”). Although strength takes on several different meanings, this categorization is reasonable given that a number of informants provided examples of strength that referenced both the physical and emotional aspects of the term. Thus, Thirty-nine of the 44 informants (87%) included one or both aspects of strength in their characterizations of masculinity.

Table 8. Masculinity Characteristics Listed By Participants, Strength (n = 39\*).

Characteristic	# of participants to list this characteristic	% of participants to list this characteristic
Strength/Strong	20	45%
Athletic	12	27%
Tough/Toughness	8	18%
Sports/Sports-Liking/Interested in Sports	4	9%
Emotionally Strong	3	7%
Muscles/Big Muscles	3	7%
Physically Strong/Physical Strength	3	7%
Not Emotional	2	5%
Active	1	2%
Emotionally Reserved	1	2%
Emotionless	1	2%
Fit	1	2%
Lifting Weights	1	2%
Not Big Worriers	1	2%
Brawny	1	2%
Burly	1	2%
Physical	1	2%
*Number of participants categorized as mentioning “strength” is not equal to the sum of the number of participants listing each characteristic because some participants listed more than one characteristic categorized as strength.		

Physical strength refers to the ability to exert force on an object. For example, when asked to provide an example of physical strength, Oliver reported, “I try to go to the gym and lift weights a few times a week.” Other participants pointed to their participation or performance in sporting activities as evidence of physical strength. “Emotional strength,” on the other hand, implied the ability to resist emotional breakdown. Mark said, “What I mean by toughness is, you know, like don’t sweat the small stuff.” Informants used words like “emotionless,” “emotionally reserved,” and “not very emotional” to describe emotional strength. These words insinuate that when situations arise with the potential to elicit an emotional response, masculinity calls for little or no emotional reaction.

As noted above, many of the informants’ examples referenced both the physical and emotional aspects of strength implying the two are related. Duane provided a good example:

Toughness is both mental and physical toughness. I guess when you're talking about masculinity, a masculine guy tends to be tough, he tends not to shy away. Like you have the people that flee from a fight, and like he'll tend to be the guy that won't flee from the fight. He'll partake in it.

Dan's description alludes to physical strength in that fighting requires certain physical capabilities. Yet, the example points to emotional strength as well in that the fighter he describes chooses not to run away. Running away would signal the emotional reaction of fear. Mark provided a second example. "Toughness is a difference between whether you're injured or hurt. Not playing through pain, but kind of, you know? Being tough and playing through bumps and bruises as opposed to real serious injuries. There's a difference between a bruise and a broken rib." For Mark, being "tough" encompasses an element of physicality demonstrated in his example of playing football, as well as an element of emotional resilience as evidenced by the ability to withstand pain and continue playing.

**Confidence.** The second most popular trait listed by the men in this study was confidence, also referred to as "pride," "being sure of oneself," and "assertive" (n = 21, 48%). Confidence implies believing in one's ability to accomplish a task. For example, Shawn said he is confident with respect to his future. He explains, "I'm sure of who I am. I know what I want to do in life and I have my long-term goals set out. I want those and nothing's going to keep me from those." Implicit in Shawn's definition is the notion of success. As another participant explained, "If you're confident in yourself, then that really helps you do anything you really want to do in life" (Duane).<sup>20</sup>

Given that many of the informants viewed confidence as a vehicle for success, it's not surprising that they attributed success (their own and others) to confidence. Conversely, they cited insufficient confidence as the reason for failure. The interviewer asked Austin, a 20-year

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<sup>20</sup> One reviewer noted that confidence, as it is described here, may be better described as "entitled." While I agree, I chose to maintain the heading "confidence" to adhere to the words listed by the participants themselves.

old engineering student, to share an example of a time in his life when he demonstrated confidence. Austin cited a difficult class project he was given to complete. He began by explaining why his fellow classmates were unsuccessful: “A lot of people were really unsure, and I feel like, doing that was like self-determination. They just struggled with it and they didn’t have the focus that they could have.” The interviewer asked, “Yeah, but how did you show confidence?” to which Austin replied, “I knew it was like abstract, but I knew that if I was just persistent I’d figure it out eventually. And I did.” Similarly, Dylan cited his own lack of confidence as the reason he played poorly in a recent football game. He said, “I think the reason was because I just got too scared to mess up and then I started playing timid. I think if I was just confident I’d have played better.”

Table 9. Masculinity Characteristic Listed By Participants, Confidence (n = 21\*).

Characteristic	# of participants to list this characteristic	% of participants to list this characteristic
Confident/Confidence	13	30%
Assertive/Assertiveness	5	11%
Egotistical	1	2%
High Self Esteem	1	2%
Pride	1	2%
Self-Centered	1	2%
*Number of participants categorized as mentioning “confidence” is not equal to the sum of the number of participants listing each characteristic because some participants listed more than one characteristic categorized as confidence.		

If too little confidence leads to failure, as Austin and Dylan maintain, too much confidence can also be destructive. A number of informants stressed the difference between confidence and over-confidence. Brandon said, “I’m confident in decisions I make, but not too confident. In the workplace I could be more assertive, but in the classroom I don’t think I could be much more assertive than I really am because otherwise I’d become overbearing, intimidating.” Echoing Brandon’s sentiments, Kyle said:

There's a fine line between being confident and condescending. A confident person is willing to walk up to any person and just introduce themselves and be like, "I'm the shit, you should meet me, you should like me, you should want to know me." But then there's overly condescending. He can't be over-the-top condescending, overly aggressive, or have the biggest ego in the world. It's a healthy ego that people respect.

In addition to being overbearing, intimidating, and condescending, participants equated overconfidence with being egotistical, cocky, selfish, and bullheaded. In short, masculinity means being able to find and maintain a level of confidence somewhere in between humility and arrogance.

**Responsibility.** Another theme that emerged from the informant's characterizations of masculinity was responsibility (n = 14, 32%).

Table 10. Masculinity Characteristic Listed By Participants, Responsibility (n = 14\*).

Characteristic	# of participants to list this characteristic	% of participants to list this characteristic
Responsible/Responsibility	7	16%
Protective/Protection/Protecting	5	11%
A Job	1	2%
Caring for others	1	2%
Chivalrous	1	2%
Do What You Have To Do	1	2%
Mature	1	2%
Reliable	1	2%
Selfless	1	2%

\*Number of participants categorized as mentioning "responsibility" is not equal to the sum of the number of participants listing each characteristic because some participants listed more than one characteristic categorized as responsibility.

Words like "reliable," "accountable," "protective," "doing what you have to do," "takes care of family," and "job" were categorized under this rubric. Kenneth described responsibility as follows: "Someone that knows how to take care of business. He knows how to take care of the people he cares about." Implicit in Kenneth's definition is the notion of protection. Several participants talked more explicitly about protection, particularly protection over women. For



example, Spencer said, “[masculinity is] having a protective relationship over like your sister or your mom, the women in your life.”

For many of the informants, responsibility also implied obligation and obedience. Dean said a real man is “the guy who instead of thinking just does. The guy who gets things done because you ask him to be there. He just goes and does it.” Similarly, Christian offered the following parable he learned from his coach:

It’s called “A Message to Garcia,” and it’s about this guy who had to carry a message through Cuba in the Spanish-American War. He didn’t know where he was going, he had to bring it to some general, and he was up on some hill and didn’t know where he was. And he said, “Okay, I’ll do it.” And he just went and did it. I was like, wow, that’s pretty cool.

The parable Christian relayed was made popular by Elbert Hubbard (1899) in a best-selling inspirational essay. The essay is often used by corporate leaders (and apparently coaches) as a model of responsibility. The parable defines responsibility as obligatory and obedient, as if asking questions or expressing concern is somehow irresponsible.

Although responsibility is exemplary of masculinity, it is worth noting that many of the informants felt quite irresponsible. For example, Scott said that he and his friends “are not really keen on responsibility or anything like that, at least in regards to life on campus. We’re just trying to kind of have fun and enjoy our senior year.” For these young men, college is a time to delay responsibility. They do, however, associate responsibility with the future and the men they hope to become. Solomon said: “When I’m thinking about responsibility, I’m thinking about the future like having a family, having children, being there for them, you know? Being there for your wife, not bailing out on them, taking care of them, spending time with them, talking to them, stuff like that.” (Note the obligatory tone of the phrase “not bailing out.”)

Even participants who felt relatively responsible at the time of the interview, saw room for growth and imagined their responsibility peaking later in life. Robert said: “When I think of protective, I think of my father, and how he is with his children. I guess I started to get that way with my sisters...but I don’t think I’m at the level of my father. Once I get a little older, probably get kids of my own, I’ll probably get to that level.”

Related to the notion of future responsibility, many participants explicitly equated responsibility with breadwinning. For example, Dean says that responsibility is “having to always have money, having to always be a breadwinner.” As traditional college students, none of the informants were currently breadwinners; yet they expressed a keen awareness that in the not-too-distant future there would be an expectation that they provide for themselves and their families. Richard articulated this pressure:

I guess the word is “breadwinner.” Like who’s going to like make the money to pay for bills and stuff. My girlfriend, she’s looking to be a physician’s assistant making eighty grand a year or more. I’m looking at a general business degree which might lead to forty-five to seventy thousand a year. That reverses the roles. I don’t think anybody will come up to us and be like, “Male female, what are your salaries? Who’s paying more of the mortgage?” But I think subconsciously if a guy is like Mr. Mom or staying at home with the kids and not working, that might weigh on his psyche. If a guy hears that you’re staying at home with the kids, and your wife is making all the money, and you rely on her, that might hurt his ego.

The importance of breadwinning articulated by these men is interesting on several fronts. First, it gives credence to the use of economic dependency as a proxy for gender identity threat in Chapter 3. Although these men have yet to experience the pressures associated with breadwinning, their anticipation of such pressures speaks to the importance of breadwinning as a defining characteristic of masculinity. Second, the fixation over breadwinning with which these young men spoke points to the obdurate nature of this particular characteristic of masculinity. Over the past 30 years, married women’s employment rates have dramatically increased (Cohen

& Bianchi, 1999; Winkler, 1998) and research suggests that the number of women out-earning male partners is growing (Fry & Cohn, 2010; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Raley et al., 2006).

Despite these trends, for these young men, responsibility – particularly with respect to providing – is an important component of masculinity. Daniel explained, “Even though there have been a lot of women’s rights changes and things like that, it’s still widely accepted that the guy’s supposed to go out and make a living for his family.” Despite recent trends in women’s employment and earnings, they are aware of the cultural expectation that their earnings constitute the primary source of income for their future families and they expect to fulfill on this expectation.

**Competition.** In their descriptions of masculinity, informants often listed words like “competitive,” “dominant,” and “aggressive” (n = 14, 32%). Competition traditionally involves the desire to succeed. Yet, for these young men, competition implies the achievement of unparalleled success across a multitude of arenas. Ben, a self-described competitor, said, “It’s like everything, if I do anything, I always want to be the best. I always want to win.” Similarly, Solomon offered the following definition of competitive: “You try to seem as if you’re like the best guy around. Like you could do anything better than all other guys.”

Table 11. Masculinity Characteristic Listed By Participants, Competition (n = 14\*).

Characteristic	# of participants to list this characteristic	% of participants to list this characteristic
Competitive/Competition/Competitor	6	14%
Aggressive	5	11%
Dominant/Dominance/Domineering	4	9%
*Number of participants categorized as mentioning “competition” is not equal to the sum of the number of participants listing each characteristic because some participants listed more than one characteristic categorized as competition.		

These men reported being competitive across a variety of domains including:

- School: “When it comes to doing well on tests and stuff like that, I’ll try to be better than everyone else.”(Tim)
- Athletics: “With sports...I’ve always been very competitive and like want to show that I am better than the other person at whatever activity I’m doing.” (Spencer)
- Heterosexuality: “You have to be the top guy that can get the girl – any girls he wants – so you have to be the type of guy that is competitive.” (Christopher)
- Video Games: “If we’re playing video games, it just gets competitive for kind of no reason. Like no one gets hurt or anything, but it’s like everyone is certainly trying to win. I mean punches get thrown. But they’re usually at the wall.” (Kenneth)
- Other Leisurely Activities: “I don’t bowl very often but I go there and I want to win. And I’m not very good and when I don’t do well I kind of get pissed off and irritated. Annoyed with myself. Because I mean even though I’m not very good, I still kind of expect to win and want to win. It’s tough when you’re not good at something. For me, it’s when you’re not very good and you don’t have a lot of success, it gets frustrating. I would say that’d be competitiveness.” (Christian)

While reading the transcripts, I was struck by the all-encompassing nature of competition. As the above quotes demonstrate, participants expressed the desire to “be the best,” in both consequential and inconsequential domains. Among other things, participants described ping pong, beer pong, Scrabble, and shopping on EBay as opportunities to compete. If “everything is a competition” – as some participants claimed – and competition means being the one and only winner, superior to all others, these young men are setting themselves up for failure. Without a doubt, the informants are intelligent and well-rounded. But they are also human. Being the absolute best, in even one arena, is an unrealistic and impossible expectation.

With this impossible demand comes self-doubt, frustration, rage and hostility. For example, Christian (the bowler) gets “pissed off,” “irritated,” and “frustrated,” and Kenneth (the video game player) punches walls and insinuates that he occasionally punches other people. This phenomenon is particularly disturbing in cases in which the person doesn’t have the requisite knowledge to be successful. For example, Christian admits that he doesn’t bowl very often, yet unrealistically “expects to win” and is upset when he doesn’t.

In light of this expectation, it isn’t surprising that some participants spoke about winning with an air of desperation. For example, Yakim said: “You’re just always thinking – even if like it’s clear and apparent that you might lose – you just try everything that you possibly can to I guess overcome the odds and try to win.” Others detailed instances in which they jeopardized their physical health in the name of winning:

We had a tournament at my school for soccer. And I was probably the best person on my team. I was goalie and we needed, I needed to be there, and I got sick. I had a fever. It wasn’t a bad fever, it was probably 100, 101. And it was the championship game, and I probably should have just gone home or at least sat it out or not done it, but instead I played. And I ended up exacerbating my fever so badly that I ended up with like a 104 and had to be rushed to the hospital. But we won the game. And I actually don’t regret the decision. I’m a very competitive person. (Julian)

Still others alluded to a willingness among their peers to break the rules in order to gain an advantage in a competitive situation. For example, Daniel said, “When it comes to sports and things, I’m competitive. And in school and things like that. But I don’t believe in cheating, you know? But some people, I have friends that joke around that ‘if you’re not cheating, you’re not trying.’” Given the importance of competition as it is defined by these young men, it is possible that far more unethical behavior is going on than meets the eye.

***Determination.*** Another theme that emerged from the informant’s characterizations of masculinity was determination (n = 14, 32%). Words like “driven,” “motivated,” “persistent,”

and “hardworking” were categorized under this theme. Determination involves setting a long term goal and taking the necessary actions to achieve the goal. For example, Brandon said: “Determination. I think that a very masculine quality is to work hard, and just keep on trying and never give up. You just keep on going and going and going.” Determination also involves persisting in spite of obstacles. For example, Ethan said determination means “being able to weather the storm.” Given the stage of life in which these young men are, the examples provided were typically about academics. Ben gave the following example: “One semester...I had six times during the semester where I had two tests in the same day, including twice with finals, and my G.P.A. went way down, but still at least I was able to at least manage it and I got it back up over the past three semesters.”

Table 12. Masculinity Characteristic Listed By Participants, Determination (n = 14\*).

Characteristic	# of participants to list this characteristic	% of participants to list this characteristic
Determined/Determination	3	7%
Driven	2	5%
Hardworking	2	5%
Decisive	2	5%
Durable	1	2%
Forceful	1	2%
Hardcore	1	2%
Motivated	1	2%
Perseverant	1	2%
Stubbornness	1	2%
No Nonsense	1	2%
Persistent	1	2%
*Number of participants categorized as mentioning “determination” is not equal to the sum of the number of participants listing each characteristic because some participants listed more than one characteristic categorized as determination.		

It is worth noting that although the interviewers asked the participants to describe masculinity in general, several participants (and reviewers) suggested that this characteristic might be unique to Cornell as opposed to other population. For example, Shawn noted, “My guy friends at Cornell are not the same as my guy friends at other schools. The guy friends that I have

at Cornell, they do all the sports and those kinds of activities, but a lot of them are really driven to get to Wall Street, be the top broker on Wall Street, and so they focus a lot of their time on studying economics and stuff like that too.” Like Shawn’s friends at other schools, it is questionable as to whether working class young men or men who have not attended college would define masculinity in terms of determination as these young men do.

Of course there are many benefits of being determined; however, the downside of determination, it seems, is that it contradicts with young men’s desire to be social. Some students, like Richard, alluded to finding a balance, “Guys, at least at Cornell, are likely to be really hard working during the week. And then the typical Thursday going out kind of deal happens. And then Friday, Saturday, they just kind of party a ton blow off the steam from the week. But then they’re back to the grind.” Mark described this as working hard and playing hard: “You have to have some type of drive or some type of vision in order to like get things done, you can’t just say something and then not really follow through with it. But, you don’t have to be like so serious that you don’t enjoy the short-term. It’s like a work hard, play hard type of thing.”

While some students were able to find this balance, a handful of students admitted that their social life suffered as a result of their hard work and determination. For example, Oswald said:

For the first six, seven semesters of college, I’ve had around a 4.0. I’d been so driven to succeed, and keep those grades up, and learn everything, and the result is that I didn’t make as many friends as I should’ve. When you’re driven in one aspect, it might take you away from being driven in another aspect, and I wish that I was able to balance the drive between the two.

This struggle is noteworthy, not just because of the benefits of friendship (and the risk of burnout), but because being sociable is another defining component of young masculinity.

***Sociability.*** Words like “sociable,” “extroverted,” “socially apt,” “outgoing” and “has

many friends” were categorized under the heading of sociability (n = 10, 23%).

Earlier I mentioned that the participants were asked about perceptions of femininity as well as masculinity. Interestingly, a number of informants also listed sociability in their characteristics of femininity (n = 13, 29.5%). The participant descriptions, however, revealed interesting gender difference regarding how to be sociable and the purpose of social activity. For men, sociability implied taking an active role in social interaction. For example, the informants described sociability in men as “making the first move” (Nerone), “being the first one to like say hi” (Adam), and the ability to “just walk up to someone and just start a conversation” (Kevin). On the other hand, when the informants discussed sociability in women they alluded to passivity and the importance of being approachable. For example, Robert described the following scene when asked to expound on the word “amiable” – one of the words he used to describe femininity: “It’s not necessarily that they’re flirting with the guys who come up to them, but they’re certainly willing to entertain a conversation if a guy had enough courage to buy her a drink and come sit next to her to try to talk to her.” The “guy” in Robert’s example buys, comes, sits, tries, and talks. The woman, on the other hand, is “willing to entertain a conversation.” In other words, she is receptive to his advances.

Table 13. Masculinity Characteristic Listed By Participants, Sociability (n = 10\*).

Characteristic	# of participants to list this characteristic	% of participants to list this characteristic
Outgoing	3	7%
Extroverted/Extrovert	2	5%
Sociable	2	5%
Funny	1	2%
Has Many Guy Friends	1	2%
Personable	1	2%
Socially Apt	1	2%
*Number of participants categorized as mentioning “sociability” is not equal to the sum of the number of participants listing each characteristic because some participants listed more than one characteristic categorized as sociability.		



Not all of the informants who listed sociability as a masculine characteristic reported being socially competent themselves; however those who listed it agreed that it was desirable. Perhaps this is because, for these young men, sociability is often instrumental. For example, Yakim described extroversion as being “good for an I-banker” (or international banker, his aspired profession), Brandon described being “charismatic and outgoing” as “important for the interview process” and Shawn described extroversion as “networking, connecting, and becoming a group member.” Aiden’s example is telling. Speaking of his grandfather, one of his role models who he described as extroverted, he said:

He can go up to anyone, start a conversation with them like for example he started a conversation with, the past Senator of New York, Al D’amato, so this was when I was growing up so I was maybe eight or ten. And he just walked up to him like absolutely no fear, and walks up, starts a conversation with him for like twenty minutes, and like then he got a job for one of his friends just by doing that.

For some of these young men, it seems that sociability is an important component of masculinity because of its potential benefits outside of enjoying the company of others. Social interaction was not reserved for instrumental purposes; however, the ability to be social – particularly in an agentic and instrumental way – emerged as a valuable component of masculinity.

**Courage.** Courage emerged as another central theme of the informants’ characterizations of masculinity (n = 9, 20%). Words like “brave,” “fearless” and “not timid” were included under this rubric.

Table 14. Masculinity Characteristic Listed By Participants, Courage (n = 9).

Characteristic	# of participants to list this characteristic	% of participants to list this characteristic
Courageous/Courage	3	5%
Brave	2	5%
Fearless/No Fear	2	5%
Not Timid	1	2%
Taking Initiative	1	2%

Courage is typically defined as the ability to do something despite being afraid. For these young men, however, courage seems to imply the absence of fear. For example, when asked to expound on courage, Daniel explained, “I wouldn’t say they [courageous people] get what they want, but they at least they aren’t afraid to at least attempt to get what they want.” Parroting Daniel, Richard said, “I would say like not timid, not afraid to do what you have to do.” Those who described themselves as lacking courage evidenced their lack of courage by referencing fear. In response to the question, “Do you think you’re courageous?” Casey replies, “Nope, I’m scared of rats.” To Casey, and others, the presence of fear negates courage. Only one informant specifically spoke of courage in the normative sense. That is, only one informant defined courage as acting in spite of fear. Paul said, “If someone’s courageous, that means that they’ve experienced fear, but they haven’t let it affect them.”

For these young men, courage also implies acting without hesitation. For example, when asked to provide an example of courage, Oliver shared the following example: “If I got my grade back and it’s not what I think it should be, I’m not hesitant to go the professor and discuss it.” Related to the absence of hesitation is the absence of second guessing. Brandon explained, “When guys make a decision, they go for it, they don’t second chance anything. They don’t think about decisions they make. They make a decision, and just go. It seems like courage goes with firmness. They make a firm decision, that’s how it’s going to be.” Through this line of questioning, courage – defined as the absence of fear, hesitation and second guessing – emerged as definitive component of masculinity.

**Power.** Nine participants (20%) specifically mentioned “power,” or a synonym of power (e.g., “in charge,” “feeling no one could ever stop you,” “leader”) in their list of masculine characteristics. and re-reading the transcripts, it became apparent that, for the informants, power

and leadership are virtually synonymous. Time and time again, the participants used the terms interchangeably. For example, when asked to provide a characteristic of masculinity, Brian searched to find the right word: “I think the right word might be like leadership and like having to be the one in charge, power.” For this reason, words like “leader” and “leadership” were coded under the heading of power.

Table 15. Masculinity Characteristic Listed By Participants, Power (n= 9).

Characteristic	# of participants to list this characteristic	% of participants to list this characteristic
Powerful/Power	4	9%
Leadership/Leader	3	7%
Feeling No One Could Ever Stop You	1	2%
In Charge	1	2%

Power does not necessary imply command over others. We can conceive of someone who is powerful as having the ability to produce an effect without necessarily controlling or commanding others. Yet, for these young men, power necessitates influence over other people. For example, when asked for his definition of power, Kyle said, “being able to...tell people what to do.” Similarly, Brian described power as “in a group, the person that makes all the decisions.” More often than not, power also implied a formal position of authority. For instance, when asked about his own capacity for power, Gabe explained: “Some sort of leadership position. It doesn’t have to be president. But I always feel as though I should be in a position that has impact.” Other informants gave similar examples including leadership positions in student organizations, captain positions on sports teams, and management positions at their places of employment.

Further, these men reported the intention to power over time through formal organizational channels. For example, Brandon said, “I’m happy where I am now, but as I get older, I want to move up the ranks, I want to get the better and better job and higher and higher esteem and power.” Similarly, Kyle said, “I feel like later on in my life, as I have more

accomplishments, gain more titles and stuff like that, I'll be able to develop a lot more power.”

In other words, many of the informants desire power, particularly in the form of formal jobs and titles, and intend to pursue this kind of power in the future.

It is worth noting, a number of participants distinguished between authority or power that emerges from respect and admiration, which we might refer to as “influence,” and power that arises from coercion, intimidation, and violence. Kyle described a leader as someone who “would definitely just naturally come out as like being the leader of the group, not necessarily by any of his own ambition, but just by the way he acts around the rest of them that they would want to follow him.” This type of power is coveted by these young men, whereas the other is not. Christopher explains the difference. Equating power with alpha male status, he said:

I guess you can like split the definition of alpha male in half like you can have like a bad alpha male, and there's a good alpha male. And so a good alpha male would be like a leader in a sense like he leads people, everybody looks up to him, and he's a good role model. But then you can have a bad alpha male where they're like, “I'm on top of the world.” “Do as I say.” Or, you know, “That's not the right way.” Like, “If you're not looking like me, then you're not, you know, blah blah blah.” That's a negative way.

In other words, while power is a necessary component of masculinity for these young men, it is only desirable as long as it can be exercised “without considerable force” (Michael).

**Competence.** “Intelligent,” “resourceful,” “ingenious,” “knowledgeable,” “wise” and “mental strength” were categorized under the descriptor “competence” (n = 9, 20%). Originally, I used the term “intelligence” to describe this theme; however, the word “intelligence” also emerged in the informants' descriptions of femininity (n = 5). While it is possible to associate intelligence with both masculinity and femininity, masculinity and femininity are typically defined in opposition to one another. As I suspected, masculine intelligence and feminine intelligence took on different meanings. After mulling over the transcripts it became apparent

that even those informants who specifically listed “intelligence” as a masculine trait were more often than not espousing competence. These descriptions implied adequacy with respect to a specific skill. On the other hand, feminine intelligence – sometimes referred to as “dorky” or “nerdy” – implied the acquisition of esoteric, academic knowledge.

Table 16. Masculinity Characteristic Listed By Participants, Competence (n = 9\*).

Characteristic	# of participants to list this characteristic	% of participants to list this characteristic
Intelligent/Intelligence	2	5%
Resourceful	2	5%
Competent	1	2%
Hands On	1	2%
Ingenious	1	2%
Knowledge	1	2%
Mentally Strong	1	2%
Wisdom	1	2%

\*Number of participants categorized as mentioning “competence” is not equal to the sum of the number of participants listing each characteristic because some participants listed more than one characteristic categorized as competence.

Seth’s struggle to find the right descriptor demonstrates the subtle difference between intelligence and competence, or to use Seth’s language, between “smart” and “resourceful.” He said, “I want to say ‘smart,’ but I don’t really mean smart...I just mean...I guess...maybe you can help me with the adjective. It’s not like a dorky smart, it’s like an ability to just kind of navigate your way.” The interviewer asks, “Like ‘street-smart’ or ‘aware’ or something like that?” Seth replies, “Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I guess ‘street-smart’ is probably the closest term we’ve come up with. How about ‘resourceful’?” When asked for an example, Seth continues:

If I’m like in a city or something usually I can get myself around and, you know, see everything I want to see, do everything I want to do, and I never feel, rarely do I feel, threatened. But when I do feel threatened, you know, I’m still alive so I know how to get myself out of that situation.

As evidenced by Seth's example, an important component of masculinity is having the knowledge and skills to conduct the task at hand. Like Seth, others described masculinity with a similar air of practicality. For example, the interviewer asked Adam if he would describe himself as intelligent, one of the characteristics he listed as masculine. Adam said, "I feel like I possess more intelligence, but it's not in the sense of like book smarts, it's like just knowing what to do, like how to cook, how to like fix stuff around the house, like just in terms of being able to figure out stuff like that."

As opposed to these descriptions, academic intelligence was not necessarily a quality the informants associated with masculinity. (Although some respondents did equate academic intelligence with masculinity.) For example, Casey said: "I associate masculinity more with physical things than I do with intelligence. I don't want to do bad in school, but I don't tie my fear of like getting a C to masculinity. It's just fear of getting a C because I don't want to answer to my parents." Again, a comparison between the informants' descriptions of masculinity and femininity is instructive. It seems that intelligence in men and intelligence in women are different, and that academic intelligence is more characteristic of femininity than masculinity. For example, when asked for descriptors of femininity, Mario said, "The typical girl is usually pretty intelligent whereas the typical guy is probably not that intelligent, so not nerdy."

This is an interesting and subtle difference. Why might academically-oriented intelligence define femininity but not masculinity? Michael offers one explanation:

I think [intelligence] is something that everyone kind of strives for, especially in an academic environment, but I don't think men strive for it more than women. . . .men, they're pushed hard to achieve something. So, they don't have to work as hard maybe to achieve that particular thing. Or the retention of knowledge isn't as important as the end goal of getting to wherever. Like in a class, I feel there's more of a push for men to you know go along a certain path, finish a certain degree, get a certain certificate. The end goal is to get a particular job. I feel like the path tends to be more pure for women. They tend to go along

with a set of coursework because of something they either like about the course or something they like about the major.

According to Michael, for men, academic knowledge is not as important as the degree to which it is tied. Therefore, some men chose to exert the minimum amount of effort to graduate and obtain employment. This notion of intelligence outside of effort surfaced again and again throughout the interviews. For example, Connor describes one of his role models, his best friend Zane, in the following way: “You know, he’s like surpassing his classes with like above a four-oh GPA, which means he’s obviously competent, but at the same time he doesn’t need to put a lot of effort in, he has a natural intelligence.” Intelligence in the realm of academia is just fine. These men would obviously prefer good grades to bad grades. And some men did report going to great lengths to get good grades. However, for others, putting an exorbitant amount of time and energy into academic pursuits actually clashes with notions of masculinity that call for competence and sufficiency.

**Risk.** Finally, “risk” (e.g., “adventure,” “reckless,” “spontaneous”) emerged as a theme in the informants’ descriptors of masculinity (n = 6, 14%). Risky means attended with uncertain, potentially adverse, consequences. The informants provided many examples demonstrating their affinity for risk. These behaviors ranged from capricious, free-spirited behaviors with minimal consequences to irresponsible, dangerous behaviors with potentially life-threatening consequences. At one end of the spectrum, participants described blowing off the day in favor of last-minute road trips, a wiffle ball competition, or to swim in one of the area gorges. Behaviors like these have minimal consequences apart from the occasional missed class. At the other end of the spectrum, participants described climbing the face of campus buildings (without safety equipment), having unprotected sex, and drinking dangerous amounts of alcohol.

The informants themselves conceptualized risk as a continuum of behavior and distinguished between what they considered appropriate and inappropriate acts of risk. Derik distinguishes between the two as the difference between being “adventurous” and “recklessness”: “Adventurous is what I would call doing cool stuff that may or may not be illegal like the building thing<sup>21</sup>. That’s adventurous I think. Reckless would be having sex without condoms, drinking retardedly, fifteen shots of stuff, other reckless behaviors.” Echoing Derik, Steven said:

I guess risky has to do with trying new things, which it could be like little things or something big. It could be like trying like a drug or something like that or it could just be doing like a stunt like sliding down a large slope or something. I’ve done that which I guess is kind of dangerous, but I’ll do it. People bring up skydiving though. I don’t think I would do that.

For Derik and Steven, there is something appealing about moderately risky behavior but not excessively risky behavior. Of course, the placement of behaviors along this continuum is subjective.

Table 17. Masculinity Characteristic Listed By Participants, Risk (n = 6\*).

Characteristic	# of participants to list this characteristic	% of participants to list this characteristic
Adventurous	2	5%
Hot or Quick Tempered	1	2%
Impassioned	1	2%
Willing to Take Risks	1	2%
Reckless	1	2%
Spontaneous	1	2%
*Number of participants categorized as mentioning “risk” is not equal to the sum of the number of participants listing each characteristic because some participants listed more than one characteristic categorized as risk.		

<sup>21</sup> Because Cornell buildings remain unlocked, Demetrius and his friends like to go into campus buildings at night and play hide-and-seek. They also go into classrooms and use the audiovisual equipment to play music and watch movies.



A number of informants equated risk with young masculinity in particular. For example, Kenneth said, “I realize that there are maybe activities that I shouldn’t necessarily be partaking in. But I’m kind of the young and stupid, college student, so to speak.” For Kenneth, being young is an excuse for engaging in activities that “he shouldn’t.” Presumably, when he is not a young college student, he will make more cautious decisions. Juxtaposing risk in young men with responsibility in older men, Derik’s comment mirrors Kenneth’s:

Masculinity, it changes. More responsible, less reckless. It’s less about having to show off and more about being a person of principle I feel. Once you grow up, once you get over those years of feeling that no one can stop you. By the time you’re thirty, you’ll have a wife, you’ll have kids, you’ll have a mortgage.

Derik assumes that the burden of responsibility will replace the risky behaviors in which he and his friends engage. Other participants, like Richard, reported having already outgrown some of their reckless tendencies:

I kind of almost did the college thing in high school, in terms of like working hard during the week, and then like hanging out with friends, and like doing crazy, stupid stuff throughout high school. I just had like a ton of fun and craziness going on in high school, and I kind of – I wouldn’t say like washed it out of my system – but almost.

Whereas some informants equated risk and recklessness with young masculinity and responsibility with more mature forms of masculinity, others conceived of risk as both favorable and necessary for both younger and older men. For example, Dylan provides an example of an arena in which risk-taking might be useful: “I think in like business it’s sort of advantageous. I think guys are more risky than women and I think that being that way is important in the business world.” Similarly, Paul explains, “You have to take risks sometimes, you know, for the good of yourself, for the good of your family, for the good of people in general.” Dylan is not an employed businessman, and Paul is unmarried without children. Presumably, these men anticipate that risk-taking later in life will be advantageous.

### *Masculinity as Success*

By analyzing the characteristics these men associated with masculinity, and content of their descriptions, an image of what it means to be man for these informants emerges. It is also important, however, to consider what these young men do not say. None of the participants explicitly listed the word “successful” (or an equivalent word like “accomplished” or “prosperous”) in their characterizations of masculinity. Yet, the majority of characteristics outlined above – strength, confidence, responsibility, competition, determination, sociability, courage, power, competence, and risk – were components these men saw as necessary for the attainment of success, particularly as defined by status and wealth.<sup>22</sup> I suggest that “success” was not listed as a masculine characteristic, not because these young men don’t associate masculinity with success, but rather because their conceptions of masculinity are so intertwined with notions of success that to name success as masculine would be axiomatic. For these young men, masculinity is success. Time and time again, the informants’ explanations and examples stressed the importance of success. For example, describing confidence, Curtis said, “You need confidence to be successful in life. If you’re confident in what you’re doing, you’re going to find success one way or another.” Curtiss’s comment implies that success is the ultimate goal. Similar rhetoric surrounded a number of the informant’s characterizations. Shawn listed “hard work” (classified under “determination”) as a component of masculinity. When asked if he would consider himself a hard worker, Shawn replied, “I’m a hard worker. I need to succeed.” Even for participants who reported working less hard, their efforts were couched in terms of success. Recall Michael, the young man who offered his explanation for why men and women value academic intelligence differently. In no uncertain terms, he explained that for men, “the end goal is to get a particular job.” Because school work is a means to an end, rather than the end itself,

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<sup>22</sup> This is a narrow, and particularly American definition of success (see Schulz, forthcoming).

exerting a sufficient amount of effort *is* a strategy for success. Thus, both types of students – the hard worker and the slacker – framed their decisions regarding schoolwork in terms of success.

Casey explained the importance of success in relation to masculinity in more explicit terms:

Career success is important to masculinity the same way financial success is. It's just having that kind of evidence of your wisdom, your hard work, and your smartness so people will kind of bow to you almost and listen to what you have to say and put you on this higher pedestal because of what you achieved.

Casey clearly articulates that success in relation to occupational and financial achievements is an important component of masculinity. For Casey, the reason success is important to masculinity is because it confirms a number of the masculine characteristics discussed above. In this excerpt, he says success affirms one's competence, dedication, power, sociability, and competitiveness. Or, to use his terms, it affirms one's "wisdom," "hard work" "smartness," ability to have people "bow to you," "listen to what you have to say," and put you on a "higher pedestal." In short, I asked the participants to provide five characteristics they associated with masculinity and they provided a list of traits necessary to attain occupational and financial success. This is because, for these young men, masculinity is success.

### ***A Tremendous Task***

Kevin provides us with another unambiguous example of the indistinguishability between masculinity and success. Summing up the five traits he listed as characteristic of masculinity – confidence, emotionally strong, assertive, driven and sociable – he said, "I think that to be a man encompasses all of that. You need to be a leader. You need to be successful." Encompassing all five of these characteristics – or all ten of the core masculinity characteristics that emerged is a tremendous task.

The achievement of each characteristic, in isolation, is not insurmountable. Utilizing Marilyn Frye's (1983) notion of a birdcage, there is nothing about any one characteristic that is particularly overwhelming, just as there is nothing about any one wire in a birdcage that serves to cage a bird. "It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment" (Frye, 1983, p. 69). Similarly, it is only when we step back and consider the cultural expectations that simultaneously mold and shape these young men that we can comprehend the weight of these various, sometimes conflicting, pressures.

On the aggregate, these young men are expected to be physically strong and display little – if any – emotion. They should fulfill their responsibilities out of a sense of obligation and obedience, while simultaneously avoiding as much responsibility as possible. They should compete and achieve unparalleled success across a variety of arenas, yet they should not exert much effort or put in the requisite amount of time and energy needed to be the best. This is particularly true of academic endeavors. They should compete even if it means putting their health and well-being at risk. They should be determined and motivated – unless doing so cuts into time that could be spent partying and pursuing women. They should be able to drink copious amounts of alcohol, particularly beer. They should like women, they should want to sleep with women, and they should be able to convince as many women as possible to sleep with them. They should "make the first move" and be agentic and instrumental in social interaction. They should watch sports, they should play sports, and they should be good at sports – but only the "right" sports like football and basketball. They should be courageous and take action without fear, hesitation or second guessing. They should be powerful and hold sway over others, but it

should come “naturally.” They should refrain from resorting to coercion, intimidation, or violence in order to attain power. They should occupy positions of authority. Of some traits, they can never acquire too much: “You can never really have too much strength or power” (Dan). For other traits, only the “right” amount will do. For example, they should be confident, but not condescending and they should take risks, but not be reckless. Above all else, they should succeed and ensure themselves occupational and financial success in the future.

This is a tall order, and these young men feel the pressure. For example, Kevin, the young man who spoke of the importance of being confident, emotionally strong, assertive, driven and sociable in the attainment of success, continued:

There’s a lot of social pressure, a lot of social expectations. Because like you have this pressure to succeed, and if you’re a guy people expect so much more out of you. Like especially in my position. Like going to an Ivy League school...and I succeeded in everything else in my life so far. I feel a lot of pressure. And I feel like you have to carry on what your grandpa and your father have done. And you need to be more successful than your parents.

This doesn’t mean that these young men don’t benefit from their status as men or their status as predominantly white, presumably monied, heterosexual, young men. For example, certainly, the majority of these young men are able to embrace a masculinity that values leisure and spontaneity because they do not have to balance a full-time job with their academic responsibilities. But, it is important to think about cultural demands and gendered expectations as they impact these young men. To view these men as exclusively privileged, without acknowledging the ways in which they experience limitations, is not only simplistic, it’s dangerous. I believe it is of vital importance that we understand the normative pressures faced by these young men precisely because of the privileged place they occupy in society and their role in the oppression of others. In the remainder of this chapter, I demonstrate that normative ideas of young masculinity are dangerous because they serve as a set of rules by young men feel

compelled to follow. When they don't live up to these notions of masculinity, not only do they feel inadequacy, they engage in compensatory behaviors some of which are illegal, unsafe, and have harmful consequences for both young men and young women.

### ***Threatened Masculinity***

This section is devoted to understanding the process of gender identity threat including the type of incidents that serve to threaten masculinity. Recall from the beginning of the chapter, I asked the following questions:

- Tell me some ways in which a guy might be made to feel like he is not good enough, particularly when it comes to masculinity.
- Think of a time when you did not feel like you were manly enough or felt like your masculinity was called into question. Please walk me through the event.

Before detailing the informants' responses, it is worth noting that the second question requesting a specific event, elicited incidents from childhood or adolescence in over half (54%) of the informants. For example, Dean said:

I remember in fourth grade we were making little art projects. And I drew this really nice thing, and I had all sorts of colors on it and it was really elaborate because I was always an artsy kid. And the kid who was sitting across from me was like, "Damn, that's so gay, man," like, "That's so gay. Don't you know purple's a gay color?" And I was like, "What?" I mean I was ignorant of all this, you know? I was nine years old at the time. And that like really hurt my feelings.

Like Dean, others vividly recalled incidents that occurred in their youth. Richard described a time in the eighth grade when he was teased for not wanting to try out for the basketball team and Christian described being made fun of by his peers for deciding to participate in a sixth grade choral class. In fact, two informants responded to the question by stating that "all of middle school" was an emasculating time. These responses are telling. First, these instances

demonstrate the lasting emotional charge that can surround issues of gender identity threat. For example, Dean – the boy who was told that purple was “a gay color” – described the incident over several pages of transcript. To this day, Dean admits that he “still won’t wear purple.” Second, in line with previous research (see, for example Duncan, 1999; McGuffey & Rich, 1999), these statements shed light on the process of gender policing that occurs in youth and continues through adolescence. In each of the above examples, the informant learned which behaviors were appropriate and which behaviors were inappropriate for their gender through sanctions that occurred when they stepped out of line.

Informants who recalled incidents from their youth were asked to recall a more recent episode. Specifically, they were asked to recall a time within the last three years in which they felt like their masculinity was called into question. In response, some informants still hesitated to talk in depth about a more recent incident. For example, Duane’s response was typical. He said, “I guess like with girls, like getting shut down, you sort of feel not masculine.” Duane, like others, kept the conversation at the level of general observations and avoided detailing a specific incident. Each interviewer was instructed to try three times to elicit a specific incident that occurred within the past three years. Most informants eventually described at least one incident.

Merely recalling these events was emotionally taxing for some of the informants. For example, Christian said, “Yeah, I mean – it probably happens pretty often, that’s a little embarrassing.” He then paused for a few seconds and added, “Yeah, I mean plenty of times. I’m pretty reserved around girls. When I go out, I mean sometimes I will start talking to girls and kind of feel like rejected. I can’t think of a specific time, but I definitely know the feeling of wow, you put yourself out there. It’s just so embarrassing.” Christian admitted having been embarrassed and appears embarrassed thinking about being rejected.

Of the 44 informants, 35 informants described a specific, recent incident in detail. The remaining 9 informants described a particular type of masculinity threats relevant to their lives as college men yet spoke in generalities. In order to analyze the responses, I catalogued each threat listed in response to both of the masculinity threat questions and grouped them according to type. Thus, I was able to establish an inventory of the kinds of incidents these men experience as threatening Drawing on both specific instances and more general discussions of masculinity threat, in the discussion that follows I detail gender identity threats listed by 5 or more participants. For a more complete inventory of gender identity threats, see Table 18.

Table 18. Masculinity Threats Listed By Participants\*

Threat	# of participants to list this threat	% of participants to list this threat
Engaging Stereotypically Feminine Activities	24	55%
Not Being a Breadwinner	18	41%
Failure (Sport-Related)	16	36%
Unmasculine Physical Features	16	36%
“Striking Out,” Not Hooking Up	13	30%
Failure (Academic-Related)	12	27%
Being “Whipped”	11	25%
Drinking or Drug Related Threats	7	16%
Losing or Backing Down from a Fight	7	16%
Romantic Rejection	7	16%
Lacking Sexual Experience, Ability, or Knowledge	6	14%
Questioning of Heterosexuality	5	11%
Not Doing Something Risky	5	11%
Failure (Other)	4	9%
Staying In/Not Going Out	3	7%
Having Unmasculine Friends	3	7%
Losing to a Woman	3	7%
Losing Control	2	5%
Spending Time with Mom	2	5%
Not Wanting to Get Dirty	2	5%

\*Threats listed by less than 2 participants were excluded to conserve space.

### ***Engaging in Stereotypically Feminine Activities***

The most popular theme to emerge from the masculinity threat narratives was the threat that comes from engaging in behaviors stereotypically associated with femininity (n = 24, 55%).



Adam's statement is representative of other statements made by the informants: "I don't know, like I've done yoga a handful of times and like a lot of people are like, "'Only girls do yoga,' and I'm like, 'Nah, actually, it's a pretty good workout. You should probably try it some time.'" Certainly yoga is normatively associated with women, but what is interesting about Adam's statement is his justification. The statement reads as if Adam needed to offer an explanation grounded in normative conceptions of masculinity ("it's a pretty good workout") in order to curtail his friends' judgment. It is also possible that Adam felt the need to justify his behavior to the interviewer, which was Thomas. Brandon offers another example of engaging in a stereotypically feminine activity that speaks to the ever present threat of emasculation. Brandon was interviewed by Stephanie. Prompted to provide an instance of masculinity threat, Brandon hesitated and then said, "You can't judge me. Don't judge me." Stephanie assured Brandon that she would not and repeated the question. Laughing nervously, Brandon said, "Getting a job in women's shoes at Nordstrom." Like Adam, Brandon then provided a rationale for his behavior: "I applied for men's clothing, which is jackets and shirts and ties. And, they said, 'We don't have an opening there.' So they told me, 'You can work in women's shoes.'" After establishing that he was not originally interested in feminine-typed work, Brandon further frames his job:

I'm in the management internship so you learn how to be a department manager at the store. Last year I was a salesperson and I got promoted. And they're hoping to promote me again if I complete this successfully, so I'd track myself working at Nordstrom...it's a very hard job to get. Yeah, I think maybe a hundred kids apply per store and they only take eighteen to twenty. So it's really low acceptance....I work in the sixth largest store in the company, so it's deeply exciting. I'm very excited.

Brandon went to great lengths to explain that, although he works in women's shoes, he is on the fast-track to management, an appropriately masculine position. He further frames the discussion by alluding to how competitive the program is and the size of the store.

Other feminine behaviors the informants listed as emasculating include ballet, figure skating, gymnastics, tennis, cooking, gardening, singing, acting, musical theater, interest in fashion, shopping, taking care of children, crying and expressing emotion. Clearly, masculinity is not only defined in terms of the activities and characteristics detailed in the first half of this chapter, it is also defined in opposition to femininity as evidenced by the litany of female-typed behaviors men reported as emasculating.

### *Not Being a Breadwinner*

The second most common threat listed by the informants was the threat of being unable to provide for one's family, or the threat of not being a breadwinner (n = 18, 41%). This is particularly interesting given that none of the informants were married, supporting children, or employed full-time. This is not surprising, however, in light of the importance these young men placed on occupational and financial success, as well as responsibility. When asked for an example of an instance that might make a guy feel unmasculine, Shawn's response was representative of those of his peers: "I think a big one is the bread earner issue. You've seen a high in unemployment, and a lot of guys define themselves by their career. Without that, you don't feel like you're living up to the expectations that are set for you for being a man and bringing home the bacon." Dean also talked about the importance of breadwinning, and shared an example from his personal life:

I think society holds men up to like having a job. It's just hard if you can't get a job, then you feel like less of a man. And I can tell from personal experience. My dad, after the World Trade Centers fell, he was working for AT&T before that, and they had towers at the top of the Trade Centers. And he was working as a network administrator for AT&T and he lost his job. And for three years he was unemployed. He got laid off. He was unemployed. And so, I could tell like based on like his movement and stuff that like it really upset him to not be able to fill that role in the family.

Although Shawn and Dean have not personally felt their masculinity called into question, they conjecture that unemployment is a significant threat to masculinity. They draw on contemporary scripts regarding men's role in the family and they equate unemployment with being unable to provide.

At this time, it is worth noting that previous studies (Anderson, 1997; Atkinson, Greenstein, & Lang, 2005; Brines, 1994) including my own (Chapter 3) have assumed that economic dependency or unemployment constitute a significant masculinity threat because they represent a failure to breadwin. This is the first study, however, to explicitly explore the credence of this assumption. Given the commitment these young men revealed during these interviews to future breadwinning, it is safe to assume that economic dependency constitutes a significant gender identity threat.

### ***Failure (Sport-Related)***

The third most common threat listed by the informants was failure in the domain of sports (n = 16, 36%). This is understandable given the importance of physical strength and athleticism to the informants' definitions of masculinity. For example, Dylan, a junior on the football team who had aspirations of being a starter, felt like a failure when he was withdrawn from playing by his coach. He said: "My best example would be getting benched this year. I just felt terrible because I felt like I let the team down. And I thought, I don't know, I guess I sort of felt like a pussy." Dylan obviously experienced this episode as particularly devastating. In addition to saying he felt terrible, and "like a pussy," Dylan sat with his elbows on his knees and his head slumped over while he talked about the incident. Other participants listed similar incidents. For example, Daniel recalled a time when his unsportsmanlike conduct resulted in the loss of an important hockey game, and Dale recalled a second place finish in a track meet.

Even in less competitive contexts, informants spoke of sports-related failures as potentially emasculating. For example, Robert said, “If you’re playing basketball with your friends, and you’re terrible, it’s going to be embarrassing. If you’re doing anything as far as like an athletic competition – I mean, not a competition, but just having fun – and you’re bad at it, you’re going to want to be better. Nobody likes to be inferior.” Robert unambiguously states that fun is the primary purpose of the game in his example. Yet, even in this context, the inability to perform well constitutes a gender identity threat.

If participating in sports comes with the risk of gender identity threat, so too, does *not* participating in sports. For example, Ethan comes from a long line of athletes: “There’s always these norms that have just heavily been followed, you know? Like people in my family have played football, and I was the first one not to play football and they like still give me a hard time about it.” Ethan made the decision not to play when he was very young, about six. Yet, now, as a 20 year old man, his family still questions his masculinity in light of a decision he made years ago.

### ***Failure (Academic-Related)***

Related to failure in the realm of sports, is the threat that comes from failing in academic-related pursuits (n = 12, 27%). Although some participants equated academic achievement with femininity, other informants prided themselves on their intellectual ability. For these informants, an academic failure served to threaten their gender identity. For example, Curtis stated, “I hate being at a test and knowing that I should know this answer if I would have studied enough. That is really frustrating.” Derik pointed to a similar experience. When asked to name a specific threat, he said, “Coming to Cornell probably. I mean, you come here, I’m sure everyone came here thinking, ‘We’re the cream of the crop. We’re going to do fine here.’ And, I mean. I’ve

been doing fine, thank God, but my first pre-lim was not that great. Getting it back was like, ‘Oh my!’”

Other academic-related failures were more explicitly tied to informants’ future career aspirations. For example, Daniel provided the following example:

I took the LSAT in February. I got a little nervous with that, so I cancelled my score within the six-day period because I just didn’t feel like...I felt like if I had studied more, I could have gotten a score I was hoping to get. And even though I didn’t know my score, I didn’t feel that it was going to be as high up there as I wanted it to be.

Most likely, the informants viewed these incidents as emasculating because of the importance of success to masculinity. If success is masculinity, then failing is emasculating.

### *Unmasculine Physical Features*

One of the more surprising findings to emerge from this line of questioning was the emphasis the informants placed on their bodies and the importance of looking appropriately masculine. Sixteen participants (36%) listed a physical characteristic of their own or of men’s bodies in general as a source of gender identity threat. Kenneth said, “Certainly, if you were born short and fat and like with a small penis, it’s probably going to be a tough life for you to be a man in this society to be straight honest. That sucks, but that’s the way it is.” Other participants criticized their own bodies and reported feeling less masculine because of bodies they deemed to be inferior. For example, Aiden recounted an incident that occurred over spring break on a trip to Israel:

So we went to the Dead Sea. Obviously it’s a sea, so you need to like take off your shirt, and wear a bathing suit, sunscreen, everything that comes with that. And I felt kind of intimidated by the others. I felt like I was kind of judged for my lack of physical strength. More by the girls in the group than by the guys because guys didn’t really care all that much. But girls, yeah. One of my friends was like, “Wow, if you were like physically stronger like Jordan,” who’s another kid who’s absolutely built, she’s like, “Yeah, if you were like physically stronger, you’d

definitely be like perfectly my type.” So, I guess, that was definitely the most recent example of me being kind of like self-conscious about it. And the fact that I don’t have like a six pack and like bulging biceps and stuff like that so, yeah.

Across the majority of disparaging remarks, these men were highly critical of their failure to possess a body that signified strength and dominance. For example, Brandon mentioned that he wished he was taller. In order to get a better handle on what being taller would mean to Brandon, Stephanie asked him why he mentioned this as an instance of feeling less masculine. Brandon explained: “I think of it this way. When someone puts you in a line of guys, you always look up at a guy, you never look down. You always think of “a guy” as the next guy who’s bigger than you. It can never be the guy who’s smaller than you because...” Brandon’s voice trailed as if at a loss for words. Then he said, “Because I can’t beat you, but I can beat you. You beat the guy who’s shorter than you, you can’t beat the guy who’s taller than you.” According to Brandon’s description, virtually every man (except the tallest) consistently feels emasculated by the presence of other, taller, men. Yet, it isn’t height in and of itself that is emasculating, it’s the threat of being “beaten.” It’s unclear whether Brandon is referring to a physical beating or to the act of losing, although either would stand in opposition to masculinity as defined by the informants.

### ***Drinking or Drug Related Threat***

A number of informants recalled instances of gender identity threat that involved drugs or alcohol (n = 7, 16%). For example, Julian, who opted not to drink during his freshman year, recalled, “Living on a [dormitory] floor there’s was a lot of peer pressure. I didn’t drink and people would all the time be like, ‘Why aren’t you drinking?’ So that can make you feel like you aren’t living up to the expectations of a man socially.” Shawn, who also didn’t drink during his freshman year recalled a similar, extremely painful, memory:

I've never been a big drinker. And I lived on a floor my freshman year where I was kind of trying to be exiled because I didn't drink. And I didn't fit into the whole party group that they wanted to form. And so it kind of made me feel like not as masculine just because I chose to do something different from them. Without displaying that I was willing to chug a few beers with them right away, I feel like I was being questioned about my masculinity...It was a continuous thing. I chose not drink for my entire freshman year, and they tried replacing me, actually. I got exiled from the group and eventually had to leave that dormitory.

As evidenced earlier, there is a lot of pressure on young college men to consume alcohol. When Julian and Shawn opted not to drink, they felt their masculinity was called into question by their peers. Julian was able to establish some friendships, but when Shawn refused to give in, he literally became an outcast.

### ***Losing or Backing Down from a Fight***

Although none of the participants spoke of instances in which they themselves fought, a number of the informants cited fighting as a potentially emasculating experience (n = 7, 16%). For example, when asked for an example of an instance that might make a man feel unmasculine, Kyle offered, "When two guys get in a fight, and one definitely loses." In addition to losing, refusing to fight is similarly emasculating. Andrew said, "During a fight, maybe at like a bar and the situation gets out of hand, and he's the one that backs down." Although neither Kyle nor Andrew specified, given the importance of physical strength, dominance, and competition to these informants' definitions of masculinity, I gather these hypothetical fights were physical in nature. Losing and backing down, then, would signal a lack of strength, dominance and competitiveness.

### ***Not Doing Something Risky***

Seven participants (16%) spoke of refusing or hesitating to take a risk as an instance in which masculinity could be called into question. For example, Oswald said, "I guess your

masculinity could be questioned if like, you're afraid of like heights or something, and you won't go jumping off a cliff into water, or something like that." When asked what was particularly threatening about his example, he explained, "I guess, guys are supposed to like have this like tough demeanor, and not really get scared in certain situations." Similarly, Steven recollected an incident during the previous semester when some of his friends decided to play with a Ouija board:

They're like, 'Steven, no, you got to try it. You got to try it.' And I said, 'No, no, no, I don't want to do it. And they're like, 'Oh, you're such a wimp. You're such a pussy. Why are you so scared?' So, that'd be an example. Like I felt like I should man up and maybe try it. I'm sure it'd be fine, but I don't know for some reason something weirds me out about that. And I think that relates to not being as risky of a person. I think if you back out of doing something that other people are doing that can be an example of where your masculinity might be called into question.

Both Oswald and Steven alluded to fear. Not taking a risk, it seems, is indicative of fear. Since being courageous is an important component of masculinity, expressing fear subjects these young men to ridicule and feelings of emasculation.

### ***Failing in Relationships with Women***

One of the most popular ways the men reported failing was in relationships with women. I divided these threats into five categories: 1) "striking out" and not hooking up 2) romantic rejection, 3) lacking sexual knowledge or ability, 4) being "whipped," and 5) the questioning of one's heterosexuality. I discuss each of these threats in turn.

***Striking out and not hooking up.*** Thirteen participants (30%) mentioned "'striking out' and not hooking up" as a gender identity threat. To "strike out" is a metaphor commonly used by the participants referencing baseball, as in "three strikes, you're out." In baseball, to "strike out" means to have swung at the ball three times, and missed. In hook up culture, to "strike out"



means to approach a woman with the hope that the interaction will lead to sexual activity, and to be unsuccessful. David, who actively participates in hook up culture, listed striking out as emasculating: “whenever I completely strike out with a girl, like I go up to her and nothing ends up happening.” Similarly, Paul expressed the belief that unsuccessful attempts to hook up would be threatening to any man: “If you want to threaten a man, tell him that he is incapable of getting women to sleep with him. That usually will hit his pride very quickly and very hard.” In truth, despite Paul’s belief in the universality of his statement, a contingency of informants explicitly expressed disinterest in participating in hook up culture. Regardless, for some men, striking out constituted a significant gender identity threat.

Given the importance of “hooking up” to normative definitions of young, heterosexual masculinity, coupled with the fear of striking out, some informants discussed specific strategies they developed to avoid striking out. For example, Casey (38) reported, “I give up really easily with girls so I don’t know if I’m rejected or not.” He elaborates by recalling an instance at a party in which he approached a woman to dance. “She had been kind of chilling the whole time, not really doing anything, and I just went up to her...and she kind of seemed a little distant, and I was like, ‘You’re not going to dance or anything?’ I was going to ask her to dance, but I didn’t want to do it directly.” By avoiding asking the question, Casey was able to buffer feelings of inferiority and rejection that coincide with striking out. Similarly, Kenneth explained:

It’s not necessarily that I felt rejected because I don’t. When I hit on a girl, I try to put her at ease, and definitely establish some sort of rapport and possible mini-friendship at the time. I just like try to get to know her and know more about her so that when I do try to make my move, or ask her if she would like to go upstairs, or if she’d like a tour of the house, or whatever stupid line I come up with at the time, if she says “no,” it’s awkward. If you get a conversation going with her, and you say, “Oh, would you like a tour of the house?” “Oh, not right now.” “Oh, alright. Well, then can I get you a drink real quick?” I mean, I’ll feel rejected in the sense, like, “Damn, why didn’t she want to go up to my room?” But with that said, I don’t want to make it awkward, and I never usually get the flat “no.”

These indirect interactions serve an important purpose. By asking women whether they are going to dance, or if they would like a tour of the house, Casey and Kenneth are able to maintain that they were not rejected. By creating an opportunity for women to rebuff their advances, these men are able to avoid explicit rejection – one of the quintessential threats to young masculinity – and escape interactions with women with their sense of masculinity somewhat intact.

Previously, I alluded to a contingency of informants who expressed disinterest in participating in campus hook up culture. It is worth noting, these informants are also at risk of emasculation, not for striking out, but for not going up to bat. In other words, informants reported that their masculinity was called into question for not wanting, or not attempting, to hook up. For example, Daniel wanted to spend time with friends he hadn't seen in a while: "I was hoping to just hang out with friends, but a lot of them took home girls that night. It's like a law. They were giving me a hard time for not taking, you know, not being aggressive or competitive or whatever it is and taking a girl home." Parroting Daniel, Aiden said, "If you're single and a lot of your friends are single, and you're not going out on a daily basis trying to get with girls, and your friends are, then you definitely feel more inadequate." For Daniel, the threat came from his friends who held him accountable for not living up to the normative standard of masculinity (hooking up) that is so pervasive he refers to it as "law." For Aiden, it is unclear whether his friends actively called his masculinity into question or not. Nonetheless, he clearly feels insufficient.

I was struck by Aiden's and the other informants' feelings of inadequacy, particularly in light of the fact that some of these young men did not appear to actually want casual sexual encounters. As both Daniel's and Aiden's passages imply, the ability to be perceived as having hooked up may be more important than actually having hooked up. Curtis provided a more

concrete example. In response to the interviewer's request for a specific emasculating event, Curtis referenced a time when he was hanging out with some friends. His friends were talking about recent sexual encounters. Curtis said, "I couldn't say anything because I, you know, had nothing to contribute, so I just felt like less of a man." I asked Curtis for clarification, "So what was it about the event that made you feel like less of a man?" He responded, "Just basically not being able to talk about a story about hooking up with a girl." Curtis unmistakably names his failure "to contribute" and "not being able to talk about a story" as the threat, as opposed to not having engaged in sexual activity. Once distinguished, this emphasis on story-telling was apparent throughout a number of the transcripts. For example, Dale listed the following as potentially threatening to a man's gender identity: "You know, if all your friends were talking like, 'Oh, you know, I got with this girl last night,' and you're like, 'Yeah, I went home and ate cereal last night' or something, it's going to be a little embarrassing, you know?" Whereas the inability to hook up can be threatening, the inability to talk about having hooked up is also a significantly emasculating experience for these young men.

***Romantic rejection.*** The majority of men who talked about striking out in relation to threatened masculinity were not involved in committed, monogamous relationships. However, some men had serious girlfriends, had serious girlfriends in the past, or were in pursuit of serious girlfriends. I define "romantic rejection," as opposed to "striking out" as repudiation by a girlfriend or potential girlfriend. Seven informants (16%) listed this as a gender identity threat. It is not surprising that men who were rejected by a committed, monogamous partner, reported that such rejections were emasculating. Yet, as emasculating as these instances were, a number of informants revealed that the qualities of their ex's subsequent partner had the ability to magnify the threat. For example, Scott said, "I had a girlfriend who left me...and she said the other guy

was better in bed, which was emasculating, obviously.” Implicit in Scott’s statement is the belief that the new boyfriend’s abilities reflect poorly on his abilities. Aiden was also left and his ex-girlfriend later began dating a woman. Aiden quite eloquently walked the interviewer through his thought process. He said, “When I found out that she was a lesbian, it was kind of like, ‘Was it something I did? Was I not good enough? Was I not man enough for her?’ Or also on the flip side, if she likes girls, and she liked me maybe like...” Aiden did not finish the sentence, however he clearly questioned his masculinity, as well as how feminine he might be. As previously discussed, any association with femininity constitutes a significant threat to one’s masculinity. For both Scott and Aiden, their ex-girlfriend’s future relationships served to expose their inadequacies as men.

A second way the informants reported being romantically rejected was by being placed in “the friend zone.” Men are placed in the friend zone when women articulate their desire to remain friends rather than becoming romantically or sexually intimate. Nerone explains, “If a girl, you know, doesn’t like you, or only considers you like as a friend, puts you in a friend zone you know ASAP. That can make you feel, you know, not as masculine as you’d like to be.” Seth described a particular instance of being placed in the friend zone. Having met a woman he was interested in pursuing romantically, he asked her if she wanted to study. “She was like, ‘Yeah. Great. Let’s do it in a group environment.’ I didn’t pursue it further.” (Note Seth’s interaction mirrors the approaches taken by men pursuing more casual encounters. He only hinted at his romantic interest without having to put himself at risk for unequivocal rejection.)

***Lacking sexual experience, ability, or knowledge.*** Related to “striking out” and “romantic rejection” is the threat that comes from a lack of sexual experience, ability, or knowledge (n = 6, 14%). For example, when asked to provide an example of an emasculating

experience, several participants admitted that they had not yet engaged in sexual intercourse.

Brandon, a twenty-one year old virgin, responded almost immediately:

I'll be very candid, other than the fact that I've never had a girlfriend, that's pretty much it. That's probably the only expectation that socially a man would look at me and go, 'What the hell are you thinking? How can you not have had a girlfriend by the time you're twenty-one?' ... That's the one thing I think someone would just isolate me and look at me and be like, 'Why haven't you done this?'

This isn't surprising given that sexual prowess is a defining feature of young masculinity.

Yet, even if a man has had sexual encounters, his masculinity is at risk of being called into question if he has reason to believe he lacks sexual skill. For example, Mario said, "What might be a threat to one's masculinity? If a girl said you were bad in bed. That can haunt you." In addition to lacking sexual ability, lacking sexual knowledge also constitutes a significant gender identity threat. Kenneth provided the following example:

When we share stories about sexual exploits, you can tell that there's some guys who are like listening because they're hearing something new...that's not necessarily a bad thing, but I can certainly understand why the guys might feel like less of a man because they don't know, like for example, about 69ing or whatever.

Kenneth went on to explain why this is such a potentially emasculating experience.

"Sexual prowess is something that I think is probably the biggest one [indicator of masculinity] because, like being athletic, being tall, being funny, whatever, they can help you I guess be more of a man, but I think at the end of the day, at least right our lives as college students, a lot is placed on your sexual prowess and your ability to talk to girls. And honestly, at the end of the day, hook up with them.

Lack of sexual knowledge is threatening because it implies a lack of sexual experience and skill.

As Kenneth explains, lack of experience and skill are counternormative to the informants' definitions of masculinity.

*Being "whipped."* As evidenced in the preceding sections, many of the informants were desirous of both casual and serious relationships with women. Ironically, being too involved – or

the perception of over-involvement – in a romantic relationship constitutes yet another threat to masculinity (n = 11, 25%). Aaron provides a typical example, “When I’m just trying to hang out with like my girlfriend or something. If I give up going out with like all the guys for one night, and stay in and hang out with my girlfriend, I definitely get called out.” Every participant that alluded to romantic over-involvement, except Aaron, used the term “whipped” to describe this type of threat. Ben explained the meaning of “whipped”: “If you’re whipped by your girlfriend, it would be like, if we’re going to the bars or something and then somebody’s like, ‘Oh, I can’t. I’m going to dinner and then going to see a movie with my girlfriend.’ They’d be like, ‘Oh, you’re whipped. She runs your life.’ Ben’s explanation alludes to being under the control of a girlfriend (“she runs your life”). Mario explained further, “If he hangs with his girlfriend too much, they say he’s whipped, that means the girl has control, and I guess the guys are supposed to be the dominant one.” In other words, being whipped constitutes a failure to live up to the masculine qualities of dominance and power.

Several things are notable about this particular threat. First, the term implies being controlled by a woman, yet none of the participants’ examples provided solid evidence of excessive control. For instance, in both Aaron’s and Ben’s examples, the men opted to spend time with their girlfriends over time with their friends for an evening. It seems that doing virtually anything with one’s girlfriend (with the exception of having sex) is grounds for being declared “whipped.” Second, this is a highly gendered term. Later in the interviews, when I asked men to discuss femininity and the ways in which a woman’s femininity might be called into question, none of the participants described women as vulnerable to “being whipped.” Third, note that across all three examples, it isn’t spending time with a girlfriend that is threatening. Rather, it is the act of being “called out” or challenged by one’s peers, which constitutes the

threat. Presumably, if one was to spend time with his girlfriend without being sanctioned by his friends, he would not feel emasculated.

*Questioning of heterosexuality.* Another theme to emerge was the questioning of one's status as heterosexual (n = 5, 11%). When asked for examples of instances in which a man might feel emasculated, Dean stated, "If a guy is called gay. In popular belief, I think gay does not equate to masculine. So like anything that looks or sounds like what the popular view of being gay means can't be masculine." On the one hand, the questioning of one's heterosexuality likely constitutes a threat given the importance of heterosexuality in defining masculinity. On the other hand, as Butler (1990), West and Zimmerman (1987) and others have noted, most people erroneously conflate sex, gender and sexuality. Thus, being called "gay," regardless of one's sexuality, constitutes a significant threat to gender identity. Tim's example is informative: "Because I didn't really like date anybody, my mom always questioned my, sexuality. She was like, 'Are you sure you're not gay?' I was like, 'Yeah, Mom, I'm positive.'" Even after insisting he was heterosexual, Tim's mother continued to tease him: "Like she knew that I wasn't, but she would just like joke around with me about it. That would be a really good instance where a little bit of a damper is put on your masculinity." Even though Tim refuted his mother's initial supposition, and Tim reports that that his mother knew he wasn't gay, Tim experienced her teasing as a continual threat to his masculinity. This is because words like "gay" and "fag" are used not to comment on someone's sexuality, but rather to comment on – and threaten – masculinity (Pascoe, 2005, 2007). In short, Tim's mother wasn't teasing him about his sexuality. Instead she was commenting on his inability to live up to traditional notions of masculinity that include romantic relationships with women and sexual prowess.

### *Call Outs and the Risk of Gender Assessment*

Through this line of questioning, I was able to establish an inventory of situations in which gender identity might be threatened. But how exactly does a particular situation or behavior lead to feelings of emasculation? I argue this process occurs in social relational contexts. Social relational contexts are situations in which individuals define themselves in relation to others in order to comprehend the situation and choose a course of action (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). These include, but are not limited to, situations in which an individual interacts with others. Because people come to understand normative definitions of masculinity through interaction, they develop the ability to judge their own behavior as gender appropriate or inappropriate. Contexts in which individuals act alone – yet feel their behavior or its consequences may be socially evaluated – require individuals to implicitly define themselves in relation to others in order to anticipate and manage the situation. Consequently, even in the absence of interaction, gender identity can be threatened.

Throughout the examples of gender identity threat detailed above, informants quoted a number of specific conversations with their peers demonstrating the process of gender identity threat during interaction. Using the informants' terminology, I refer to these instances as "call outs." To be called out means to be explicitly confronted or challenged in some way, particularly with respect to masculinity. Thirty-four of the participants (72%) detailed an incident of being called out, mocked, or questioned for behavior someone else deemed inappropriate or unacceptable for their gender. Some of these call outs occurred in childhood. For example, in the beginning of this chapter, Dean recalled his fourth-grade schoolmate's call out, "That's so gay. Don't you know purple's a gay color?" Dean's peer was not legitimately asking if Dean was



aware of some sort of association between purple and homosexuality. He was chastising Dean for doing something inappropriate for his gender.

Instances like this one serve to socialize boys and encourage gender “appropriate” behaviors. Yet, the process of being called out continues throughout the course of men’s lives. Take, for example, Adam, whose friends told him, “Only girls do yoga.” Or Julian, whose suitemates asked him, “Why aren’t you drinking?” Or Aaron, whose friends teased him for “being whipped.” Again, the sole purpose of each call out is to police gender. Adam is, no doubt, aware that yoga is associated with femininity. And, I’m sure that those who called him out don’t doubt that Adam knows yoga is associated with femininity. There is no other reason for the question other than to sanction him for failing to do gender appropriately.

As noted above, however, not all participants alluded to interaction in their illustrations of gender identity threat. A number of informants expressed feeling deeply emasculated in the absence of an explicit callout. On the one hand, because these men are aware of culturally normative conceptions of masculinity, in the absence of their peers, they remain aware that their behavior stands in opposition to these conceptions. On the other hand, in the presence of others, men who have not been called out are aware of the omnipresent risk of being called out. As West and Zimmerman explain, “to ‘do’ gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*” (136, italics in original). In other words, aware of what it means to be a man, the informants recognize that they could be judged at any time. Dylan provided a good example. Dylan is the football player who was benched by his coach. He said, “I was the only one who got benched. No one ever said anything, but I felt like the team thought, so...” Dylan’s did not finish the sentence;

however, his statement exposes his fear of judgment despite the fact that none of his teammates called him out for being benched.

In Pascoe's (2005, 2007) ethnographic study of high school masculinity, she refers to the ever-present threat of being called a "fag." She refers to this as the "specter of the fag" which she explains is "a powerful disciplinary mechanism. It is fluid enough that boys police most of their behaviors out of fear of having the fag identity permanently adhere and definitive enough that boys recognize a fag behavior and strive to avoid it (Pascoe, 2005: 330). I contend that the "specter of the fag" continues at least through college and that being called a "fag" is just one example of being called out for engaging in non-masculine behavior. Because of this specter – or illusory presence – young men police their own behavior and often feel emasculated even in the absence of interaction.

### ***Compensation***

In August of 2010, New York Mets' closer Francisco Rodriguez was suspended without pay for two games and barred from home after ruthlessly attacking his girlfriend's father, Carlos Peña. According to *The New York Times*, Rodriguez was upset about the latest Mets loss and Peña challenged Rodriguez's masculinity with the words, "Man up, and play better" (Zimmer, 2010). The term "man up" surfaced again and again throughout the interviews. For example, recall Steven, the young man who was called out for being afraid of Ouija. In telling his account, he said, "I felt like I should man up and maybe try it." Urban dictionary, a Web-based dictionary of slang words and phrases written by site visitors, offers the following definitions for the term "man up:"

- "Don't be a pussy, brave it, be daring."

- “To fulfill your responsibilities as a man, despite your insecurities and constant ability to place yourself in embarrassing and un-manly scenarios.”
- “An uplifting imperative, derived from the saying ‘be a man about it.’ To grow a pair, stop being childish, and stop complaining.”

The phrase has recently infiltrated popular culture in a number of ways. For example, ABC recently premiered a new prime-time comedy bearing the name. In the pilot, we learn that Will Keen, one of the show's protagonists, plays *Call of Duty* on his PlayStation 3 and uses non-dairy hazelnut creamer. Will's behavior is juxtaposed to the behaviors of his grandfather who fought in WWII and his father who fought in Vietnam. The show's website explains, that “each new day brings these lovable beta males another opportunity to man up and be like their forefathers.” In a similar vein, Miller Lite recently released a series of commercials encouraging men to “man up” by drinking their product. In one commercial, a man carrying a “carry all” asks for a beer, to which the bartender replies, “When you want a beer that tastes good, put down your purse and I'll get you one.” Other commercials feature a man in “skinny jeans,” a man in a skirt, a man in a woman's scarf, a man in a thong, a man with a lower back tattoo, a man with glitter on his shirt, and a man at the bar with his mother. Each of these commercials features the following voice over: “Man up, because if you're drinking light beer without great pilsner taste, you're missing the point of drinking beer.”

The underlying theme across the various usages of the term “man up” seems to be that any man doing something typically feminine (e.g., carrying a bag, wearing tight pants, using hazelnut creamer) or non-masculine (performing poorly in sports, expressing fear) needs to be policed by those around him. More importantly, he needs to take action. By engaging in real

combat, drinking beer, “growing a pair,” getting in a fist fight, or buckling down and playing Ouija, these men presumably re-establish masculinity.

This section of the dissertation is devoted to understanding if and how the informants perform compensatory actions in response to threatened gender identity. Do these young men engage in hyper-masculine behaviors as these everyday usages of the term “man up” suggest? Or is this largely a cultural construction that fails to resonate with the lives of young men?

### ***Interview Protocol and Presentation of Results***

The purpose of the remainder of this chapter is to examine in an exploratory fashion the informants’ responses to gender identity threat. In order to avoid influencing the informants’ responses, my research team and I did not ask participants directly if they engaged in compensatory behavior. Instead, we listened for potentially compensatory behaviors in the informants’ threat narratives. We then followed up with questions intended to grasp the meaning and rationale behind their behavior. After following this strategy for each potentially compensatory behavior, each participant was then asked to think back on the emasculating threat and walk the researcher through the events immediately following the incident. Again, the interviewer listened for potentially compensatory behaviors in the narratives and followed up with questions in order to understand the participants’ meaning and rationale. After allowing the participant to detail each threat – as well as the events that followed – the interviewer then asked the participant, “Did you do anything in particular that maybe you wouldn’t have done if the event hadn’t have happened?” and, “People do all kinds of things to deal with external events and make themselves feel better. Did you do anything like this?”

In the previous two sections, the goal was to create an inventory of masculine characteristics and an inventory of potential gender identity threats. As a result, I presented

counts and percentages alongside the data. In this section, the goal is to explore the various strategies men employ in response to gender identity threat. I do not present counts and percentages because to do so would be misleading. I argue that more popular and less popular responses are equally interesting and important to note. It is useful to know how the majority of young men respond to gender identity threat; however it is also valuable to note the kinds of behaviors that are exceptional rather than normative. I do not argue that all people, or even most people, engage in compensatory gendered behaviors like the ones under investigation in this dissertation. Rather, I argue that when gendered behaviors like these occur, they might be in response to emasculation. Moreover, less popular responses reveal little about how often particular behaviors are actually enacted. Many the gendered behaviors that are the subject of this dissertation are typically frowned upon. As a result, even if a significant number of informants do engage in these types of behaviors, it is unlikely that they would have all been forthright with the interviewers. Thus, any presentation of counts or percentages would likely underestimate the true prevalence of these behaviors. I begin with a discussion of the more popular, innocuous responses to gender identity threat and describe more exceptional cases toward the end of the chapter.

### ***Shrugging It Off, Waiting It Out, Ignoring***

Some participants literally reported doing “nothing” in response to gender identity threat. For example, Gabe was recently placed in “the friend zone” by a potential dating partner. The interviewer asked Gabe to recall what he did afterwards. Gabe said, “Nothing. I mean it’s just natural. You get rejected, you know? You take a hit to your self-esteem. But obviously if you go into something like that, you’re confident. You’ll pull through.”

Other informants reported “shrugging it off” or “waiting it out.” Tim, for instance – the informant whose mother teasingly questioned his heterosexuality – said, “I mean I don’t really take those kind of things to heart so I would just kind of shrug it off and keep going.” Another informant detailed an instance of being “shot down by a girl” and said, “When something like that happens, I typically just wait it out” (Spencer).

Still others reported simply ignoring the threat. For example, Christian, who was ridiculed by his friends for participating in musical theater, said, “I just tried to ignore it. Ignoring it is probably the best possible strategy.” Time and time again, the informants demonstrated that, in response to an emasculating threat, it is possible to simply do nothing.

### ***Retreating***

Another common way the informants reported responding to an emasculating experience was to retreat. For example, Daniel felt his masculinity was called into question when he wanted to spend the evening out with friends without the pressure of trying to hook up. His friends gave him a hard time. When asked if he did anything to make himself feel better, he reported, “I kind of just isolated myself and got over it. Sometimes I just need a little alone time to work things out.” While in isolation, a number of informants reported exercising or engaging in a physical activity. For example, Oliver said, “I went for a run. I love going for a run when I’m angry.” Another stated, “I just went to the basketball court in my parent’s backyard. I’ll usually go there to shoot and I guess just think about stuff. It’s kind of where I go to escape” (Brian). Others reported retreating in order to meditate, pace, inhale and exhale, play music, play video games, and free write. In short, although a number of the informants reported retreating in response to threatened gender identity, their efforts seemed healthy and restorative as opposed to avoidant.

### ***Friends and Family***

Another popular response was to rely on friends and family when dealing with an emasculating threat. As opposed to doing nothing or retreating, relying on family and friends seemed to be a strategy the informants turned to in the face of weightier emasculating threats. For example, recall Dylan who spoke with a heavy heart about getting benched by his coach. Dylan reported calling his parents after the event: “I called my parents, and my mom came to visit me. It’s only a couple hours. That was nice.” Another participant, Shawn, who was ostracized by the men on his floor for not drinking, stated, “That was one of the most difficult periods of my life. It was through friends and family that I was able to feel better. Not friends from school, but friends from over the course of my life. By surrounding myself with people who cared about me I got through it.”

### ***Try Harder***

A number of informants reported feeling motivated as a result of their emasculating experience. This response was especially common among participants who cited incidents of failure. For example, Brandon said, “I know when I’m playing sports, and I get called out for not making the play or whatever, I just try harder.” Similarly, Andrew, who cited doing poorly on tests as emasculating, said, “I usually go through them right away and find everything that I did wrong, and fix those problems and try to understand why I did that wrong.”

While some of the try harder narratives – like Brandon’s and Andrew’s – appeared largely innocuous, other narratives came across as retaliatory and spiteful. For example, Connor summed up his emasculating experience (being ridiculed in front of his peers by his high school football coach for performing poorly) in the following way:

I would say it made me feel just like kind of just pissed off about my life in general, but I have a lot of like fight in me, so I would say that it just like made

me more motivated to become stronger, you know? Do more work, be more successful, so like eventually just like anyone around me who would've said something like that to me in the past, in the future would just, you know, disregard it because the roles are reversed.

Although all three participants were motivated by the threat, Brandon and Andrew appeared to have a genuine interest in improving for the sake of improvement. On the contrary, Connor and others appeared motivated by proving something to someone else and avoiding similar experiences in the future.

### ***Call Outs***

Several participants indicated that they respond to threatened gender identity – particularly instances in which they were called out by their friends for doing something feminine or non-masculine – with a return call out. For example, Aaron described a time he went home instead of joining his friends at an after-hours party. His friends gave him a hard time for not wanting to continue partying. Aaron reported responding this way: “I called them back for something else they did in the past.” The interviewer asked, “Then what happened?” Aaron replied, “Yeah, it just becomes a pissing contest and you just shrug it off at the end.” In describing the interaction as “a pissing contest,” Aaron’s interaction resembles a of a game of hot-potato in which no one wants to be left emasculated without someone else to emasculate in turn (Pascoe, 2005, 2007).

### ***Working Out***

I mentioned earlier that some of the men who retreated simultaneously engaged in physical activity. For those participants, exercise served as a vehicle for escape and an opportunity to be alone with their thoughts. Other participants specifically talked about working out in a compensatory way. For example, Dean was teased all through high school for being



skinny. When he started college he “started taking a lot of weight training classes, you know, I worked on it.” Similarly, Kenneth who described striking out at a recent party said, “I know sometimes I’ll go workout...I think I do that so I’ll look more fit, I’ll look good and all that.” In both cases, working out served to remedy feelings of emasculation.

### *Drinking/Drugs*

Drinking, and to a lesser extent drug use, emerged as a compensatory response as well. For some participants, because the context of the threat occurred at a bar or party, it wasn’t clear if informant drank in response to the incident or because drinking was part of the environment in which the situation occurred. For example, Scott saw a woman at a party that he knew from one of his classes. He approached the woman, started a conversation, and then suggested they “hang out” outside of class. The woman replied that she was busy, which Scott took as an indication of her disinterest. Scott told the interviewer, “I felt like an idiot, you know? I felt like I misread signs or perceptions of things.” The interviewer asked, “Is there anything you did to kind of like let go of that feeling?” Scott replied, “I mean, I had a drink.” Other informants more explicitly linked drinking to the emasculating incident they detailed. For instance, Gabe was casually dating a woman from home when he learned through that she was seeing someone else. He said, “It like made me feel really down, I definitely went out and drank more that night than I would have, but eventually I got over it.” Similarly, Paul reported drinking in response to a series of academic-related failures. He said, “In a way it’s like if you keep getting tests that say you don’t know the material or you didn’t work hard enough...you get a feeling of hopelessness. It wouldn’t surprise me, because I probably did this but just like self-medicate, but I just started to drink a lot, just like drink a lot of alcohol, and consume whatever drugs I could get my hands on.” Certainly drinking and drug use are part of undergraduate culture, but these responses

suggest that drinking and drug use might also be a way in which young men deal with emasculating threats.

### ***Risky Behavior***

In addition to drinking and drug use, which can be risky, several participants provided evidence that engagement in other risk-taking behaviors might be compensatory. For example, Nerone talked about losing a fight as a masculinity threat. The interviewer asked him, “In situations like this, do you think you would do anything in particular that maybe you wouldn’t have done if you hadn’t lost a fight?” Nerone responded, “If it’s a situation where a guy can reverse the notion that he lacks masculinity, he’ll do something about it. Like if you lose, then you might go out and like even if it’s risky, you might try it just so you can get that tough guy attitude back.” While Nerone spoke of risk-taking in general, Duane provided a concrete example of risk-taking in response to threatened gender identity:

I was learning to snowboard this winter. I was like with a bunch of guys that have been snowboarding for a while, and they wanted to go down this black diamond, like one of the harder tracks. And I was like, “This is like my second day snowboarding, I don’t want to do that.” And then, you know, it was the whole issue of like, “Are you man enough to do it or not?” So, I mean, I gave into the pressure, but I guess it was just one of those instances where I felt like, you know, I don’t want to do this but I kind of have to preserve my image.

Duane’s account exemplifies the interactional nature of the gender identity threat and compensation process. It is doubtful that Duane would have attempted a black diamond trail on his second day of snowboarding had his friends not called his masculinity into question. In response, Duane “gave into the pressure” and attempted the course.

### ***Sexual Activity***

A number of informants reported compensatory behavior related to sexual activity, particularly in response to situations that called their sexual prowess into question. First, several

participants reported engaging in discourse that exaggerated the extent of their sexual activities. Recall Aiden whose ex-girlfriend later came out as a lesbian. Aiden reported that his friends regularly bring up his ex's sexuality in order to call his masculinity into question. Aiden reported using humor to redefine the situation into one in which he has extraordinary sexual prowess: "Well, I usually I say, 'Oh, I like to think that I was so good that no other guy can top it, so then she went into girls.' So that's kind of what I say and just kind of laugh it off, but at the same time, I still kind of feel it, that like, blow to my confidence" Aiden hesitated and then continued:

And, I exaggerate some of the details about it just to make it more interesting and make me look a little bit better. Yes, the entire story's true unfortunately, but sometimes like I say we went out longer than we did or I'll leave out details to make it seem like we did more than we actually did.

Similarly, Yakim reported, "If I'm like telling a story of like something that happened in the past, I may change some details, make myself seem better, make myself seem more macho."

Second, informants reported compensating by seeking out sexual activity. Aiden, the participant described above whose friends tease him about his ex-girlfriend's lesbianism, noted, "Sometimes if they make fun of me about it, then I'll like go and kind like flex my muscles a little more, like take a chance and approach a really, really cute girl instead of just sitting there at the table just hanging out with my friends." While Aiden's intention isn't entirely clear, presumably he approaches women to flirt, date, or hook up. Similarly, Austin recalled a time in which his on-again-off-again girlfriend broke things off. When asked to detail the events following the incident, he said, "Well, we were off a little bit like, so I kind of hooked up with her friend but not really. I guess I did that just to make myself feel better. We just like kissed, though." Kenneth provided a third example. Kenneth spoke at length about the importance of heterosexual sex with women in validating his masculinity:

Getting back to what I said earlier about the validation about getting with girls, it validates you in both the sense of, at least for myself, it validates my self-confidence or whatever. And, in the group setting with my fraternity brothers, it validates me in their eyes as well, especially if I tell them about it.

Kenneth cited both failing to hook up and getting called out by his friends for failing to hook up as emasculating experiences. The interviewer asked Kenneth if he does anything to resolve the feelings of inadequacy that surface in these situations. Kenneth replied:

The best way I think of, honestly, is going and proving my sexual prowess. So I'll probably like go to the little black book and call up a girl, just like have her come over, and be like, "Yeah, look what I can do." I can just call a girl up and tell her to come here and she does. And then I like prove that to myself and I prove it to my fraternity brothers.

It is worth noting that Kenneth revealed this strategy for dealing with identity insecurity to Thomas, the most similar interviewer to the informants. It is doubtful that he would have relayed this story to either Stephanie or me. Nonetheless, to the informants, heterosexual activity and the illusion of heterosexual sexual activity have the power to restore masculinity following an emasculating event.

### ***Anger and Aggression***

Another interesting theme to emerge from this line of questioning was the theme of anger and aggression. For example, Dean – the young man who is celibate for religious reasons – recalled an incident in which his friends ridiculed him and his decision to wait until marriage to engage in sex. He said, "I'm not a guy that uses a lot of foul language, but like it's uncontrollable sometimes. I just like started saying stuff that just isn't me, you know? Like I blurted out some big four-letter words." It is interesting to note that Dean feels he is largely unaggressive in his day-to-day life. Scott had a similar experience in which his anger welled up inside. Scott is the young man described above who felt like "an idiot" when he was rejected by the woman from

his class. Recalling the incident, he said: “I was just angry, and like, you know, even though I’m not aggressive, it like made aggressive feelings come out.” It seems that gender identity threat has the ability to incite anger and aggression in young men, even in young men who describe themselves as unaggressive.

While Dean and Scott did not express their anger toward any particular target, other participants directed their anger toward the source of their gender identity threat. For example, Dylan – the benched football player – explained:

I almost got in a fight a few weeks ago with someone who, I forgot what he pissed me off about, but he said something. It wasn’t about football, but then I called him out on something else. Then he mentioned football. He mentioned how I got benched.<sup>23</sup> So, we almost got in a fight about that.

Another participant, Tim, directed his anger toward a woman who rejected him. Tim is the young man whose mother questioned his sexuality. During the interview he recalled a second emasculating instance, in which he finally mustered the courage to ask out a friend for whom he had developed a significant crush. He eloquently explained the intensity of his feelings:

She said no. When they say no, that kills. You kind of feel like you’re being made to feel like you’re not good enough kind, like you don’t meet that person’s standards, and it makes you question like what’s wrong with you that they don’t want to be in a relationship with you. It’s a pretty shitty feeling.

The interviewer then asked, “What did you do right after that happened?” Tim responded, “I just punched a wall... That’s not something I usually do, but if I get worked up enough, I will. I’m like the type of person that doesn’t like to talk things out. Once I’ve hit a point like I’m just like, ‘I don’t want to talk to you anymore.’ And haven’t really talked to her since.” Although Tim’s physical aggression was directed toward the wall, he behaved passive-aggressively toward the woman he deemed responsible for threatening his masculinity. Having been rejected he stopped

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<sup>23</sup> Note that this is inconsistent with his earlier statement that no one said anything to him about having gotten benched.

speaking to the woman despite their previous friendship and her attempts to contact him. He later reported, without remorse, that he heard this upset her very much.

Finally, one informant expressed aggression towards women in the form of derogation. For example, Kenneth, the informant who admitted calling women from his little black book to prove his sexual prowess to himself and his friends, detailed getting called out by his friends for not hooking up. The interviewer asked Kenneth to talk about how it felt when his friends called him out. Kenneth avoided the question and instead offered the following verbal attack on women:

I'll be honest, like especially in the college setting, I don't really view girls as the most rational or intelligent of beings. So in my mind, I can chalk it up to, 'Oh, she's just being irrational right now. If she doesn't want to get with me, she must be an idiot. Because I'm a Cornell double major, I'm California a boy, you know what I'm saying? I'm funny, I'm tall, I'm athletic, I don't really know what's not to like. If you don't like me, then I guess you should go find a short, fat guy who's from, I don't know, Texas or something I guess.

The interviewer then asked Kenneth, "What do you do after you get a 'no'?" Kenneth replied, "I mean after you get a no, I mean I certainly understand that when you're talking to girls, some girls are just prudes, or excuse my language, but bitches....but I usually just try to say 'It wasn't me, it's her.'" (Again, he said this to Thomas and it is doubtful that he would have expressed these views so openly had Stephanie or I conducted the interview.) Although Kenneth's response was exceptional, other participants like Tim and Nerone, also directed anger and aggression toward women in response to feeling emasculated.

### ***Discussion***

The interviews provided inventories of the ways in which these young men defined their masculinity and the types of situations they experienced as emasculating. These inventories will be useful to researchers interested in conducting research on gender identity and gender identity

threat in the future. Moreover, the interviews provided rich, detailed accounts of the ways in which men respond to gender identity threat and the interactional process of gender identity threat and compensation. When these young men fail to live up to normative definitions of masculinity, or are held accountable by their peers for failing to live up to these definitions, they are likely to experience feelings of emasculation and identity insecurity. The data revealed a great deal of variation in how young men respond to these feelings. The most common response was to simply do nothing, and a number of participants detailed healthy, restorative strategies for dealing with gender identity threat. At the other end of the spectrum, however, were respondents who drank, used drugs, engaged in risk-taking behavior, exaggerated the details of sexual activity, sought out sexual activity, and expressed anger and aggression. I don't contend that all men, or even most men, engage the adverse gendered behaviors under investigation in this dissertation. But, the presence of some young men in the data who reported engaging in adverse gendered behavior in response to gender identity threat provides evidence of the interactional theory of gendered behavior I've put forth.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

For many, the study of gender is largely synonymous with the study of women. But femininity and masculinity – like oppression and privilege – are relational. Though men have produced most of the knowledge in use today, few scholars have undertaken the systematic study of men *as men*. That is, few scholars have critically investigated how men live gendered social lives in the context of gendered institutions and power relations. Such investigations not only illuminate how gender shapes men and influences behavior, they have the ability to reveal the dynamics of power and privilege at the heart of oppression. This dissertation is an example of one such investigation.

Chapter 1 introduced the scope of young men’s involvement in various deleterious behaviors, and provided an overview of the theoretical framework and empirical studies found in later chapters. Chapter 2 outlined the main theoretical argument. Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) and theories of gendered interaction (for example, Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999; West & Zimmerman, 1987), I developed an interactional theory of gendered behavior. In short, the theory suggests that receiving information that challenges one’s status as a prototypical man, otherwise known as “gender identity threat,” leads young, heterosexual men to engage in stereotypically male-typed behaviors. I then applied this theory to the study of gendered behavior across three methodologically diverse studies.

Chapter 3 examined the effect of gender identity threat on sexual infidelity. Using panel data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, I examined the role of economic dependency on infidelity in young men. My analyses showed that economic dependency



increased the odds of infidelity among young, married men. I argued that economic dependency threatened married men's gender identity by calling into question their breadwinning ability whereas sex with multiple partners served to restore threatened masculinity. Economic dependency did not increase the odds of cheating for cohabiting men. I interpret this finding to mean that marriage is a strongly gendered institution, and suggest that cohabitation may allow couples the freedom to chart new, less gendered, approaches to intimate, heterosexual relationships.

Chapter 4 experimentally tested the argument put forth in Chapter 2. I presented the results of an experiment designed to examine the effect of gender identity threat on anti-gay aggression. I manipulated gender identity threat by randomly assigning heterosexual, young men to one of two conditions. Participants assigned to condition 1 were informed that they were gender typical, whereas participants assigned to condition 2 were informed they were gender atypical. I then examined the impact of this feedback on aggression against a person believed to be gay. While the primary hypothesis was not supported, I found evidence of gender identity threat and compensation in some groups of men, suggesting that gender identity threat and compensation operates differently depending on various social categories.

Chapter 4 also made a unique methodological contribution. This is the first study of its kind to use video game technology and accelerometers to capture velocity data and measure aggression. The main advantage of this approach is that it allowed me to observe aggressive behavior without the participants harming themselves or others. This is a useful new paradigm to be used in the study of aggression in laboratory settings.

Chapter 5 outlined the results of 44 in-depth interviews with heterosexual undergraduate men. The purpose of these interviews was to understand the ways in which young men define

their gender identity, experience threats to their gender identity, and respond to gender identity threat. Content analysis of the transcripts revealed a core of behaviors and characterizations these men use to define masculinity. For these young men, watching and participating in sports, drinking or partying, heterosexuality, and sexual prowess are definitive of masculinity, as are physical and emotional strength, confidence, responsibility, competition, determination, sociability, courage, power, competence, and risk. Moreover, these young men equate masculinity with occupational and financial success. Not all men, or even most men, live up to this definition of masculinity, however it was recognized by virtually all of the informants that this form of masculinity is the most socially acceptable and valued. When young men failed to live up to this definition of masculinity, or were held accountable by their peers for failing to live up to this definition, they experienced gender identity threat. The majority of young men relied on healthy strategies to respond to the feelings of emasculation and disappointment that arose. However, less often, young men responded to gender identity threat and feelings of emasculation by engaging in adverse gendered behavior.

Together, these studies illuminate the causes and consequences of gender identity threat in young men and find that many of the adverse behaviors associated with young masculinity emerge through a dynamic threat-and-compensation process. The mixed-method design, coupled with the investigation of multiple dependent variables, provides strong support for the overall theory. The survey data allowed for the investigation of this process in a large, nationally representative sample; the laboratory experiment evaluated the causal impact of threatened gender identity while controlling for unobservables; and the interviews provided a rich description of masculinity, gender identity threat, and compensation as understood by the informants.

## *Implications*

The findings of this dissertation suggest several theoretical implications for the study of both masculinity and gendered behavior. First, popular discourse, stemming from theories of evolution, promotes an erroneous understanding of gendered behavior as innate. However, this dissertation makes clear that decisions to engage in gendered behavior are subject to influence, and it provides an understanding of who is likely to engage in gendered behavior under what conditions.

Second, this research points to the importance of understanding gendered behavior at an interactional level. Previous research on gendered behavior has typically remained at the level of individuals, although some theorists have written about the importance of institutions and cultural ideology. I add to this literature by demonstrating that these behaviors get performed during and through interaction. In other words, young men modify their actions and reactions in response to others and in light of internalized normative definitions of masculinity. This is particularly important because it is at the interactional level that these behaviors can be attenuated. At any given time, people have the option of acting or reacting differently in response to external stimuli.

Third, this dissertation sheds light on the micro-level processes that produce macro-level phenomena. For example, high rates of sexual promiscuity, alcohol poisoning, and brain injury in young men can partially be attributed to repeated interactions between men which in turn support and strengthen normative constructions of masculinity that call for gendered behaviors like sexual prowess, alcohol consumption and risk-taking.

### ***Directions for Future Research***

The findings of this dissertation reveal a number of important questions for future sociological research. First, given that economic dependence served to threaten masculinity in Chapter 4, what are the implications of women's increased labor force participation and financial security for this process and how are these trends likely to influence the relationship between gender identity threat and gendered behavior? Recent research suggests that equal breadwinning (Nock, 2001; Raley et al., 2006) and the number of women who earn more than a male partner (Fry & Cohn, 2010; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Raley et al., 2006) is growing, yet the informants in study 3 held fast to the notion that breadwinning is an important component of masculinity. Might we see an increase in gendered behaviors over time? Or, might young men acclimate over time to women's increased financial gains and ultimately experience economic dependency as less threatening?

Second, although wives are increasingly more likely to out earn their husbands, this arrangement is often temporary (Winkler, McBride, & Andrews, 2005; Winslow-Bowe, 2006). Do temporary gender identity threats operate in the same way as more long-term threats? Might gendered behaviors attenuate with knowledge indicating the threat is likely to be short-lived? Moreover, what is the role of choice in this process? Do men who actively and thoughtfully adopt alternative definitions of masculinity experience threatened masculinity in the same way as men who do not?

Third, the focus of this dissertation has been on young, heterosexual, U.S. men living in the United States. Yet, there is tremendous diversity in men's behavior across time, space and the life course (Connell, 2005). Older men, gay men, and racially or ethnically diverse men may be more or less likely than young, heterosexual, American men to experience cues suggesting they

are atypical as threatening. Future research should examine the relationship between gender identity threat and compensation in other populations.

Fourth, as noted in the introduction, both men and women engage in gendered behaviors. The theory of gendered behavior put forth in Chapter 2 suggests that both men and women will compensate in response to gender identity threat; however, there is little research investigating the effects of threatened femininity (for an exception, see Munsch & Willer, forthcoming). What are the implications of threatened femininity? Given the subordinate nature of femininity to masculinity (Connell, 1995; Johnson, 2005; Pascoe, 2007), will women respond to gender identity threats to the same extent as men? More broadly, what experiences threaten femininity given that masculinity may complement, rather than threaten, gender identity?

Finally, future research should investigate the pathways that reduce young men's engagement in unhealthy gendered behaviors. For example, does knowing about the consequences of threatened masculinity ameliorate its' effects? What are the short and long term effects of exposure to different messages about masculinity? In addition, what is the role of one's social network in sustaining or resisting these messages? Anecdotally, we know that the perpetrators of some of the most prominent school shootings failed to become socially integrated in their communities. It is possible, then, that smaller, tighter networks may perpetuate narrow notions of masculinity that encourage young men to engage in dangerous behavior. On the other hand, networks that are more open may discourage these behaviors by introducing young men to alternative definitions of masculinity.

Questions like these comprise an exciting new agenda for gender and masculinity scholars alike. This dissertation provides an important point of departure for answering these questions. I offer this dissertation with the hope that it will motivate sociologists to undertake

more research on men and masculinity, as well as gender identity threat, and that it will generate further research investigating how both women and men live gendered social lives.

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