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Understanding Masculinity: Exploring the Personal and Professional Lives of Male Middle School Directors of Private, All-boys' Middle Schools

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Understanding Masculinity: Exploring the Personal and Professional Lives of Male Middle

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Understanding Masculinity: Exploring the Personal and Professional Lives of Male Middle

School Directors of Private, All-boys' Middle Schools

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Approvals

In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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Abstract

There is a gap in research about the gender identity and gender experience of men leading all-boys middle-schools. In addition, there has been little work done exploring the link between the inner lives of male school leaders, their level of burnout or satisfaction, and the impacts on their school leadership. The purpose of this study was to explore how male middle school directors of all-boys' middle schools make sense of, engage with, and are impacted by their masculinity. The study employed narrative research with a social constructivist and post structural feminist lens. Four participants completed digital participatory journals, written document analysis of school communications, and semi structured interviews. One participant was selected as a critical case for site visits and nonparticipant observation. Study findings suggested that participants' gender development was characterized by limiting patriarchal beliefs in early life, destabilizing gender experiences, new ways of knowing and being, and ranges of continued engagement with gender identity. Through their inner, interpersonal, and institutional work focused on identity and meaning-making, the male leaders of the study have healed their childhood wounds, applied their discoveries to their leadership practice, and modeled a liberating existence for the men and boys in their care. The leaders, however, did not demonstrate or report consistent, effective strategies to maintain life balance or support their health and stress response. In addition, their masculine identity revealed an insufficient range of awareness and commitments towards issues of gender equity and feminism in their work. Key recommendations include the effective deployment of personal sustainability and wellness practices considerate of male worldviews and the need for continued education for male leaders in gender allyship and gender equitable leadership practices. Areas for further study may include broadening the scope of gender exploration inside boys' middle schools to include the feminine standpoint or a wider range of masculinities and

sexualities. Further research could specifically address the inconsistency of self-care practices and the correlation to masculine beliefs and expression by male leaders in single-sex schools.

Key words: masculinity, single sex schools, boys' schools, leadership, gender, narrative study, middle school, identity, gender equity, leadership, allyship

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all the men and boys who were never able to be truly free. To the ones we lost too early. To the ones who entered the arena as gladiators and were devoured by lions. To the ones who wondered if there was more to being male but were too scared or uninformed to access it. To those who are engaged in the glorious labor for liberation of self and those who toil to end cycles of oppression. This is for you. I see you. I feel your pain. I love you.

The free male will constantly reaffirm his right and need to develop and grow, to be total and fluid, and to have no less than a state of total well-being. He will celebrate all of the many dimensions of himself, his strength and his weakness, his achievements and his failures, his sensuality, his affectionate and loyal response to women and men. He will follow his own personal growth path, masking his own stops long the way, and reveling in his unique and ever-developing total personhood. (Goldberg, 1976, p. 184)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I started this project, I made two commitments to myself. One, I decided that I would

prioritize this experience as one of enjoyment and transformation, not just labor. Two, I vowed to

moderate my discipline and vigor for this journey with life balance (where applicable). Finishing

this project, I can say with confidence, I accomplished both. Through this process, I have learned

to write, learned to think, learned to research, and learned how to be a better version of a man in

the world.

I firstly want to thank my committee for their time and feedback. John Ciesluk, my advisor,

patiently taught me how to write and put up with my initial wordiness and sophomoric waxing.

You are an inspiration of care, persistence, resilience, and mentorship. Rick Melvoin, a mentor

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Linda Mensing-Triplett, a steady supporter who provided thoughtful feedback, a critical eye, and

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road with lessons, love, and presence. For those who have mentored me, and those who have

allowed me some space and access as a mentor, I am grateful. We have done some great work

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mission in action – self-discovery and contributions to the academic community in service of the oppressed or the marginalized.

Lastly, I owe a debt of gratitude to my number one team at home. My wife Melissa – thank you for being a selfless cheerleader of my efforts and inner work. I appreciate your constant validation and active listening. To my children – Emma and Reece – thank you for the opportunity to be a dad and practice love of self and others in our home. Your sensitivity, respect, and compassion reveal to me daily that genders are more alike than different, and all crave recognition, love, and loyalty. To my parents and in-laws, thank you for loving me, believing in me, and watching the children so I can make a living and make an identity. Mom – we did it.

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Personal Background

A conversation with my Catholic school's Director of Community Formation about how we, as leaders of young men, present our love and appreciation to boys, provided an unanticipated insight on masculinity. We explored the Christian story of the Prodigal Son, who returns in shame to his father as an abject failure having just squandered his inheritance. The father embraces him and, despite the conflict, throws him a celebration in honor of his return home. The accomplished older son, dutiful and moral, retreats in jealousy and frustration from the attention given to his sibling. The story reveals the power of the father's unconditional love, the prodigal son's dignity despite the failures, and the older son's constant striving and never feeling enough. My colleague suggested that love between men should never be a competitive event. The interaction spurred me to think about how we, as men, can trade self-love for self-abuse, and unconsciously place conditions on our nurturing and love of other males.

Theologically, sin is defined as both the refusal to love or allow ourselves to be loved. Perhaps leading and teaching boys and men is mostly about showing them they are loved and appreciated for simply being, not doing. Many men and boys come to accept that love is performance-based, and that work equals worth; they obsess about producing artifacts rather than existing as one. Stewards of boys have an opportunity to reframe love and connection, remove qualifications to worthiness, and suggest that men can live lives of service and personal care.

Men and boys are linked by the precariousness of their social position (Vandelo et al., 2008). Reflecting on manhood, a wise middle school teacher reported, "You worry throughout your childhood about whether or not you are going to be a man. Then, once you are a man, you spend the rest of your life wondering whether *they* think you made it." (Kindlon & Thompson,

1999, p. 257). Ironically and tragically, males strive for status and recognition inside a traditional masculine model, which they rarely fully attain (Jakupcak et al., 2005; Reilly, et al., 2014). Their shame and strain are often left unspoken, and they usually lack awareness of the masculine force field subliminally guiding their choices, efforts, and self-concept.

Kimmel (1993), speaking of masculinity and referencing a Chinese proverb, suggested that fish are the last to discover water. The metaphor implies men's passive consent and perhaps a taken for granted aspect of masculine identity resulting from the experience of privilege and power. Kimmel (1993) declared that "American men have no history as gendered selves," (p. 28), highlighting the lack of attention paid to how the experience of manhood affects the trajectory and personal meanings of the men who impact events and communities. It is as if men are so busy trying to be somebody that they never learn who they have become.

For the past 15 years, I have been a man swimming in the masculine pond of all-boys schools. Despite my immersion and belief in the mission of single-sex schools, I remained fairly mindless around my masculinity. More recently, two events coincided that profoundly shook my understanding of manhood: I left organized sports after 30 years of participation, and I became a father to a daughter. To find connection and purpose, I organized father's social groups and started men's affinity leadership meetings. What I discovered was that men faced burn-out, lacked connection, and needed practice in vulnerability and help-seeking behaviors; their nature is to go hard and go alone.

With each meeting, my male friends began showing up and talking; we cried and listened to each other. While they expressed gratitude for the intentional space we created, I began to wonder why my renewed mindfulness and heightened curiosity around gender ignited outside of my professional school life, where I worked with boys day after day. Why had there been no

formal training, either in graduate school or embedded in my position, that prepared me to

examine my own masculinity as a lens to better understand my leadership and vocation?

Boys' schools exist to serve the unique psychosocial, academic, and developmental needs

of male students. Based on my own adult realization of *invisible masculinity* (Kimmel, 1993),

men's privileged, unconscious, and universalized sense of gender, I wonder if leaders of all-boys

schools are really meeting their potential to develop thoughtful, healthy, and fully human men.

My curiosity involves detecting any trends or inconsistencies between degrees and kinds of

masculine awareness, explicit personal gender identity work, and modeling of masculinity for

colleagues and students by male middle school directors. My intuition suggests that, in creating a

situation where male sex is the exclusive student identity marker, boys' schools unintentionally

reduce the salience and meaning of gender and lessen the incentive for critical reflection. In an

environment where boys are all educators see every day, how motivated are school leaders to

delve into the mire of boyhood struggles if conventional messaging suggests that single sex

schools take certain social pressures away? Do male middle school leaders take gender for

granted at school and in their personal lives? Like the boys in front of them, how socialized are

they? My study investigated how male middle school principals of all boys' schools experience

and describe their masculinity. Referring to literature on how masculinity is constructed, is

problematic, is recognized, and is evolving, I endeavored to understand any personal or

professional patterns in masculinity's relevance and consciousness for male directors of private

all-boys schools.

I approached this study as an entrenched, veteran all-boys educator previously lacking a

conscious motive to question possible disconnects between the artificial environment of single

sex schools and the nature of gender awareness that results. Because of the emic, or native,

perspective I brought to bear in my research, it was distressing to question the significance of gender for male leaders inside schools for boys. The tension I saw can be reflected in Ladson-Billings' (2000) epistemological dichotomy between hegemony and liberation (p. 257), as we consider the "regime of truth" sold in marketing all boys' schools. Does the gender salience promised to students and families more closely resemble "folklore" (p. 258), that is "less rigorous, less scholarly, and, perhaps, less culturally valuable" (p. 258)?

Ontologically, I was interested in the conscious reality, actual practice, and perceived impact of gender on the male leaders charged with developing boys as a core outcome of their professional mission. I queried whether the experience of all-male presence promotes a deeper level of gender mindfulness and shared sense of masculinity's relevance. Perhaps a focus on the general collective of "boys" gives us an easy pass and excuses us from the complexities of masculinity. My working premise was that gender salience cannot be passively assumed by male leadership; it requires active engagement and critical examination to advance and model the healthy formation of male identity. In terms of axiology, the recent process of writing a Sociocultural Perspective Paper (SSP) at Lesley University, and facilitating men's leadership groups, have given me unique insights on gender role conflict. My interest has moved away from the academic role of schools and more towards the role of schools in impacting healthy masculine self-concepts. I have less of a vested interest in students getting into Ivy League schools and more in their future ability to become fully human men. I realize not all school leaders have the same incentives or insights, nor might parents and students have similar goals as mine beyond building their academic transcript and getting into good colleges.

Research abounds on the way male students interpret, internalize, and modify the prized versions of masculinity in their schools. I have found less direction in the literature on how

leaders of single sex schools construct and deconstruct gender as a reflective practice. If we assume male students benefit from increased gender mindfulness and gender justice, then male leaders are in a strong position to model and impact gender development. Exploring their experience of masculinity may illuminate areas for further study and illicit strategies for deeper understanding, a curious and liberatory mindset, and healthier identities for men and boys in schools.

Chapter One details an exploration of the meaning, engagement, and impacts of masculinity for male, middle school directors of all-boys' middle schools. It consists of the following sections: (a) statement of the problem; (b) purpose of the study, with guiding research questions; (c) definition of terms; (d) expected contributions to the field of educational leadership; (e) literature review summary; (f) overview of the method; (g) identification of delimitations and (h) chapter outline for the dissertation.

Statement of the Problem

Men who direct all-boys middle schools are in a unique, visible position to model mindful, healthy masculinity. In working to advance their school's mission, attend to their students' developmental needs, and fill various personal roles, they run the risk of neglecting their own health and personal growth as males. By developing a purposeful masculine vision and critically evaluating their personal gender history, these leaders may more fully realize their potential as men, leaders, and role models in their personal and professional lives.

In this section, I presented the inquiry's main problem by describing: (a) my experience with masculinity and leadership and preliminary research; (b) the complex work and identity of the study participant cohort; (c) masculinity's fundamental tension between health and heroism; (d) the strategic presentation of masculinity in all-boys schools; (e) the main patterns and gaps in

the existing research; and (f) the overall significance and urgency of this issue for educational

leadership.

Personal Experience and Preliminary Research

Experiences directing an all-boys middle school and being a father have prompted my

inquiry into the tensions and opportunities of masculinity. My gender confers undeniable social

privilege, requiring commitment and effort to challenge my masculine ideology, reflect on how

and why I matter, and determine the lessons on manhood I want to teach and embody. Over the

years, my gender consciousness has increased with experience and intentionality, yet I am still

embedded in a stubborn and complex web of culture, norms, roles, and organizational pressures

inside a competitive learning community. I can say that my work leading middle school boys

presents an ironic contrast of privilege and strain. We are in a position to become captains of

industry and agents for change, yet we are subsumed by the public pressures to achieve and

prove our worth. Our long-term struggle becomes a quest to integrate our private and public

selves and reconcile the masculine models available to us, our students, and our families

(Whitehead, 2002).

To hone my inquiry into masculinity and leadership, I conducted an exploratory pilot

study as part of my qualitative research coursework in the spring of 2021. Participants were men

who directed three Christian, all-boy middle schools, and the study purpose was to understand

the nature and salience of masculinity for these men through interviews and journaling. Their

narratives suggested the following themes: (a) they rarely critically evaluated their masculinity;

(b) they experienced more androgyny and role-switching in the family and home realms than

their professional domain; and (c) their brand of masculinity reflected traditional, blue-collar,

and Judeo-Christian notions of responsibility, work ethic, and duty to others. Participants

struggled with rigid role expectations, unreasonable comparisons with other men, burn-out, and keeping their brand of masculinity relevant. The men had vivid memories of compassionate men who demonstrated non-compliant, expansive versions of masculinity, yet they lacked engagement and intention to develop their own manhood. Findings suggested there was more to learn from this cohort of male leaders in support of their growth.

The Complexity of the Study Cohort's Identity and Work

As a cohort, my peers and I are laboring and languishing. The existence is not unlike the universally complex and turbulent journey of our male brethren. Our quest for socially valid and valued masculinity influences our health and longevity. A *Promundo Report* (Ragonese et al., 2018) linked men's health risks with dominant masculine norms, highlighting the shorter life span and over-representation of men in nearly all major leading causes of global mortality (p. 7). Core tenets of global masculinity promote risk-taking, extreme careerism, hypersexuality, and aggression, while also discouraging help-seeking behaviors and self-care (Ragonese et al., 2018). Internationally, aspiring men occupy positions of power and influence, yet are left with addiction, illness, and burden-of-disease. The health of socially, ethnically, and racially, and sexually marginalized men is even worse due to shorter life spans, threats of discrimination and violence, exclusion from health care, and diminished social supports (American Psychological Association, 2018a). Problematic factors for these vulnerable men include, among others, theories of gender and power which discourage positive health practices, and result in increased trauma, substance abuse, depression, and violence (p. 3). In addition, the American Psychological Association (2018b) released a report on the best practices for counseling men and boys, based on the social-emotional struggle emanating from the stresses and strains of enacting male gender roles. In closing, dominant, problematic models of masculinity have contributed to a

global public health challenge for men and boys. Ultimately, successful interventions promoting men's health involve gender-conscious consideration of the socially constructed elements of manhood that impact health and longevity (Barker, et al., 2010).

       Gender specificity, examining the health risks of boys due to biology and male social norms, also provides important insights for boys' health. Internationally, boys face early pressures of individuation and separation from caregivers, while also encountering an achievement-oriented culture with "outward oriented masculinity…[as] providers and protectors" Barker, 2000, p. 17). Less likely to report health problems, seek help, and express their emotions, boys world-wide show higher rates of mortality and morbidity from violence, accidents, and suicide (p. 11). Research has identified two main patterns in the socialization of adolescent boys that directly impact their health and wellness: (a) a too-early push toward autonomy and a repression of desires for emotional connection, and (b) social pressure to fulfill rigid and socially defined male roles. (p. 21). Because of the significant role of community, family, and friends in the socialization process for boys, there is a need to engage stakeholders in boy development in open discussions about longstanding ideas about manhood, traditional aspects of gender socialization, and the roles and expectations consciously and unconsciously endorsed and assumed by men.

Tension Between Outcomes of Health and Heroism Inside Masculinity

       While males wage their health battles privately, they perform and police their masculinity publicly. Charged with protection and provision, men equate worthiness with heroism and sacrifice, rather than adequateness and authenticity. Whitehead (2002) described the *heroic male project*, a familiar male narrative represented by "the adventurer/conqueror/explorer trapped in a cycle of return and departure as he exposes himself to new challenges; with a drive to achieve

that is not, apparently of his choosing but comes from 'deep' within his psyche" (p. 118). The

male hero emerges in American history as the enterprising *self-made-man,* "a man who seeks to

make his mark on and change the world through his drive, energy, self-discipline, initiative…[a]

leader, risk-taker, gambler, inventor-creator, and, inevitably, a workaholic" (p. 122). Considering

the accompanying danger and cost of the heroic male saga, Farrell and Gray (2019) lamented

over the consequence of male disposability, or the devaluing of male life and health in the

provision of their labor, safety, and security in work and war. What results for men has been a

historical trend toward *heroic intelligence*, a dutiful and expendable mindset, over *health*

intelligence, a commitment to well-being and self-compassion (Farrell & Gray, 2019, p. 234).

Consequently, the global path to manhood is littered with damaging social bribes, that call men

to "so fully sacrifice himself that others only recognize his facade as a quasi-human doing, not

himself as a fully human being…. a hero is never fully integrated within himself. He lives a

double life" (Farrell & Gray, 2019, p. 238).

Mission Statements, Branding, and Performativity Inside All-Boys Schools

The heroic journey for male leaders of all boys' schools includes dual responsibilities –

the formation of young men and the simultaneous positive integration of our own personal role

and gender identities. Despite the pervasive masculine landmines, our cohort is expected to stand

up and deliver to our schools and families. Our institutions aim to mold men and fashion

purposeful versions of manhood. A scan of boys' school websites reveals philosophies that

incorporate various perspectives on service, leadership, morality, character, productivity, and

modernized skills for academic and social impact. Words and phrases such as "abiding sense of

responsibility"; "men for others"; "public servants"; "high standards"; "honor and commitment";

"worthy and sustaining lives of achievement, leadership, and service" indicate the serious,

selfless, and sacrificial nature of the training boys undergo to prepare for the "common good." Few school websites resemble the one exemplar I found, which touted a nurturing mission based on boys being "known," believed in, and celebrated for their innate "goodness and vast human potential." At this school, "vulnerability and discomfort are values shared by everyone" – a nod to a priority of health intelligence over any notion of exceptional heroism.

The International Boys School Coalition (IBSC), a global affiliation of all-boys' schools, advertises the six main impacts of all-boys schools: (a) deep understanding of the complexity of boys and their total development; (b) the contribution of character and citizenship values; (c) support for the unique learning styles of boys; (d) teachers and instruction that celebrate boys and prioritize relationships; (e) environments that safely allow boys to try new things; and (f) a space for boys to foster emotional intimacy, belonging, and depth in their relationships (International Boys' Schools Coalition, n.d.). Despite the impressive list of outcomes, the IBSC manifest still highlights their goal of preparing boys for their "roles in a globally connected world" (International Boys' Schools Coalition, n.d.).

To combat the increasing trend of men's issues like suicides, school shootings, and sexual assaults, boys' schools have recently engaged in a "'national reinvention'… to help boys feel whole instead of 'hollow' and disconnected" (Strauss, 2019, para. 18). Boys' schools are packaging their masculine platforms and marketing the noble aspirations of their mission statements. As tuitions rise, boys struggle, and male celebrities behave poorly, boys' schools face mounting scrutiny of their value-add and increasing competitive market pressures. This results in a culture of performativity focused on deliverables and strategic branding (Gottschall et al., 2010; Meadmore & Meadmore, 2004). Adopting some "impression management" strategies (Gottschall et al., 2010, p. 18), there is a quasi-promise these schools can "provide it all" (p. 21)

by integrating traditional and progressive manhood into "an homage to masculine forefathers *and* a symbol of masculine innovation and ingenuity" (p. 21). Gottschall et al. (2010) described the evolving nature of the covenant offered by all-boys schools to prospective families, a pathway to heroism and health:

> The male private school subject has always been measured by traditional behavioural codes such as honesty, duty, and loyalty towards his institution…While the idealised masculine subject remains physically strong and competitive, a new focus on self-management and self-reflexivity also requires masculinity that stakes a claim to introspection and community service. (p. 27)

> Scanning the landscape, witnessing the changing nature of leadership, and seeing the suffering, hurt, and neglect of young men, boys' schools have prioritized emotional vibrancy as "powerful touchstones for the reshaping of male educational identities as competitive and enterprising subjects" (Gottschall et al., 2010, p. 27). The predicament for schools, however, is that these soft skill commodities are easy to sell, difficult to teach, and hard to measure (Gottschall et al., 2010).

Men, School Leadership, and Men's Identity Work

The male leaders tasked with developing healthy, thoughtful, enterprising young men have their hands full. They are responsible for enacting the school mission and delivering a specific version of masculinity, yet they are still subject to their own socialization, masculine pressures, and gender story. Many male administrators cling to traditional ideas around role modeling (Cushman, 2008; Jones, 2008), endorse highly masculinized archetypes and frames of leadership (Feuerstein, 2006; Jones, 2008), embrace ambition and obsessive careerism that compromise their time, health, and relationships (Chan, 2011), and lack sufficient training or

education in gender identity (Cushman, 2012; Feuerstein, 2006). Without any preparation, critical friends, or direct guidance, these men cling to the widely available narratives of the Weberian "ideal worker" type emanating from the scientific revolution (Feuerstein, 2006; Whitehead, 2002) – "purposeful, rational, competitive, ruthless, strong-minded and controlling" (Whitehead, 2002, p. 132).

The research on how male school administrators experience and engage their gender identities is limited. The most significant area of research examines male elementary school principals who lead in a predominantly "femininized" culture and fashion a traditional masculinity to establish their heterosexuality and differentiate their roles from the predominantly female domain of the classroom (Chan, 2011; Jones, 2008). A few studies focus on the intersectionality of identities as school leaders and teachers as fathers (White, 2011). In addition, some literature exists on the qualities of men that male school leaders consider to be worthy male role models for students (Cushman, 2008). Lastly, there exists robust research on the differences and changes over time in gender experiences for female and male school administrators (Feuerstein, 2006; Krüger, 1996) In most studies, the study participants and sites are co-educational, and very few focus on middle school or junior high school specifically. Little research exists on how male school leaders in all-boys schools confront and develop their own masculinity when it is a significant aspect of their work environment and school mission.

Significance of Men's Identity Work for Enhanced School Leadership and Health

In response to existing literature and my own experiences with manhood, middle school boys, and leadership, I am left wondering about the sustainability and suitability of building men and being men in conventional ways. In their attempts to mold the next generation of male heroes, leaders may be putting their own health and growth at risk. In a competitive market,

facing demanding work pressures, and balancing their own families and personal lives, the men leading boys' middle schools are simultaneously facing cultural scripts for manhood and in a position to help rewrite them. To ensure their work serves the school mission and their masculinity also serves themselves, a few questions are worth considering. In our promise to educate the whole boy, and in service to that ideal, are we also creating pathways for male directors/leaders to cultivate the whole man? Are we missing an opportunity to intentionally assess and deliver what middle school boys need from their male school leaders?

Considering the preceding literature and questions, I contended that championing a brand of masculinity may be easier than mindfully constructing and modeling one (Gottschall et al., 2010). Lacking intentional time or practice in critically examining their gender experiences, men committed to growing boys are at a disadvantage in their work and wellness. Without deliberate focus on their masculinity, these men are vulnerable to normative cultural scripts and unrealistic expectations of heroism. Male middle school directors of all-boys' schools require regular practice, heightened consciousness, and peer support in male identity work. If this issue is not addressed adequately, leaders may experience increased burnout and compromised health, gender equity in schools may suffer, and male students could experience a limited, narrow repertoire of masculinities in their schools. In what follows, I articulate a study that sought to understand how male middle school directors of all boys' middle schools experienced and engaged with their gender.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand how the concept of masculinity impacts male directors of all-boy middle schools. Their experiences with and views of masculinity influenced their identity formation, professional leadership, and personal wellness.

By consciously highlighting and processing personal stories of gender with the participant cohort, I anticipated learning about (a) the relative meaning and significance of gender as an identity marker in their personal and professional life contexts; (b) the manner in which their understandings and experiences of masculinity compromise or support professional roles and personal health; (c) the degree and nature of their active engagement in gender identity formation; (d) the alignment between their conceptualizations of masculinity and their school's espoused mission, values, and stance on masculinity; and (e) possible pathways for sustainable and effective gender identity development.

The research questions below were designed to investigate the nature of conscious masculinity for male all boys' middle school leaders. Results delineated study participants' unique position to support male formation and champion gender liberation. The following three questions guided the study:

Guiding Questions

1. What do middle school directors of all-boys private middle schools report are the patterns of meaning ascribed to masculinity in their personal and professional lives?

2. What do male middle school directors of all-boys private middle schools consider the extent and nature of their active engagement in their gender identity development?

3. In what ways do male middle school directors of all-boys private middle schools believe their understandings and experiences of masculinity impact their school leadership and personal wellness?

Definition of Terms

Engagement*:* engagement involves the extent and nature to which study participants

acknowledge, feel, critically reflect on, question, perform, modify, customize, develop, or deny their masculinity in various settings. Engagement describes behaviors that span a range of agency, power, or resistance on one hand; and compliance, uncertainty, powerlessness, and oppression on the other. An example from literature explaining gender engagement would be the Gender Role Journey concept as presented by O'Neil (1996; 2015).

Impact: impact refers to (a) the manner and extent gender identity informs or elicits problematic or beneficial behaviors, discourse, emotions, or self-concepts; (b) the degree and nature of gender identity's influence on culture, relationships, and power dynamics; and c) the rigidity or fluidity of subscriptions to masculine ideals. Examples from literature representing masculinity's impact include the idea of gender role strain (O'Neil, 1981) and men's health issues related to gender norms (Barker et al., 2010).

Masculinity: for purposes of this study, masculinity is defined as "largely a homosocial enactment" (Kimmel, 2006, p. 5) built upon the approval of other men and involving a collection of meanings "that we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world" (Kimmell, 2006, p. 3). The larger concept of masculinity involves a space for gender relations, a set of practices selected to engage in that space, and the effects of those practices in "bodily experience, personality and culture" (Connell, 2005, p. 71). This definition, primarily relational and emphasizing social forces (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2006), relies less on essentialist or positivist stances on masculinity that delineate one monolith "essence" of men or "objective" psychometric measures that distinguish men from women through characteristics and aptitudes (Connell, 2005). Our preferred definition, draws upon normative elements of masculinity, that describe what men ought to be, and semiotic qualities, that contrast male from female through symbolic cultural influences (Connell, 2005).

Meaning*: meaning refers to the associations, values, definitions, and labels used to describe, articulate, and conceptualize masculinity as a social phenomenon and personal lived experience. Meaning also suggests the relative level of significance and salience of masculinity as an identity marker. An example from literature representing a degree and nature of gender meaning can be found in Kimmel's (1993) analysis of masculine invisibility due to male privileges and overrepresentation.

Middle School Directors*: for the purposes of this study, middle school directors are the main administrator in charge of the day-to-day operations of the school division, generally between grades 5 through 8. Depending on the school, the formal title of this role may include: Assistant Principal, Middle School Director, Division Head, Middle School Head, Head of the Middle School, or Principal (if the school does not include grades 9 through 12).

Anticipated Contributions to the Field

This study, first and foremost, can be of interest to stakeholders in and beneficiaries of single-sex, all-boys' education. Most notably, male leaders represented by the participant cohort could benefit from a focused exploration of how masculinity, roles, leadership, and wellness intersect. This study is important for current and aspiring male leaders in all-boys' schools because it addresses a gap in the literature on the meaning and significance of gender in the identity, leadership, and formation of school leaders. How the "head" man in the academic building experiences, reconciles, and challenges his own masculinity may support or conflict with the stated values and masculine stance of the institution. The boys in their hallways are watching, struggling, and performing for validation; their male leaders are able to reframe heroism and masculine worthiness through vulnerability, authenticity, and compassion. They can leverage their influence to broaden the concepts of health and strength beyond bench press and

running times to include emotional vibrancy, self-compassion, balance, and depth of human connection.

The men who occupy the director's office are serving in various roles, but they are also men – social animals impacted by the culture, norms, and socialization of their families, organizations, and communities. They may similarly benefit from the recent upsurge in men's identity work and male affinity groups that help men heal their trauma, amend cognitive distortions, and replace problematic masculine subscriptions (Hansen-Bundy, 2019; Seligson, 2018). In better understanding their gender history and coming to terms with the various masculinities in their personal and professional lives, these men can lead healthier, more impactful, and more sustainable lives as leaders, fathers, sons, friends, partners, and brothers.

The study may also benefit: (a) policy makers at private, singe sex schools that include trustees, boards of directors, and senior administrative teams; (b) graduate students in educational leadership curious about gender identity as a contributing factor in school culture, school practices, and professional roles within single sex schools; (c) men of all professions and family roles who aspire to a more mindful version of masculinity; (d) male leaders in predominantly male organizations or industries who seek to support wellness and inclusive organizational cultures; (e) social service groups, nonprofits, counselors, and social workers that specialize in identity work, treat boys and men, or partner with schools in their student services; and (f) nonsecular, coeducational, and public schools that are looking to expand their knowledge of gender, foster positive school cultures, and benefit from insights on masculinity's impact on leadership, school systems, and professional practice.

This study calls for a critical examination of the role of masculinity in study participant lives to assess the relative dissonance or consonance between gender identity, health, school

mission, and leadership. Findings and insights may provide lessons on how to promote gender identity development, liberatory versions of masculinity, and healthy self-concepts for male school leaders as they enact their various life roles. Development in these areas could have effects that further school mission, teach boys how to consciously construct their gender identity, and include male directors in the lifelong educative experience of "becoming" in relation to boyhood and manhood.

An intention of this study is to change the way male directors of all-boys middle schools regard their masculinity, regard their health, and regard their influence inside their schools and homes. The anticipated outcome is to renew an interest in and engagement with male identity work for male school leaders in all-boys schools to ensure a sustainable and influential approach to leadership, relationships, and self-help. The future of masculinity as a socially constructed and enacted phenomenon depends on the intentionality and courage of today's leaders to question, challenge, and expand the scripts and expectations traditionally embraced by men and boys.

Overview of the Literature Review

The theoretical framework for the dissertation is grounded in historically relevant and progressively evolving literature on the costs, benefits, and potentialities for manhood. The framework relies heavily on literature related to the following five areas: (a) masculinity as a social construct, (b) masculinity and schools, (c) masculinity and school leadership, (d) masculinity and wellness, and (e) masculinity and identity work. Linking together these specific strands of research can inform how male educators leading all-boys schools may better understand, recognize, evaluate, and evolve their masculinity. Each section of the literature review informs the purpose of the study and delineates aspects of the research problem.

Masculinity as a Social Construct

This body of literature traces the historical and social development of traditional masculinity and outlines its lineage back to demarcated sex roles, biological essentialism, and a strict division of labor at home and in the economy after World War II (Angrist, 1969; Harrison, 1978; Hochschild, 1973). The works explain the evolving domestic and professional boundaries between the sexes in terms of dispositions, abilities, and areas of competence and belonging; nativist views of male sex roles assumed a "clear masculine essence that is historically invariant" (Levant, 1996, p. 260). Monolithic conceptions of maleness emerged following the Industrial Revolution that promoted power, wealth, technology, and competitiveness, resulting in a *masculine mystique* - the male value system defining optimal masculinity (O'Neil, 1981). Males' elective adherence to the dominant male paradigms, norms, and roles explained their *masculinity ideology* (Levant, 1996).

Emerging from the feminist movement and a new psychology of men (Levant, 1996), a concept of *hegemonic masculinity* explained how "particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance" (Carrigan et al., 1985, p. 592). Connell and Messerchmidt (2005) distinguished hegemonic masculinity from sex role theory with its emphasis on patterns of practice over expectations, and they described its facets as: (a) a portrayal of the most "honored" way of being a man, (b) the requirement of all men to position themselves according to it, and (c) the global subordination of aberrant men and all women to the hegemonic form.

Masculinity and Wellness

The sources in this section illuminate the trials of men that wrestle with integrating their authentic selves, rigid social norms, and prescriptive gender roles. Major concepts include the New Psychology of Men's (NPM) focus on the precarious position of males who strive for ideals

many will never attain (Jakupac et al., 2005; Levant, 1996; Vandello, et al., 2008), and gender role conflict theory's (GRC) focus on the strain and pain resulting from manhood's elusive objectives (O'Neil, 1981; O'Neil, 2015; O'Neil & Denke, 2016). A brief description of the boy crisis debate demonstrates that masculinity's troubling grasp extends to all age cohorts, environments, and domains of wellness (Bettis & Sternod, 2009; Farrell & Gray, 2019; Kleinfeld, 2009; O'Neil & Lujan, 2009; Sommers, 2009). In addition, a survey of recent health reporting highlights the unique wellness challenges of men and boys that go beyond biology and ascribe to unhealthy masculine role enactment (American Psychological Association, 2018a, 2018b; Barker, 2000; Barker et al., 2010). The section concludes with a discussion of the Positive Psychology and Positive Masculinity (PPPM) framework, which offers an optimistic roadmap for men to utilize traditional masculine strengths to promote their own flourishing (Kiselica et al., 2016). The PPPM literature suggests that men who utilize traditional male strengths to care for others in essence are in a better position to care for themselves as people and professionals (Kiselica et al., 2016; White, 2011).

Masculinity and Schools

An examination of literature regarding schools as a site for gender dynamics and masculine formation contributes to the theoretical framework. First, the practices, discourses, and structures of schools can encode a *gender regime*, or social ecology where types of masculinities, gender norms, and self-concepts develop, are celebrated, incentivized, and socially surveilled (Connell, 1996; Martino et al., 2004; Skelton, 2002). An understanding of common patterns of gender expression, socially constructed meanings, and impacts on student and staff identity inside schools supports an exploration of single-sex schools as an educational alternative to enhance male development. The second strand of literature in this section explores the

strategic promises and articulated missions of all-boys schools (International Boys' Schools Coalition, n.d.), the challenges and tensions of elitism and performativity (Meadmore & Meadmore, 2004), and dominant models of manhood that emerge from all-boys' schools' market positioning and branding (Gottschall, et al., 2010). An overview of the explicit marketing and implicit realities of all-boys' schools suggests a space between opportunity and lived experience worthy of further critical reflection.

Masculinity and School Leadership

This collection of literature explores how men approach their professional lives, public purpose, and leadership in schools, specifically. An exploration of social pressures to embody the American ideal of the *self-made man* (Kimmel, 2006; Whitehead, 2002*)*, post-industrial *ideal worker type* (Whitehead, 2002), and protagonists in the *male heroic project* (Farrel & Gray, 2019; Whitehead, 2002), reveals the historically durable male roles of breadwinner, soldier, and laborer. Careerism, ambition, wealth, and power have become defining outcomes for men participating in the market economies and professional domain.

Men in school leadership utilize various frames to make meaning of their work and gender experience. This section discusses the emotional struggle (Gill & Arnold, 2015), leadership stressors (Jones & Hodson, 2011), and complex gender identity implications for men leading and role modeling in education (Chan, 2011; Cushman, 2008; Jones, 2008). A related strand of research suggests that men actively involved in their families and fathering perform better as educators and caregivers (Jones, 2008; White, 2011).

Masculinity, Leadership, and Identity Work

This section outlines the challenges and possibilities of male identity work for enhanced school leadership and personal wellness. A belief in gender role development as a lifelong

journey with distinct stages ranging from passive acceptance to active resistance underlies this collection of literature (O'Neil, 2015; O'Neil & Denke, 2016). The discussion begins with a summary of the scarcity and ineffectiveness of education on gender and masculinity for male school leaders (Feuerstein, 2006; Young, et al., 2006). Based on the underwhelming preparedness for identity work, the section articulates several potential pathways for male school leaders to continue their gender development: (a) gender role journey workshops (O'Neil, 1996), (b) relational study groups (Raider-Roth et al., 2012), and (c) developing gender threshold knowledges (Martino et al., 2004). By drawing upon the concepts of *presence* and *double vision (*Raider-Roth, 2015; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006) and developing a better connection to self through identity work, leaders can better connect to others relationally, and to their leadership through enhanced gender consciousness.

Method

The following section delineates various components of the study's method: (a) an overview and rationale for the selected design approach, including the worldview it represents; (b) a description of the participants and setting; (c) an explication of the development of the instruments and validity measures; (d) data collection processes, with explanations about maintaining confidentiality and reducing researcher bias; and (e) data analysis procedures.

Overview and Research Design Rationale

The conceptual framework in the previous section bolstered my attempt to evaluate the evolving meaning and impact of gender in the lives of men who lead all-boys middle schools. To effectively understand the salience, nature, and experience of masculinity for these men, I selected a qualitative narrative research design to highlight and explore their stories of gender identity consciousness and engagement. Narrative inquiry supports a study centering on gender

awareness, for it "may shed light on the identities of individuals and how they see themselves" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 69), it focuses on "epiphanies" and "turning points" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 73), and it has "power relations [as a] principal concern" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 73). My decision to select a narrative study supports my belief in the developmental potential for gender identity, where turning points and growth support learning, wellness, and wisdom.

My qualitative research design was based upon two relevant worldviews: *social constructivism* and *feminist poststructuralism*. Social constructivism emphasizes complex personal meaning derived from interpersonal interactions and the broader sociocultural context (Creswell, 2013). Feminist poststructuralism encourages personal agency, the challenge to unquestioned heroic attributes of gender binaries created by "grand narratives" (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 312), and the deconstruction of what is "normal" or subordinated by "interrogating" power relations and acknowledging multiple truths (Davies & Gannon, 2005; Kim 2016; Simmons, 2020). Davies and Gannon (2005) described the methodological approach in feminist poststructuralist research as a "process of exploration" (p. 315) and the analysis as having a main goal to "trouble that which is taken as stable / unquestionable truth" (p. 314) in relation to gender and the male/female binary.

The integration of these two worldviews with the relevant literature promotes a research lens that questions gender hegemony, acknowledges individual agency, and supports identity development. Because my theoretical framework recognizes the gender role journey as a unique and deeply personal process, acknowledges the intersectionality of multiple identities beyond gender within the sample, and assumes the presence of multiple masculinities as accessible models, generalizing study results to a wider pool of middle school directors promotes the kind of hegemony that contradicts the complexity, variety, and customization endemic to healthy

masculinity. This conclusion eliminated other research designs that promote universal generalizability, assume monolithic experiences, or assume a positivist stance. Focusing on individual narratives honors the personal trials and triumphs of men leading all boys' middle schools as they recognize and reconcile aspects of their masculinity.

Participant Selection and Site Description

This study included a purposeful sample of four current male directors of private all-boys' middle schools. There were no other prerequisite qualifications for study participation, and this study did not include any participants who had a previous relationship with the researcher. In my sampling, I intended to represent a span of all-boys' school sites and the racial diversity of men who lead these schools. Accordingly, the sample of directors included a person of color and directors from urban, suburban, religious, and secular institutions. I chose to limit my study to four participants to allow depth of analysis within and across the sample. To expand upon themes and patterns in the data, I highlighted one participant as a critical case to delve further into the nuances of any prevalent findings.

This study combined *critical case sampling*, using a representative case that allows generalization and applicability to other cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159), and *maximum variation sampling*, which recruits diverse variations of participants or sites according to certain characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159). This approach reflected a desire to be inclusive of men, schools, and beliefs, and fits conveniently within the time and scope constraints of the current narrative study. By including these four participants, I intended to evaluate whether their experiences with masculinity varied by identity intersectionality, school characteristics, or personal circumstances, or if there were shared trends in their masculinity development.

Development of Instruments

The data collection included four methods: participatory video journaling (Salmons, 2019), document analysis, in-depth interviews, and site visits. By using these four qualitive research methods (Creswell, 2013), I intended to enhance validity through data triangulation and identify narrative response consistencies and outliers. Each instrument served as a chronological step to (a) ignite gender consciousness; (b) critically engage with concepts and practice; (c) explore masculine ideology, behaviors, and impacts; and (d) invite identity growth and development.

Participatory Video Journaling

The participatory video journaling offered space for participants with privacy (no researcher present) and time flexibility to engage in some reflexivity. In this way, participants entered the interviews having already undergone some independent and unconstrained thinking about masculinity. The intention with the journaling was to raise the critical gender consciousness and elicit some vivid memories, images, and storylines of masculine development. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to journals as "spaces for struggle" (p. 104) and a "way to puzzle out experience" (p. 103). Data and insights gained from the video journaling informed possible follow up questions in the in-depth interviews.

Document Analysis

I asked each participant to annotate and analyze in writing three selected excerpts from published school documentation regarding mission statements, school values, admissions publications, or school philosophy related to masculinity, male formation, or gender identity development. The analysis, using document excerpts and practitioner experience, asked participants to identify

- What are the "master narratives" of your school's espoused version of masculinity?

(Simmons, 2020)

- What opportunities or benefits do you see or experience in your school's vision and/or teaching of masculinity?

- What tensions or contradictions do you see or experience in your school's vision and/or teaching of masculinity?

- How do you model your school's vision and/ or teaching of masculinity in your work and leadership?

- What would you change about your school's vision and/ or teaching of masculinity?

Data and insights gained from the document analysis informed possible follow up questions in the in-depth interviews.

In-depth Interviews

I intended to conduct one 60 to 90 minute recorded Zoom semi-structured interview (Kim, 2106, p. 163). The interviews followed a protocol (see Appendix E) addressing the three guiding research questions. In accordance with a social constructivist worldview, the interview protocol relied upon open-ended questions about the topic of inquiry and was supplemented by further probe questions (Reissman, 1993). I intended to transcribe the interviews using the Zoom transcript and converting the file to a Microsoft Word document using the Happy Scribe website. I intended to begin each interview with a general question about the video journaling experience and its impact on their preparation for the interview. For each participant, I added one to three custom interview questions to the protocol based on their specific individual video journaling responses and document analysis.

Site Visits

Based on the video journaling, document analysis, and in-depth interviews, I selected

one critical case for a site visit. I planned to spend two full school days and two weekend days

shadowing the participant in their school and home environment. This would allow efficient

travel over a long weekend. I intended to observe the participant daily and finish the day with a

debrief where the participant and researcher reflected on the day's personal and professional

moments where aspects of masculinity, gender, or identity were salient, impactful, or missed.

During these field observations, I acted as a *complete observer*, where the researcher observes

without any participation (Creswell, 2013).

Validity

To ensure the study meets the rigorous criteria for qualitative science, I intended all data

and findings to demonstrate validity. Because narrative inquiry involves secondhand

representation of meaning and significance through participant experience and story, Kim (2016)

suggested the primary concern of narrative methodology is maintaining "fidelity to told stories"

in portraying what happened to participants (p. 111). A clear distinction is made between *truth*,

or what happened in a situation, versus *fidelity*, which is "truth in meaning to the storyteller….

[and] implies something to be trusted" (p. 111). Kim (2016) advised primary reliance on

vernacular language to make the field text more accessible and contextualized.

Qualitative rigor implies there is no objective truth accompanying researcher

interpretation, and that any "cultural analysis is essentially incomplete" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 106).

Maxwell (2005) urged a different standard, a "testing these accounts against the world, giving

the phenomena that we are trying to understand the chance to prove us wrong" (p. 106) through

exploring alternative explanations. Several strategies aim to mitigate, *validity threats*, or "way[s]

you might be wrong" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 106) and increase the credibility of conclusions. They

include (a) "rich data," or detailed, intensive, and verbatim data (p. 110); (b) respondent

validation, or "member checks," (p. 111); (c) examining discrepant evidence (p. 112); (d)

triangulation, involving data collections from a diverse set of individuals, sites, and methods to

assess generality (p. 112); and "quasi-statistics," using quantitative support by describing

frequency and intensity of phenomena (p. 113).

       I intended to collect rich data and triangulate findings across a diverse data pool by

combining instruments that involve participant self-reporting with researcher observation;

instruments that involve researcher presence with those that do not; and instruments that take the

written, dialogic, and video journal form. I employed a skeptical mindset and embraced the *rival*

thinking advocated by Yin (2016). This approach involves questioning initial data appearances,

assessing participant candor, and checking original assumptions against collected data (p. 90).

Data Collection Methods

       This subsection outlines the data collection procedures used in the administration of

instruments. It details how participants were contacted, the software and programs used for data

collection, format options for instruments, steps taken to ensure participant confidentiality, and

measures taken to reduce researcher bias.

       Upon a preliminary scan of sample websites, a group of ten possible participants were

identified who met the initial criteria according to the sampling strategy outlined above. An

email was sent (Appendix A) to each school's head of school to recruit participation, describe the

goals and purpose of the study, outline confidentiality, and seek consent from the school and

participant. Once four participants consented, the data collection process commenced. The

instruments and methodology for data collection align with the study purpose and three questions

guiding the study. Looking ahead, the data reporting section of this dissertation is organized

according to the same questions.

Participatory Video Journaling

Using the web-based platform FlipGrid, participants recorded video responses of up to 10 minutes to the following prerecorded video prompts, which reflect my narrative design and social constructivist and feminist poststructuralist worldviews:

- Describe in your own words the story of your masculinity (Reissman, 1993).

- Describe your "training" in masculinity (Simmons, 2020). Be sure to describe any turning points or major revelations in your experience with or understanding of masculinity.

- What does masculinity mean to you?

- Where and how and when is masculinity important or relevant in your personal and professional life?

- What are some vivid or important memories you have related to masculinity?

Participants responded to the prompts over one week. Settings for the Flipgrid responses were set to private, so that only individual participants and researcher could view video responses. In addition, the discussion board (grid) was password protected by registered user, and each grid had a unique link to access. FlipGrid allowed transcripts of video recordings to be downloaded.

Document Analysis

Participants received via email a document analysis response template (Appendix D) in Microsoft Word that asked for chosen excerpts, a description of sources, and critical analysis. Each prompt had a three-hundred-word response limit, and participants were asked to email their completed analysis document to the researcher. Participants had two weeks to complete this instrument. Responses received were downloaded and kept on a password protected laptop, and email responses were deleted after a thirty-day period. I reserved the right to ask follow-up

questions regarding participant responses via phone call or a Zoom session.

In-Depth Interviews

I opened the interviews with a reminder of prior participant consent and study purpose, a description of interview format, and the seeking of permission to record interviews through the Zoom platform. All interviews were downloaded from the Zoom server and stored on the cloud to enhance study privacy and confidentiality. In addition, interview transcripts were downloaded, listened to, and checked for accuracy. Interviews allowed for follow-up questions to further delineate or clarify participant responses. Interviews were scheduled at convenient times for participants.

Site Visit

Prior to a site visit, I reviewed the school website for language related to school mission, philosophy, and any messaging related to male identity formation. In addition, I reviewed the participant's document analysis response and identified any guiding questions I had entering the site visit to focus my observations.

During a site visit, I utilized a field observation journal where I took notes that documented interactions, times, themes, and researcher memos according to the three guiding research questions addressing masculinity's meaning, engagement, and impact. Observations focused exclusively on participant behaviors, discourse, and reflections; I avoided recording or interpreting the actions or language of the participant's colleagues, students, or family members. Daily follow-up debriefs with the critical case were recorded using a voice memo app on the researcher's phone.

Researcher Impact

Maxwell (2005) described two main qualitative validity threats: researcher bias and *reactivity*, or the influence of the researcher on setting or individuals studied. To consciously thwart negative researcher influence, Clandinin and Connolly (2000) advocated for the cultivation of researcher "wakefulness," or ongoing reflection about decisions made in the study (p. 184).

Researcher Bias. Researcher bias, or subjectivity, mainly manifests as data selection that fits researcher theory or data that "stand out" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 108). Maxwell suggested that it is not possible to eliminate researcher values or expectations, but to be aware of how particular perceptual lenses employed "influence the conduct and consequences of the study," (p. 108), and ameliorate any negative outcomes.

Throughout the study, I intended to address researcher bias by documenting my own reflexivity to increase trust and credibility. By its very nature, narrative inquiry is subject to the imperfections of researcher representation of participant "truth" (Reismann, 1993). As a male in the same role and setting as my participants, and with extensive knowledge of and personal experiences reflecting on my masculine journey, I built practices into my research design to bracket my beliefs and monitor bias from my questions and research. I planned to approach this process with curiosity rather than a predetermined agenda. I accomplished this by asking open-ended prompts and avoiding leading questions. While traditional masculinity ideology typically promotes a heteronormative worldview, I remained mindful of my own heterosexuality and crafted research tools and protocols that created room for the range of sexualities and masculinities in the greater world.

Reactivity. Another challenge to researcher integrity is *reactivity*, or the influence of the researcher on the setting or participant (Maxwell, 2005). Because the researcher will always

influence the testimony of the informant, minimization is not the goal; it is more pragmatic to

"understand how you are informing what the informant says, and how this affects the validity of

the inferences you can draw" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 109). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discussed

the benefit of self-consciously disclosing researcher choices, possible alternative stories, and

other limitations "seen from the vantage point of 'I, the critic'" (p. 182). Yin (2016) instructed

that an honest, thorough, and transparent researcher account of how the reflexive and declarative

selves interact in a study leads to enhanced "quality control" (p. 288).

Ensuring Confidentiality

Acknowledging that my participants were visible campus leaders, I took care to protect

confidentiality and establish trust and rapport. Being in the same professional role and space, I

could speak to the need to balance public perception with private vulnerabilities. The use of

aliases were employed in all notetaking, memoing, and transcription printing.

Participant permissions and data security were of paramount concern in this study. All

data and transcriptions were downloaded from the cloud and then temporarily stored on my

personal laptop, accessible only to me and password protected. When possible, all documents

and media were backed up to an external hard drive and kept in a locked drawer. Table I

summarized a timeline of the data collection process, providing a brief description of

each action step.

Table 1

Timeline of Method

Stage	Action Step	Description	Timeline
1	Participatory Video Journaling	The use of Flipgrid and video journaling to ignite gender consciousness and explore the salience and meaning of masculinity.	1 Week

2	Document Analysis	The use of a written response tool that promotes engagement and reflection with masculinity inside the participant's school.	2 Weeks
3	In-depth Interviews	A semi-structured interview protocol based on the three guiding questions.	2 Weeks
4	Critical Case Site Visit	Full-day field observations in the professional and personal domains for one selected participant.	1 Week

Data Analysis Methods

This subsection outlines the procedures used to analyze data procured from all instruments. Data analysis involved a systematic approach to in case and across case analysis, looking for *story*, the "temporally sequenced, or causal narrative of life," (Reissman, 1993, p. 30), and *plot*, or unexpected "deviations from the conventional story" (Reissman, 1993, p. 30). Reismann (1993) described an approach that compares "plot lines across first-person accounts" (p. 30) to "locate turning points that signal a break between ideal and real, the cultural script and the counternarrative" (p. 30). This critical approach supported my attempt to investigate the evolving meaning, engagement, and impact of masculinity in the lives of the participant sample. All analysis worked towards the identification of findings that are organized by the study's three research questions.

My data analysis plan included several recommended steps from Creswell and Poth (2018) within the stages of data analysis: preparing and organizing the data for analysis, condensing and making thematic meaning of data, and then representing the data and key findings (p. 183). Procedurally, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested the practice of database exploration, suggested the utility of analytic memos, and advised the use of an "audit trail" to document thinking processes (p. 188).

During the research phase, I intended to keep two separate documents: a codebook and an

analytic memo journal (using the prompts from Saldana, 2019, p. 53). The researcher journal

tracked key words and phrases, lingering questions, observations, and annotations in the

margins. The codebook served as a starting point to begin to determine code definitions,

boundaries, and examples from data (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 192).

Based on initial memo notes and instrument data, I planned to compile a short list of *in

vivo* codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 193) to keep participant voice and description at the center

of analysis. I assumed these initial codes would support lean coding principles (Creswell & Poth,

2018, p. 180), with an eye towards code expansion as needed. During this first reading and

review of data, I intended to create a list of emergent codes, using a mix of *concept codes*

(Saldana, 2019, p. 119) and *values codes* (Saldana, 2019, p. 131) Concept codes served my

researcher interest in transcending "the local and particular of the study to more abstract or

generalizable contexts…[and stimulating] reflection on broader social constructs" (Saldana,

2019, p. 120). Values codes helped describe the "moral codes," "situational norms," and

"worldviews" reflected in attitudes, beliefs, and values (Saldana, 2019, p. 131). My second

reading involved a round of coding that expanded the number of codes, and analytic memos

identified themes through the combining of similar codes. My writing and thinking included

preliminary sketches and visual diagrams relating code and theme categories through some of the

more prominent theoretical frameworks around my topic.

In my data analysis, I relied heavily on emergent codes. This approach aligned

with my researcher beliefs that there are multiple masculinities and that, likely, in any given

sample, there will be a variety in the kinds displayed/described (subordinate, complicit,

hegemonic, etc…). To code the data by predetermined categories would contradict my belief in

men's agency to personalize their masculinities. Emergent categories also supported the

developmental nature and requisite consciousness of masculinity as reflected in the study's focus on meaning, engagement, and impact regarding masculinity.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was restricted in three distinct areas regarding (a) the participants, (b) the setting, and (c) the researcher. Explanations of each delimitation area follows below.

Study Participants

Participants were four male directors/division heads of all-boys' private middle schools. I decided to study men because of their potential to positively influence masculinity development in a single sex boys' school environment. Participants represented a diverse sample of race and ethnicity and family/domestic configurations. I elected to highlight the self-reported perspectives and experiences of this population of leaders because of the personal nature of masculinity. I purposefully selected and secured participants without a prior personal or professional relationship to avoid potential issues with honesty, transparency, and the nature or levels of disclosure. Years of experience in administrative leadership or graduate degree level were not a limiting factor in the sample of participants.

Because this study presented only the perceptions and stories of the selected participants, I did not intend to confirm the objectivity, accuracy, or suitability of the reported experiences. In addition, the study design did not allow for representation of the thoughts and feelings of all (or even most) male leaders represented by the sample.

Setting

For the research setting, I chose to focus on private single-sex boys' middle schools because of the significance of biological sex and gender identity as an aspect of the school mission and purpose. Accordingly, I elected to eliminate public schools or private coeducational

schools. The study was limited to private boys' middle schools that represent various demographic characteristics - urban and suburban; a range of tuition cost; and secular or faith-based / Christian. In addition, I elected to investigate leadership in middle schools (defined as within the range of grades 5 through 8) since middle school is the time boys begin to detach from close peer relationships (Way, 2011); encounter social pressures to mature, become autonomous, and separate from femininity (Gottschall et al., 2010; Reichert, 2001); and encounter challenges with and attunement to self-concept and social identity (Reichert, 2019). This age period is a turning point for male indoctrination, where traditional masculine values can facilitate "the traumatic abrogation of boys' holding environments" and a loss of emotionality, relational anchors, and self-assuredness (Pollack, 1995 as cited in Reichert, 2019).

Possible Researcher Bias

I entered this study as a male researcher in a similar professional and domestic position as study participants. As a group, we share a cache of emic knowledge and unique vantage point at the leadership table of all-boys schools. While commonalities may be an asset in building trust, legitimacy, and rapport for the research relationship, my familiarity with participant roles could narrow the field of questioning or prompt researcher assumptions that reflect my own positionality. Similarly, sharing professional experiences could restrict dialogue and close off divergent thinking. To mitigate these challenges, I ensured research questions and methods minimized bias, prioritized participant narrative, and made clear where I inserted researcher commentary beyond the literature and data.

Lastly, I conducted this study as a man deeply committed to my own gender role development. As such, I have developed a strong vision of what healthy masculinity may look like. Accordingly, it was important for me to remain open to learning about many possible

presentations and manifestations of gender roles and masculinity. Where necessary, I attempted to bracket myself out of interviews and data analysis to not influence the story by asking leading questions or imparting value or judgment on the data. Throughout the study, I consciously attempted to avoid coaching the participants on what I perceived as some of the potentially problematic gender constructs they employ.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One provides an introduction to the study subject as well as a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the questions that guided the research, and a glossary of terms used. Also included in Chapter One is an overview of the significance of the study, a brief review of the literature used to inform the study, a description of the method, the description of the limitations and delimitations of the study, and an outline of the chapters in this dissertation.

Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant literature on (a) gender as a social construction, (b) masculinity and schools, (c) masculinity and school leadership, (d) masculinity and wellness, and (e) masculinity and identity work. The literature review synthesizes significant findings and peer-reviewed reports that highlight the challenges of traditional male paradigms for school leadership and the potential for liberatory gender engagement for professional effectiveness and personal health.

Chapter Three presents an overview of the method selected for this study as well as the tools used to collect qualitative data from the male middle school directors who participated. It explains the overview of the research design, the selection of the participants and setting of the study, the development of research instruments, the data collection procedures, and a description of procedures used to analyze the data.

Chapter Four presents the results of the study. Included is an overview of the data collection as well as an analysis of the data This chapter also presents the findings of the study organized by each research question.

Chapter Five offers a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, recommendations for action and future research, and concludes with a final reflection.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Male executives are adept at pushing through the pain. Weiss (1990) conducted a phenomenological study on the social and emotional lives of successful, professional men. The research revealed a herd of insecure, repressed, and agitated men, deeply concerned about status and self-worth. These male managers coped in two main ways – *compartmentalizing*, shutting off emotional and cognitive capacities as a form of personal sustainability; or chronic *mobilizing,* where one is in a constant state of engagement, worry, or rumination. Embodying exemplary work ethic, organizational commitment, and noble dedication to their many roles, the study participants always served, hardly benefited, and paid significant prices to be on top.

Professional stress and insecurity come from very real daily pressures, but looming in the background are more pervasive role expectations and social norms. Daily, men negotiate how to be successful, how to think about themselves, and how to remain healthy enough to do all they must do. I am always struck by how many men, in discussions, highlight the moment where they cross the threshold of their home's front door after a long day of work, bracing themselves and drawing on a reserve of energy, to engage and lead in their home. The intensity and personal demands can be unrelenting.

Kimmel (2018) posed an interesting dilemma for men – the difference between being "good" and being "real." In Kimmel's binary, good men are honorable, moral, responsible, compassionate, and selfless; real men are tough, aggressive, rich, and sexually potent. Kimmel's analysis suggested two realizations: (a) the idea of "good" is ungendered and suggests a good man is a good person, and (b) the word "real" is specific to men and demands constant performance and surveillance. Men suffer from the costly distinction; they must constantly

assess – "which do you want from me: good or real?" – at any given point. In addition, the external standards of goodness and realness are often outside their control; the resolution of this tension is at the heart of most male identity struggle and midlife crisis.

Feminist author Liz Plank (2019) described the "precarious" position of men: tirelessly pursue an idealized masculinity and never actually measure up. To most men, masculinity is something earned and constantly proven, like a trophy, after "going through excruciating circumstances" (p. 36). The gendered scripts for male strength and self-sufficiency leave men with intense feelings of inadequacy and strong resistance to ask for help when they encounter weakness or failure (Vandello et al., 2008). Plank metaphorically compared this predicament to the familiar image of men being lost and refusing to ask for directions. Men, on average drive an unnecessary and extra 900 miles over their driving careers (Plank, 2019, p. 27). Plank pondered the irony, "If men can't ask for directions to the closest gas station, then how the hell are they supposed to ask for directions about being a man?" (p. 28).

Male school leaders are in the influential position of modeling healthy masculinity for the boys in their care; they can reframe "good" and "real" as being one and the same. They must deliver on the promises of their institutions to prepare the next generation of leaders, but they can also show boys they are loved just as they are, not for who they should be. In order to do "good" work and achieve "real" results, male school leaders benefit from being mindful, being engaged, and being healthy. In so doing, they show their colleagues and students the roadmap to full human potential.

In exploring the connection between masculinity, identity, and school leadership, this chapter identifies threats and opportunities for male school leaders to interrogate masculinities and enhance relational and emotional health for all stakeholders. The review of literature

addresses five important components. First, it explains masculinity as a social construct. Second, it traces the connections between masculinity and health and wellness. Third, it uncovers the role and influence of schools on male gender formation. Fourth, it discusses the link between masculinity and school leadership. Lastly, it suggests opportunities for increased mindful, resilient, and inclusive masculinity for school leaders through their own identity work.

Masculinity as a Social Construct

Kimmel (2018) and Plank (2019) framed looming dangers for men as they navigate the gendered aspects of their lives. First, they are presented with a confining social script. Next, they encounter unrealistic models of exemplary masculinity. Lastly, they feel shame when their performance falls short (Jakupcak et al., 2005; Reilly, et al., 2014). A closer look at research and theory can help illuminate the mechanics of socialization, the implicit purposes of masculinity, and the nature and scope of male suffering. The first section of this paper outlines (a) the nature and history of sex role theory, (b) the framework of hegemonic masculinity, and (c) the presence of gender conflict for men. In reviewing these concepts, I illuminate some foundational pressures male school leaders hoping to enhance their health and leadership might consider.

Sex Role Theory: A Brief History

Sex role theory emerged in late nineteenth century scientific debates about innate sex differences employed to resist women's emancipation (Connell, 2005). After World War II, functional analyses of the American family channeled men into instrumental roles and women into expressive roles, thus implying universally gendered traits, strengths, and values (Messner, 1998). Functionalist views suggested that men and women were more suited and appropriate for distinct and separate spheres of influence. Such thinking paved the way for socialized role reproduction and maintained the social system for the family, and thus consistency and stability

for the broader society (Messner, 1998). Sex roles, a cultural elaboration of biological sex differences, "provided a handy way of linking the idea of a place in social structure with the idea of cultural norms" (Connell, 2005, p. 22).

Sex role scholarship reflected interacting causal systems of personality, biology, reproductive role, and socialization via various institutions (Hesselbart, 1981) At question was the relative influence of nature versus nurture arguments on sex-based personality traits and adult social and familial responsibilities (Harrison, 1978). If evolutionary biology focused on humans' past adaptive behavior, role theory identified the source of sex differences as a social and cultural phenomenon grounded in gendered meaning (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005). The new language of sex role theory "facilitated a partial break from biological essentialism. It connected personality formation and social structure and suggested principles for a politics of reform, especially emphasizing the need for less sex role stereotypical socialization processes" (Messner, 1998, p. 258). The initial symmetrical, restrictive nature of sex roles for men and women paved the way for both sexes to question the cost of narrow social norms. Later, activists and sociologists argued for more focus on the political and power dynamics between sexes, abandoning sex role theory for discourse around "gender relations" (Messner, 1998, p. 258).

Models of universal traits and suitable sex roles proved useful and "operationally tidy" (Angrist, 1969, p. 217) in some cases, but inadequate and overly simplified in other aspects. Goode et al. (1982) explained the complexity well:

> most of the sex-role allocation must be explained by how we rear our children,
>
> by the sexual division of labor, by the cultural definitions of what is
>
> appropriate to the sexes, and by the social pressures we put on the two sexes to
>
> keep each in its place. (p. 291)

This synthesis sheds a suspect light on the deployment of evolutionary psychology for social engineering and set the stage for the impending feminist and men's liberation movements.

Millman (1971) convincingly argued the surreptitious purpose of roles in society, enabling social systems to "preserve contradictory qualities or features" (p. 774) by assigning them to different sets of actors. In linking contradictory values to social "deviants" or minority groups, the system can disassociate and disavow the elements distracting from the dominant needs of society. In this model, social change necessarily requires new scapegoats or deviants as one group progresses or evolves.

Challenges with Sex Role Literature

Several issues derailed the staying power of sex roles as a valid framework. First, most identities are plural and integrate multiple roles across a *sex role constellation* where individuals are "many things to many people" (Angrist, 1969, p. 221). In addition, there is a fluidity to sex roles resulting from the life cycle aspect over time and a *flexibility allowance* that constructively recognizes some agency and options for those in the role (Angrist, 1969). Goode et al. (1982) also inquired if society should take sex role norms seriously if so few men live up to them. Finally, the theory succumbed to questionable science. Regarding sex role research, Millman (1971) identified bias in sample selections, methods, the focus on women and family, and the terms and labels used. Hesselbart (1981) labeled sex role theory an example of *gender mythology*, a quasiscience approach blocking social change despite data existing to invalidate it, biased findings, or illogical or inconsistent analysis.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Sex role theory explained complimentary patterns between the sexes; it did little to "register tension and power processes *within* gender relations" (Carrigan et al., 1985, p. 556). The sex role model, built upon the social conservatism of the 1950s, masked questions of power and material inequity and did little to articulate any personal suffering inside sex roles. With the rise of feminism in the 1970s, male role literature began to focus on the "restrictions, disadvantages, and general penalties of being a man" (Carrigan et al., 1985, p. 564) and began to consider the normative male role as "inappropriate and insupportable" (Carrigan et al., 1985, p. 565). Traditional masculinity suddenly came under attack for its influence on men to behave poorly and encounter extreme discomfort in its enactment; there was now a documented male dilemma (Carrigan et al., 1985). As a result of the findings, a novel notion of modern masculinity emerged that explored the need to integrate the expressive and instrumental designs of the standard male role.

Critical role theory of the 1970s and 1980s utilized empirical social research to link male role norms to oppressive behavior and study "local gender hierarchies and local cultures of masculinities" in schools, workplaces, and communities in a style of "ethnographic realism" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Studies identified variation within masculinity from a scale of "hard' to 'soft" and explained the diversity as *androgyny,* where combinations of male and female sex role characteristics exist within one individual (Carrigan et al., 1985, p. 566). Scholarship also identified the presence of an inner "self" separate from, and sometimes opposed to, the prevailing motives and behaviors of the "male package" (Carrigan et al., 1985, p. 579). The range of variation and intensity of conflict found in studies of sex roles suggested that the meaning of masculinity emerged at the level of the individual's experience and that there was no one true nature of men. At the same time, rampant violence and prejudice against homosexual

men from straight men in the 1970s spawned the concept of homophobia and indicated a socially

enforced hierarchy of masculinities, with those emanating from the conventional male role at the

apex (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The Framework of Hegemonic Masculinity

At its core, hegemonic masculinity is similar to evolutionary theory where fitness,

variation, and reproduction perpetuate dominant traits. Hegemony, a Marxist concept, involved

the "winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups in that

process" (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645). A ruling class consolidates influence by (a) defining the

situation, (b) setting the discursive agenda, (c) representing ideals and morality, (d) persuading

the people, and (e) organizing social institutions in nonthreatening ways (Donaldson, 1993).

Applied to masculinity, hegemony explains how "particular groups of men inhabit positions of

power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate

their dominance" (Carrigan et al., 1985, p. 592). Within the model, *subordinate* masculinities are

denied legitimacy by being considered lesser than or aberrant; *complicit* masculinities are

nonconforming and nonthreatening, but still reap the patriarchal reward; *marginal* masculinities

are trivialized or discriminated against because of complex intersections with other unequal axes

of social relations like ethnicity, race, or age; and *protest* masculinities are compensatory

hypermasculinities formed in reaction to social powerlessness (Griffin 2018; Messerchmidt,

2019, p. 87). Heterosexuality, homophobia, and the subordination of women are the bedrock of

hegemonic masculinity and used as normative referent points (Carrigan et al., 1985; Donaldson

1993; Griffin 2018).

Connell and Messerchmidt (2005) distinguished hegemonic masculinity as patterns of

masculine practice, whereby sex role theory emphasized expectations and identity. Hegemonic

masculinity's package included (a) a portrayal of the most "honored" way of being a man, (b) the requirement of all men to position themselves according to it, and (c) the global subordination of aberrant men and all women to the hegemonic form (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The framework could be used to describe or understand social dynamics in education, criminology, media imagery, men's health, organizational psychology, and "professional practices concerned with boys" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 834). Studies employed hegemonic theory to further document its costs and consequences, uncover the mechanisms of hegemony, explore greater diversities of masculinities, and analyze historical trends in hegemonic masculinities (Connell and Messerchmidt, 2005).

Donaldson (1993) aptly portrayed the complexity, costs, and dangers of hegemonic subscriptions. He called the concept "exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent. It is pseudo-natural, tough, contradictory, crisis-prone, rich, and socially sustained…not all men practice it, though most benefit from it" (p. 645). His two questions of what men can do with it (hegemony) and what it can do to men, suggest a dangerous combination of social saturation and unavoidable pain; men are left without agency and joy, and lacking consciousness and satisfaction (1993, p. 646).

Limitations of Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity theory has several limitations, mainly involving simplicity and representation. First, it downplays intersectionality, with patriarchy monopolizing other structuring identity principles (Griffin, 2018). In addition, it does not acknowledge the analogous potential of women to institutionalize their own power relations, nor does it offer optimism in subordinated men's ability to actively resist hegemonic forms (Connell & Messerchmidt, 2005). Ontologically, it is problematic, (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Griffin,

2018), for since it operates on the production of exemplars of men, one must ask if it represents

the reality of most men who make up the "unheroic majority" (Donaldson, 1993, p. 646). The

model's ambiguity in usage also extends to its ignoring of *situational identity*, where men

proactively shift between types of masculinities according to circumstances and audience

(Griffin, 2018).

Hegemonic Masculinity and Support for Men and Boys

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) offered a reasonable suggestion for those wishing to

support men and boys: "Without treating privileged men as objects of pity, we should recognize

that hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily translate into a satisfying experience of life" (p.

852). This dissatisfaction emerges as boys and men travel through the hierarchy of masculinities

and engage in active masculine management and performance. When applied to schools, we can

see boys and men participate in "masculine legitimation" as they learn to understand the

masculine landscape and the social milieu that sort and maintain dominant models of manhood

(Keddie, 2006; Pascoe 2003). Understanding pathways to supporting males in schools, then,

seems to involve a deeper look at the kinds of gender role strain they encounter and the ways

schools support hegemonic systems.

Gender Role Conflict Theory (GRC)

The 1970s ushered in a new era of writing that highlighted the limiting features of the

male sex role, the scarcity of traditional experiences validating masculinity, the shifting and

contradictory demands on men, and the possibility of incongruence between modern manhood

and "fundamental personality needs" (Pleck, 1976, p. 161). A paradox emerged of

simultaneously acknowledging men's institutional privileges and the costs of masculinity

to men. The residue of sex roles and hegemonic manhood has proven problematic for men

deserving healthy and inclusive models of masculinity.

Men experience conflict as they enact and embody the dominant paradigms of masculinity available (American Psychological Association, 2018). Society presents a model of maturity and self-sufficiency that leads men to separate from nurturing and close relationships (Jordan, 1995). In the process of relational separation, they lose a key resource for emotional connection and resiliency. Barraged by expectations of stoicism, dominance, and misogyny, young men lose touch with their childhood instinct for loving, close, and emotionally rich friendships (Way, 2011, 2013). Underlying this transformation are powerful social norms of heteronormativity and homophobia that juxtapose all things feminine and emotional as undesirable and all things masculine and aggressive as normative (Frank et al., 2003; Martino, 2000a, 200b; Way 2011, 2013). What results is a complex ecosystem of unwritten, suffocating rules aimed at "saving face" and enduring the crucible of masculinity (Oransky & Marecek, 2009).

Gender Role Conflict and Strain

The ideas of gender role conflict and gender role strain emerged from a focus on the gap between the authentic self and the ideal self-concept culturally linked to gender (O'Neil, 1981). Gender Role Conflict theory (GRC) attempts to explain the psychological pain and dehumanization of men who assume limiting gender roles and endorse hegemonic standards of masculinity (O'Neil & Denke, 2016). Gender role conflict occurs when gender roles negatively impact a person's psychological state and limit the pursuit of full human potential (O'Neil & Denke, 2016). Role strain is the symptomatic expression of role conflict as excessive mental or physical tension. (O'Neil & Denke, 2016).

O'Neil and Denke (2016) recategorized the main patterns of gender role conflict to include (a) success, power, and competition (SPC); (b) restrictive emotionality (RE); (c) restrictive affectionate behavior between men (RABBM); and (d) conflict between work and family relations (CBWFR) (O'Neil & Denke, 2016). These patterns manifest in gender role experiences that devalue, restrict, or violate; taken as a whole, the system socially polices role deviation, restricts freedoms and behaviors, and legitimizes emotional or physical abuse. Their metanalysis revealed strong correlates between men's intrapersonal and interpersonal problems and GRC, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, shame, internalized oppression (homonegativity, homophobia, heterosexist discrimination, and negative feelings about being gay), alcohol and substance abuse, and help-seeking stigma. Interpersonal challenges included parental attachment problems, restricted intimacy and self-disclosure, marital or parental dissatisfaction, and increased racism and heterosexism. O'Neil and Denke (2016) suggested GRC "significantly relates to dysfunctional and potentially dangerous interpersonal outcomes for men" (p. 68).

Levant (1996) distinguished between categories of gender role strain based on unrealistic standards, unsustainable effort, and overwhelming demands. *Discrepancy strain* is felt when falling short of one's internalized masculine ideal (generally the traditional model of masculinity) and is reflected in mental and physical health indicators like stress and cardiovascular reactivity (p. 261). *Dysfunction strain* results from the negative side effects of successfully fulfilling the ideals of the masculine mystique and typically relates to social and public health matters like marital and parental involvement, sexual promiscuity and violence, and substance abuse (p. 262). *Trauma strain* follows the long-term, repetitive injury of the male

socialization "ordeal" beginning in early childhood with parental "suppression and channeling of male emotionality" (p. 262).

To counter the suffering, O'Neil (1981) advocated for assessment and clinical intervention, educational and preventative programming, and men's groups to facilitate "consciousness-raising experiences" to process strain, conflict, and fear of femininity (p. 210). Marlowe (1981) discussed a promising notion of gender role *transcendence* – whereby a "trait or behavior is either healthy or unhealthy for a particular individual regardless of sex" (p. 212). The suggestion promotes an androgynous approach where men can overcome trait suppression by considering behaviors and values as healthy or not versus masculine or not. GRC theorists and researchers understood the need for men to conduct identity work and audit their masculinity ideologies in order to actualize their health and potential. Through their complicity and endorsement of the hegemonic system and traditional male roles, male leaders are at risk and put their mindset, well-being, and relationships on the line. The next section examines the strong link between masculinity and wellness.

Masculinity and Wellness

In *Think Like a Monk*, Jay Shetty (2020) described actor Daniel Day Lewis' intense method acting, where, in his preparations, he fully assumes the identity of the character he will play. Holistic devotion to the role and identity often leaves Lewis empty and exhausted. The story illustrates the costs of role-playing, unmetered personal commitments, and the intense assumption of external identities. For men – like actors - myths, performances, and scripts blend into a subconscious, influential paradigm that guides their behavior, impacts their health, and defines their masculine experience.

For many, the masculine plot and storylines can be grim. On average, men die younger, have higher death rates than women in all leading causes of death, successfully commit suicide more, and are more prone to coronary heart disease and cancer (Barker, 2000; Courtenay, 2000a). Their health falters because of insufficient and maladaptive health behaviors that influence health and longevity and increase the risk of disease, injury, and death (Barker, 2000; Courtenay, 2000a). In some models, poor health is a direct result of social constructions of gender and how gender is enacted, prescribing men to be "independent, self-reliant, strong, robust and tough" (Courtenay, 2000a, p. 1387). Men's health behaviors, then, become an active strategy to negotiate masculinities, reject femininity, and validate maleness according to dominant norms. A system develops where "cultural dictates, everyday interactions and social and institutional structures help to sustain and reproduce men's health risks" (Courtenay, 2000a, p. 1388).

Applying *gender specificity,* an approach to identifying how biological sex and social gender constructions affect men and women differently, allows practitioners and researchers to understand and address the different health needs of particular male and female cohorts (Barker, 2000). In hopes of recognizing the unique context of male educational leaders, this section further delineates the major stressors, angst, and impacts men feel in their roles. It includes a discussion of (a) the landscape of men's health; (b) male norms and health (c) representations of male health; (d) the crisis discourse in men's health; (e) work and health; (e) addressing men's health; and finally, (f) the Positive Psychology Positive Masculinity framework.

The Landscape of Men's Health

The average man conceptualizes health and well-being according to the following markers: the absence of physical illness, normal and routine functioning, a degree of physical

fitness, and as looking or feeling "good" (Robertson, 2006). Men generally regard health as a

passive, "normal" state, but they experience tension between social norms that promote health

apathy ("don't care") and a moral responsibility to be healthy "producers" for others in society

("should care") (Robertson, 2006), p. 178). Their discourse reflects this tension through an

emphasis on *moderation*, as men navigate social responsibility and personal discipline (control)

in order to experience consumption, gratification, fun, and risk (release) (Robertson, 2006).

Gast and Peak (2011) discovered that men do have health fears related to disease, family

history, and aging, but that they are rarely able to follow through with proactive measures. They

tend to focus on nutrition and exercise, primarily focusing on the area of physical health,

consistent with traditional health priorities in the masculine gender script. In addition, spouses

often serve as health gatekeepers for their male husbands, whereby men submit to their

supervision because "pleasing a wife was perceived as more important than the potential loss of

masculinity" (Gast & Peak, 2011, p. 324).

The current state of men's health is usually assessed using a series of yardsticks in two

main areas: (a) comparison to female health, and (b) a variety of trend analyses to identify

developments, changes, or issues over time (White, 2002). Research has highlighted gender-

related differences in (a) health risk behavioral patterns and (b) the use of health services (White,

2002). Troubling and risky behavioral patterns are categorized by alcohol and drug use, work-

related activity, and risk-taking behavior (White, 2002). Broadly, men are overrepresented in

many types of certain deaths related to natural causes and certain deaths due to external causes

(White, 2002).

Epidemiological data can be explained by biological determinants, socio-cultural ones, or

a combination of the two. Men's health can be understood through various lenses: a "biomedical

paradigm" (Smith & Robertson, 2008, p. 284) emphasizing anatomical and physiological aspects of male health concerns, or a social science lens which prioritizes the influence of gendered social practices (Smith & Robertson, 2008). The approaches pit epidemiological data based on sex differences against socially constructed, norm-driven determinants of health (Smith & Robertson, 2008). While a thorough understanding of male well-being requires both frames, a social constructivist inquiry exposes controllable factors that contribute to disproportionate indicators of male mortality and morbidity.

Male Norms, Role Enactment, and Unhealthy Masculinity

How men construct masculinity can lead to a host of "adverse lifestyle behavioral patterns," (White, 2002, p. 271) resembling *commonalities* of male experience (White, 2002, p. 272) that include lack of full health disclosure, avoidance of medical care, relational isolation, and "macho" risk-taking. The socialization of boys and men often necessitates a facade of stoicism, self-reliance, and physical toughness. In contrast, proper health care requires that "one is expected to ask for help, reveal physical and emotional vulnerability, and forfeit control to others" (Gast & Peak, 2011, p. 319). Coyle and Morgan-Sykes (1998) decried a society that produces "men who are detached from their feelings and are able to experience aggression but not fear, logic but not emotional expressiveness, sexuality but not sensuality, autonomy but not dependence" (p. 265).

Masculine gender scripts, defined as "ways of acting, feeling, and thinking based on socially prescribed norms of masculinity (Gast & Peak, 2011, p. 320), often promote health help-seeking behavior only when it relates to a prized masculine role or trait, like being a provider or sexual performance (Gast & Peak, 2011; O'Brien et al., 2005; 2007). In all other areas, the conventional masculine health approach is "wait and see" (Gast & Peak, 2011, p. 327)). Addis

and Mahalik (2003) predicted help-seeking behavior to be a "function of different men's degree of endorsement of particular masculine gender-role norms that are incongruent with seeking professional help" (p. 8). Meinecke (1981) acknowledged the male conundrum: "two equally unacceptable alternatives: admitting their inability to achieve some masculine ideal or continuing to strive, ignoring psychological and physical warning signals of distress" (p. 243). A better model calls for "living holistically…living in full awareness of the whole self and accepting responsibility for one's total well-being" (Meinecke, 1981, p. 244).

Help Seeking

Male gender scripts mainly manifest in health as a reluctance to seek help for physical illness and mental health challenges (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Barker, 2000; O'Brien et al., 2005). Data related to-medical visits and self-reporting in interviews and focus groups reveals a pervasive underutilization of help available to men (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Barker, 2000; O'Brien et al., 2005). The complexity and full-picture of male help-seeking can best be understood by integrating ideas from gender role socialization, social constructivism, and social psychology (Addis and Mahalik, 2003). The cost and benefit analysis of help-seeking by men can be mediated by (a) their view of what symptoms, illnesses, or behaviors are "normal" for their gender, (b) their assessment of whether the problem is a central part of their identity or ego, (c) the ability to reciprocate the help requested, (d) the reaction of others to help-seeking, and (e) what control is perceived as lost in asking for help. Often, men can experience a situation of *double jeopardy*, where experiences of gender role conflict may result in depressive symptoms and a simultaneous more negative view of accessing mental health assistance (Addis & Mahalik, 20003).

In practice, most men tolerate "minor" symptoms and wait to act in the hope that symptoms will go away (O'Brien et al., 2005; 2007). Different illnesses impact men differently; there seems to be a *hierarchy of threats* that challenge masculine norms and compromise men's ego to different extents (O'Brien et al., 2005). Illness, when severe enough or unavoidable, can disrupt male identity via dilemmas (O'Brien et al., 2007). Cardiac issues sometimes "shock" men into questioning masculine norms they have been endorsing, prostate cancer hastens an acceptance and realistic approach to personal care, erectile disfunction inspires immediate medical action, while depression remains hidden by machismo, often minimized as normal stress (O'Brien et al., 2005; 2007). Clearly, men struggle with managing a "dilemma between 'don't care' and 'should care'" when it comes to their health and well-being (O'Brien et al., 2005, p. 514). A male focus group respondent aptly described the stubborn "old-school" male health approach as "caveman stuff" (O'Brien et al., 2005, p. 513).

Health, Men, and Wellness Representation

Like their choices and behaviors, representations of men's health and lifestyle in popular journalism remain shallow and limited (Lewington et al., 2018; Waling, 2017). Discourse analysis of imagery and self-help reporting indicate prevailing themes of sexual potency, hard bodies, and career ascendancy (Lewington et al., 2018). The constant pressure to accept commercialized models of masculinity presented in mainstream media leaves men feeling objectified and conflicted with their identities (Waling, 2017).

Ironically, despite the prevalence of male mental health challenges and disparaging health indicators, social and emotional health dialogue is noticeably absent in prevailing media renderings of men. Lean muscle, increased libido, and a "killer" instinct hold more sway in popular health reporting than trusting relationships, emotional balance, and spiritual grounding.

Testosterone trumps wisdom and perspective, and the gym, the bedroom, and the boardroom replace the heart, soul, and mind as the hearth of masculinity. Men equate health with conquest, dominance, and strength, often leaving them under "unnatural strain" (Lewington et al., 2018, p. 247) in the workout of life, "gasping for air, fighting panic, questioning their manhood" (Lewington et al., 2018, p. 247). Waling (2017), citing Reeser (2010), contended that depictions of men's health congeal as a *mythscape*, a "process in which images, language, local myths/narratives, and physical embodiment work together to create and sustain a culturally held belief or ideal through widespread enculturation" (p. 430). In this process, men consume fabricated, popularized depictions of masculinity and health, while at the same time experiencing inauthenticity in their actual lived reality (Waling, 2017).

The Crisis Discourse in Men's Health

Exemplars of male health are far and few between. Accordingly, men face a predicament – they operate inside a model of health they do not identify with yet must strive towards. In relation to their health, Gast and Peak (2011) referred to men as "underserved and a difficult to serve population" (p. 318). Coyle and Morgan-Sykes (1998) described men's health crisis discourse as "confirmed and uncontestable…and [linked] to a state of being" (p. 268) rather than connected to behaviors or social performance. In popular media and academic health reporting, men are often homogeneously overgeneralized, portrayed with qualifiers like "never" and "won't," and linked to data-driven arguments that suggest an existence of "out-there-ness" (p. 269) support by legitimate, objective medical discourse (Coyle & Morgan-Sykes, 1998). In addition, a "mounting sense of disaster," victimhood at the hands of women and shifting social and professional roles and demands, and confusion between "old myths and new expectations"

(Coyle & Morgan-Sykes, 1998, p. 271) mean that while the new man is needed, "the inarticulate caveman…still lurks within" (Coyle & Morgan-Sykes, 1998, p. 272).

Gough (2006) described the typical claims associated with the arena of "men's health": (a) the presence of a "crisis" due to pervasive male health problems, (b) portrayal of men as obstinate in rejecting health assistance, (c) "masculinity" to blame for men's poor health, and (d) the call for more "male-friendly" health interventions to meet men where they are at. Much of the health discourse does little to differentiate pathologies and illness in men by age, race, socioeconomic status, or sexuality; accordingly, the claims are essentialist and monolithic, leaving men with little agency and a stigma for their generalized stubbornness and health ignorance (Gough, 2006). Health data on men can be fashioned to portray men as "relatively unhealthy and unminded to change, a 'tendency' inherent within the 'male culture' and fashioned by 'conditioning' and 'evolution' which we should 'accept'" (Gough, 2006, p. 2481).

In some health reporting, the male/female binary is represented by the unhealthy / healthy dichotomy, with women adopting and practicing the self-help proactively while men passively lag, holding on to the stubborn male relationship to self-care (Gough, 2006). To make matters worse, some theorists suggest that men's health can only improve if services "attend to men's needs without any threat or cost to their [hegemonic] masculinities (p. 2485), leaving men off the hook for active personal care or evolution in their concepts of health. Gough (2006) suggested a psychosocial approach is needed to address the individual and social factors mutually producing "unhealthy" men; therefore, he urged the challenging of the "facile equation between hegemonic masculinity and ill-health…[to] ask in what ways forms of masculinity can be marshalled as health-promoting so that strategies can be devised which appeal to more men" (p. 2486).

Work, Corporate Masculinity, and Health

If there is indeed a men's health crisis, it plays out predominantly with work. Pressure on men to fulfill roles of protector, provider, and procreator can promote obsessive careerism, competitiveness, and focus on achievement (Burke, 2002). Williams (2013) linked male ambition and strong work ethic to America's Protestant past, reflecting a "work devotion schema" (paragraph 12) that "marries moral purity with elite status" (paragraph 14) and legitimizes upper-middle class men as important. Working long hours enacts class status and proves manhood, providing an attainable heroism through tests of physical endurance and mental commitment (paragraph 15).

There are costs, however, for men lament "children crying when they missed their soccer games, of poor health and substance addictions caused by how they worked, and of a general sense of feeling 'overworked and underfamilied'" (Reid, 2015, paragraph 1). Reid (2015) argued that men must comply with notions of the "ideal worker" with "always on" expectations, suggesting that "superman doesn't get time off" (paragraph 3). Double standards exist however, where devotion to ordinary family commitments can threaten perceptions of devotion to work, while lavish family vacations can demonstrate a signal that the employee has "arrived" at elite status (Reid, 2015, paragraph 17).

Corporate masculinity is the alignment between traditional masculine ideology, provider and protector roles, the internal needs and character structure of men, and organizational values, beliefs, and rewards (Burke, 2014). Usually, this manifests as imbalance between two broad polarities: mastery striving and intimacy avoidance, thereby rendering men as "success objects" (Burke, 2014, p. 140) who increasingly commit to work and neglect personal and family life. This paradigm rewards task accomplishment, an achievement orientation, and career mobility; it promotes personal sacrifice, hyperrationality, and tenuous self-worth (Burke, 2014).

Type A Behavior

For men, Type A behavior can be an adaptive response to the demands of corporate masculinity, reflecting a need for control, predictability, and order in chaotic and threatening environments. Type A behaviors are characterized by "high achievement strivings or unbridled ambition, competitiveness, time urgency, aggressiveness or free-floating hostility, undertaking two or more activities simultaneously…and the appearance of tension" (Burke & Deszca, 1982, p. 161). Burke (2014) described a Type A individual as an "unrelenting worker, dominated by the success ethic, eager to outperform others and to constantly better his productivity" (p. 142). Type As, due to more intense career involvement and organizational commitment, can experience impatience, burnout, and interpersonal conflict; however, they also reap more of the job rewards like promotions and favorable reviews (Burke, 2014). Ironically, they are rarely more satisfied personally than their counterparts - type Bs, and their homelives are typically marred by marital distress and more time spent away from their children (Burke, 2014). Citing Pollack (1998), Burke (2014) suggested that Type A might as well be classified as "Type M" for its similarity to traditional masculinity.

Burke and Deszca (1982) found a correlation between type A manager behaviors and the likelihood of feelings of personal failure. The study found participants exhibiting type A behaviors as having (a) greater workaholism, (b) greater lack of affiliative satisfaction, (c) greater fear of failure, (d) greater social alienation, and (d) more negative work experiences (p. 166). Despite the negative results, type A behavior is usually valued positively by organizations, and has been found to be related to "job involvement, occupational self-esteem, organizational identification, and number of hours worked per week" (p. 169). In managing, men navigate what they must do, should do, and are expected to do to serve their constituents, climb the

organizational ladder, and meet their responsibilities at home; their sense of duty may overcome

their sense of self.

Workaholism and Heavy Work Investment

Courtenay (2000a) argued that masculinity "requires compulsive practice, because it can

be contested and undermined at any moment" (p. 1393). Such identity compulsion supports the

obsessive careerism of male managers. Empson (2018), a business management researcher,

proposed that insecurity, driven by "a profound sense of inadequacy" (paragraph 8), underlies

extreme work commitment. A "myth of the invincible professional" (Empson, 2018) transforms

autonomy into isolation, public duty into private burnout, and self-esteem into perpetual quests

for external validation. Hewlett and Luce (2006) suggested that extreme jobs, marked by stress,

long hours, and little time off, are worn like "badges of honor," with pressures mostly self-

inflicted. An "extreme" professional ethos – marked by glamor, desire, and virtue - is a natural

derivative of the male craving for extreme sports, adrenaline rushes, and dopamine hits. In the

world of extreme work, one's ability to withstand and endure reflects his personal character,

courage, and loyalty (Hewlett & Luce, 2006).

In a workaholic model, traditional perceptions of hard work - as dutiful, committed,

dedicated, and responsible – shift toward themes of disfunction – escapism, insecurity,

overbearance, obsession, and compulsion (Porter, 1996). *Workaholism,* is defined as "excessive

involvement with work evidenced by neglect in other areas of life and based on internal motives

of behavior maintenance rather than requirements of the job or organization" (Porter, 1996, p.

71). Workaholism shares many of the same features as other addictions; it can (a) promote

neglect of other interests; (b) reflect underlying identity struggles; (c) encourage rigid,

perfectionist thinking and a need for control; (d) cause withdrawal symptoms when inactive or unengaged; (e) become progressively worse; and (f) be avoided through denial (Porter, 1996).

Burke (2000) suggested that underlying beliefs and fears, developed in early social learning, explain Type A behaviors and workaholic patterns. Rooted in striving for social approval and material gain, these beliefs and fears include (a) the constant need to prove oneself or risk social rebuke, (b) a view that no moral forces exist and fear that goodness will not prevail, (c) a belief in a winner-take all approach, and (d) fear of scarcity and impoverishment (Burke, 2000). Burke (2000) reasoned that workaholism and the drive to work is a behavioral strategy in response to feelings of low self-worth and insecurity.

Career Success and Personal Failure

In modern times, men are more aware of the costs of success (Burke, 2014); life on the professional edge of extreme work affects health, relationships, and intimacy (Burke, 2014; Hewlett & Luce, 2006). Despite the increased awareness, men often choose the paycheck and boardroom over family dinners and the living room. Their career ascendancy does little to boost their self-concepts or ability to discern larger purpose and life meaning. Their careers and awards mask their lurking susceptibility to depression, alienation, broken relationships, and risky antics. A wedge develops between their managerial career identity, based on external trappings and achievement, and a healthy, balanced sense of self apart from work. The tension can lead to social-emotional distress that requires reconciliation (Burke, 2014). Feelings of personal failure may result from a range of work experiences coupled with the unsettling male mid-life stage of development (Burke, 2014).

Bartolome and Evans (1980) articulated the concept of *emotional spillover*, the crossing of organizational stress, worry and doubt from the professional domain into the personal realm,

rendering male managers "psychologically unavailable for a rich private life" (paragraph 4).

Fatigue, emotional tension, aggression, or mental absence may seep into home life, where men

often "close up like a shell. Total closure" (paragraph 16) to escape and recover. Practice in

emotional processing of professional pressures, doubts, and disappointments allows men to be

readily available at home and away from work. Bartolome and Evans (1980) encouraged

organizations to broaden their company values to reward balance and moderation alongside

achievement and performance.

Spillover and the Mid-Life Crises of Middle-Aged Managers

Levinson (1969) described the turbulence for middle-aged managers coming "face to face

with reality and [finding] that reality doesn't measure up to his dreams" (paragraph 10). For men,

success can disguise the "realization that life demands are contradictory…the realization that

one's view of cause-effect relationships was wrong; the realization that many of one's choices or

decisions were made to please others; and the realization that one has few close friends and is

basically alone" (Burke, 2002, p. 46). Depressive symptoms and feelings result from career

forces that include (a) competitive timeframes for promotion, (b) pervasive threats of defeat, (c)

denial of feelings and relationships, (d) a constant state of defensiveness, (e) the pain and

isolation of rivalry, and (f) resentment and anger toward entitled and younger staff. Middle-aged

managers, marred by disillusionment and feelings of obsolescence encounter an identity vacuum.

Levinson (1969) suggested that "if a man has met his own standards and expectations reasonably

well, he adapts more successfully to the aging process" (paragraph 54). On the contrary, the

manager "who fails to take himself, his crises, and his feelings seriously keeps running,

intensifies his exploitation of others, or gives up to exist on a plateau" (paragraph 65). Any

dissatisfactions of the middle-aged managerial class have implications since successful managers

serve as role models, shape corporate culture, lead earnings, and generally inspire the dedication and behaviors of subordinates.

The Future of Male Managers: What do Men Want?

Kimmel (2014) suggested that men are haunted by dual demons in their search for meaning: defiant nonconformity, represented by the maverick loner, and overconformity, represented by the company man. Facing conflicting pressures and emotions, men are limited to options of rebellion or compliance. A popular coping strategy manifests as escape, where men leave their families and throw themselves autonomously into more work, travel, or adventure to "find himself and prove his masculine prowess" (paragraph 23).

In terms of careers, men are unsure of what they want (Kimmel, 2014). For the first time, the demands of the "organization man" are evolving, and men struggling with purpose and balance, wanting to be involved fathers "with no loss of income, prestige, and corporate support – and no diminished sense of manhood" (paragraph 3). Men are beginning to question work as an "unquestioned source of self-fulfillment" and push back against traditional male careerism (Kimmel, 2014). Weiss's (1991) study of successful male executives found men defined by

> vaulting ambition; most seemed to be content with a kind of grounded stability
> – being what they called good fathers, good providers, good men. But all of
> them reported stress and irritability; half had trouble sleeping; most had few
> close friends, choosing instead to compartmentalize their lives to get through
> the day. (Kimmel, 2014, paragraph 21)

Despite man's search for meaning and identity, corporations have remained inflexible, and definitions of masculinity have "proved remarkably inelastic," binding men "as tightly as ever in the public sphere" (Kimmel, 2014, paragraph 36).

Addressing Men's Health

The prevailing hopelessness in the space between male aspirations and role fulfillment suggests there is a need to address male representation, masculine ideology, and the resulting impact on men's health. Burke (2002) outlined the major themes, pressures, and forces colliding in the complex bid of men to both be well and meet male expectations. At root is an irony behind male power: it is a source of great privilege, but also a major cause of pain, insecurity, and "painful isolation" (p. 37). White (2002) suggested that men's health would benefit from an unpacking of "the ways in which material circumstance...interact with certain notions of manhood…to produce various types of health outcomes" (p. 273). Barker et al. (2010) suggested that a *gender transformative* approach to health education and male behavior change requires "explicitly acknowledging prevailing gender-inequitable definitions of manhood as part of the problem" (p. 550).

Accordingly, men's health programs that take an ecological approach – looking at the "dynamic interrelationship between individuals, family, peers, structural factors, and wider sociocultural norms that shape gender-related behaviours and vulnerabilities" (Barker et al., 2010 (p. 542) -- are more likely to lead to lasting changes in behaviors and attitudes. Progressive men's health advocates propose an integrated, eclectic perspective that breaks down silos and isolated practice and research lenses (Courtenay, 2000b; Smith & Robertson, 2008; White, 2002). White (2002) urged a three-strategy approach to intervening in men's health: (a) measures that address biological determinants of health and well-being, (b) measures that focus on gender relations, and (c) measures that are directed at social differences and inequalities within the male population. Courtenay (2000b) suggested an interdisciplinary, collaborative biopsychosocial approach, calling upon "teammates" (p. 388) – colleagues, practitioners, and researchers across

connected disciplines to bring men out of the isolation of the "wilderness" (p. 388) and keep them alive. Smith and Robertson (2008) advocated for a reflexive men's health practice [encouraging] practitioners to re-evaluate their practice using critical reflection, appropriate theories, principles, concepts, and experience" (p. 288).

Positive Psychology Positive Masculinity

Inherently, masculinity is not entirely bad or entirely good; it is complex. Despite its privileges and distinguished traditions, manhood can be both a benevolent and callous experience. Its toxic, dysfunctional versions are marked by misogyny, chauvinism, aggression, illness, and hyper competitiveness. Its magnanimous and healthy versions are characterized by empathy, servant leadership, personal responsibility, a dutiful regard for community, civility, and dignity. Following the New Psychology of Men (NPM) movement and its revelations on the deficits, shadows, and pathologies of male socialization, a positive, complimentary strand of research was needed to amplify the goodness of men and male traits (Kiselica & Englar-Carson, 2010). The Positive Psychology Positive Masculinity (PPPM) framework combines elements of (a) positive psychology – the support of *wellbeing* and *resiliency* through a virtue lens with (b) positive masculinity – "prosocial attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of boys and men that produce positive consequences for self and others" (Kiselica et al., 2016, p. 126). What culminates is a celebration of traditionally socialized male strengths that can be deployed for good (Kiselica & Englar-Carson, 2010).

In the PPPM model, men can leverage male ways of knowing and being - their propensity for caretaking, sense of fraternity, autonomy, provision, and bravery - to improve their own lives and their communities (Kiselica & Englar-Carson, 2010). A positive and generational male socialization process – "noble masculinity" (Kiselica et al., 2016, p. 125) - occurs when men

teach boys to bring their strengths out into the world as a humanitarian and honorable campaign. This model positively addresses the male purpose gap (Farrell & Gray, 2019), thus promoting happiness and inner peace for men and boys. The idea of *utilization* – employing personal strengths to solve problems, promote hope and belonging, and achieve – can be supported through therapy, coaching, and mentoring males via encouragement, not exclusively diagnosis (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010).

Wilson et al. (2021) illuminated pathways to embed the PPPM framework in schools. A hopeless situation where "the vast majority of discourse depicts young men as damaged" (p. 4), can be countered by reestablishing what is positive with masculinity. The main issue is the preponderance of theories that overemphasize the strain and conflict aspects of traditional male roles. By focusing on connection, motivation and authenticity, health promoters and school-based practitioners can envision what is possible with masculinity, rather than what is problematic (Wilson et al., 2021). By endorsing aspects of self-determination theory in the operationalizing of PPPM, Wilson et al. (2021) created space for boys to "appraise societal expectations and forge their own path" (p. 7). By building respectful relationships, a commitment to community, and a portfolio of authentic personal values, boys and men can enhance their intrinsic motivation to "be" real in the world. A key framing of the PPPM model is that it is fluid and dynamic rather than a fixed state of destination; by seeing the prosocial model as an "ongoing developmental process" (p. 5), males can see entry points and feel progress.

Leaders who pay attention to health and seek balance are in a better position to manage the stress and complexity of organizations. Social norms drive male managers towards control, certainty, and autonomy; the realities of organizational life require patience, humility, and collaboration. Men who lead boys in schools set the agenda for manhood and offer their students

and staff a vision for human dignity and gender equity. They help establish who gets seen, who gets rewarded, and what winning looks like for their community. What follows is an examination of how masculinity and gender can manifest in schools.

Masculinity and Schools

A New Year's blog post by a progressive all boys' head of school called for community self-care in the coming year (Botti, 2021). The writing questioned the hurriedness of schooling as our society inches toward a post pandemic awakening. The headmaster emphasized a shared vulnerability rarely recognized in stated school objectives. The prose pondered the sustainability of traditional school engagement and challenged stakeholders to "make sacred something decidedly *non*-instrumental" (paragraph 5). This theme of yearning and healing stands in stark contrast to the achievement orientation of schools and the core elements of traditional masculinity. School leaders charged with male development find themselves enmeshed in a social system that resists change and promotes stubborn expectations; their liberties to confront male norms depend on their espoused values, school missions, and comfort with disruptive approaches to gender ideologies.

Kessler et al. (1985) offered sound advice for evaluating the interaction between schooling, identity, and gender: (a) examine large-scale structures without reifying them, and (b) scrutinize personal practices without losing their larger contexts (p. 35). This two-fold approach honors the tension between personal agency and the institutional forces impacting masculine formation in schools. This section examines the systems of gender inside schools, the unique settings of schools for boys, the human impact of gender regimes, and some possibilities for progressive gender considerations that actualize healthy male identities.

Schools and Gender: Institutional Influences

Schools can be complicit in the binary ways masculinity and femininity are constructed

and how the "gender order" is institutionalized (Browne, 1995; Connell, 1989; Connell, 1996;

Kessler et al., 1985; Martino et al., 2004, p. 450). Connell (1989) admonished, "Schools do not

simply adapt to a natural masculinity among boys or femininity among girls. They are agents in

the matter, constructing particular forms of gender and negotiating relations between them" (p.

292). Mainly outside the scope of any conscious intention and through policy, custom, and

culture, schools ascribe sex role patterns, arbitrate among different forms of masculinity and

femininity, and provide a setting in which one form typically becomes hegemonic (Kessler et al.,

1985). As institutional bodies that create an ecology for learning and personal development,

schools act as co-conspirators in shaping the possibilities presented to and recognized by females

and males. The relative influence of schools in the formative process is significant, for Connell

(1996) described it as a "weighty institution, a major employer, a key means of transmitting

culture between generations…which have a considerable impact on the experience of children

growing up; and it can set standards, pose questions, and supply knowledge for other spheres of

life" (p. 230). Below, I discuss how schools create gender regimes by allocating influence,

demarcating behavioral boundaries, and suggesting what men and women "ought" to be inside

their patterns of teaching, learning, and leading.

Gender Regimes

Through explicit and implicit processes, policies, and messaging, schools either construct

or deconstruct gender (Kessler et al., 1985). In this way, schools become both a "site" as an

institutional "agent" in the process of masculinity formation and a "setting" where other agencies

come into play, like the agency of the stakeholders themselves (Connell, 1996). At any given

moment, the gender package of a school can be operationalized as a *gender regime*, defined by

Kessler et. al. (1985) as "the pattern of practices that constructs various kinds of masculinity and femininity among staff and students, orders them in terms of prestige and power, and constructs a sexual division of labor within the institution" (p. 42). Any regime affects reality through a "network of supports and restraints" (Browne, 1995, p. 226), creating a gendered culture where actors determine the best ways to have their needs met. Browne (1995) suggested that gender regimes typically include aspects of organization and structure, power dynamics, the nature of school policies, gender balance in leadership positions, staff dynamics, pedagogy and instructional methods, academic subjects offered, and the nature of relationships between teachers and students. These regimes, systematically composed and symbolically experienced, create subliminal windows and mirrors; encounters within the system define ranges of available identities and behavioral options. Connell (1989) summarized the journey for males in schools, "Some masculinities are formed by battering against the school's authority structure, others by smooth insertion into its academic pathways, others again by a tortuous negotiation of possibilities" (p. 300). There are three main ways schools operationalize gender at the organizational level: establish the identity hierarchy, supervise behavior, and regulate emotional and gender norms.

Schools define power and negotiate status among identities. Schools pave gender lanes that reproduce the dominant forms. Reichert and Kuriloff (2004) highlighted the enduring "ideas about being male [in schools] that are intended to reproduce particular identities from one generation to the next" (p. 545). This becomes problematic when gender regimes actively construct identities as a "social fact, which [actors] have yet to come to terms with somehow" (Kessler et. al., 1985, p. 42). Schools may either foster or restrict the "marketplace of masculinities" (Connell, 1989, p. 294) through the curriculum, competitive academics, and

distribution of social power (Connell, 1989). By being accomplices to "pecking order stuff,"

(Connell, 1989, p. 294), schools perpetuate a dynamic where, "to know where you stand…seems

to be choosing a masculinity" (p. 294). Unequal resources and significant school coercion

(Kessler et al., 1985) may reflect an intentional institutional plan to train male students to

become part of a "power elite" (Stoudt, 2012, p. 29), where they can assume upper class

positions and "future enactments of privilege" (Stoudt, 2012, p. 30). Students are taught, via

recognition and rewards, or exclusion and invisibility, whether they are the right kind of men.

Reichert (2001) portrayed boys as a compliant flock - "Innocent, trusting and dutiful…led to

manhood…[via] custom, design and practice" (p. 41).

       Schools police behavior and enact authority. Male students excluded from social

power because of academics, immaturity, or awkwardness, still crave visibility. In this

circumstance, the school's disciplinary and behavioral systems can be a proving ground for

increased attention. Connell (1989) described the pattern of "getting into trouble," (p. 294) where

students push up against authority structures of the school, which "becomes the antagonist

against which one's masculinity is cut" (p. 294). Protest masculinity related to discipline occurs

when boys are lacking resources to achieve and fit into the social hierarchy (Connell, 1996).

Resistance to school, a la the "boy crisis," results from a boy's need to "protect a bruised sense

of self and to assert his masculine claims to authority and personal space" (Kessler et al., 1985,

p. 37). Boys become resentful of arbitrary, extreme, or petty injustices at school, and an "ethic of

revenge which defines a masculine pride" (Connell, 1989, p. 294) promotes spiraling cycles of

trading behavioral sabotage for recognition. How staff participate in the supervision and

discipline of boys also sends messages to the community around school roles and gendered

styles.

      Schools establish patterns of emotion, maturation, and divisions of labor. Schools

endorse or restrict patterns of emotion that are encoded as "feeling rules" (Connell, 1996, p.

214). Typically, these norms reflect a social responsibility to make men responsible and self-

sufficient. Reichert (2001) offered "where the hallways lead" as a metaphor for the physical and

emotional transition toward adulthood and away from femininity. This "man-making" process

starts as one exits elementary school toward middle school, where students "turn the corner," see

less women teachers, and "everything [is] bigger, brighter, stronger…you know more pressure"

(Reichert, 2001, p. 40). Reichert (2001) aptly described a restrictive evolution reflected in "ideas

about difference and disassociation: that males are distinguished from females, that the way to

manhood involves…a willingness to assume male duties, constraints and prerogatives" (p. 40).

      Schools further divide gender along sex role lines. Kessler et al. (1985) argued schooling

"reflects the sexual division of labor in the workforce; it also constitutes it" (p. 35). To better

meet the needs of boys, schools focus on male role modeling, signaling the departure of the

mothering figure and arrival of strong and assertive men (Reichert, 2001). This perpetuates a

privileged, male-oriented culture in schools, where tacit approval supports sexist attitudes

(Stoudt, 2012). Female faculty often feel the need to be strict and tough, acting as "moral

regulators" (p. 27) to keep boys from getting in their own way. This proves to be an "unfair

burden that allows men off the hook from regulating their own social-emotional relationships"

(Stoudt, 2012, p. 27) and asks women to unfairly embody compassion and emotional vitality.

Women may be also refuted in questioning the "'boys will be boys' culture" (Stoudt, 2012, p.

28). Especially in all boys' schools, where girls are stereotypically considered a distraction to

success and growth, a subliminal message is sent that girls and women "contaminate the space

for boys" (Stoudt, 2012, p. 26). The next subsection explores the gender implications of all-boys'

schools.

All-Boys' Schools: Unique Missions and Pressures

Modern boys' schools exist to meet the unique developmental needs of a diversity of

male students (International Boys' Schools Coalition, n.d.). However, their ethos and cultures

may continue to reflect a yonder time where males were educated separately to maximize future

social and economic leverage and perpetuate family prestige (Gotschall et al., 2010; Proctor,

2011). Any tension between progressive values and lingering patriarchal forces plays out in the

daily school experience. Stakeholders assess, sort, and categorize behaviors, masculinities, and

identity markers according to what is seen and promoted within the honored cultural elements of

the institution (Nelson & Vidale 2012; Reichert & Kuriloff, 2004). Reichert and Kuriloff (2004)

explained the power of schools to affect self-concept:

Both as sites for their socialization in an implicit curriculum for being male and as

sites within which boys are pressured to play a customary part in the collective

social practice, schools invest considerable effort teaching boys who they are and

who they should become. (p. 545)

Boys' schools and their leaders can benefit from a review of their missions through a

gender lens, a solid understanding of their collective social practices, and knowledge of

what they reveal about gender.

Missions and Promises of All-Boys Schools

The International Boys' Schools Coalition (IBSC) has described the intentionality of

boys' schools as catering to the development of integrity, empathy, and academic excellence

(International Boys' Schools Coalition, n.d.). According to the IBSC, the single sex experience

expands identity, teaches values, and encourages relationships. Boys' schools are also equipped to tap into male strengths, promote well-being, support vulnerabilities, eschew boy stereotypes, and promote morality (International Boys' Schools Coalition, n.d.). Theories, aspirations, and promises of international boys' schools are attractive and enlightened; from a social construction perspective, however, we can anticipate the gap between best practice and actual practice. A survey of boys' school websites suggests a vast range of masculine intention.

A Survey of Boys' School Websites

My own review of school promotional materials reveals a spectrum of gender-based commitments, stances, and beliefs. The single-sex rationale and philosophy may reveal a minimal threshold where personal needs and safety are met, or a more liberatory stance where identity and self-concept are transformed. In examining the discourse, I noticed three distinct categories of messaging: *gender attentive*, *gender expansive*, and *gender disruptive* paradigms that approach the gender binary, nature of masculinity, and role of single-sex schools differently.

Gender attentive orientations emphasize biological and conventional traits associated with boys: impulsivity, executive immaturity, unbridled energy, competitiveness, and analytical prowess. Schools embracing this stance promote male brain science and academic rigor in line with "universalized" male learning profiles, the benefit of eliminating female social distractions, and the lifelong bonds of male friendships. This model captures the essence of boyhood and promises the safety, security, and discipline for boys to shape up and thrive. Discourse language from websites advocate "important strides toward a strong and secure manhood" and a trial by ordeal that encourages parents to "bring us your boys and we will return to you men" (anonymous website used). Gender attentive websites promote lessons including: "don't whine," "don't be sorry, be responsible," and "learn to own it" (anonymous website used). A sample

website narrative in this strand acknowledges a "secret sauce" to unlock manhood like firm

handshakes: "those who have a weak or unmanly grip have to go to the back of the line and do it

again until they get it right…Timidity makes cowards of us all" (anonymous website used).

Gender expansive schools approach masculinity as an opportunity, not an outcome. Their

discourse promotes fuller humanity for boys beyond typical archetypes. In this paradigm,

masculinity serves health and wellness, not production or provision through roles. Authenticity,

connection, and intimacy complement the positive aspects of traditional masculine ideology. A

critical reflective lens emerges, as the central question becomes – what sociocultural factors limit

boys from reaching their fullest potential? Schools in this website category "want boys to

develop a healthy masculinity…[through] classroom time and space to model positive

relationships, increase empathy, develop active listening skills, and broadly explore how gender

is performed and lived." In addition, they "exist to celebrate and affirm boys at every stage…and

to help them understand the myriad ways that healthy masculinity is expressed…[to] challenge

societal boundaries…that hinder a boy's ability to live an authentic life of purpose" (anonymous

website used).

Gender disruptive schools go further, striving to upend and redress any unquestioned

systems of patriarchy or male privilege. This paradigm recognizes sexism and actively organizes

to change it. Schools of this genre focus on social justice, allyship, courageous self-expression,

and personal advocacy. By acknowledging power imbalances and injurious gender norms, these

schools are sustained by "fiercely loving and accepting school culture[s] founded on feminist

principles" where "boys tend to let go of 'acting like a man' and inhabit their authentic selves"

(anonymous website used). Their websites reflect missions that aim to "*empower*…students so

they don't have to take power away from others…[and] challenge students to use respectful

language, unlearn messages of misogyny inherited from the larger culture, and reflect on their gender identity in relation to power and privilege" (anonymous website used).

The variation of missions, stances, and rationales suggests there is some debate and fluidity to the overall purposes of boys' schools. It is important to take a closer look at the evolving positions of private schools for boys.

Elitism, Performativity, and Branding

Boys' schools have an enduring legacy of exclusivity and uppish entitlement, dating back to Thomas Arnold, the Rugby School, and their English lineage (Connell, 1989; Neddam, 2004; Proctor, 2011). Proctor (2011) suggested that boys' schools have perpetuated a classed and moral "self-conscious leadership ideology" (p. 844) that engages the masculine drive to fulfill duty. Schooling for upper class leadership – "the making of ruling-class men" (p. 845) - pervades the histories of elite male schools. Their rituals and values often propagate particular kinds of male solidarity…heroism, teamwork, and self-sacrifice…[as] a certain kind of commemorated warfare" (p. 847). A priority of learning to lead in society results in schools that have been "organized around the management of privilege" (p. 853).

In modern, elite private schools, Kuriloff and Reichert (2003) identified a *habitus*, the "positions and dispositions…[behind] intergenerational stability of wealth and privilege" (p. 753), that boys were expected to learn. Lessons within the habitus include imperatives within the *academic geography* to "learn the drill" (p. 756) of discipline, motivation, and "bearing pain" for success; and the *social geography* based on "center" or "margin" positions emphasizing homogeneity and insider ("lifer") status (p. 760). Within the dominant habitus, boys were expected to build cultural capital by proving their emotional control, courage, ease of effort, and desire for competition (p. 753).

Modern boys' schools are striving to stay relevant (Brown, 2021; Reilly, 2019). They

must integrate the celebrated legacies of yesteryear with the increasing demands of corporatized

private school enrollment and modern competencies. *Performativity,* or competitiveness coupled

with marketization (Meadmore & Meadmore, 2004), encourages schools to position their brands

and message their "elite" status. In promoting their "value-addedness" in building leaders and

public servants, schools have recently coopted self-esteem, social-emotional health, confidence,

spiritual expression, and creativity as enhanced outcomes (Meadmore & Meadmore, 2004). Their

renewed purpose includes a promise to educate the whole man, in addition to setting them up for

future industry success. Meadmore and Meadmore (2004) warned that school promotional

literature can be "a form of rhetoric that must be read as cultural texts…Performativity, by its

boundless nature, includes a degree of fabrication" (p. 386).

Gottschall et al. (2010) described the purposeful "impression management" (p. 18) of

schools that advertise through "hard lines" and "soft scenes" – the juxtaposition of the innocence

and vulnerabilities of younger boys paired with the intense preparedness, strength, and maturity

of elder classmates. Through intentional marketing, there is a sense that schools can "provide it

all" (p. 21) - traditional and progressive elements – in "an homage to masculine forefathers *and* a

symbol of masculine innovation and ingenuity" (p. 21). In the modern age, soft skills like

thoughtfulness and altruism "are now powerful touchstones for the reshaping of male educational

identities as competitive and enterprising subjects" (p. 27).

Consequences and Cost to Boys and Men

With the expectation that they be able to do it all, private school boys fight hard to win,

matter, or be relevant. Reichert (2001) explored the toll of striving, performing, and achieving

according to institutional expectations and cultural assumptions. Measured by prowess, boys

soon "discover that they are measured, sorted and played against each other. Being valued in school depends upon running fast, acting cool, being good at things as well as not being unathletic, uncool, inept" (p. 43).

       Good men survive. Having needs of affirmation and belonging, boys quickly adjust to the mindsets, behaviors, and approaches that "earn them rewards (and spare them the negative sanctions) of the curriculum" (p. 43). They may shed any identity markers from personal experience, family, or culture that draw negative attention and latch onto those that support social esteem or institutional legitimacy (Reichert, 2001). By putting aspects of self on the market, boys willingly engage in a grueling process where they seek any benefit to edge out other boys hustling for notoriety. According to Reichert (2001), "What is assumed – or taken for granted – by this deliberate and cherished system for reproducing identities is that, in their scramble over the top of each other for advantage, somehow good men survive" (p. 46).

       The looking glass self. Schools can be crucial sites for students' development of self-concept, where students split consciousness between accommodation and resistance to the perceptions and appraisals of others (Nelson & Vidale, 2012). Sociologist Charles Cooley described the concept of the *looking glass self*, where identities are formed through socialization, and people use "social interaction as a type of 'mirror,'…[using] the judgments they receive from others to measure their own worth, values, and behavior" ("Perception is Reality," n.d.). Cooley identified three main stages in an individual's discovery of the looking glass self: (a) imagining how he or she appears to others in a social situation, (b) imagining how others judge that appearance, and (c) developing feelings about and responding to those perceived judgments ("Perception is Reality," n.d.). The relative trustworthiness, popularity, and social capital of the people involved in this dynamic complicate the looking glass self-process, as does the setting,

which may add a stamp of contextual legitimacy or implicitly streamline the process through resources or infrastructure. In addition, the looking glass process involves active alignment and adjustment, where people seek consistency and harmony between their internal and external worlds ("Perception is Reality," n.d.). Perhaps the looking glass process is the arena in which boys' schools can live out their purported aspirations for liberated identities. Thoreau (cited in Weiss, 1990) captured the causal nature of ego – "What a man thinks of himself, that is which determines, or rather indicates, his fate" (p. 92).

Possibilities and Incentives to Change

Brown (2021) claimed modernity presents an "existential moment for boys' schools" (p. 187). Continued feminist advances, spotlights on toxic masculinity, and skyrocketing tuitions have forced people to question the value and worth of private boys' schools (Reilly, 2019). At root is a debate of whether boys' schools perpetuate patriarchy and entitlement, or whether they offer a more robust and healthy experience for all kinds of young men (Brown, 2021). A confidential 2019 IBSC survey of 330 boys' school administrators suggested that healthy masculinity is the most important challenge they face in their school leadership (p. 189).

Schools can question and address gender implications with humility and intentionality. Researchers acknowledge gender regimes can be amenable to change (Connell, 1986; Kessler et. al., 1985), depending on the "consciousness of groups of participants" in the system (Kessler et. al. 1985, p. 44). Connell (1996) suggested gender constructs in schools can be "decomposed, contested, and replaced" (p. 210). Since gender is actively constructed, healthy opportunities exist for change agents because "masculinities come into existence as people act" (p. 210). Schools already have conditions ripe for healthy identities: the presence of multiple masculinities, and a layering within personal student identities, where unsettled and

"contradictory desires and logics" (Connell, 1996, p. 201) could be productive sources of tension and change. Connell (1996) articulated existing personal conditions that could ignite gender development for all school actors: experience with the emotional and physical costs of patriarchy, curiosity, personal crisis, a sense of lacking, a sense of justice, a desire for personal growth, and a wish for a space for nontraditional conduct (p. 228).

Institutionally, school leaders can interrogate current gender regimes and audit the school's looking glass effect. Reichert and Kuriloff (2004) advocated for a critical look at recognitional practices inside schools to develop a meta view of privileges and entitlements. Courageous, honest conversations can cultivate awareness, for "taboos restricting open discussion of schools' hidden curricula and patterns of reward and recognition can be acknowledged for what they are – and what they are in the service of" (Reichert & Kuriloff, 2004, p. 565).

Individually, school leaders can explore layers of their own gender identities, examine relational histories, and study male developmental patterns for seeds of insights on how to better support men and boys. By modeling inquiry and critical reflection, faculty and staff can show boys how to question aspects of hegemonic masculinity and help them "reflect on how their attitudes and ways of behaving were related to social expectations about dominant practices of masculinity" (Martino et al., 2004, p. 450). This section addressed the ways institutional actors and organizational forces inside schools contribute to the masculine experience. The next section surveys the literature on men who lead schools, and contextualizes the significance of gender on leadership performance, identity, and style.

Masculinity and School Leadership

Most of the literature on male school leaders highlights masculine management styles and the cross-gender relations among administrators and staff in coeducational public schools. Some research describes the masculinized behavior of male academic leaders (Feuerstein, 2006; Fisher & Kinsey, 2014; Martin, 2001). Significant studies highlight the contrasting leadership differences and challenges of men versus women administrators (Eagly et.al, 1992; Kochan et al., 2000; Kruger, 1996; Lee et al., 1993). A few studies illuminate male gender role conflict at the principal level (Jones, 2008; Whitehead, 2001), while some describe the tension men experience leading predominantly female staffs at the primary grades level (Chan, 2011; Cushman, 2008; Jones, 2008). Scarce research exists on the internal lives of male school leaders as men; there is a gap in research exploring the identity work of male school leaders and its benefits on their work or wellness.

In examining school leadership, Hall (1997) discussed a powerful triple metaphor of power, culture, and gender; the themes reveal professional interactions influenced by "different uses of power and allegiance to particular cultural norms, but [also] by contradictory gender expectations" (p. 312). This section addresses how these triple influences have affected the division of labor in schools, solidified the perceived and real differences of male and female leadership, and challenged the identity of men in administrative school roles.

Gender Segregation in School Work

For much of our country's history, school administration has been an "acceptably masculine haven" for men (Blount, 1999, p. 55). The sex segregation of schoolwork began when women entered teaching in mass numbers in the middle of the nineteenth century and became a lasting, intentional part of school design (Blount, 1999; Strober & Tyack, 1980). Educational gender lanes developed because of "prevailing sex-role ideology and the organizational

requirements" of schools (Strober & Tyack, 1980. P. 501). Victorian ideas of a woman's place, prevailing notions of proper man's work, and the formalization and bureaucratization of public schooling set gender boundaries and professional expectations for men and women.

For women, teaching was sold as an ideal preparation for motherhood (Strober & Tyack, 1980) and suited to innate female mothering qualities of "nurturance, patience, and understanding of children" (Strober & Tyack, 1980, p. 496). Women's responsiveness to rules and male direction and men's believed ease of managing women solidified the gender chain of command in schools. Strober and Tyack (1980) noted, with "few alternative occupations and [their being] accustomed to patriarch authority" (p. 500), women were ideal employees for the launch of the new public school district.

With women joining the teaching profession in throngs, men's patterns of homosocial affirmation required adjustment. Accordingly, male faculty started their own teacher fraternities to celebrate manly accomplishments and police masculine collegial behaviors (Blount, 1999, Strober and Tyack, 1980). When schools became more hierarchical and chief school administrators were needed, school boards and hiring committees focused on the "overt status characteristics of the leader…male, middle-aged, tall, white, and usually a member of a dominant church" (Strober and Tyack, 1980, p. 500). Maleness for administrators became a major asset" (Blount, 1999, p. 50), and male leaders became important to the social credit rating of the school" (Blount, 1999, p. 50). Principal openings were shared by men in charge with other men, and men achieved school head status younger, with less experience, and more often than women (Blount, 1999, Strober and Tyack, 1980). Eckman (2004) described the influence of the "good old boys" network – which included favoritism and mentoring, job placement, access and information, and phone calls and contacts (Eckman, 2004). The affiliative reach of the "academic

boys' club" continues into today's academic institutions despite feminist advances in access and representation (Fisher & Kinsey, 2014).

Initially, both men and women faculty and staff desired traditional masculine traits for their leaders, believing that effeminate men and women lacked the toughness, resolve, and discipline to manage school tasks (Blount, 1999; Cushman, 2008). Underlying these social forces was a fear of sexually deviant males in schools with children, and gay men represented unacceptable levels of professional risk, fear, and discomfort in schools (Blount, 1999, Strober and Tyack, 1980). Over time, school administration evolved to represent "expectations of proper work for a man" (Blount, 1999, p. 59), which included autonomy, heroism, civic and commercial connectedness, control of resources, and executive compensation (Blount, 1999, Strober and Tyack, 1980). Gendered school roles reenforced biogenetic ideas, gender stereotypes, and perceptions about male and female school leadership. It is important to address how men and women lead differently and act as agents in the complex interplay of gender, power, and culture.

Gender Differences in School Leadership

A review of studies addressing gendered patterns in school leadership typically measure focus and behaviors according to three indicators: task orientation, interpersonal orientation, and democratic versus autocratic inclinations (Eagly et al., 1992). Eagly et al. (1992) suggested that any significant themes in male or female leadership are likely as influenced as much by organizational role expectations as gender role characteristics. Thorough discussions of gender and leadership in schools typically include aspects of (a) equity, bias, and privilege; (b) comparative leadership analysis between men and women; and (c) the central place of power in sustaining leadership.

School Leadership as Masculine by Association

Responsible analysis of management and gender acknowledges the historical and contextual realities that privilege some, while limiting opportunity, performance, and authenticity for others. School heads acknowledge that being a man advantages their leadership and that they do not think about it much (Chan, 2011; Chard, 2013, Whitehead, 2001). Jones (2008) emphasized men's higher wages, higher representation, fast-tracked promotions, and a pervasive boys' club for networking.

Chard (2013) argued the "dominance of a masculine stereotype continues to be associated with educational leadership roles" (p. 171) that rely on hierarchical leadership structures. Eckman (2004) linked masculinity's penchant for control to schools' institutional performativity, including the need to produce results and run efficiently. A "maleist" managerial discourse permeates many school sites and privileges objectivity, instrumental action, rationality, and obsessive control of internal processes and external influences (Fisher & Kinsey, 2014; Whitehead, 2001). Over time, the focus of male administrators has become less paternalistic and more entrepreneurial, competitive, and aggressive in practice, behavior, and language (Burris, 1996; Whitehead, 2001).

School administration in the United States has a gendered history (Blount, 1999; Strober & Tyack, 1980), and the unwritten rules for entry and success continue to reflect a typical masculine focus on managing risk, wielding power, and assessing loyalty (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). The cautious, ubiquitous white male leadership framework obstinately lingers, with the potential to suppress divergent values and mute disruption (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). Citing Kanter (1975), Marshall (1992) discussed the stubborn "masculine ethic" supporting school administration values, expectations, and activities. Organizations prize managers displaying male traits, which include a decisive approach to problems, analytic prowess, obsessive commitment,

and a neglect of self and relationships to advance one's work (Marshall, 1992). Marshall (1992) suggested the need to incorporate the feminine "ethic of caring" (p. 370) and "atypical" managerial values to reimagine the school leadership playbook.

Leadership Styles and Trends by Gender

Conventional wisdom has characterized male and female school leadership according to outdated, universalized, and largely unproven sex role stereotypes (Little, 1983; Morsink, 1969). At the macro level, men are portrayed as behaving as traditional managers and focusing on decisiveness, problem-solving, and "achievement of tasks in a formal and hierarchical way" (Coleman, 2003, p. 30). Women more typically reflect collaborators focused on relationships, instruction, and curriculum (Eckman, 2004; Kruger, 1996; Shaked et al., 2018). Kruger (1996), arguing gender and school culture inform whether men and women leaders feel "at home" (p. 456), found that women heads of school focus on internal teaching processes in their schools, whereas males emphasize external tasks.

Demographically, male school leaders often come from a coaching or sports background (Chard, 2013; Eckman, 2004). They start in administration earlier to support their family, pursue career ambitions, and make more money; most had male leader role models who influenced their worldview and values (Eckman, 2004). Men often seek more influence beyond the principalship towards superintendencies (Eckman, 2004). Male administrators have supportive families that make sacrifices to support their leadership, help them cope with role conflict, and attend events at school (Chard, 2013; Eckman, 2004). Sometimes male administrators, with work "colonized domestic lives" (Mulholland, 1996), encounter marital challenges based on role demands and job stress (Chard, 2013). Their female partners often assume double the emotional labor to (a) shield

them from domestic problems, (b) counsel them into confidence, and (c) relieve them of familial

responsibilities (Mulholland, 1996).

Females typically enter leadership later, after starting families; they usually have more

years of teaching experience, are less strategic with their career ambitions, and show less interest

in district level leadership (Blount, 1999, Strober & Tyack, 1980). Women tend to be more

democratic, less concerned with control, and more interested in building consensus and

interpersonal dynamics (Eagly et al., 1992; Little, 1983). Coleman (2003) contended that women

practice more transformational leadership, characterized by a motivation and instinct that

"develops and motivates staff to share a vision for the school" (p. 30). Women, by their

subordination or underrepresentation, tend to engage in more reflexivity, come to terms with

their identities, and develop a keen sense of how gender impacts their worldview, leadership

choices, and behaviors of male colleagues (Martin, 2001; Whitehead, 2001).

Data concerning gender differences in school leadership indicate a complex web of

motivations, behaviors, and loyalties. Martin (2001) suggested that organizational men mobilize

their masculinities in patterns that either *contest* (to separate from or exclude) or *affiliate* (to

align with) other men. At its most innocent, this mobilization subconsciously supports the

fraternity (generally other men) via intimate male bonding and networking; at its worst, it aims to

dominate, secure resources, compete, or gain favor and approbation at the expense of others

(Fisher & Kinsey, 2014). The next subsection further explores the role of power in gendered

leadership.

Conceptions and Use of Power

Brunner (2005) explored how broad, competing concepts of power align with binary

constructions of gender. Two main strands exist, where *power over* connotes traditional male

control and authority leveraged against the powerless, and *power with* implies a collaborative, integrative approach that democratizes power and decentralizes influence (p. 126). Masculine leaders often articulate leadership as results-driven and pro forma consensual, but in practice comes down to the decisive imposition of personal will (Brummer, 2005). Reynolds (2005) described the process where male and female leaders embody power models and gender scripts in the form of two main tropes: *prom queens* and *chief executives*. Studies show that leaders find the least professional resistance when they align with the ideals of these archetypes: feminine and not sexualized, popular and charismatic for women; competitive, well-connected, tough, attractive, and commanding attention for men (Reynolds, 2005). Reynolds (2005) highlighted the tension and conflict resulting from "the leadership goals of those studied…and the reactions of others to their attempts (how people have reacted to their embodied work)" (p. 137). Popular gendered images and presumptions hold sway, as those who "try to break the usual 'gender scripts' are seen as trouble" (Reynolds, 2005, p. 139); the result is a more carefully "managed self" (p. 139) to not rock the boat.

Current research offers conclusions that some feminine or androgynous approaches are the best options for new demands of leadership in complex and unpredictable times. Supervision that is concerned with teacher empowerment and self-esteem, intentional with interpersonal relationships, and attuned to listening and communication are promoted (Chard, 2013). Interestingly, self-perceptions of leadership by both men and women contradict universal styles or attributes of male and female leadership (Coleman, 2003; Lee et al., 1993). Coleman (2003) found the more "prevailing model of management that both sexes appear to identify is 'androgynous' in that it cuts across both sets of gender stereotypes, but it does favor the 'feminine'" (p. 31). Both men and women aspire to collaborative and people-oriented leadership;

and the prevailing "macho" gender stereotype linked to male leaders is not actually how male

school leaders view themselves (Coleman, 2003).

A fascinating milieu of personal, professional, and sociocultural worlds collide in school

leadership; personal identity, notions of self, organizational role expectations, and gender norms

layer on top of the challenging work of school administration. A look at the complexities and

tensions of typical male school leader identities helps explain their unique behaviors and stresses.

Male Identities in School Leadership

Male leaders are subject to gendered associations and high expectations for their

professional performance and self-regulation. Whitehead (2002) made the distinction between

men's personal lives and public lives, as if males are perpetually torn between two worlds. The

public man is the man who serves a purpose and fulfills a role. Walsh (2014) noted that all male

archetypes portray men "in [their] power, directed, focused, and impassioned…a man serving his

purpose is like the hunter with his eyes on the kill" (paragraph 1). Public masculine energy, or

power, is "forward moving 'doing, fixing, sorting, and achieving'" (paragraph 1). The public

man is on display and assessed regularly; the private man remains in the shadows, often taken for

granted or muted to accommodate public purposes and corporate performance. The next

subsection explains the various forces, fears, and biases impacting the psyche and minds of male

school leaders.

Conflicting Identities, Roles, and Archetypes

Hall (1997) acknowledged different assumptions related to male and female leaders,

namely that females are assumed to have competing pressures between home and work, and that

men lack complex emotionality and can sustain prolonged, singular professional focus. Rarely

addressed are the "symbiotic relationship between men's personal and professional needs and

their impact on their workplace behavior" (Hall, 1997, p. 313). Conventional wisdom suggests that male consciousness is stunted, in that their roles are paved, and their directives are clear, leaving little time or drive to consider alternative, "possible selves" (Hall, 1997, p. 315). Kerfoot and Knights (1996) warned of an unreflective self-estrangement of male managers who chase validation, careerism, and instrumental approaches to work. Masculine managerial identities sway between competing value poles, rather than produce a novel, healthier self-concept via integration.

Male school administrators wear many hats, and their leadership portfolio is burdened by gendered expectations for performance, style, and approach. School stakeholders expect them to serve many unrealistic masters (Jones, 2008). Jones (2008) asserted that men must be (a) "experts" and cultivate a self-confidence and assurance of their own abilities; (b) role models, fulfilling common sense notions that men are needed to show boys the way; (c) authoritarians and disciplinarians, wielding control, power, and ambition; and (d) family men appreciative of the sacrifices of partners, recognizing the cost on their families, and extending their fathering to their students and colleagues. Their quest rests on proving worthiness by proving sufficiency for the titles and roles they occupy (Burris, 1996; Jones, 2008).

Men Leading in Female Spaces

Men leading elementary schools face extra scrutiny in highly feminized schooling environments (Chan, 2011; Jones, 2008). Jones (2008) identified the various tensions and forces acting on the identity formation of male primary school headteachers in the United Kingdom. The research showed that headteachers, to meet varied expectations, alternate between caring and distant personas, despite their implicit wishes for more human work connections. Male principals wanted to be affectionate with children, but they worried about perceptions and felt

constraints on touching and emotional boundaries with students (Jones, 2008). The ambiguity on appropriateness for men in caring professions like school work blurs the distinction between perceived femininity or a new, reimagined masculine strength. To avoid denigration or male norm violation, male primary school principals assume traditional roles and values as mentor figures to make up for lack of fatherly influence (Cushman, 2008). It is not surprising to encounter primary grade administrators married to women, experienced in sport leadership, and interested in traditionally male activities (Cushman, 2008). Despite the male satisfaction of nurturing younger children, primary grade educators often feel pushed towards upper years of schooling to embrace more serious management and gain access to more prestige and masculine validation (Jones, 2008).

Male insecurities, drive for homosocial acceptance, and subconscious preservation of privilege remains unspoken, yet influential in work and leadership cultures (Ely & Kimmel, 2018; Fisher & Kinsey, 2012, Martin, 2001). Male self-doubt and ego precariousness are generally coupled in their work, and men develop coping strategies to minimize threats and keep fragility at bay (Ely & Kimmel, 2018). As a result, four sustaining norms may combine to stabilize unpredictability, bolster esteem, and project personal competence: show no weakness, embody strength and stamina, put work first, and "dog eat dog" mentality (Ely & Kimmel, 2018). Chan (2011) encountered a strong discourse around, "work commitment," (p. 750) where promotion and success become "dependent on the willingness of an individual to become selfless and to do more" (p. 750). One can see a complex relationship between male ego, the potential for organizational toxicity, and looming personal damage for male management gone astray.

Work as a Masculinity Contest

Men continue to be at the center of education management because of (a) a gendered history, (b) numerical dominance (representation), and (c) a "particular masculinist organizational hegemony" (Whitehead, 2001, p. 68). For men, their profession proves an additional battle ground for their masculinity (Berdahl et al., 2018). No matter the industry or the organization, men may compete in "endless 'mine's bigger than yours' contests to display workloads and long schedules" (p. 423). Defined by prevalent masculine norms and roles, *Masculinity Contest Cultures* (MCCs), the "organizational manifestation of precarious manhood" (p. 431), valorize professional stamina, work obsession, hyper competitiveness, and emotional invulnerability (Berdahl et al., 2018). Berdahl et al. (2018) compared MCCs to a "gladiatorial arena" (p. 433) that prizes self-reliance, toughness, and qualities of "ideal workers" (p. 435) that make professional life "inhospitable to work-family balance" (p. 435) and promote "burnout and workplace stress" (p. 436). In such environments, successful leaders prove to be "instrumental, decisive, and willing to take big risks" (p. 430), and there may be a "conflation of top performance with masculine gender performance" (p. 430).

Jones (2008) argued that MCCs and maleist leadership paradigms may both privilege and injure male administrators:

> Male heads are aware that they are constantly measured against the stereotype of
> hegemonic masculinity which brings both protection - through the demonstrations
> of power - and restriction in that they are limited in the conduct of relationships. As
> such, although rewarding, the role is characterized by complexity. (p. 701)

Chan (2011) suggested the benefit of honest feedback, enhanced consciousness, and review of particular social constructions to help men see "the ways they embody and understand gender can consciously or otherwise, overtly or covertly, reproduce, create, and transform gender

inequalities in the workplace" (p. 756). While the brand of masculinity in boys' schools may not be overt and the masculinity contests may not be explicit, the MCC frame informs the current study's focus on the conscious masculine identity engagement of male school leaders.

School Leadership and Moving Forward as Men

Matheus (2020), attempting to redefine masculine leadership for the 21st century, pondered a "strength that doesn't wear me out, that doesn't fray my relationships, and that doesn't cause collateral damage for those around me" (0:36). In his mentoring of boys, he has sought to facilitate their access to a fuller humanity by replacing compensatory and competitive values with sustaining and mutually empowering frames. In the model, the "four bullets" of traditional strength (power over, win-lose contests, oppression of others, and repression of self) can be replaced by the "four gifts" of modernized strength (power-with, win-win, inclusion, and vulnerability). Little (1983) suggested that the formula for leadership excellence involves overcoming limiting "acculturation," (p. 79) yet holding on to the positive role traits and values endemic to the leader's gender.

If men remain in a dominant organizational and social position in schools, and the maleist views persist, there is a very important impact on wider cultural movement. Because of schooling's important role in the production and reflection of available discourses (Whitehead, 2001), male principals and directors have a responsibility to engage in reflexive work to ensure their beliefs and knowledge confront their privileges and social harms. Healthy, humble men lead better schools. The next and final section of this chapter addresses the opportunity male school leaders have in working on their own identity, impacting equitable discourse, and contributing to empowering cultural transformation.

Men, Leadership, and Identity Work

The previous section discussed some of the conditions and settings where masculinity is most salient for managers and school leaders. The next section moves from salience to engagement, where leaders evaluate the impact gender has on their leadership and personal development. A Call to Men – a nonprofit promoting positive male activism – portrays healthy manhood as (a) having a justice oriented and servant-leader mindset, (b) preventing violence against women and girls, (c) pursuing equity for marginalized communities, (d) improving health outcomes for male-identified people, (e) inspiring gender equity and violence prevention for youth, and (f) addressing power and equity in the workplace (A Call to Men, n.d.). Their mission aligns with the modern vision and objectives of boys' schools to promote morality, courageous leadership, and social and emotional health. To advance these evolving aspirations, school administrators can survey the various experiences and values of their constituents. Doing so effectively requires cultural humility, an inclusive mindset, and a commitment to personal identity work. Gender, a key identifier and determinant of power and security, can be enlisted as an anchor for reflection and positive action in single sex schools.

Knowing the extent to which male school leaders consider their masculinity may predict where men are in the important pursuit for gender equity in all-boys' schools. McIntosh (1989) suggested the obtuseness of male privilege, which, at its worst, can lead to an unconscious oppressiveness. She added that the dominant, hegemonic actor carries with him or her a metaphorical "invisible knapsack" (p. 10) that hoards and hides advantages, escapes accountability, and upholds a myth of meritocracy. McIntosh endorsed a reflective analysis of position and identity – that seeks to test assumptions, question power, and examine privileges that "distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored group" (p. 11). Male administrators, to maximize human potential, may also consider that gender consciousness leads

to better organizational performance (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; 2008). Fostering a community of

belonging, authenticity, and equity for students and colleagues starts at the source – the meaning

making, metacognition, and personal evolution of the head of the division.

Men, Gender Consciousness, and Leadership

McIntosh (1989) described a web of interlocking oppressions in most organizations that

become embedded and escape the perception of dominant group members. To achieve full

participation, leaders benefit from promoting hidden voices and harvesting silenced viewpoints.

McIntosh (1989) instructed:

> To redesign social systems, we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen
>
> dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here.
>
> They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned
>
> advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects. (p. 12)

Whitehead (1998), to advance representation, equity, and gender justice argued for

"breaking the silence" (p. 201) on the gendered experiences of men and management. By making

the invisible, visible, gender can become a focal point of leadership intentionality and reform,

rather than fuel for subconscious manipulation and repression. Feuerstein (2006) called for

leaders to "establish the ways in which an unrecognized and unnamed masculinity may work to

perpetuate inequalities within schools and limit the potential of individuals, both men and

women, to perform at their best" (p. 8).

For most organizations, the uncontested privileges of power and influence have

traditionally resided with men, who actively collaborate to perpetuate their gendered advantage

(Deutsch, 2007; Feuerstein, 2006; Kelan 2018). Organizational researchers focus on the

intentionality, agency, and metacognitive aspects of behaviors labeled as "doing gender" (Kelan,

2018) or "practicing gender" (Martin, 2001). A look at the behaviors and patterns of gender

awareness by male managers offers a glimpse into the nature of identity work and the capacities

men may have for promoting enlightened masculinity and gender equity and in their leadership.

Liminality and Reflexivity

Martin (2006) offered an important analysis of typical organizational gender dynamics.

Interested in subtle sexism and unchallenged gender bias, Martin (2006) found that (a) gender

dynamics can be harmful, (b) are usually born out of good intentions, (c) are usually

unconscious, and (d) affect organizational performance and culture. Male actors generally lack

reflexivity – or awareness and intention (p. 256) around their gender interactions regarding "what

to do/can be done/is done" (p. 257). A key distinction is made between normalized and socially

constructed *gender practices* - "familiar, persisting, and relatively predictable content of gender"

(p. 258), and *practicing gender* – the "'literal saying or doing of gender' in real time and space"

(p. 258). The practicing of gender is dynamic and complex; it is rapid, variable, and

unpredictable. To make it more challenging, it is directional and temporal (unable to be

reversed), and unable to anticipated. The melee resembles a dodgeball game, "where taking

account of others' locations and actions is required for successful interaction to occur" (Martin,

2006, p. 259).

At the level of practicing gender and engaging in gender practices, men typically exhibit

a *liminal* awareness – employing only a tacit knowledge, generally escaping any verbal

articulation, and hardly ever linking options with consequences. Their basic modus operandi is to

"routinely and more or less constantly [do] things associated with 'acting like a man' without

reflecting on them" (p. 261). Martin (2006) suggested that organizational leadership can improve

reflexivity by focusing on agency to resist prevailing norms, enhance reflexivity to think

carefully around intent and impact, and acknowledge power structures explaining male behavior

of subordination and exploitation. Men can start by seeing and calling out their tendencies to

rescue women, compete for airtime, and explain away gender as an influence (Martin, 2006).

Researchers can assist the efforts to expose subtle sexism by collecting female and male stories

around work experiences and espousing a stance that believing is seeing to "make gender

stereotypes and their associated practices more visible and to challenge their inaccuracy" (p.

270).

Mobilizing Masculinities

Men can unwittingly bring gender to bear in organizational life; Martin (2001) labeled

this phenomenon *mobilizing masculinities*, described as "practices wherein two or more men

concertedly bring to bear, or bring into play, masculinity/ies" (p. 588). This mobilization

typically involves (a) men collaborating to mobilize their masculinities in work settings, (b) men

equating masculinities with work dynamics, (c) men unaware of this mobilization, and (d) the

potential for mobilization to harm women. Male mobilization can take the form of "peacocking"

displays of smarts or power, male fellowship (*affiliating* with other men), or *contesting,* which

serves to set boundaries and standards against which other men and women are evaluated (p.

603). Displays of alliance or competition feature the following qualities: (a) the audience is

generally other men, (b) the impact of the mobilization is lost on men (liminality), and (c) the

interactions may exploit the labor or emotions of women. Whether contesting or affiliating,

men's organizational behavior sends messages of who is part of the "in crowd," who gets

resources, and whose emotions and contributions are either expendable or valorized.

Martin (2001) warned that men – "especially white, able-bodied heterosexual, 'northern,'

professionally and organizationally advantaged men – rarely see gender as a source of privilege,

yet women often experience men's gender as an advantage and their own as a handicap" (p. 592). A check and balance for organizational understanding can be feminist standpoint theory, which prioritizes women's observations of men as an ontological safeguard (p. 592), "provid[ing] evidence [of a reality] that would otherwise be lost" (p. 592). Such *double reflexivity* – a woman researcher asking other women about men's behaviors – improves objectivity by accumulating "multiple subjective understandings" (p. 590). In so doing, standpoint theory can be corrective in addressing bias, power imbalances, and male liminality.

Invisibility and Standpoint

Whitehead (2001) examined the link between feminist advances in educational management, changes in men's leadership practices, and men's subjective perception of their own gendered identity. Questions arose around where men in management might be positioned given changing expectations and more intergender experiences. The research showed male educational leaders stubbornly embracing a gender as "a given, a universal 'fact'" (p. 77). Male participants suggested that women knew them better than participants knew themselves (p. 78), and they tended to shun, escape, or silence expansive feminist discourses. Whitehead (2001) endorsed male self-reflexivity to move men away from the center and make invisible gender forces apparent. Lastly, Whitehead (2001) urged male managers to uncover the feminist standpoint because "women have uniquely valid insights…unique knowledge of both women's oppression and men's oppressiveness" (p. 71).

Lack of Gender Knowledge in Educational Leadership Training

Focusing mainly on organizational and leadership theories, program evaluation, and methods analysis, educational leadership training generally lacks any specific instruction or dialogue about gender theory, equity, diversity, or social justice (Feuerstein, 2006; Logan &

Scollay1999; Rusch and Marshall, 2006; Young et. al., 2006). While educational administration preparation programs have succeeded in increasing female representation in higher education programs and focused on leadership job placement, they have failed in addressing limiting mindsets or equity issues through leadership curriculum and training (Feuerstein, 2006; Logan & Scollay, 1999). In so doing, they remain complicit in the role stereotyping and cultural biases that limit women's access and sustain the male power in school leadership (Feuerstein, 2006). It is not enough to support and mentor future female leaders; true change requires "changing perceptions about women held by power brokers in the employment setting" (Logan & Scollay, 1999, p. 119).

To ignore the role of gender or identity in the formation of school leaders or its implications for organizational culture and practice is missing a powerful shaper of professional vitality. Aspiring leaders enter their work in schools with a deep well of relational experiences and their own positionality. They undergo their own professional socialization and gender journey as adults. Accordingly, their work is informed by their beliefs, personal theories, and unconscious bias. It makes sense that, since we "are all subject to cultural bias…[so] the first place these stereotypes should change is in the academic setting that prepares leaders" (Logan & Scollay, 1999, p. 120).

Transformational learning, a reflective evolution around personal values and bias (Mezirow, 1997; Young et. al., 2006), models the reflexive mindset and autonomous, critical thinking that leaders need to navigate the organizational change process. School leader preparation programs that have escaped the herd and adopted a social justice and equity mindset have found partial success at deconstructing limiting gender beliefs (Young et. al., 2006). While the programs encounter normal resistance to disruptive personal reflection (distancing,

opposition, and intense emotions), the infusion of feminist viewpoints and critical theories shakes the sediment of personal experiences towards novel insights and understandings. Less direct, traditional, and consensual curriculum on school leadership silences gender meanings and permit students to "keep sexism and male privilege at arm's length" (p. 272). Possibilities for active leadership training reform include the "social justice advocacy leadership" (SJAL) model focused on advocacy and change leadership through pluralistic, ethical, feminist, and cultural lenses; such a paradigm reflects transformational learning and a critical, poststructural stance (Feuerstein, 2006, citing Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005).

Leadership and Gender Development

The previous subsection revealed the gendered self is a dynamic position constantly negotiated within a range of intention and awareness. As managers, school administrators promote personal agency, equity and empowerment, and democratic school values; as lead learners they embrace change, expand capacity, and adapt to conditions. The practice of reflexivity ties together the affective, relational, and cultural needs of organizations. To enhance performance, promote inclusive managerial behaviors, and maximize personal wellness, school leaders can take stock of their position, their power, and their natural histories as men. More generally, effective adult learning promotes increasing consciousness (Hall, 1997 citing Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 1997), and emotional and cognitive maturity involves the "trying out [of] 'possible selves' i.e. their ideas of what they might become, would like to become and what they are afraid of becoming" (p. 315). Self-concept is an organizing feature of leadership style, where taking an "overview of the self and see[ing] how the parts hang together... [can align] with the same capacities required of leadership, management, and administration" (p. 315) – namely the

triad of effective focus and knowledge described by Goleman (2013): mastering the self, the other, and the outer.

Hall (1997) lamented the limited stories and research on male leaders as men – the real but downplayed pressures and themes around marriage, children, siblings, supports at home and otherwise – a bias taken for granted or considered unimportant (when researching men leading schools). The study of educational leaders cannot escape or minimize men's natural histories – or life experiences within the context of values about power, culture, and gender (Hall, 1997). Researchers can make connections between participants' "formation of personal identity (who you are), career decisions (what you want), and subsequent leadership behavior (how you act)" (p. 314).

Whitehead (2001) argued that gender transformation makes sense for education based on a history of male privilege, the bureaucratization and masculinization of the sector, and the profession's democratic grounding in equity and equality. With advances in women's positions in school leadership and general acceptance of feminist goals, Whitehead (2001) asked how male school leaders may have changed and whether they similarly have achieved higher gender awareness. Has their gender reflexivity remained "blocked" (p. 73)? Has any enlightenment achieved been a strategic response to perceived loss of gendered power? Asking these questions indicates that the gender identity process can be developmental, resistant to change, and unfold via various moments of engagement or disruption.

Gender Role Journey

An interesting concept in the gender role conflict (GRC) literature is the idea of a *gender role journey*, a meaning-making framework that helps people "examine how their gender role socialization, GRC, and sexism have affected their lives" (O'Neil & Denke, 2016, p. 53). The

process moves people towards evolving understanding and eventually *self-sovereignty*, having

autonomy over self while living inside normative structures that restrain individual autonomy

(Stromquist & Fischman, 2009).

O'Neil and Denke (2016) described three empirically derived phases in a gender role

journey: acceptance of traditional roles; gender role ambivalence, fear, anger, and confusion; and

personal and professional activism. These phases imply a life-long consciousness of gender

experiences that is retrospective of personal history, grounded in assessments of the present, and

optimistic about future opportunities to reach full human potential. O'Neil (2015) delineated four

specific action-oriented processes during gender role transitions: (a) demonstrate ("do gender"),

(b) resolve, (c) reevaluate, or (d) integrate tensions in one's masculinity ideology. As men move

through these phases, they undergo gender role transformation and derive fuller meaning and

satisfaction from their roles. O'Neil (2015) suggested that men wishing to deconstruct sexism

and achieve psychosocial growth change their psychological defenses, face many false

assumptions, increase internal dialogue, engage in "psychological warfare," and manipulate

various symbols and metaphors for gender. If managed adeptly, the gender role journey can help

men heal their identities, see reality more fully, and manage more effectively.

Gender Filters for Leaders

Gender, as a social influence, plays out in organizations. Discerning gender's effects,

squelching sexism, and promoting belonging can be managerial superpowers in building culture

and empowering teams. Rusch and Marshall (2006) categorized various gender filters individuals

employ, which guide responses or reactions when moments of gender equity are in play. Various

filters express "value positions for gender equity" (p. 230) by reifying organizational inequities,

silencing alternative discourses, or perpetuating a white maleist paradigm. At the enlightened

end, these filters "(m)odify conduct [to enhance] equity" (p. 235) or "openly interrogate the production and reification of leadership knowledge from the standpoint of both genders" (p. 246). Less developed filters embrace anger and denial to gender challenges, prove less reflexive, and tend toward theorizing without conscious practice. Filters that acknowledge untested assumptions and "critique the testimony of experience" (p. 232), promote enabling behaviors and interventions for more equity. Rusch and Marshall (2006) suggested the shift to more productive and mature filters involves the sharing of *defining moments (p. 233)* – the experiences that open eyes and heighten awareness – and an educative stance of *care and counseling* (p. 241) - where allies advance equity through teachable moments where curiosity, not judgment, frames the resolution of sexist encounters. Which gender lens a person ultimately uses indicates "[their] stage in development of an ethical consciousness or identity" (p. 242) which approaches conflict as an opportunity to see the same situation from multiple standpoints and dissect any privilege or marginalization involved.

Male school leaders are socialized in the wider gender ecology, but they manage the unique gender dynamic in their schools. The journey they take, the consciousness they wield, and the subtle ways they promote equity influence organizational culture and performance. Moving their minds towards gender freedom requires deliberation, intent, and a willingness to identify, test, or destabilize implicit assumptions about men and women.

Undoing Gender: Disruption and Development

Whitehead (1998) discussed the tension-filled space for male leaders who cannot see themselves fully inside the dominant managerial discourse. They are "subjects working hard at trying to manage the contradictions of their won multiple subject positions within their particular public and private arenas" (p. 201). Trying to stand the heat, prove their competency, and

navigate the performativity of modern schooling, male educational leaders have a "poignant and ambiguous relationship to these managerialist discourses…[with] a "significant investment of identity in the subject position of manager, while being especially vulnerable within this new work culture" (p. 207). Their quest to be seen as credible leaders while also hold on to their humanity means they seek alternative social positions, managerial behaviors, and effective language which will "enable them to [still] be heard, and which will validate them as meaningful, potent men/managers" (p. 206). For those open to creative and disruptive personal change, "man/managerial identity work carries with it disruptive moments within, and alternatives to, dominant organizational and gendered discourse" (p. 200).

While "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987) highlights gender difference and maintains the existing male-centric hierarchy; "undoing gender" (Kelan, 2018) reduces gender difference and promotes gender equity. Deutsch (2007) argued that a feminist gender consciousness can transform the performance, culture, and belonging inside institutions. The "dismantling of gender" (Deutsch, 2007, p. 107) changes the power dynamics and inequities between men and women by encouraging social interactions that make gender difference less salient to organizational leverage. Undoing gender moves past balanced representation for women; the evolution necessitates upending the norms and discourses that reproduce gender and sustain privilege. Liberation from the grip of gender constructs promotes the "right to be equal when difference makes us inferior, and the right to be different when equality denies our specificity" (Stromquist & Fischman, 2009 citing Sousa Santos, n.d.). Confidence and security (in identity and self-concept) levels the playing field and raises the organizational ceiling for both men and women.

Holding on to Gender

Ely and Meyerson (2000) made the appealing connection between gender consciousness and enhanced organizational performance. The questioning of deeply held assumptions about work and productivity can promote effective interventions that advance gender equity and simultaneously serve organizational output. The approach makes a bold, pragmatic claim – that behaviors that injure gender equity also hurt performance. The stance favors a "generative critique… [that] locate[s] and enact[s] a vision of work and organization for men and women that is more equitable, less constrained by gendered and other oppressive roles, images, and relations, and more effective for the organization overall" (p. 592). Ely and Meyerson (2000) advocated for a concept of "holding on to gender" (p. 597) where managers strategically use a gender lens to probe complexities when looking at business or leadership problems.

Whereas most ideas on gender equity focus on remediations to further empower women, this approach digs deeper – to find where gender issues manifest as gender-neutral and have "no immediate, transparent connection to gender as traditionally conceived" (p. 599). In this model, committed leaders seek ways to contest the safe notion of gender irrelevance by focusing on organizational practices that "conflate images of work and the ideal worker with images of masculinity" (p. 599). Such a shift – of focusing on deficits with women to privileges of all men (moving from margins to the center) can be jarring and disturbing for maleist organizations. The reflexive muscle of organizations that hold on to gender exposes narratives instead of letting them draw upon "unexamined knowledge claims" (p. 604) and highlights "subversive stories" (p. 604) inside the executive suite. Gender narratives, then, serve as the anchor and unit of analysis behind corrosive work practices and behaviors. Equitable managers fight to resist the subconscious and "countless temptations to dilute, disguise, or otherwise hide our gender concerns" (p. 606).

Ely and Meyerson (2008) provided evidence that undoing traditional masculinity can save lives and increase productivity. In exploring the social norms for men on dangerous oil ships, researchers found normal male validation strategies unnecessary and irrelevant. Employees embraced a radical transparency and vulnerability that withered the toxic insecurities of traditional manhood. In routinizing asking for help, discussing mistakes, and building trust, the normal energy used for social standing shifted to productivity. These new mindsets "profoundly influenced their sense of who they were and could be as men" (paragraph 6).

Logic and Undoing Gender

Kelan (2010) suggested that there are two ways to undo gender – each involving a different kind of logic: wishing away the gender binary or destabilizing the gender binary itself. An ethnomethodological approach looks at how a gender social order is created and implies an inevitability based on normative elements and the existence of binary sex categories. In this model, using unitary logic, there is only one way to undo gender – make it less significant and irrelevant. Explanations in this "gender-neutral" model might resemble "people are just workers" (p. 183) or someone being "accepted as a colleague, not as a woman" (p. 184). Here, *sex categories* are undone, not necessarily *gendered experiences*.

On the other hand, a post-structural discursive approach treats gender as a practice where agency lies within discourses and the choice to displace them or not. This approach involves multiple logic, which exposes the "constructedness of supposedly natural behaviour, [allowing] gender to [take] on new and more multiple meanings, which ultimately lead to more legible identities" (p. 186). In this model, gender is linked to human desire for validation and self-worth, and the potential for agency allows people multiple positions for recognition and esteem. By

disturbing the binary, "offering a different and confusing reading" (p. 186), either/or logic is transformed into a both/and logic, setting up people of all kinds to be seen and known.

Looking Ahead

The role of male organizational leaders in gender equity processes is unclear based on a scarcity of research (Kelan, 2018). Secondly, gender practices are hard to observe and capture in language (Martin, 2003). The literature abounds on examples of male managers highlighting gender difference and protecting and promoting other men (Deutsch, 2007; Kelan, 2018; Martin, 2001; 2003). Male managers spend their time separating from women, seeking validation from others, and chasing status as organizational heroes (Kelan 2017). The question remains then – with new purposes and demands for all-boys schools, what is the expectation for male school leaders with regards to their manhood and leadership? Are they to "do gender" in a healthier way or shift towards unraveling gender altogether? Stromquist and Fischman (2009) argued the task is both conceptual and pragmatic:

> how can gendered representations and ideas be modified in the direction of diminishing inequalities between and within multiple masculinities and femininities? How can we undo the effects of external and internalized oppression? How can we move into practices that weaken discriminatory gender constructions and their practices? (p. 465)

Attempts at answering these questions always "involves multiple narratives and subjects, engaged in overlapping and constantly shifting conflicts over recognition, representation and redistribution" (p. 468). Accordingly, male leaders with minimal gender focus are at the mercy of muted imagination and compromised perspective.

The participants of this study and their cohort are at the top of the organizational chart and oversee the gender constructs in their school community. They are in position to model and promote the "promises and possibility of empowerment…that the school experience occupies as a space of hope and as an agency that can help create personalities that are less dichotomous...and more democratic, demanding equal rights for all" (p. 469). Whether man or woman, leaders "need to make a moral and ethical commitment to interrogate the production and reification of leadership practices that limit both genders" (Rusch and Marshall, 2006, p. 247).

Conclusion

As this review of literature has shown, men in leadership at all boys' schools may be walking a fine line between jeopardy and opportunity. In leading and serving, filling roles, and managing expectations, they put their health, status, and identity on the line. They wrestle with reconciling gender norms, personal needs, and organizational goals. Through word and deed, they teach their communities about the options for manhood and the nature of partnerships with women.

As the research has shown, it behooves men in this cohort to step back, consider their identity, and examine their worldviews. Assumptions about masculinity left uncritically examined undermine the liberatory potential of gender and tighten the restricting stronghold of traditional masculinity on the hearts, minds and souls of our men and boys. Lehrer (2020), a gender justice activist and professor, urged men to take "a critical look at the cultural soup we all swim in that we often take for granted as natural, normal, unchangeable" (6:14). She recommended, through her organization The Men's Story Project, the importance of sharing male stories of pain and conflict to humanize males and leave space for their healing and

discernment. Asking questions like: "What was I taught? Have any of those ideas contributed to harm? How can I push back and do things differently in my life, my relationships, and in my community" (Lehrer, 2020, 6:39) can lead to a healthy turning point in our journeys as men.

If male all-boys' school leaders open the aperture of their identities through a lens of inquiry, evolution, and consciousness, they are more likely to be healthier, share power, and model less vicious cycles of masculinity. Sharing stories that address men's inner lives, that examine social expectations, and invite women to the conference table can free up men and women to exist and lead authentically. This narrative study supports the worldview of Lehrer (2020) and Matheus (2020) that male strength can be redefined, that identity remains formative, and that stories can heal. Jones (2008) offered hope that an "autobiography of choice exists [for male leaders] …whereby we can become who we want to be" (p. 693).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how male leaders of private all boys' middle schools make meaning of, engage with, and are impacted by their masculinity. By using a narrative and critical case study approach highlighting individual gender journeys, I attempted to understand any significant patterns, problems, and opportunities participants experience as they lead professionally, relate personally, and care for self and others. The study was designed to elicit stories that portray aspects of gender conflict, indicate routines for managing gender strain, and hint at healthy possibilities for challenging male norms. The study involved four sequential phases:

1. A digital video participatory journal to assess personal meaning around gender and masculinity. Five different prompts focused on moments, stories, turning points, lessons and experiences about boyhood, manhood and internalized messages of masculinity.

2. A primary source written analysis of school messaging to promote active engagement with and critical thought around the participant's school and texts from websites, curriculum, or programs around masculinity. Using a worksheet, participants selected excerpts from mission statements or published communications and then analyzed the discourse through a gender lens.

3. A semistructured interview to probe deeper into gender experience.

4. Field observations of one participant case.

My role in the study as a researcher was complex. I have a background of similar experiences as I attended a single-sex high school, played and coached sports for thirty years, and have been entrenched in all boys' school professional work for nearly twenty years.

Though I entered the study with a recent consciousness towards feminism and reflexivity, I also have lived experiences with heteronormativity, competitive hypermasculinity, and a traditional masculine ideology. Having walked both masculine paths – compliant and resistant – I claimed a unique position to decipher and decode meaning through male stories. Because I can locate and appreciate a comprehensive range of masculinities in my own journey, I uniquely relate to the trajectory of gender development. Having experienced shame, fear, guilt – and now pride, peace, and freedom because of my inner work - I have avoided judgment of participants' current stage of gender identity. Because much of masculinity is unconsciously absorbed, I have not criticized the intentions, experiences, or beliefs of participants. Since masculinity is co-constructed at the social and individual level, the conversations in this narrative study naturally permitted mutual reflection between participant and researcher. During analysis, however, the focus of coding was exclusively on the actual language of participants and their representation of experience. Where I synthesized, extended, summarized, or inferred from the data, I stated so transparently in the sections that follow.

This chapter provides an overview of study methodology and is divided into the following eight sections: (a) Introduction, (b) Overview of the Research Design, (c) Participants and Setting, (d) Development of Instruments, (e) Data Collection Procedures, (f) Data Analysis Procedures, (g) Delimitations and Limitations, and (h) Chapter Summary.

Overview of the Research Design

This study was designed as a qualitative narrative study that highlighted a critical case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were purposefully sampled to represent different types of schools and men through "maximum variation" (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As Yin (2016) noted, qualitative studies tend to "generalize and to seek transferability to other situations on the basis of analytic claims" (p. 301) rather than extend quantitative generalizations to "distinct populations based on probabilistic claims" (p. 301). Yin (2016) also suggested that qualitative methods align with the reflexive nature of social science research, especially those studies that aim to explore "multiple realities and the complexity of human affairs" (p. 301). Power and equity struggles take place on the battlefield of assumptive worlds, and qualitative research seeks to synthesize the perceptions of lived experience to discern the beliefs and behaviors that impact human health and performance. The study's design and research reflected Yin's (2016) *methodic-ness,* or total approach reflecting study integrity, transparency, carefully articulated reflexivity, and "adequate room for discovery and unanticipated events" (p. 14).

Narrative Study

Narrative study represents the long arc of development characterizing learning processes that promote consciousness or transform mental paradigms (Kegan, 1995; Mezirow, 1997; Rusch & Marshall, 2006; Strober & Tyack, 1980). If we assume that suffering and thriving can be both subjective and objective experiences, then a qualitative study addressing the lived phenomenon of masculinity can complement more positivist, quantitative measures of men's health. Whitehead (1998) lamented a societal shift toward performativity and data aimed at production, while ignoring narratives that illuminate the hearts and souls of humans. Advocating for the discreet data of private male experience, Whitehead (1998) mourned the fact that in the "endless and boundless search for efficiency, 'narrative knowledge' – the 'life of the spirit and/or the emancipation of humanity'…has been marginalized, if not displaced by scientific knowledge" (p. 207). Rusch and Marshall (2006) contended that, "if we attend to the voices who choose to

share their lived experience with us, the pathway to gender equity becomes more visible" (p. 246).

Critical Case Study

To more fully understand the gender development of male school leaders who exhibit depth of meaning, engagement, and impact, one participant was selected for an additional method (site observation) and more detailed analysis to "permit logical generalization and maximum application to other cases" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159). Creswell and Poth (2018) referred to cases as being bound by parameters (for example: one school, one person), with *intrinsic* cases defined as those adding unique value or characteristics to the study, indicating a relative outlier position compared to norms, traditions, or perspectives (p. 98). After completing the first three data collection instruments for all participants, I identified a participant who stood out for his commitment to gender equity, his ongoing identity work, and his healthy skepticism of the often "unquestioned" benefit of all-boys' education. The purposeful sampling strategy for the case followed my goal to share the case themes with other leaders to glean lessons, routines, mindsets, and experiences that promote gender progress and healthy, effective leadership. The participant was invited to continue in the study with observations and follow-up conversations. The observation field notes, photographs, and transcripts became rich data sources for the case.

Worldviews

As a researcher and practitioner in all-boys schools, I have come to fear the manifestation of male privilege as an "invisibility," where the saturation of men promotes a passive acceptance of traditional masculine ideology (Kimmel, 1993) and mutes any potential for resistance to male scripts. In preparing men for lives of achievement, do schools implicitly teach the experience of power as a natural fact, mute male authenticity or vulnerability, and perhaps – at their worst –

spawn sexism or misogyny? My prior investigations and personal experience have led me to believe male reality is typically endowed by social forces we cannot even see; we toil against rigid standards biologically linked and socially encoded. In sum, our roles and espoused values often position men and boys in narrow lanes. The following worldviews informed my research design and research purpose: to uncover the gender sense-making, coping, and transformation of men who lead all-boys' schools.

Social Constructionism

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that narratives come into existence "not as a product of an individual but as a facet of relationships, as a part of culture, as reflected in social roles such as gender and age" (p. 153). Creswell (2009) further argued that humans are "born into a world of meaning, bestowed upon us by our culture" (p. 8), and they make personal sense by wrestling with their historical and social perspectives. Social constructionism hints at inevitability since most social interactions privilege some and deny others according to prevailing norms and beliefs. Especially within entrenched gender regimes, the interpretation of experience is always contested along the political lines of power and identity. Stromquist and Fischman (2009) proposed that since "gender is a social construction, it is amenable to change but, as a deeply embedded social variable, gender also tends to resist modification" (p. 473). Social constructivist worldview promotes research that is open-ended, appreciates subjectivity, shares reflexivity between researcher and participant, espouses inductive analysis, and honors the ceaseless negotiation of meaning in experiences (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Feminist Post Structuralism

To counterbalance the potential fatalism of unenlightened social construction, this study integrates a feminist and poststructural worldview to suggest the agency of men and boys to

evolve. By advocating mindfulness, rewriting discourse, and suggesting rituals and routines for gender identity reassessment, humans can create a different gender experience and story. Feminist post-structuralism "allows for a plurality of perspectives, for individuality to be acknowledged and for the 'establishment of truth' (Foucault 1977, p. 184) to be explored simultaneously" (Simmons, 2020, p. 29). Stromquist and Fischman (2009) effectively delineated the victim/agent dualism of gendered experience: "to reform social structures requires the conscious effort of subjects with a sense of agency; yet, as subjects, we live in a world of structures that precedes us and, as such, we must be subjected to those structures before we are ever to become subjects 'for ourselves'" (p. 471). Kelan (2010) endorsed a conscious and critical destabilization of discourses through *discursive displacement*, and Whitehead (1998) acknowledged the complex, tightly wound discursive "interaction involving men as gendered subjects, masculine identities, and particular ways of being a manager" (p. 200). This study mirrored Whitehead's call to "contribute to the critical interrogation of men's practices, while both illuminating and deconstructing the gendered relationship that exists between men, masculinities, and organizational life" (p. 201).

Participants and Setting

A priority for selecting participants was achieving representation across a diverse cross-section of school types. Similarly, I also wanted to achieve some sociocultural and/or racial diversity among the school leaders who were participants. This sampling goal supported study efforts to highlight common themes and significant contrasts across stories and narration around masculinity. Participants were recruited by invitation to heads of school, who then solicited their middle school director colleagues. Thirty-four invitations were sent in the hopes of securing four participants. One participant began the study and withdrew after completing the first instrument.

Securing racial diversity in the sample was a challenge, with 13 invitations sent to men of color

with only one actual commitment. Challenges in securing study participants might have

indicated a post-Covid reaction to time management and prioritization, or perhaps indicate the

perceived worth or value of such a study on masculinity for this cohort of leaders.

Four males between the ages of 40 and 60 participated in the study, and their experience

in their current role at their school ranged from 1 to 30 years. Some participants were fairly new

to all-boys' education, while others had spent most of their career in boys' schools. The types of

private all-boys' schools included three secular independent schools and one Episcopal school.

One school was urban, heavily funded for tuition assistance, and founded for underrepresented

students; while the other schools were suburban and had significant tuition requirements to

attend. One school had a boarding element and significant international student population.

Geographically, the schools represented various sections of the east coast of the United States,

including New England, the Mid Atlantic, and the South. Table 2 shows the self-reported

demographics of participants sampled.

Table 2

Participant Self-Identifying Demographics

Participant name	Age	Race	Sexual Orientation	Yrs. experience in role
Christopher	40's	White	heterosexual	5-10
Graham	50's	White	heterosexual	20-30
John	40's	White	heterosexual	10-15
Walter	40's	Black	heterosexual	0-5
Participant name	**Yrs. of experience all-boys education**	**Religion**	**Marital status**	**School Descriptors**

Christopher	15-20	Christian	married	Suburban, Christian, Independent, Day
Graham	30-35	Catholic	married	Suburban, Secular Independent, Day
John	5-10	Christian	married	Suburban, Secular, independent, day and boarding program
Walter	0-5	Christian	married	Urban, Secular Independent, Day

Development of Research Instruments

Three instruments were common to all four participants. First, participants completed five prompts regarding the personal meaning of masculinity in their lives using the FlipGrid platform (now called "Flip"). This participant video journaling allowed respondents to reflect and record their thoughts without the researcher present in up to ten-minute intervals per question. Second, participants completed a written analysis of school archival information related to masculinity using a provided worksheet template. The goal of the worksheet was to spur critical reflection and engagement with the school's stated outcomes and stance towards boyhood or masculinity. Lastly, the study utilized a semifocused interview that probed themes mentioned in previous instruments and addressed questions linked to the study's three main research questions. All three required instruments utilized the direct words of participants, honoring the main objective of narrative study – to highlight and report on the first-person stories, meaning-making, and experiences of participants. A final instrument involved direct observation of one participant case at their natural setting over a span of several days at work and at home. The critical case selection allowed a more comprehensive look at one participant's personal and professional life.

Data Collection Procedures

The collection of data for this study was entirely digital through the first three phases. In two of the instruments, I was not present. Each instrument built upon the previous one, with each instrument/method focused on a different research question. Participants were provided rough timelines for instrument completion but were encouraged to move at their own pace. Participants were sent specific instructions via email before each protocol was shared (see Appendices F and G), and they completed each instrument in order. The fourth and final data collection phase focused on one unique participant - the selected critical case.

Before moving into data analysis, all video files were transcribed, checked for accuracy, and then sent to participants to confirm data accuracy and representation for all instruments. As part of the validation process, I asked participants for voluntary demographic data to include in the study. I acknowledged age and experience ranges to help protect the anonymity of participants.

Participant responses were downloaded from the software cloud, and stored on laptop hard drive folders, with a backup file saved to a Google Drive folder protected on my school's server. Additionally, transcripts were uploaded to nVivo software for coding purposes. Access to my computer always remained secure via password protection. Both digital files and paper documents inside my journal utilized initials and aliases to protect participant anonymity. All collected narratives that listed school names or personal names were changed to further enhance confidentiality.

Video Journaling Phase: Instrumentation and Procedure

The first phase of the research employed the use of participant video journaling and the online Flip tool, "a video discussion app… where curious minds connect in safe, small groups to share videos, build community, and learn together" (www.flip.com). Participants received an

email with instructions and context for the instrument, including the individual prompts.

Participants were told that no preparation was necessary (Appendix F) and were engaged

separately with each of the five prompts. Prompts were designed to spark reflection regarding

masculinity, and each prompt had a ten-minute maximum file length. Participants relied upon

their individual laptop cameras to record their responses. For confidentiality purposes, settings

ensured that participants could only see researcher-led video prompts and no other participant

responses. Upon completion of the five prompts, video and transcript files were downloaded.

Video journaling has been an emerging tool in exploring identity constitution in

educational settings. Video journaling prioritizes the analytical lens "to address not only

exclusionary practices but also what is privileged in certain communities" (Danielsson & Berge,

2020, p. 2). The methodology promoted participant authenticity due to the absence of researcher

interventions and also provided insights to guide future semi-structured interviews (Danielsson

& Berge, 2020). Open-ended video prompts helped "direct the recorded narrative to a particular

area of interest, while also allowing for [respondent] flexibility" (p. 3). Danielsson and Berge

(2020) suggested other "affordances" (p. 4) of video journaling include: (a) inviting researchers

into various life environments of the participant, (b) complementing other empirical data by

promoting a "thick," nuanced data set, and (c) helping move future data instruments past

"surface talk" (p. 6). A suggested limitation of the method was the inability by the researcher to

probe further in real time (Danielsson & Berge, 2020).

Document Analysis Phase: Instrumentation and Procedure

The next stage included an instrument stimulating the kind of metareflection typical of

reflexivity. This study, exploring the nature of identity engagement, benefitted from a research

method promoting a critical stance toward explicit and implicit gender messages inside research

sites. Participants were asked to select three archival selections from their school's messaging

around masculinity, manhood, or their single-sex mission and write their interpretation or

reaction to that description (see Appendix G). Several prompts also asked them to comment on

various aspects of the gender regime inside their school. Responding in writing on the document

analysis worksheet allowed participants to ponder the masculine stance of their school

community.

Document analysis, as a method, "entails finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of),

and synthesizing data contained in documents [or other copy]" (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Its

utilization supported (a) triangulation of data through combination with other methodologies, (b)

the corroboration of data across methods and reducing bias, (c) providing further data on the

context within which the informant operates, and (d) suggesting situations to observe and

questions to ask (Bowen, 2009). In addition, like video journaling, document analysis allows for

participant reflection in a "unobtrusive and nonreactive" process (p. 38).

Mortari (2015) linked effective educational practitioners to qualitative researchers – both

wielding a metacognitive stance that questions knowledge, builds awareness, and actively

reviews thinking patterns. Building reflective capacity "allows people to engage into a thoughtful

relationship with the world-life and thus gain an awake stance about one's lived experience" (p.

1). Mortari (2015) suggested an ethical obligation to reflectivity – not only for its pragmatic

problem-solving purposes, but also for its liberatory potential to "degovern the mind" (p. 4). A

radical reflection seeks out and rattles loose tacit, stubborn assumptions "that structure the core

of thinking and exert a performative power over our mental life" (p. 7). The document analysis

worksheet supported the researcher's worldview that "dedicate[ing] oneself to a radical self-

inquiry is one of the most important tasks we should face not only for the research work but also

for the everyday life, and thus a main aim of education" (p. 8).

Interview Phase: Instrumentation and Procedure

The third phase for all participants included a semistructured interview on the Zoom

digital video conferencing platform, using an interview protocol (Appendix E). Narrative

interviews fit my worldview and purpose, for "interviews are designed to obtain descriptions of

the interpreted life world of the interviewee," (Wildy & Pepper, 2009, p. 24) where meaning is

negotiated, socially constructed, and holds potential for evolution. The interview included three

distinct sections: (a) questions about the experience and impact of the first two research stages,

(b) questions probing emergent themes in the first two instruments, and (c) questions related to

the three main research questions. Interviews strived to "elucidate participants' background,

personal highlights, setbacks and critical incidents" (Wildy & Pepper, 2009, p. 19) around

gender identity. To allow organic dialogue and avoid redundance around some topics from

previous instruments, not all questions from the protocol were asked in each interview. Zoom

provided transcriptions of digital recordings, and the researcher checked each transcript for

accuracy. Audio and video files were named with alias initials and saved on the researcher's hard

drive. Participants were allowed to change their name on the Zoom video before recording began

if they preferred.

In this third stage, I appeared for the first time as an active participant. Wildy and Pepper

(2009) described semi-structured interviews as "relational…facilitate[ing] a less formal

conversation where both parties may interact as equals" (p. 18). The role and skill of the

interviewer helped determine quality of data – in terms of actions, questions, and responses

(Wildy & Pepper, 2009).

Ultimately, narrative research is interpretive – with researchers and interviewees selectively showing interest in various stories and biographical elements; accordingly, the relationship is hardly neutral or value-free (Wildy & Pepper, 2009). In addition, the role of gender in the relationship and themes of the interview needs to be considered (Broom et al., 2009; Pini, 2005). With male-to-male interviews there was a *gender congruence* (Broom et al., 2009) that may have limited or enhanced various aspects of the data collection. Pini (2005) cautioned the "gendered dynamics of our data-gathering need to be recognized and analyzed, rather than ignored as subjective and/or marginalized as not central to the findings" (p. 214). Broom et al. (2009) advised that interviews "both explor[e] gender issues and [serve] as gender scripts in themselves" (p. 62).

Anticipating male performativity, I thoughtfully attempted to mediate any potential for inauthentic "impression management" in interviews (Broom et al., 2009, p. 52). First, I intended to create a safe interview space by building rapport, courtesy, and gratitude. In addition, I modeled vulnerability by being honest around my own challenges and personal development in similar leadership work. Lastly, by using varied, multiple instruments and employing methods without being present, I planned to reduce the potential for any male posturing.

Case Study Phase

Based on his engagement and the stories in previous instruments, one participant emerged as a critical case to research further. The selected case modeled a comprehensive gender journey evolving toward an intentionally activist gender equity approach. The case integrated easily identifiable routines for engaging with identity, rich and deep gender meaning structures, and careful management of masculinity impacts in his personal and professional life.

The case study phase involved several days of nonparticipant observation at the school site during school days and following the participant away from school in his personal life. During observations, I attempted to blend in and only participate or engage when invited by the case. To protect confidentiality, observation visits were framed as "professional learning visits," as the case and researcher fill the same roles in similar schools. I kept a notebook for reflection and description and used a phone camera for photographs. I followed the participant's normal schedule, as the goal was to witness a typical day in the role and not alter the work in any way. The daily schedule included meetings, general office time, academic classes taught by the case, and building rounds, where the case wandered the halls to connect with community members. Each day involved a follow up interview to discuss the day and any bracketed moments related to identity, gender, or leadership. Follow-up discussions were voice-recorded and later transcribed for review and analysis.

Nonparticipant observation, following the case in his natural environment, helped mitigate the potential bias of self-reported accounts and expanded the completeness of personal testimony. Morgan et al. (2017) offered that observation "reveal[s] insights not accessible from other data collection methods such as structures, processes, and behaviors the interviewed participants may well be unaware of themselves" (p. 1060). The observation method enriched the attempt to discern the "complexity of clinical practice" (p. 1061) by seeing what people did instead of what they say they did. An effective way to triangulate data, observation allowed me to make inferences from reported perspectives, discern tacit or reluctant participant understandings, and test reported worldview "theories-in-use" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94).

The limits of observational data included a selective attention – as the observer made choices of what to pay attention to and record – and a reciprocity – as the observed and observer

mutually influenced each other in the natural environment (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000; Morgan

et al., 2017; Yin, 2016). Scheduling several days of observational visits, and keeping detailed

field notes regarding times, activities, and people involved helped reduce bias and lack of

representativeness in the data collection (Yin, 2016). Lastly, I utilized artifacts characterized as

non-obtrusive measures, traces of human activity in the environment unaffected by the

observational process, (Yin, 2016, p. 153), to balance out the reactivity limits of the

observational influences. These props included – printed daily schedules, lesson plans, office

décor, and PowerPoint presentations and agendas from meetings.

Data Analysis Procedures

Narrative data interpretation is "a meaning-finding act through which we attempt to elicit

implications for a better understanding of human existence" (Kim, 2016, p. 190). Yin (2016)

framed qualitative data analysis as an iterative process of disassembling and reassembling datum

by "looking back" across the origination of personal, substantive research ideas and questions

and "looking forward" across a sketch of heuristic structures or data matrices through codes and

combinations (p. 194). Creswell and Poth (2018) similarly expressed the value of beginning the

analysis with a coding data template (p. 215).

Kim (2016) warned of *arbitrary subjectivity* (p. 192) in one's analysis – the appropriation

of data to fit our philosophy and / or transpose data across situations. In addition, *narrative*

smoothing (p. 192) prioritizes a good story at the expense of a faithful representation; and, as a

result, trustworthy researchers avoid important omissions and highlight helpful context for

readers. Kim (2016) offered a necessary duality in narrative analysis – "interpretation by faith"

and "interpretation by suspicion" – a binary which honors the reported meaning of participants

but also digs deeper for discreet patterns to "demyst[ify] the implicit meaning that might go

unnoticed in the first approach" (p. 194).

The analysis processes employed during and after data collection aimed to limit bias,

enhance researcher reflexivity, and integrate faith and suspicion in researcher choices regarding

data synthesis. At the completion of the analytic process, I shared the restorying of narratives and

cross-case analytic abstractions with participants to assure that my representation accurately

captured their accounts. This step aligned with the collaborative and active approach between

researcher and participants in narrative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

During Data Collection

As I conducted and transcribed data during the different phases and instruments, I

engaged in *flirtation* (Kim, 2016, p. 187) and *aesthetic play* (p. 85) – a time for initially getting

acquainted with data, noticing early reactions, and approaching emergent themes with creativity

and wonder. The transitional process from data collection to data analysis involved

"experimenting with many, different possible ideas out of curiosity [and skepticism] ….to dwell

on what is unconvincing, uncertain, and perplexing, rendering surprises and serendipities" (p.

187). Because each successive phase informed the other, I annotated transcriptions and

highlighted major, repeated themes relating to the research questions and worthy of follow up

questions during the interview. I tried to distill the important data from each instrument into two

questions related to patterns or significant moments. During the interviews, I took notes on the

protocol handout to refer to in later analysis as a form of bracketing my attention to certain

responses or language used.

After Data Collection

Upon completion of data collection, I uploaded all transcripts and texts to Nvivo for analysis. Kim (2016) described the analysis phase as a deliberative and recursive process involving four basic elements: codes, categories, patterns, and themes (p. 188). Within this phase, there were two basic approaches which guided the data analysis: paradigmatic and narrative. Sharp (2018) argued using both modes in combination allows general "descriptions of themes that hold across the stories" (p. 869) but also the rich nuance and depth of meaning inside one particular story.

Paradigmatic Mode of Analysis

Kim (2016) delineated a *paradigmatic mode of analysis*, which aims to highlight pieces of evidence "identified to form general concepts and categories… [serving as] common themes or conceptual manifestations" (Kim, 2016, p. 196). The analytic lens employed either inductive procedures to locate significance in the text or deductive analysis to apply meaning from existing theories. I chose to initially focus on codes and data that address the "predetermined foci of one's study" (Kim, 2016, p. 196) – in this case masculinity's meaning, engagement, and impact. The second round of inductive reasoning produced categories and patterns within the research questions by making comparisons and asking questions (Sharp et al., 2018). Once in those categories, I developed emergent codes that linked participant stories to existing theories from the literature review. The mode of analysis tracks patterns within or across experiences and builds an "explanatory story" (Sharp et al., 2018, p. 866); it was selected for global use across the four participants and three initial phases of data collection.

Coding schemes, like *structural coding* (Saldana, p. 297) or *level 1 codes* (Yin, 2016, p. 196) that "classify instances into categories and subcategories based on common attributes" (Sharp, 2018, p. 869) served the initial deductive phase of paradigmatic mode, linking data to the

original research questions. Once disassembled and organized by the research questions, the data

corpus was reassembled inductively, in a second phase of interpretation using *Pattern coding*

(Yin, 2016, p. 196) or *level 2 codes* (Yin, 2016, p. 196). Pattern codes effectively "demonstrate

habits, salience, and importance in people's daily lives…confirm[ing] our descriptions of

people's 'five Rs': routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships" (Saldana, 2016, p. 6).

Included below is a description of each major coding category and its subcategories.

Meaning Codes. As noted in previous chapters, gender is a socially enforced, binary

construct rooted in slowly evolving roles, ideologies, and norms. Heteronormative masculinity

carries various privileges and costs that can impact leadership, health, and identity development.

As described previously, *meaning* refers to the associations, values, definitions, and labels used

to describe, articulate, and conceptualize masculinity as a social phenomenon and personal lived

experience. Meaning also suggests the relative level of significance and salience of masculinity

as a factor in identity and self-concept.

Any analytic framework examining narrative meaning may benefit from a literary

approach that integrates temporal and plot phases reflecting development through cycles of

action, reflection, and resolution. Like traditional myths and fables, life actors experience

conflict, detach from pain, experiment with solutions, and ultimately rejoin society more fully

alert and whole. Prominent narrative collector, Bruce Feiler, celebrated life stories as crucial

drivers of meaning (2020; 2021). He found that life transitions, called *disruptors,* destabilize us –

leaving us no choice but to adapt and lean into new modes of thinking or being (2020). Turbulent

change events called *lifequakes* can spur "heartrending and heart-mending" (Feiler, 2020,

Transitions are Essential section, paragraph 7) and become *autobiographical occasions* – or

moments to "reassess who we are and modify our life stories" (Feiler, 2020, Transitions are

Autobiographical Occasions section, paragraph 7). Feiler's life change paradigm is nonlinear,

with actors frequently stopping through three various unique stages: *the long goodbye, the messy*

middle, and the new beginning (2020; 2021). Table 3 below reveals the major meaning codes,

subcategories, and code examples (which result from Feiler's framework described above).

Table 3

Meaning Codes and Examples

Major Meaning Codes	Code Definition	Subcodes	Examples of Datum
the long goodbye	This phase involves a farewell to meaning structures and contexts that will not come back. This could be difficult circumstances or simplistic or harmful worldviews (Eisenberg, 2020).	Subcodes within *the long goodbye* meaning category include early socialization, emerging constructs (ways of knowing and being), and gender roles (role modeling and role theory).	Data inside these subcodes reflect patterns formation and induction participants received about masculinity in their early lives.
the messy middle	This stage involves an active coping stance – a trying on of various identities and meaning structures, while shedding others that prove less useful or harmful (Eisenberg, 2020).	Subcodes within *the messy middle* meaning category include turning points/defining moments, major learnings, and salience.	Data inside these subcodes reflect experiences, people, or moments that heightened awareness or changed the gender understanding of the participant.
the new beginning	This step includes a new unveiling of self and active revision of one's life story, where consciousness and intention are paramount (Eisenberg, 2020).	Subcodes within *the new beginning* meaning category include personal gender ideology, professional gender ideology, and success models.	Data inside these subcodes reflect present understandings and meanings attached to masculinity that drive current behaviors and beliefs.

The temporal categories presented in Table 3 resemble the processes and phases of the

gender role journey (O'Neil, J. M., & Egan, J., 1992). Accordingly, they supply an appropriate

first level coding structure for gender meaning and support my researcher worldview that masculinity is fluid and often contested throughout the lifespan.

Engagement Coding. Engagement refers to the active focus participants bring to bear on their worlds: their inner world (relationship to self); their "other" world (interpersonal); and their outer world (relationship inside systems and organizations) (Goleman, 2013). Engagement reflects a committed stance to growth and learning as it relates to personal mastery, relationships, and leadership. At the heart of engagement with masculinity is how one comes to regard oneself as a man, partners with others to reflect on gender or identity, and wrestles with organizational elements that impact human potential.

For purposes of this chapter, *engagement* involves the extent and nature to which study participants acknowledge, feel, critically reflect on, question, perform, modify, customize, develop, or deny their masculinity in various settings. Engagement describes behaviors that span a range of agency or resistance on one hand; and compliance, uncertainty, powerlessness, and repression on the other. McLean and Syed (2016) described identity development as "the person, the culture, and the processes of negotiation between the two." In relation to identity – one's story is "a subjective, constructed, and evolving story of how one came to be the person one currently is" (p. 320). At play are the active and unconscious dynamics of *negotiation* – tension between a sense of self versus society – and *internalization,* the degree to which individuals embrace or endorse the available master identity narratives (p. 325). These fundamental meaning-making processes serve as the foundation of engagement as delineated in this study.

Watts and Borders (2005) suggested that younger males, subject to more scrutiny and early identity struggles, experience more gender role conflict than older adult males. Perhaps

there is an inverse correlation between levels of engagement and personal identity conflict; as

men develop more reflective and agentic practices, their masculine struggles mitigate over the

lifespan. Table 4 below reveals the major engagement codes, subcategories, and code examples.

Table 4

Engagement Codes and Examples

Major Engagement Codes	Code Definition	Subcodes	Examples of Datum
Inner Work	This major code represents the awareness men bring to bear in their roles. It suggests that managing others requires managing oneself, and the code reviews the ways these men report their attempts to hold themselves accountable, meet their own standards, and track their own progress.	Subcodes within the *inner work* engagement category include "routines," "reflections," and "resources."	Data inside these subcodes highlight practices that participants have developed or utilized to advance and hone their identity and leadership inside their homes and schools.
Interpersonal Work	This major code represents elements of the participant's story reflecting his commitment to others and attempts to relate to, serve, and lead them inside his home and/or school.	Subcodes within the *interpersonal work* engagement category include "leading," "developing," and "modeling."	Data inside these subcodes reflect the participant's attempts to positively influence or move people along in their development, performance, or health. Actions or strategies in this category reflect the participant's current gender ideology.
Institutional Work	This major code relates to gender themes inside the discourse, mission, or culture of the school, and the participant's meaning making of the site's master narratives (McLean & Syed, 2016).	Subcodes within the *institutional work* category include "goals", "gaps", and "good work."	Data inside these subcodes reflect the participant's assessment of where his school is in terms of serving boys, promoting gender equity, and advancing healthy masculinity.

Essentially, the coding structure presented in Table 4 represents the crucial skill of

managerial reflexivity, which involves both intention and awareness (Martin, 2006). This

capacity involves anticipation of probable outcomes, weighing options, and choosing to

maximize the hoped-for outcome in gender diverse situations. At the heart of this process is

gender equity – acknowledging and actively eliminating behaviors and discourse that limit men

and women.

Impact Coding. For purposes of this chapter, *impact* refers to (a) the manner and extent

gender identity informs or elicits problematic or beneficial behaviors, emotions, or self-concepts;

(b) the degree and nature of gender identity's influence on culture, relationships, and power

dynamics; and c) the rigidity or fluidity of subscriptions to masculine ideals. Examples from

literature representing masculinity's impact include the idea of gender role strain (O'Neil, 1981)

and men's health issues related to gender norms (Barker et al., 2010).

In trying to identify a coding structure for masculinity's impact, I was drawn to a device

used to measure health and fitness: a Whoop band (https://www.whoop.com/). The band utilizes

digital sensory technology to record and track health biomarkers. The application interface

categorizes daily effort (*strain*), nightly restoration (*recovery*), and universal device properties

(*settings*). The Whoop labels and terminology mirror this study's exploration of male strain,

men's health, and identity evolution. Tracking one's output, ensuring recovery, and actively

regulating one's thinking are the core demands of modern administrative life. Table 5 below

reveals the major impact codes, subcategories, and code examples.

Table 5

Impact Codes and Examples

Major Impact Codes	Code Definition	Subcodes	Examples of Datum
Strain	This major code represents the consequential labor and toll of leading, modeling, and managing by participants at home and at work.	Subcodes within the *strain* impact category include "career," "health," and "family."	Data inside these subcodes highlight physical, emotional, or relational challenges caused by life imbalances, professional stress, or cognitive distortions hastened by gender norms.
Recovery	This major code represents any strategies employed to protect or heal participants from the real consequences of social, familial, and professional demands.	Subcodes within the *recovery* impact category include "resting," "training," and "separation."	Data inside these subcodes reflect the participant's proactive attempts to provide self-care commensurate with the attention they pay to others in their roles and service.
Settings	This major code relates to any intentional or subconscious adaptations participants have reported because of their roles, experiences, or meaning making.	Subcodes within the *settings* impact category include "knowing," a knowledge and capacity to evaluate societal norms and meld a unique gender identity (Wilson, et al., 2022); and "being," the integration and embodiment of positive masculinity traits through their relationships, their motivation, and their authenticity (Wilson, et al., 2022).	Data inside these subcodes reflect the participant's current health, identity, or worldview forged through their developing gender identity, their meaning-making, or their evolving self-concept.

Essentially, the coding framework outlined in Table 5 represents the adaptive cycle of noticing and addressing gender role conflict and leadership strain; and then healing one's inner and outer worlds through active engagement. Resulting from this process, participants come to manifest as changed men – more aware, more intentional, and more liberated.

Figure 1

Data Coding Matrix for the Paradigmatic Mode of Analysis across All Cases

Paradigmatic Coding Structure across Cases
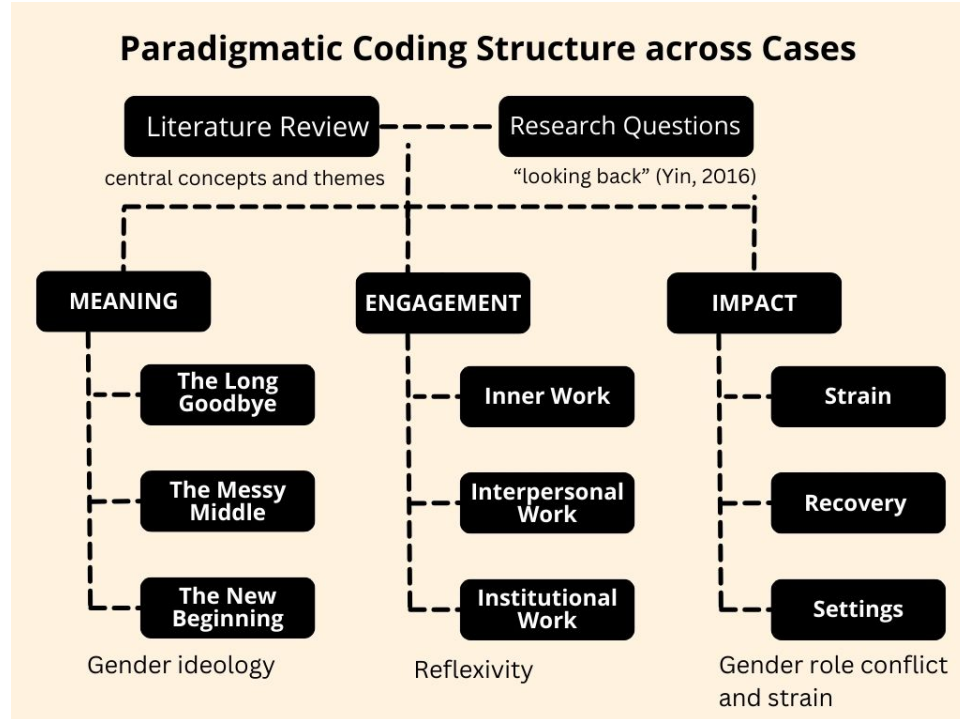
Narrative Mode of Analysis

Sharp et al. (2018) described how narrative researchers promote change and justice via

constructing a "narrative whole…. the integration of events and actions into a goal-directed

story" (p. 864). For the selected critical case analysis, which also included site observation, I

selected a *narrative mode of analysis,* which highlights "narrative cognition that attends to the

particular and special characteristics of human action that takes place in a particular setting"

(Kim, 2016. p. 197). This retrospective mode suited the critical case exploration because it

portrays a fuller contextual story, a temporal plotline, and uses narrative smoothing to fill in less

significant gaps, revealing the larger significance of the lived experience not necessarily explicit

in the data alone (Kim, 2016; Sharp et al., 2018). The narrative mode of analysis best captured

the metaphoric richness, nuance, and congruence of meaning in the protagonist's journey,

suggesting his or her "remarkability" and paving the way for an empathic understanding. Kim

(2016, p. 201) and Saldana (2016, p. 156) provided an example of Labov's analytic model, which recognizes typical literary elements inside the protagonist's life which help "[extract] the core story" (Kim, 2016 p. 202) – a developing orientation, a complicating action, a grueling evaluation and turning point, and some resolution scheme. The progression details "anxieties, desires, wishes, failures, [and] future developments" (p. 202).

The narrative mode of analysis required codes that tied the elements of a story together – like *narrative coding* (Saldana, 2016, p. 154) – suitable for holistic inquiries producing a "richer aesthetic through [the] retelling" (p. 155) of stories related to identity development, goals, and the fulfillment of purposes. Figure 2 below illustrates the data analysis heuristic used for the critical case (adapting elements from Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 216; Saldana, 2016; Yin, 2016).

Figure 2

Data Coding Matrix for the Narrative Mode of Analysis for the Critical Case
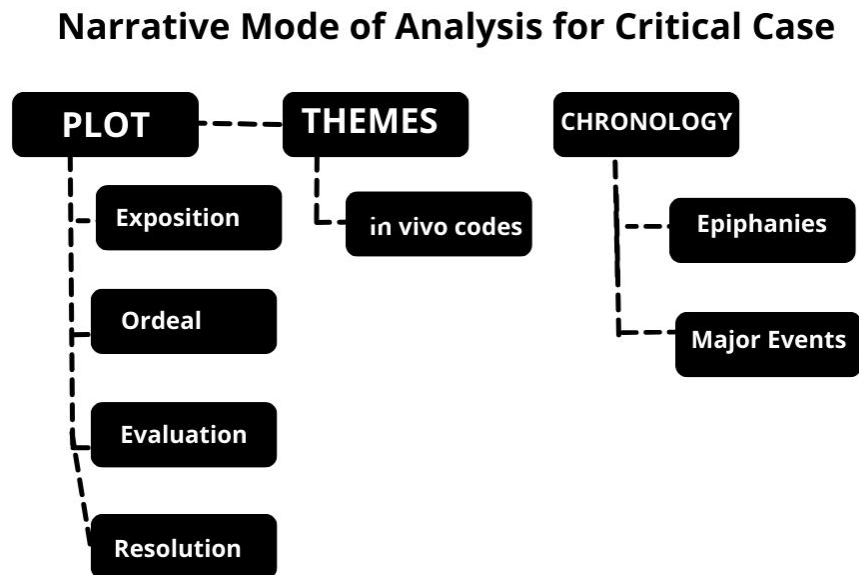
Delimitations and Limitations

Narrative study does not aim to generalize experience by measuring frequency or magnitude; it aims to richly capture how a select number of people actively represent their

experiences through story and memory. The study did not attempt to extrapolate behavioral or emotional patterns across the male leadership of all-boys' schools, nor did it strive to be predictive of future experiences of male leaders in similar roles. The scope of this narrative study was to magnify and reflect the richness of story; accordingly, the sample size was limited, resulting in a rather narrow swath of experience.

Accordingly, limits had to be placed on the size and scope of the study. Participants had to meet the following criteria: (a) current leader of an all-boys' middle school (between grades 5-9); (b) identify as male; and (c) have no previous familiar relationship with me. In sampling, there was no consideration given regarding success in role, length of experience or tenure, or nature of career path. While no specific skill set or credential was required from participants, research methods aimed to capture the representation of stories in varied formats – in writing, in spoken testimony, and in dialogue. As told stories are selective and biased, the researcher was not interested in the accuracy or objectivity of reported experiences.

Lastly, the gender congruence – between male leaders and boys (single-sex students) – limited the sample pool and the gender diversity of the school site. By limiting in this way, the study aimed to understand the salience of masculinity and permeation of socialization within a dominant male gender demographic. Male perspectives missing from the sample stories included those identifying as unmarried/single, gay, and transgender; in addition, female voices were missing from the narratives. The goal in excluding the female leader perspective was not to further privilege male experience, but more to locate nuance, tension, and opportunity in male leadership for advancing gender equity and the health and performance potential for all.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the general research design, which included a description of the four main phases of inquiry: (a) reflective video journaling; (b) school messaging document analysis; (c) semistructured Zoom interviews; and (d) for one critical case, observational site visits. I also explained the sample of participants and research settings, summarized the development of instruments, outlined data collection procedures, highlighted data analysis processes, and explained the rationale behind the study's delimitations and limitations. The chapter also explored ways the study addressed issues of trustworthiness and my unique positionality. Details of the selected research methods reflected a purposeful alignment between the relatedness of social constructivism, narrative inquiry, and the study of the data-rich lives of those "whose experiences depart from normative" (Sharp et al., 2018, p. 865).

Carefully constructed and aligned narrative research resulted in *transferability* – stories that have "an explanatory, invitational quality, with evidence of authenticity, that is, elements of adequacy and plausibility" (Wildy & Pepper, 2006, p. 22). Choices existed in how collected stories were constructed and whether my attempted retelling was relatable or rang true. The next chapter reviewed the study's results and findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter Four presents and analyzes data collected from the various qualitative phases of the study. The data collection for this study took place over one full year, during which time all participants completed a digital video reflective journal, a document analysis tool related to their school's published artifacts, and a semi-structured interview informed by the previous instruments and research questions. Based on previous instruments, one participant was selected as a critical case for further data collection through site visits and observations. Data are presented using descriptive paragraphs, direct quotes, and excerpts from written analysis or interviews that demonstrate themes that emerged during data analysis. The guiding research questions are used to organize the presentation of the data and discussion of findings. This chapter is organized according to eight sections: (a) Introduction, (b) Participant Profiles, (c) Narrative Analysis, (d, e, f) Paradigmatic Analysis and Major Findings for Research Questions 1,2,3, (g) Narrative Analysis and Findings of the Critical Case, and (h) Summary.

Narrative Participant Profiles

Four men agreed to participate in all required aspects of the study**.** What follows is a description of the study participants, including demographic data and a brief description of their espoused masculinity, positionality, and emerging worldview.

Christopher

Christopher is a mid-career educator with significant experience as a director and dean in all-boys' middle schools. He has a traditional student-athlete background, excelling at two major sports through college. Christopher's early life was dominated by the role of little brother – learning about masculinity by watching his brother and father engage in relationship. His ability

to "keep up" informed a rather traditional male ethos of hard work, toughness, and competition.

His college years included exposure to the misogyny, debauchery and hypermasculine behaviors

of athletics and fraternity life, providing a sharp contrast to his present reformed brand of

manhood. Christopher's current role of father to a boy informs much of his thinking about boys

and gender. His main professional priority is male formation – the teaching, learning, and

enforcing of aligned actions, words, and values through character development. He prizes

expansive, contemporary masculine virtues and capacities and approaches his work from a

counselor perspective – looking to know and build relationships with boys to root out and

overcome their disconnection and isolation. His leadership is a living embodiment of

unconditional positive regard, where he models inclusivity, reflection, and hope for boys. He has

cultivated a keen social and personal awareness of "checking himself" to harness his masculine

energy and ensure he is modeling comprehensive human traits.

Data reveals Christopher is a champion of healthy, positive masculinity for his students.

He is beginning to ask big questions about what is in the best interests of their development as

boys. Regarding adults on campus, Christopher tends to reflect on qualities, mindsets, and

characteristics as androgynous, "human" traits, where morality and courage apply equally to men

and women. His mostly gender-blind frame sees people as more alike than different and held to

the same noble standards. In instruments, he acknowledged that he does not consider masculinity

often, and his reflections on male privilege are in the infancy stages. Christopher seems ready for

an advancement of his gender equity frame, but currently most closely adopts the *rose-coloured*

glasses filter (Rusch & Marshall, 2006, p. 238), where actors face gender interactions "with

uncertainty about the origins of the dynamics…[and] typically [look] for explanations other than

sexism" (p. 238). People who wield this filter also "[tend] not to reflect deeply on the meaning of

complex gendered interactions or were confused about what they should think about them" (p. 238). While Christopher is further along in his gender role journey stages at the personal and interpersonal level (O'Neil & Egan, 1992) - integrating positive traits as human and non-binary, his organizational leadership may benefit from developing a more complex and courageous gender equity filter (see Appendix I for example narrative excerpts).

Graham

Graham is a middle aged, veteran of the boys' school world. He has three decades of service to his school, having been in the director role under four different school heads. Graham is an insider, having attended his current secondary school as a student, excelling as an athlete and leader on campus. He has several graduate degrees, prides himself on being a lifelong learner, and values professional development. He is drawn to the work of leadership – having served a s a high school and collegiate athletics team captain. A series of defining moments mark his masculinity: the death of his father at a young age, the dissolution of his first marriage, and the early presence of an influential mentor-coach. Currently, Graham deeply respects and understands a comprehensive version of masculinity – one which integrates the full range of social and emotional skills to learn, grow, and lead for success. Graham is a realist – he knows the work boys need to actualize is messy, necessary, and fraught with disappointment, tensions, and cultural antagonisms. His leadership is one of intention, purpose, and modeling; he values social-emotional intelligence and relational awareness. His feminism is informed via the memory of his early missteps and a sensitivity to the power dynamics inherent in formal male authority.

Data suggests Graham is a throw-back; he revealed a longing for earlier times when people could work through conflict directly through dialogue. Graham resents cancel-culture, where people lose credibility and trust via honest mistakes. He would rather have a transgression

pointed out, have the hard conversation, and move on as better informed. He reveals some

trepidation and discomfort with social change and the inherent loss of control and predictability.

Graham fears the weight of being judged or misunderstood and not getting it right. The most

senior participant in the study, Graham works hard to stay up to date with norms and political

correctness but rejects those who rush to judgment rather than understanding and assuming good

intent. Graham has always demonstrated an openness to evolving and enlightened masculinities,

but his narratives indicate the loss, grief, and labor men experience as they embrace vulnerability

to keep up with changing times. Graham seems more interested in education and accountability

rooted in empathic conversation, rather than shame and an "us-versus-them dynamic that

'amplifies the problem rather than addressing it'" (Dubin, 2022). His testimony suggests that

gender equity advocates need to differentiate their messaging and approaches in building

alliances with men of different age cohorts (see Appendix J for example narrative excerpts).

Walter

Walter enters school directorship with considerable experience as a diversity, equity, and

inclusion practitioner. Fairly new to single-sex education, his practice and leadership are

informed by a background in counseling and his own identity work. Inherently empathic and

emotionally sensitive, Walter's masculine formation centered on traditional male approaches to

urban life focusing on survival, toughness, and loyalty. Growing up without his father, Walter

relied on the women in his life and "the block" culture to teach him about self-sufficiency,

respect, and manhood. His transition to boarding school and college presented him with

opportunities to wrestle with gender roles, sexism, and homophobia; at the same time, operating

in mostly White cultures presented Walter with challenging expectations of sociocultural

assimilation and uninformed bias. His work with students centers on expanding their emotional

landscapes, counteracting gender norms, and creating a culture that moves past survival and low expectations towards a supportive ecology embracing "kindness with no cost."

Data revealed Walter's depth of social awareness and committed inner work (see Appendix K for example narrative excerpts). As a man of color with extensive practice in both DEI work and counseling therapy, Walter has developed the tools of reflexivity – intention and awareness – in his practice (Martin, 2006). He is comfortable participating in spaces where reflection, admitting fear, and embracing discomfort are part of the work. He has developed a keen sense for learning, employing, or upending the different rules, expectations, and perceptions that come with mixed company in a variety of contexts. Walter is capable of leading people because he has been a "tightrope walker studying other tight rope walkers" at predominantly white institutions (PWI) his whole life (Haynes, 2022). Accordingly, he is skilled in "complex perspectives and coping strategies" and demonstrates "a spirit of resistance to race-gender stereotypes" (Haynes, 2022, p. 30). He has vast experience in "creating spaces for [himself] in environments that are simultaneously policed, contentious, hostile, and liberating" (p. 30). Walter's competencies spawn *coalitional activism* where transparency, agency, and accountability lead communities to address intersecting privileges and oppressions inside systems (Jones, 2010). Walter's life experience growing up as a black man in an urban environment means he had to learn to navigate the world in a much different way than the other participants in this study – mainly white males of relative privilege; accordingly, his gifts came from his navigation. His unique path leads to an interesting question: do suffering and struggle lead to better leadership? (Jones, 2010).

John

While not a rookie in the field, John is a novice in the boys' school world, having served in various capacities in coeducational schools most of his career. John comes from a "school family," his father having been a school leader while John grew up in another country before relocating to the Midwest. The international experience broadened his sociocultural perspective, establishing a formative sense of being the "other" among indigenous populations. John also experienced impactful lessons at youth summer camp programs that emphasized 21st century skills, outdoor education, and female empowerment. Accordingly, his worldview leans into teamwork and the female viewpoint, resulting in a committed equity mindset. John remains a healthy skeptic of boys' schools, open to their strengths but also realistically seeking their growth points. Because of this doubt, John examines school life through a reflective, critical lens. His wife remains a crucial thought partner for John as he explores boy development, leads female staff, and raises his own sons. His journey integrates his own internal work with a global lens and social justice orientation. His school and family life are made dually joyous and complex by nature of his service to the school's residential life community. John's striving for students, staff, and self demonstrates exemplary passion, humility, and conviction.

Data illustrates John is a committed feminist. He works hard to uncover and dissect his privileges and use his position to advance gender equity (see Appendix L for example narrative excerpts). For John, single sex education is not a holy grail – its validation as an educational model comes from a collaborative and concerted effort to acknowledge and remediate its main structural deficit – the lack of full gender inclusion. As an outsider, John entered all boys' schools with an essential question – how can boys better themselves without any expense to women and girls? John's narratives suggest he embraces the *outsider within* lens, rejecting full insider status, challenging the dominant tropes, and "intentionally [using] his complex

background, his ability to walk in several worlds, as a lever to advance gender equity" (Rusch &

Marshall, 2006, p. 244).

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis permits researchers to "move beyond efforts to describe a

universalized, orderly social world and to put themselves in touch with 'local knowledges'"

(Ospina & Dodge, 2005, p. 143). Hearing participant stories allows us to interpret and experience

their world, rather than explain or predict it (Ospina & Dodge, 2005). The approach accesses

unspoken and subliminal understandings to uncover personal meaning structures. As a fellow

member of participants' professional and personal space, I appreciate the narrative lens for its

emic over etic approach – it spawns an insider partnership and aim to "understand intention and

action rather than just explaining behavior" (p. 146). If school leaders manage the delivery of

services and control for quality, narratives serve our inquiry since stories illuminate "identity

judgements that influence how [participants] treat clients" (p. 151). First person narratives assist

researchers "interested precisely in seeing how participants interpret the work they do and how

those interpretations tell us something about leadership" (p. 150).

While the paradigmatic findings for a sample size of four participants may not prudently

permit a wider extrapolation or generalization of themes, narrative analysis does not require or

suggest that need. At its core, narrative inquiry can inspire an ethic of curiosity that promotes a

more inclusive, compassionate, and nuanced understanding of identity. The intentional telling

and retelling of life stories move us along the path of transformative learning, heightens our

consciousness, and develops the capacities needed to navigate life transitions (Feiler, 2020;

2021).

As referenced in chapter 3, narrative coding was first performed deductively according to the three research questions; later subcodes were inductive and derived and refined simultaneously with close reading of the narrative text. The research questions provided three main thematic categories: meaning, engagement, and impact (which have been further divided into more specific subcategories).

A presentation and analysis of data with a delineation of findings for three guiding research questions follow. Sections for each research question include the data presented and evaluated according to each instrument used. Each section concludes with a delineation of findings for each of the three guiding research questions. The next three sections present and analyze data for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3, relating masculinity's meaning, engagement, and impact for participants over their life span. Each section concludes with a delineation of findings for the research question.

Research Question #1: What do middle school directors of all-boys' private middle schools report are the patterns of meaning ascribed to masculinity in their personal and professional lives?

This research question focused on participants' developing masculinity from their early experiences, across narrative turning points, and through their current meaning structures. Tracing this evolution helped contextualize their reported navigation of identity conflict, relationships, and roles. Analysis of instruments through the lens of meaning supported our attempts to learn about the gender story of participants across their lifespan. Tracing the narrative arc of masculinity's meaning for participants explores how their formation as boys and young men has informed their leadership development, role fulfillment, and current worldviews. As shown in Figure 3, the gender story is a useful frame for analyzing and reflecting on distinct epochs and transitions in identity and self-concepts (Feiler 2020; 2021; O'Neil, 1992).

Figure 3

The Gender Story of Participants

The Gender Story

Below is a figure highlighting the paradigmatic analysis and major coding scheme for research question #1 related to the meaning of masculinity for participants.

01 The Long Goodbye
Participants' early life is dominated by learning the rules of "the project" of becoming a man.

02 Complicating Experiences
An event or situation intensifies the gender "training" of participants, complicating their development.

acceptance

integration ambivalence

activism/anger

The New Beginning
Participants integrate a more balanced, conscious, and healthy view of masculinity that serves their professional and personal goals.

The Messy Middle 03
As participants mature and encounter the world, they try on new perspectives, engage with their identity, and question controlling life principles.

05 Participants have experiences that inspire reflection and change in their identity and understanding of manhood.

Disruptive Moments

04

Note. This figure represents the cyclical and iterative stages of masculine meaning using Feiler's paradigm (2020; 2021) for life transitions. The figure places O'Neil's (1992) gender role journey process stages prominently in the center of the diagram.

As Feiler (2020;2021) suggested, life experiences and resulting narratives rotate people in and out of various stages of meaning over the lifespan, and each individual's life transitions may begin or end in different stages resulting from their unique life circumstances. Practically, this

means that not all men need to shed their worldviews or start over with their identity; however, the cycle proved useful as an organizing structure for data analysis. The gender story framework suggests that men, to varying degrees, engage in critical, ongoing processes where they reflect, struggle, and refresh their beliefs and values related to gender and identity. The requirements of modern leadership reward those who have been able to accelerate this cycle and engage in frequent cycles of introspection and modification.

Presentation and Analysis of Data for the Digital Video Journal

Flipgrid responses served as the main tool for exploring participant meaning making around masculinity. While other tools addressed meaning indirectly, the digital prompts focused the leaders' reflections on their gender histories and worldviews. Participant narratives highlighted patterns of early socialization, times of identity struggle, and pathways to new understandings. The presentation and analysis of data for Research Question #1 below follows the three main meaning codes (the long goodbye, the messy middle, and the new beginning) and instruments used (digital video journal, document analysis, and semi-structured interview).

The Long Goodbye

The long goodbye is the beginning phase of meaning in their early years, where participants learned the rules of the masculine game. The phase is marked by explicit and implicit messaging around gender, various stakeholders and allies in the socialization process, and controlling social constructs. Participant narratives called to mind significant memories on their training in manhood. As shown in Table 6, participants highlighted specific aspects of their upbringing that reflected the dominant gender paradigms of their childhood. Their education included internalizing traditionally defined sex roles and hegemonic conceptions of the inner and outer worlds of men.

Table 6

Phase 1 of Meaning: The long goodbye

Christopher – The Long Goodbye		
Subcodes	**Descriptive Summary**	**Exemplifying Statement(s)**
Early socialization	Christopher lived in the shadow of his older brother and father's relationship, which centered around athletics and competition.	"…my childhood up until probably about the age of 22 or 23 was the be tough and don't show weakness and my life really was very sports driven…" (Flipgrid excerpt)
Emerging constructs	Christopher has not found himself in typically gender diverse situations, instead finding a home in traditionally masculine-associated activities and groups. These experiences supported his adoption of the typical binary constructs.	"You know, I think probably, I mean, I've lived a life where a lot of my activities are based on sort of male dominated arenas." (Interview excerpt)
Gender roles	In Christopher's home, dad managed performance and accountability, and mom acted as a softer, emotional balance for his development.	"I think looking back at my own father…he's very firm and there was some fear for me at times of him and I, you know, I think at times there's healthy fear for a parent to have to make sure their kids know the boundaries." (Flipgrid excerpt) "[My mother] had a nice balance for me, of being caring and gave me a sort of soft side because…I think those go hand in hand unfortunately with you know female/male sort of breakdowns." (Flipgrid excerpt)
Complicating Action	Christopher was the little sibling in a sports-dominated family. He was afforded the ability to observe masculinity expressed by his father and older brother.	"So masculinity and sports went hand in hand for me. I'm having an older brother who is 4 years older. I got pushed around a lot physically." (Flipgrid excerpt)
Graham – The Long Goodbye		
Subcodes	**Descriptive Summary**	**Exemplifying Statement(s)**
Early socialization	Graham's father modeled stoicism and independence for him.	"…expectation of me growing up was to be strong, to be smart, to not cry, to not show emotion and to be fearless in many ways." (Flipgrid excerpt)
Emerging constructs	Graham learned at an early age that competition, winning, and power	"Run away in I kind of fight or flight response, right? So if I was in a situation where it wasn't clear that I would be on

	were the monopolized domain of men.	top, I'd get out. Being competitive, I think some ways ties into masculinity…" (Flipgrid excerpt)
Gender roles	Graham's model of marriage revolved around female dependency and a man's worth centered on provision and protection.	"…raised in a household where we had a hierarchy…very conservative in terms of that model…man should be the provider in the home." (Flipgrid excerpt) Graham received advice from his late father to "marry a woman that needs me…[and his preference to be] welcomed when you walk in the door by your wife, who would cook, clean, and raise kids." (Flipgrid excerpt)
Complicating Action	Graham was impacted deeply by the loss of his father at age 12. Quickly, he became the man of the house at a young age.	"I unfortunately lost my father at age 12." (Flipgrid excerpt)
John – The Long Goodbye		
Subcodes	**Descriptive Summary**	**Exemplifying Statement(s)**
Early socialization	John was into typical "boy things" as a kid – sports and outdoors activities - but he distinctly remembers the tomboy, adventurous side of his younger sister, considering her a notable active and strong counterpart.	"…again, I go back to some of the masculine sayings I've heard - 'stick to your guns' and 'only the strong survive' and things like that." (Flipgrid excerpt)
Emerging constructs	John learned at an early age that the traditional binary is an oppositional dynamic, not complementary.	"You know, I think traditionally that masculinity and femininity have opposed each other, and I don't like that. But there seems to be an opposition that if one is masculine in one factor in one aspect that that he wouldn't be feminine in that aspect. So there always seems to be this you can't be masculine and feminine at the same time, and it tends to be that masculinity was often viewed as being more of a power, and to be honest, more of a positive attribute to define someone, and certainly when it comes to being a boy or being a young man traditionally." (Flipgrid except)
Gender roles	John's early life was marked by his father's career as school leader. His family traveled and adapted based on his father's	"As I mentioned before I grew up in a pretty patriarchal home. Dad goes to work; mom stays at home environment." (Flipgrid excerpt)

		career ambitions. The family's existence in foreign lands was marked by rigid sex roles native to the local population.	"The notion of masculinity I think was rooted in the very traditional sense of male and female norms and masculinity and femininity and what I mean by that is it was a wonderfully straightforward existence. My dad had built us a cabin up there…he was an educator… he was a moose hunter and a bear hunter and trapped Beaver and mink and all sorts of other animals…he would pull me out of school for days at a time to go cut firewood and my mom was the caretaker at home and she worked with some of the [local] women on [their art and crafts]." (Flipgrid excerpt)
Complicating Action	John's early life was impacted by the experience of being the "other" in indigenous communities. He also had experiences of allyship and gender equity in summer camp programs. Most of his friendships were with girls, and he did not connect with the single sex middle school he attended after a coeducational elementary school. We can see in his early stories a discomfort with the prevailing norms and tropes around him.	"It was very much a boys will be boys' type of environment, and I was a sporty kid and all of that…But I found that most of my friendships but most of my good friendships were with girls, and I think I did have a slightly higher emotional quotient than a lot of my male friends." (Flipgrid excerpt)

Walter – The Long Goodbye		
Subcodes	**Descriptive Summary**	**Exemplifying Statement(s)**
Early socialization	Walter's early male life centered around assessing the environment, threat management, and establishing credibility in the neighborhood.	"But in terms of my, my story as it relates to masculinity, it was pretty early on and it was, it was really about anger, you know, anger and what the kids these days will call, will call swag. It was really about not letting anybody mess with you. Also being charming and being able to get people to do stuff for you if you needed it. Definitely being able to fight, not being scared of anything and you know, showing no emotions. So your range of emotions was anger or unaffected." (Flipgrid excerpt)
Emerging constructs	Walter learned that masculinity is imposed on you by others. It is oversimplified and always in	"But, that training was very early, it was pretty consistent early on and it was simple, you know, it wasn't like that complicated,

	contrast to femininity and other lower male expressions. Therefore, it is policed and must be proven to earn approval or status.	which is always kind of the fascinating part. Gender identity is a complicated thing, but it was simplified. It was distilled to these few things and those messages were pretty clear from a variety of people." (Flipgrid excerpt)
Gender roles	Walter's mother and sisters put Walter's needs first. It was clear he was placed on the path of opportunity for a bright future with education and career.	"I have two older sisters and because I was a boy, specifically because I was a boy, I got to take advantage of two life changing opportunities. I got to go to this magnet school called Mount Hall in Harlem. My oldest sister couldn't go to that one because it was in Harlem…And then there was a program called Prep for Prep that my oldest sister could have applied for, and I can't imagine she wouldn't have gotten in because she's super smart and again wasn't allowed to because she was a girl. And so that's also a big part of my story, being a boy and the opportunities that that afforded me because of my mother's perception of what she thought what her job was. As a mom. And it was to protect her daughters and to let her son take advantage of things of, of opportunities." (Flipgrid excerpt)
Complicating Action	Walter's father abandoned him at an early age. He was raised by women in an urban environment that prized "street code" for male behavior. The men in his life were influencers in his neighborhood or celebrities in sports or the music industry.	"My father wasn't around and so I was just looking to the men around me to help me to find masculinity in manhood. What I saw were, you know, my uncle, my stepfather came into my life pretty early and then the dudes on the block, you know, and then eventually images of hip hop and sports." (Flipgrid excerpt)

As Table 6 shows, participants acknowledged their gender training was complicated by circumstances outside their control (complicating action), clear expectations on gender roles, and implicit, binary principles that guided self-expression as men and women. Several dominant themes inside the masculinity "project" emerged - participants, all between 35-55 years of age, encountered similar pathways to manhood. They scanned the landscape for appealing models of manhood, integrated traditional masculine traits and worldviews, and developed a comparative notion of gender grounded in an idealized binary system.

While recent studies have shown more inclusive and liberatory gender paradigms for

men, this study's participants, having grown up in the 1980s or earlier, experienced several of the

dominant themes of traditional manhood represented by David and Brannon's model of

masculinity: "no 'sissy' stuff; be a big wheel; be sturdy as an oak; and give 'em hell" (Anderson,

2018, as cited in David & Brannon, 1976). The concept of *generational masculinity*, age cohort

differences in masculinity, suggests a progressive understanding of manhood for younger men,

with older men having been exposed to homohysteria and restrictive, overly aggressive models

of manhood (Anderson, 2018). Participants revealed several early insights into the process of

becoming a man; by surveying their own identity process later in life, they turned their boyhood

socialization into an object of reflective, engaged study (Kegan, 1994). As shown in Table 7,

participants acknowledged the enduring, narrow, and prevalent repertoire of options available to

them for expression as boys.

Table 7

The Long Goodbye: Reported ways of knowing and being as a boy

Masculine Construct	Descriptive Summary	Exemplifying Statement
No sissy stuff	This theme manifested as a social policing of weakness, linking dependence and vulnerability to femininity, and a bonus placed on male aggression. This model rewarded stubborn courage, risk-taking, and independence.	"the expectation of me growing up was to be strong, to be smart, to not cry, to not show emotion and to be fearless in many ways." (Graham) "And I just remember this time I think I was like 5 years old…and my aunt…she liked to mess with me a little bit…she was like "what you want to hit me? You want to hit me?" And I remember being like "I do." "I do" with me thinking like - those are the only options I have. It's either be angry and fight or something else and it starts there…my aunt kind of pushing my buttons and just really having no space for any other emotions other than my kind of anger or being somehow charming. (Walter)

		"my father told me don't cry when I pass away." (Graham) "I got pushed around a lot physically by him playing sports in a good way…it taught me a lot and I got hurt. I would get tackled and I would, you know, whine and cry and they would push me over towards a ditch to make sure my mom didn't see me hurt, but it was a gambling game where I would win baseball cards if I could get by them." (Christopher)
Be a big wheel	Participants described the youthful appeal of promiscuity and the prize for accruing respect as the top dog in their networks.	"[behaviors] with women, and you know whether it be because of alcohol or sexual things. I think there was a feeling of needing to have multiple girlfriends or doing certain physical acts to be masculine. To show off." (Christopher) "[being a man] meant promiscuity. It meant kind of physical dominance. It's just about respect. Don't disrespect me, I won't disrespect you. And if there is any kind of disrespect then let's throw the hands." (Walter)
Be sturdy as an oak	This theme represented participants' need to learn self-sufficiency and stoicism. Their limited emotionality and protective instincts prepared them for a cutthroat, competitive world ahead.	"And football, my 7th grade and 8th grade year there was a ton of anxiety for me, and I didn't share it with anyone ever. Just about how nervous I was getting hit and getting hurt…In 8th grade I was invited to play on the JV football team, and I showed up for tryouts in the summer and I just sat in the locker room. I never went out to the practices for two straight days because I was so scared of going out, and I think you know that was for me the first time where really, you know, just the 'be tough,' 'be tough' kept banging around my head. 'Alright, I've got to do this,' and I think you know that was a good thing because eventually as I got to my sophomore and junior year, that was a positive force to make me overcome, you know, a fear." (Christopher) "boys or young men who ask for help are weak…in terms of compassion,…those are who are empathic, those who commiserate with others, tends not to be a masculine characteristic…Be strong, overcome, push things down" [was the standard]" (John)
Give 'em hell	All four participants discussed the important role of sports and	"… [for sports] the raw energy and anger that…I thought you had to play with or the bravado or the… 'I'm going to take you down' aspect…the kind of

	competition in their early efforts to become men. Leadership required toughness and rigidity. Their competitiveness on and off the field taught zero-sum outcomes – either you win or have power; or you lose and give away power.	measuring yourself against others that was kind of inherent to masculinity." (Walter) "… [as a camp counselor] a feel of having to…do things to the younger boys to…get to them…like a fraternity feel almost of giving them activities to do that were definitely hazing." (Christopher) "establishing a certain level of dominance in relationships. Almost very stereotypical. Trying to be strong. Not lose a fight so to speak. Never run away in a kind of fight or flight response, right?" (Graham)

In their narratives presented in Table 7, the men highlighted a limited repertoire of acceptable feelings and robotic redirection when they encountered pain, emotional conflict, or threats to their image. Athletics and leadership represented a model of power and competition that supported dominance rather than collaboration and humility. The men looked back regrettably on pervasive and toxic post-adolescent behaviors experienced in their neighborhoods, in their schools, and on athletic fields. The oversimplification and incompleteness of the male model left the participants with internal conflict and feelings of being misunderstood, undervalued, and unsuccessful.

The Messy Middle

Narrative inquiry and life stories highlight transitions that promote new understandings (Feiler 2020, 2021). Via recognition of disruptive memories and moments, participants described significant changes to their ways of knowing and being as men. The transitions launched them into exploratory struggle, where they wrestled with aspects of their self-concept, core beliefs, and approach to relationships and community. Rusch and Marshall (2006) found power in *defining moments*, or eye-opening experiences that "have promise to engage and challenge, to disrupt existing patterns *and* to assist in learning ways to reduce gender tensions" (p. 240). Participants readily called to mind the experiences or moments that ignited reflection and adaptation.

Experiences of shame, surprise, or regret for not being more authentic, inclusive, or thoughtful stayed with them and led to change in identity, values, and leadership.

Gender turning points were durable stories bracketed in memory and indelibly stamped with emotion, trauma, disappointment, or eye-opening awareness. Oftentimes, it involved a realization that limiting or oversimplified constructs did not match the nuance and complexity of reality. Participant's willingness to claim ownership of their story and identity became a rebellious act of courage and protest. Table 8 highlights stories of notable transformative experiences where participants adjusted their beliefs or heightened their critical consciousness.

Table 8

Gender Turning Points Described by Participants

Descriptive Summary of Event	Effect on Gender Meaning and Consciousness
Walter attends boarding school.	"there the story of my masculinity becomes about not being aggressive…I kind of tried to mute myself a little bit when I got there because I felt so…I felt so different and it was fear inherent into people's reactions towards me that there was… there was an awareness of trying to tamp that down… it was like this feeling of being dangerous and wanting to check that, you know, wanting to check that ..at that school, in that environment." (Flipgrid Excerpt)
Walter has a gay roommate.	"I never questioned my sexuality, but it was…it was the idea of why can't this person who was my friend, who's gay, why aren't they a man? I don't understand. I'm beginning to reject that concept and seeing how powerful it was for me to reject it and what that meant for someone like me to reject that, to reject homophobia." (Flipgrid Excerpt)
Graham becomes the man of the house.	"I was exposed to some feminism in the late 1970s. I was educated to see equality because now I lived in a household with two women, my mother and my sister." (Flipgrid excerpt)
Graham takes an impactful class.	"The most powerful class I took was actually my senior year called Power, Conflict, and Violence in the American Family…in the class of 55 students there were five men. That was life-changing for me and understanding how men in many ways, not all men, but some men oppressed, repressed, and created environments for women where they felt unsafe." (Flipgrid Except)
John goes to college.	"it wasn't until where I went to college, which is 60% girls and 40% boys where I really started to understand better the roles and the stereotypes and the expectations of boys and girls and men and women, particularly in the

	United States and so I went from a rather conservative private Midwest Minnesota town to an exceedingly liberal campus college existence, and I felt much more comfortable there, and I think it's one of the reasons that I really have found the East Coast to be my home." (Flipgrid except)
John has a foster daughter.	"one of the turning points happened when we became foster parents to a girl, and to have someone who I now consider a daughter and she calls me dad and calls my wife Mom has further changed the bar to which I hold myself in terms of modeling and encompassing masculinity. Because you know and with you know Roe V. Wade overturned, and I viewed it through a much different lens as the father of a girl now and thinking about all of that and so that has inspired me and motivated me to be the father of a daughter and to show her what being a man is really about, and hopefully those are lessons and those are experiences that she will carry forward with her. In a way that provides her with a pathway of how she deserves to be treated."
Christopher apologizes in a meeting.	"You know, apologizing I'd done something in a in a faculty meeting. I'd made a decision without checking with anyone that made a few people really unhappy. And a faculty member voiced that. And I wrote that faculty member an apology e-mail and addressed it in the next faculty meeting that, hey, I got this wrong. I should have, you know, gone and gotten more feedback from everyone before I made this decision. And, you know, getting a response from him that that was the first time a boss had done that in his career - He had been here for 30 years. I had only been here for you know, 10 years and only two as the principal. It showed me I think I had I had done that right. I'd done…I had made up for that situation, right? And as I define masculinity, being willing and able to admit mistakes and own them." (Flipgrid except)
Christopher trains as a counselor.	"I went to an institute…which is sort of a counseling, professional development week for non-counselors, and I think a lot of what we did there. While it wasn't directly about masculinity, it's just raising awareness about what students might be going through. And I think that was a big part for me as I sort of reframed helping boys through a counseling lens made me realize that you know there are definitely flaws and some of the things I had been taught in the way that I had been raised that led boys into my office feeling a need for support in some ways." (Flipgrid Excerpt)

The opportunities for critical reflection shown in Table 8 ignited a questioning stance for the men, where they began to review assumptions and biases. With increased awareness, gender became more visible and salient, providing more opportunities for examination.

As table 9 shows below, the link between turning points, increased salience, and reflection on ways of knowing and being set in motion a reflective cycle for participants that allowed them to edit and customize their existence as men.

Table 9

The Messy Middle: Connecting turning points, salience, and new meaning

	Turning Points	Gender Salience	Impacts on Ways of Knowing and Being
Christopher	Moments of shame or regret around aggressive masculinity. Counseling work experience with boys as a Dean.	Raising a son and daughter. Serving in family roles.	"I think if you're just looking at the definition of what it is to be a man that can have a number of different things." (Flipgrid except) "And I think that was a big part for me as I sort of reframed helping boys through a counseling lens made me realize that you know there are definitely flaws and some of the things that I had been taught in in the way that I had been raised that led boys into my office feeling a need for support in some ways." (Flipgrid except) "I think I started to realize a healthier masculinity of being you know, a gentleman and you know how masculinity really actually should… how I teach it now and lead boys to see masculinity now as a as a very positive thing of you know, having courage, being able to show weakness when you know it's a healthy thing to admit weakness and admit fears, and I think apologizing is a really big part." (Flipgrid excerpt)
	Turning Points	**Gender Salience**	**Impacts on Ways of Knowing and Being**
	Failed first marriage. Failed attempts /mistakes at allyship.	Relationships with women.	"So I got to watch my sister's mistakes as well as my mother's desire to not only be the nurturer, but also the provider and the disciplinarian, which was tough for her. That was not the role that she signed up for. So my ideas of masculinity shifted. To be one, a better understanding of the roles of men and women. Better understanding of how masculinity is not emotionless. But it does have emotion

	Turning Points	Gender Salience	Impacts on Ways of Knowing and Being
Graham	Becoming the male of the house at an early age. Feminist movement. College class on feminism and relational violence.	Leadership as captain of teams. Formal power of supervisory roles.	and that can be caring and supportive." (Flipgrid excerpt) "that was life changing for me and understanding how men have in many ways, not all men, but some men oppressed, repressed and created environments for women where they felt unsafe. And hence the creation of power and family, the conflict and violence that can then ensue." (Flipgrid excerpt) "And of course, there's that kind of woke moment right where I had to respond to hey, mia culpa, my bad. Not thinking anything of it, and certainly an awakening for me of understanding again where I fit in the world and how comments - whether they be completely innocuous or simply naive, I can still create discord and then an expectation or belief that someone is one way when they're another." (Flipgrid except)
	Turning Points	**Gender Salience**	**Impacts on Ways of Knowing and Being**
John	Outdoor experiences illustrating gender equity. Becoming a foster child to a girl. Joining a boys' school as a professional.	Raising of sons. Critical conversations with wife/partner	"I see ways in which my mind as an adolescent and preadolescent was not respected enough by some of my teachers to understand why it took me a little longer to get something, and some of my female classmates were so quick to put their hands up. Why it took me a greater amount of time to build self-confidence and things like that." (Flipgrid excerpt) "[gender has] such a fluid and personal definition or meaning….it's been an interesting journey, certainly one that has not reached its conclusion, and I find that even now, at 46 years old is the time when I'm starting to become most aware." (Flipgrid excerpt) "So that's where it leads to you know what is my meaning of masculinity, and I

	Turning Points	Gender Salience	Impacts on Ways of Knowing and Being
			struggle with this because I don't want to put qualifiers on it and certainly don't want to make the proposal that masculinity and femininity are opposite each other." (Flipgrid excerpt)
Walter	Attending PWI schools as a person of color. College and adult life experiences with LGBTQ+ friends. Memories of the AIDS epidemic in NYC.	Dealing with anger as a black man. Work in counseling and participation in clinical therapy.	[on the external imposition of masculinity] - "initially the story is written by others." (Flipgrid excerpt) "ignorant folks trying to educate other ignorant folks about something incredibly nuanced and complicated." (Flipgrid excerpt) "And then as I got older, just realizing how limiting that was and how I was a full human being with the full range of emotions and many of which I didn't know what to do with because I hadn't grappled with them." (Flipgrid excerpt) "And so again, it was kind of like a contrast. I was either contrasting masculinity with people's perception of my masculinity, and then I was learning to contrast masculinity in general with the perception that gay men were not masculine, right?...The idea of defining masculinity on its own as opposed to it being compared to something, you know, like the idea of telling you what it's not as opposed to what it is." (Flipgrid excerpt)

Table 9 indicates a process where the men experienced destabilizing lessons that led them toward gender role reevaluation, "the process in which men and women assess, maintain, and redefine their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors about their masculine, feminine, and androgynous roles" (O'Neil, 1981, p. 205). Through their stories, the leaders identified when and why their masculine inner work began in earnest. Early in life, transitions in consciousness revolved around loss and suffering – loss of fathers or failed relationships. Middle life transitions

involved new professional or leadership roles, new parental experiences, or wider social

upheaval. Primarily, family roles and responsibilities inspired depth of reflection and awareness

for participants. The act of husbanding and parenting shifted understanding about roles, values,

and expectations. Reported intentional behaviors and mindsets offered new possibilities for the

next generation of children and promoted equity in their marriages and domestic partnerships.

With increased gender salience and gender destabilizing experiences, participants began

to question or adapt their former ways of knowing and being. Assumptions were challenged,

biases were addressed, and the unspoken forces of gender became visible for the first time.

Participants spoke retrospectively about pervasive social constructs, limited agency, and

victimhood. Their analysis revealed a sadness and regret they were not equipped to be critical of

gender at a younger age – resenting its tenacious grip and flawed oversimplification. Ironically,

something very complex was reduced to an immature and impartial script. Its simplicity and

enforcement were given power through constant binary comparison: traditional masculinity

remained durable in its opposition to anything feminine or in relation to effeminacy. Participants'

experience of manhood was always in response to other people's expectations.

The New Beginning

This epoch represents a fresh start for participants, where they wield more intentional and

life-tested understandings that support their health and leadership. In their current lives and

work, participants employ their new perspectives to serve the needs of their communities and

homes. While they still wrestle with some aspects of masculinity and management, they are in

better positions to navigate the internal or external tensions. Participants provided testimony that

revealed an evolution in their personal ideology, professional approach, and definition of

success. As Table 10 below indicates, participants have arrived at more mature and modern

conceptions of manhood and education.

Table 10

The New Beginning: Changes in participants' views of masculinity in their stories

	Personal Evolution	**Professional Growth**	**New Success Models**
Descriptive Summary	Personal testimonies suggest participants have been developing masculine ideologies that challenge prevailing narratives for men. The men promote expansive competencies of modern manhood, championing concepts like vulnerability, honesty, and compassion.	Participants acknowledged the vast demands of their positions and thought tirelessly about their professional mission. They articulated a professional ideology rooted in courage, morality, and compassionate service. Participants viewed healthy stewardship of masculinity as a major aspect of their school leadership.	For participants, their vision of success comes from the human, loving act of selfless giving. They emphasize a healthy and equitable model of community that moves away from winning at all costs, manipulative power, oppression of others, and repression of self (Matheus, 2020).
	Personal Evolution	**Professional Growth**	**New Success Models**
Exemplifying Statements (Christopher)	"it's a healthy thing to admit weakness and admit fears, and I think apologizing is a really big part." "Obviously there are some of the standard things that you think about of maybe being strong or being a provider or being chivalrous."	"Being a good man for our male faculty members, so do they treat the boys with respect? Are they, you know, do they set good expectations for the boys? Do they lead in a way that shows that they're always honest that they're always going to be? You know, doing what's right? I think that's important for our boys to see." "to me really someone who is honest and	"[be] a boss that teachers know they can come to, that I'm going to have the courage to help them through very tough things." "very tough conversations with teachers. You know, I think that's the place where I want to be a really good boss and I really want to show the responsibilities of being a good boss, male or female, masculine or feminine, but I, but I think something that comes along with my being masculine is being a boss that teachers know they can come to, that I'm going to have the courage to help

		that's something we talk a lot about at our school. Someone who is willing to admit mistakes and own them…apologize. I think that's a masculine trait…having courage, you know. I think courage is very important and that doesn't have to be just in physical courage or physical strength, but having mental courage to do difficult things. To take a risk. And then finally I think being able to build strong relationships is an important part of masculinity"	them through very tough things."
	Personal Evolution	**Professional Growth**	**New Success Models**
Exemplifying Statements (Graham)	"I believe there is both emotional and physical strength …being emotional, being sensitive, caring." "I also think it's very important as part of masculinity to be empathetic and to be caring and be someone that folks can rely upon by being transparent and being trustworthy."	"Questioning- I think it's important to be able to question and ask questions and get answers and then listen." "being on campus early in the morning, and being one of the last ones to leave"	"So we have a nice gender equity within the building and making sure that I am always in touch with where I am in terms of directing folks and answering questions and then being supportive and not coming across as anything less than all the positive aspects of masculinity and not the negative aspects of masculinity. And I think I do that and I think I allow the boys to cry if they want to." "making sure folks know where I stand. Not necessarily politically, but where I stand in terms of supporting feminist thoughts and making sure that our team is one that supports each other and having those communications and

		understanding where my power is within an environment where again I'm seen as the defacto leader or the assigned leader in the building."
	Personal Evolution	**Professional Growth**	**New Success Models**

	Personal Evolution	**Professional Growth**	**New Success Models**
Exemplifying Statements (John)	"[acknowledging the] gender, racial, cultural, socioeconomic aspects of those with whom you interact and engage but also respect for perspectives and viewpoints." "I think compassion for oneself and compassion for others is a critical component of masculinity."	"resist misogyny, racism, sexism." "speak about politics, about sports, about media, about social media when it pertains to masculinity." "I look at it through a professional lens, with masculinity in terms of the boys that are here and the faculty and staff that I that I lead. And you know, we talk about honesty, compassion and respect and I think for us those are the three pillars through which we hope our boys see and seek masculinity. To be honest with yourselves, to be honest with others, to be honest about your feelings. To be honest about your struggles. I think vulnerability is a large part of where there's been a shift in masculinity."	"it's time to go against those stereotypes, and so you know, for me on the professional lens I look at it through the framework of honesty, compassion and respect…when our students embody, celebrate, and espouse those things, that's what I consider as being the height of masculinity." "a far greater acceptance and confidence in the boys being vulnerable and showing emotion. And that ran counter to what I thought admittedly, a boys school would be like."

Personal Evolution	**Professional Growth**	**New Success Models**
"rigorous honesty" "And so, you know, for me, the	"Like it's not it's not just about winning. Then it becomes about what are we doing? How are we going about this? What are	"If we can build strong relationships with our boys where they can…feel safe enough that they can navigate or explore their emotions, and there won't be necessarily a

Exemplifying Statements (Walter)	importance of masculinity is expanding what that means. And really making sure the stuff in vulnerability and empathy is in there - like just you're going to jam in this concept of vulnerability. Because vulnerability is really about being honest. You know, it's about being honest, having the opportunity to be honest with yourself first and foremost and then by extension with others. "	we trying to achieve? How are we doing it together? Are we able to talk about the places where it was difficult and challenging for us? Are we able to celebrate each other? Am I able to celebrate your victories or your accomplishments, the things that bring you joy, without it having to be about me not being able to have those things? You know, I think kind of stripping away the zero-sum aspect of masculinity is something that I'm really here for."	stigma attached to them. Or they won't be excommunicated, or they won't be rejected, or they won't be stripped of their masculinity or manhood because they're exploring their emotions. That's then we're winning, right? Because if they're able to do all of those things, then there are positive outcomes. That has a positive impact on educational outcomes, right? They would feel more connected to the school, they'll feel more connected to their classmates. They'll feel more comfortable with their selves, with themselves, or at least they'll be more willing to interrogate their emotions and be honest about their own emotions, and then by extension, learn how to deal with them."
		"being vulnerable for them is a duty. I need to be able to model for them how to be vulnerable, not that they're not learning it somewhere else or that they don't necessarily know how to do it. Irrespective of those potential realities, I still, I know that I still want to do that. I want to be able to model vulnerability. Ultimately at the at the crux of that idea of the vulnerability is the ability …is the opportunity to grapple with the full range of human emotions, and I feel like the	

> masculinity as it was presented to me, as it was, as I was trained in masculinity per se, it was a very limited number of emotions that were offered to me."

Table 10 reveals a roadmap for male transformation, where participants have gained new understandings that mediate personal conflicts and promote effective leadership. Their revised meaning structures model the kinds of mindsets they champion for their students and colleagues.

Personal Growth. The men attempt to integrate modern, relational skills of manhood with traditional masculine character strengths as continued assets in a changing world; they acknowledge that courageous leadership requires interpersonal attunement alongside the concrete, techno-rational talents of professional life. Graham's identity as "a protector, provider, being a director, a chief, an assistant, being a partner" suggests that modern man drive or take the back seat depending on the context and the needs of the stakeholder. In his model, strength is not brutish; it is wielding character and influence to serve the greater good. This revision combines a new androgynous frontier of human competencies with some foundational masculine associations.

Professional Evolution. Beyond operations management, the men thought deeply about their role in promoting an enlightened, inclusive, and contemporary version of manhood. All participants mentioned the importance of modeling vulnerability, compassion, and respect in their work. Overall, participants reported that leadership success reflects the quality of their relationships, the environment's emotional safety, and a commitment to progressive masculinity.

For these men, their work with boys and colleagues offers a second chance at the process of becoming a man, a second iteration of masculinity they can contribute to their communities. The transition and shift of the work away from reproducing privilege and bravado to developing boys as whole, healthy people was clearly articulated across participants. The emphasis on an expansive masculinity connected softer personal traits with enhanced relational skills and prized interdependence and brotherhood among students. Celebrating each other implies a level of humility, inclusion and belonging. Participants cited a professional responsibility to encourage prosocial behaviors and cultural competency.

New Success Models. Participants' carefully crafted professional ethos aspires towards an "inexhaustible, communal, self-generating strength, to handle the challenges ahead in [their lives]" (Matheus, 13:30). Their reflections centered on the success of others, reflecting servant leadership and a deep commitment to personal sacrifice in service of the wider community. Rather than success models that reflect personal roles of provider or earner, the men have embraced a higher communal calling – creating conditions and context where people in their midst can self-actualize and reach fuller authenticity and potential.

Presentation and Analysis of Data for the Document Analysis Worksheet

In their written reflections on school messaging, participants elaborated on gender meaning at the professional and institutional levels. Participants acknowledged the maturation of prevailing masculinities (both taught and embodied) reflected in their schools. Their statements suggested that gender in their schools is dynamic, responding to new social demands and expectations to prepare students for the future. Table 11 below presents connections among masculinity, schools, and changes in the wider society. The narratives reflect evolving schools and evolving school missions.

Table 11

Organizational Dynamism and Matters of the Heart and Soul

	Evolving Schools	**Evolving Missions**
Descriptive Summary	Participants reflected on the move away from hard skills and achievement as boys' schools foci to more relational and ethical priorities.	The vision of male community our participants promote relies on pure human motives to be great and do great. Their model celebrates boyhood and does not shame it. It implies multiple paths to manhood, with increased agency and freedom for boys to be authentic.
Christopher Exemplifying Statements	"I think our school focus on values and honor are always at the forefront of my work as a leader. Not letting boys get away with being rude or cutting corners. Not letting boys cheat or disobey the honor code is really important." "a focus on gratitude and being grateful for all that we have and other who make things possible for us is another key element of what we teach."	"I often think about a boy going home and not feeling like he is known at all at school or not having quality relationships and what that can mean for a boy/young man, especially in the recent years where we think about mental wellness and disconnected males who are depressed or turn violent." "we often make decisions based on 'most boys' need this. Although when you look at decisions being made for the majority in other areas it comes off as not inclusive. We look out for the boys who don't fit the norm because of this."
Graham Exemplifying Statements	"we can change, evolve, and address social and cultural issues, where a [traditional] boys' school refrains from actively shifting the paradigm." "What it says about boyhood, manhood, or masculinity is that students at our school will learn that being a boy is more than being strong. Future success at our school is built on the foundation of support and inclusivity." "being a part of our school means being a part of something bigger than just an	"What the mission statement says about boyhood, manhood and masculinity is that to be a positive member of our school community and our community at large, boys need to be brave, smart and emotionally equipped to succeed in society." "the desire to fully understand boys and provide them with a safe space for conversation, opinion, and growth. Masculinity is seen as something that is a part of them and to be celebrated. The school is

	education, but a member of a family. The boys often speak about the brotherhood and the love that they share with each other. When it works, it is very powerful."	confident and intentional in their messaging to the boys and continues to read, research, and develop our program to change as necessary."
John Exemplifying Statements	"masculinity, and the definition of it, are in somewhat of a transitory period. I am confident that we would all agree in shifting the definition from the way it was, transitioning from manliness to a more nuanced and sophisticated definition of the term." "Absent were traditional stereotypes regarding the alignment of gender with activities." "our ambitions are to focus on such characteristics as empathy, honesty, vulnerability, and a sincere desire for boys to be reflective about who they are and who they wish to be for themselves and in the greater community."	"inclusion means building a community whose spirit and purpose is based on mutual respect and care. It is vital that each member feels recognized and valued. Inclusion is an essential part of our mission to cultivate each student's potential and develop each boy's mind, character, and heart. We believe that differences of backgrounds, perspectives and cultures are integral to preparing boys to be successful young men in a global community." "Our school is designed to bring out the best in boys. It is a place where boys learn that there are many routes to manhood, where traditional stereotypes can be dismantled and replaced by a more thoughtful approach to maturation. Boys are encouraged to explore their competitive spirits and learn that the strong bonds of friendship, teamwork, and social interaction are what matter most in life."
Walter Exemplifying Statements	"[wanting students] to know that they do not have to pretend to be anything other than who they are and finding out who you are is one of the most important, difficult, and special aspects of life." "We believe that masculinity is grounded in brotherhood which requires us to believe in and support other men. Competition does not require dominance, but rather doing your absolute best and in the hopes that those	"We do not brainwash them into believing anything that we espouse. We ask them to think about the meaning of our values and the purpose of our mission on a regular basis." "[I prefer to] ask them for their opinions and perspectives and treat them with respect. I cannot truly empower them; that is a paternalistic perspective. Instead, I push them to acknowledge their own agency."

	around you will do their best as well."	"[boys] have to be honest about that with which you struggle. No pretending. You have to display the courage to ask for help…[and believe] that people will actually help you and not use your request against you."

Table 11 reveals that the changing mission and work of educating boys simultaneously addresses the longstanding pains of patriarchy and evolving demands of leading in complex, modern times. Matching the changing social constructs of gender, the leaders promote a progressive vision for boys to be fully human and integrate traditionally viewed feminine characteristics to better relate, lead, and take care of themselves. Their schools now embrace a directive to not only prepare boys for higher learning, but also teach them healthy and prosocial behaviors that lead to inner peace, better relationships, and a resolute moral compass. Amplifying their unique position, boys' schools are helping lead the way for a revamping of outdated gender norms and stereotypes in an intentional and mission-driven way.

Participants' schools honor student individuality and actively combat the patriarchal "jello mold" of manhood. They are intentionally reflective organizations that give permission to revise masculinity in changing times. In these enlightened, healthy systems, character replaces accomplishment, and collaboration replaces domination, resulting in a priority of solidarity and community that replace a cutthroat worldview. In recognition of his own humanity and soft spirit, Walter expressed a powerful realization guiding his own work and leadership: "I have a soul, something that connects me to all other people - past, present, and future folks." In such a connective view, rivals once considered opponents slowly become brothers and resources for strength.

Presentation and Analysis of Data for the Semi-structured Interview

Participants further elaborated on the pervasive process of socialization they endured as they navigated their spaces as young men. Semi-structured interviews also allowed participants to review their meaning structures for progress and continued hang-ups. In the process, they engaged in a reflective cost-benefit review of their masculinity over time. Participants identified continued tripping points for their continued growth and development as men. They also were able to discuss how their dedication to inner work and healing others has made space in their hearts and minds for more empathy and relational awareness.

Clear Rules and Pathways to Manhood

Table 12 lists participants' articulation of how the rules of the game of manhood were passed along and taught. With hindsight, the men could dissect the training they endured with a critical lens. They reported clear expectations, implicit costs, and a code of silence and compliance.

Table 12

Socialization: Reported methods and elements of the "project" of becoming a man

Descriptive Summary	*Exemplifying Statements*
Participants elaborated on the rules of the project of becoming a man.	"the project also kind of implies conspiring, you know, so kind of a group of people, whether intentionally and definitely intentionally and in certain ways unintentionally, conspiring to produce this right to produce this kind of outcome. And I bought into it. You know, I. I bought into the big man. You know, I definitely heard "Be a Man" when I'm six years old, which is literally impossible. I cannot possibly be a man at six years old." (Walter) "the baseline in my neighborhood was don't be a punk, right? Because if you're perceived as weak or soft, then people will prey on you. Right. So there was so the survival piece in the context of where I grew up" (Walter) "I'm gonna be here at 3:00. Let's fight. I'm not scared of you - like I needed him to know, like I wasn't scared of him. And this was just the dumbest shit. I was sacrificing my scholarship to, like, prove to

	whatever, whomever that I was a man or something, you know, kind of holding on to that masculinity. It was just so…it was so dumb. And what was really kind of happening was - it just felt like - you know, kind of being tired of like, of not feeling like you belong or like kind of rejecting the hierarchy and power dynamics of high school." (Walter on conflict)
	"And I mean, think of the kind of complicated part of it…is there anything wrong with being charming? No. Is there anything wrong with being attractive? You know, not inherently. Is there anything wrong with being calm and even keeled? Not necessarily right. But at what cost? You know, and I think that's the part that I never I didn't get to weigh, like what cost? What cost in my participating in this project?" (Walter on inner conflict)
	"We did not have deep dive conversations. We did not have emotional conversations. I did not feel…again they loved me. I love them. I will continue to do that. They're my parents. But I just I grew up in what I might describe as an emotionally unsafe environment just in that I never felt comfortable really sharing fragilities or anxieties. Frustration, sadness and things like that." (John talking about his parents)
	"I loved him to death, and still at age 57, have very fond memories of the time that we were together. But he said some things that we don't need to get into, that created in me the understanding that if I have a particular role and I have power, that I'm captain, that gives me a certain level of power that allows me to potentially be dominant over other people." (Graham talking about his father).
	"My father didn't. Hence the reason he died at age 48. Didn't take care of himself. I think it's vital." (Graham on male health)

In Table 12, participants acknowledged their lack of agency and understanding as boys – they were reliant on the messages and instruction of those around them. To complicate things, they had yet to have the capacity or incentives to question the values and behaviors set as the masculine standard at that time.

Further Rough Edges

Participants had some "aha" moments where they identified areas for further mindfulness as men. Walter pondered the cost and role of anger in his own life and that of students against the conventional tropes of the angry black man and violent black boys. As a leader of mostly white

staff, he questioned how to honor these real feelings but also process them in ways that do not jeopardize social capital or positive regard. John remains measured to avoid being an equity imposter and works hard to sell his partner at home on the importance of his work with mostly affluent boys against a global surge in toxic masculinity and misogyny. Graham identified his longstanding appetite for formal leadership (in sports and work), unquenchable drive for self-improvement, and relentless competitiveness as lingering remnants of ego from his past. All three men acknowledged the space and perceptions they occupy as large, athletic, broad-shouldered men.

Winning by Healing

The men are better for having faced their childhood pain and actively processed their inner conflicts. The growth manifests as better relationships and communication at home (Graham), more self-assurance with authenticity and social activism (John), a healthy approach to trying new things and assessing progress (Walter), and considering work and home life as a quest to build trusting, caring, and supportive relationships (Christopher). As part of their healing journey, the participants turned deficits into strengths and painful experiences into actionable wisdom. Walter commented on the importance of becoming whole to support others:

> Um, and so if I hadn't done some of the healing that I needed to do. Whatever healing my student, a student, had to do or a colleague had to do, it might have triggered something in me, and I might not have been able to be as present as I needed to be for them. And that would have affected how effective I could be for them. So, yeah, I wholeheartedly agree that you have to… I think you have to heal in order to effectively lead.

Walter acknowledged that empathy involves labor and skill and that capacity for compassion develops as we learn to love ourselves through reflection and discovery.

Delineation of Findings for Research Question #1: What do middle school directors of all-boys' private middle schools report are the patterns of meaning ascribed to masculinity in their personal and professional lives?
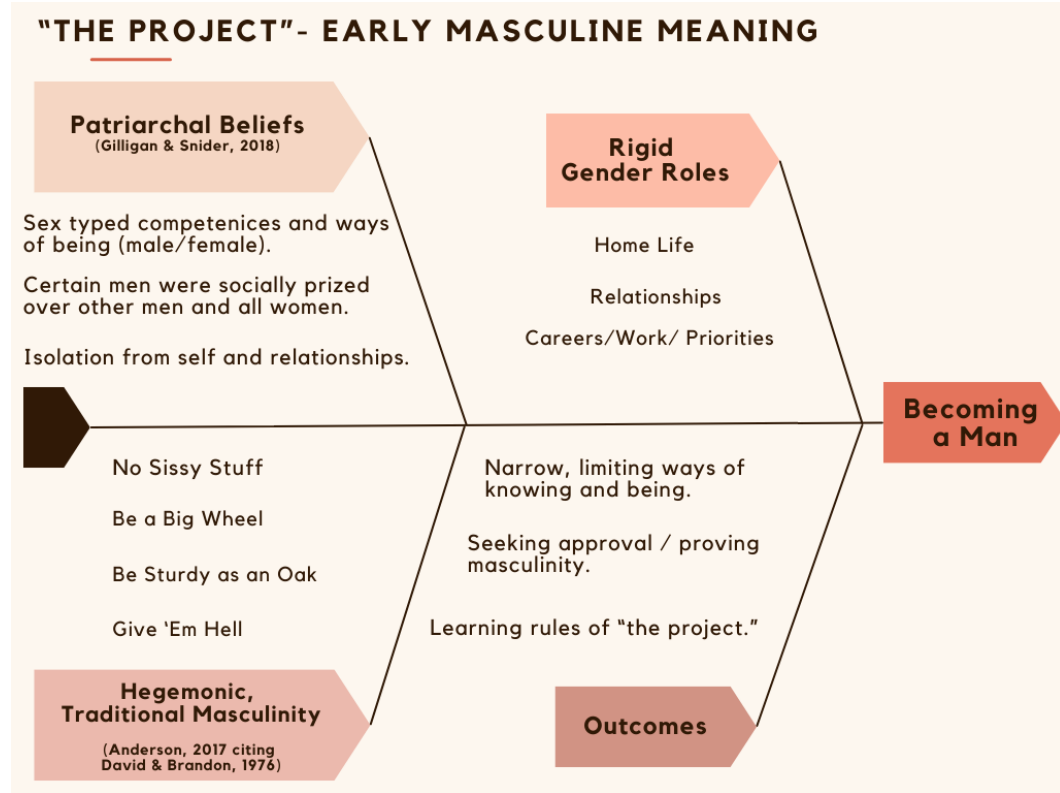
Finding # 1: As boys and young men, the courageous leaders of this study learned and internalized various aspects of hegemonic masculinities and patriarchal belief structures.

The first finding proffers that participants were embedded in the conventional masculine ideologies of their childhood. They experienced implicit and explicit social collusion and pervasive training in masculinity rooted in patriarchal rules and a strict gender binary. Through direct instruction and role modeling, participants learned a gender playbook that fell short in explaining the complex dynamics around identity, leadership, and health.

Figure 4 below outlines the reported process of socialization – the "project" described by Walter – the study's participants endured as boys. The depicted gender system integrates the generational norms participants described around patriarchy, rigid gender roles, and aspects of traditional hegemonic masculinity. Participants' lived experience of the masculine crucible resulted in some social-emotional strain; in internalizing the dominant norms and expectations, participants became less healthy and confident, their self-concept became more tenuous, and they sought validation through praise and inauthentic performance.

Figure 4

The Project of Becoming a Man

"THE PROJECT"- EARLY MASCULINE MEANING

Patriarchal Beliefs
(Gilligan & Snider, 2018)

Sex typed competenices and ways of being (male/female).

Certain men were socially prized over other men and all women.

Isolation from self and relationships.

Rigid Gender Roles

Home Life

Relationships

Careers/Work/ Priorities

Becoming a Man

No Sissy Stuff

Be a Big Wheel

Be Sturdy as an Oak

Give 'Em Hell

Narrow, limiting ways of knowing and being.

Seeking approval / proving masculinity.

Learning rules of "the project."

Hegemonic, Traditional Masculinity
(Anderson, 2017 citing David & Brandon, 1976)

Outcomes

The project in figure 4 is by no means a required process for all men, nor is it monolithic for particular generations or all masculinities. However, data analysis revealed this pattern held up for this particular cohort of male leaders.

Digital Video Journal. As Tables 6 and 7 reveal, participants endured significant, chronic training on masculinity in their childhood. Walter described his main childhood task as "the project, right? [It] is to be a man, whatever that meant." Walter's realization implied a tragic loss of control and freedom over his own destiny as a boy. All participants reported patriarchal experiences in their youth: the labeling of certain capacities as male or female, the social elevation of certain men over other men and women, and feelings of isolation and disconnection from self and relationships (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). In relation to their familial, athletic, and community-based experiences, participants encountered limited socioemotional

expression and options for boys – thereby validating the lasting, hurtful impact of the gender

socialization process (Watts & Borders, 2005). The data reveal a pattern of traditional masculine

ideology for participants' generational cohort.

As they figured out their worlds and the rules for membership and belonging, they

alternated between threat assessment and response. Oftentimes, their safety or image were on the

line. When participants did reflect on concepts of the gender binary, they revealed patriarchal

understandings of gender hierarchy and the gendered divisions of self, role, domain, and

relationships (Gilligan and Snider, 2018). All four men indicated growing up in homes, where

either culturally or economically, males benefited from clear sex roles and the privileges of

patriarchy. The men were given the freedom to provide, protect, and discipline. The women and

mothers served as caretakers and emotional guardians within the home. Interestingly, only John

highlighted the importance of or need for male-female relationships outside of family in their

early years.

Semi-structured In-depth Interview. At a young age, participants were not invited to

co-construct their identities or self-concepts as young men. They were handed scripts and norms

and asked to fall into line. The men around them embodied hegemonic themes of masculinity,

reflecting the unchallenged patriarchal values of the time. Table 12 shows how the masculine

model was passed – implicit and explicit tutelage to prove, perform, and go hard all the time.

Through the research instruments, the men seemed to relish the therapeutic opportunity to

articulate what was never theirs – the process of growing up becoming a man.

Finding # 2: Participants experienced meaningful gender turning points that ignited a critical

consciousness and new ways of knowing and being in their personal and professional lives.

The second finding confirms gradual transformation and liberation in participants' gender expression and identity. The men reported memorable cycles of reflection and change that were spurred by disruptions to taken for granted expectations, norms, or patterns of behavior. When challenged to change, reconsider, or expand their worldview, participants took stock of their beliefs and behaviors. They began to ask "why" instead of continuing on autopilot (Nevzlin, 2020). Their growth and development as young adults depended on their intentionality in reconciling hurtful aspects of their boyhood by actively processing new feelings and experiences. Figure 5 portrays the cycle of action and reflection revealed by participant stories.

Figure 5

Evolving Masculine Meaning through the Messy Middle and New Beginning
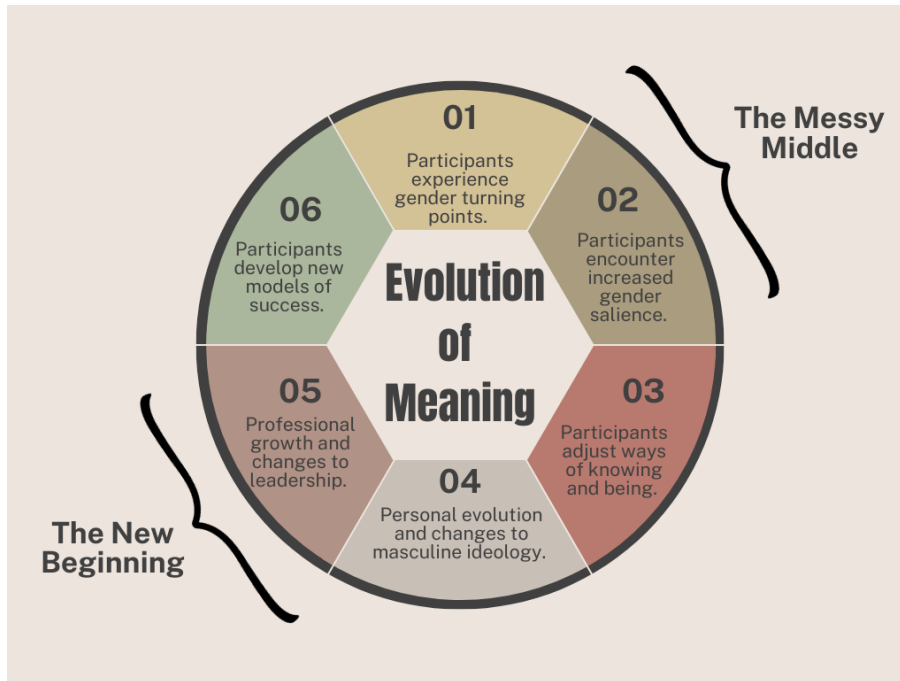
Digital Video Journal. In their video reflections, participants highlighted the moments and experiences that changed their minds around gender. Table 8 lists powerful memories that increased awareness or led to new understandings. The men began to assess whether their learned conception of manhood was in alignment with their realities; in surveying their worlds,

they encountered confusion and strain, realizing their models and paradigms were incomplete

and insufficient. By looking internally, they began to ask, "what works for me?" based on their

own needs and aspirations (Nevzlin, 2020).

Table 9 highlighted a loop where notable turning points prepared participants for contexts

with increased gender salience. Once in those spaces, participants were then confronted with

opportunities to modify their ways of being and knowing as men to meet the rising demands and

complexities of leading and growing as men. Table 10 suggested the significant ways that

reflection and experience has impacted participants' personal growth, professional evolution, and

measures of success. Analysis of this table reveals an ever-expanding masculine construct that

supports inclusion over domination, compassion over aggression, and service over achievement.

The transformation indicates a level of personal healing that offers participants an intentional

opportunity to employ their discoveries in building liberating relationships and organizations.

Document Analysis. At the organizational level, participants found meaning in the

deliberate mission of their schools. Document analysis afforded the chance to bring a critical lens

to bear on the stated objectives and cultural impact of their schools. Table 11 portrayed schools

as evolving gender sites, where academic communities are addressing the harms of patriarchy via

liberatory conceptions of boys and a healthier process of formation. The evolution suggests

schools have their own gender story (see figure 3) that mirrors the paradigmatic framework of

saying goodbye to old ways of existing and ushering in novel ways of being, relating, and

educating for the future.

Semi-structured In-depth Interview. Participant interview narratives suggest that

masculinity is dynamic, that identity work never stops, and that change is always possible. By

having built the capacity to reflect and interrogate assumptions and norms, the men embrace

vulnerability and humbly know they are still works in progress. Their dedication and

mindfulness have turned suffering into wisdom and lingering problematic behavioral patterns

into further objects of study.

Research Question #2: What do male middle school directors of all-boys' private middle schools consider the extent and nature of their active engagement in their gender identity development?

This research question focuses on the various ways participants consider or modify their

gender identity. It addresses the conscious practices and commitment these male leaders have to

their masculinity as it relates to work, leadership, or their personal lives. The level and intensity

of engagement suggests a correlation between male consciousness and agency in gender identity.

Table 13 below organizes narrative references that portray the overall nature and characteristics

of participants' self-reported identity work across the various instruments. Exploring the top-

level aspects of identity work lays the foundation for a deeper dive into the rich descriptions of

participant engagement with masculinity.

Table 13

Aspects of Participant Identity Work (Engagement) Related to Masculinity

Nature of Identity Work Related to Masculinity	Routines and Resources Mentioned
Identity work is constant and evolving. *John speaking on cultural competency:* "With this stuff, there is no finish line." **Identity work is developmental and dependent on shifting roles and responsibilities over the life span.**	***Inner Work*** Reading professional articles and curating resources that include podcasts, films, and books. *(Christopher, John, Graham)* Writing letters to the community or journaling to distill thinking. *(Graham)*

Christopher addressing shifting roles and responsibilities:

"I think it's constantly developing because of your stage of life. I mean, I think now having a son and a daughter, being a husband and my work role, I think those are the those are the four elements that are probably most at play versus 15, 20 years ago, where a lot of those elements weren't there. It was just about myself and my current situation. So I think I probably have more perspective now obviously than I did in previous years and especially in college."

Identity work involves a curiosity and willingness to engage with the unfamiliar or uncomfortable.

Walter discussing learning about transgender and non-binary people:

"You know gender identity as it relates to trans folks and non-binary… like that stuff…those concepts continue to fascinate me and push my thinking around what it is to be a man and what gender is. It's…whenever I engage with it or I, you know, I think about it a lot, I typically leave with more questions, and I think kind of the question at the heart of it is -how are we defining this concept? And as a leader of an all boys' school now, it's something I think about all the time."

Identity work is contextual.

John processing the current political climate:

"a misogynist, a racist, a president who put down anybody that did not fit his very narrow demographic of white men in terms of the respect he afforded," resulting in "a delicate balance when you're talking about

Purposeful time to reflect. May include professional affinity groups, individual quiet time, or clinical therapy.
(Christopher, Walter, John, Graham)

Interpersonal Work

Life partner/spouse as a critical thought partner and equal member of a marriage.
(John, Graham, Christopher)

Professional mentors.
(Graham, Christopher, John)

Home-life. Most notably, the raising of children, especially as an opportunity to right the wrongs of their own childhood experience and relationship with their father.
(Graham, Christopher, John)

Conversations with colleagues.
(Graham, John, Christopher, Walter)

Background or training in counseling, DEI work, or graduate/doctoral work to inform leadership.
(Christopher, Graham, Walter)

Institutional Work

Onboarding, training, and professional development.
(John, Graham. Christopher)

Outside or internal speakers that address concepts of masculinity, gender, or inclusion.
(John)

Advisory time or large assemblies.
(John, Christopher)

The ideology of the geographic location/campus.
(John)

The single-sex attribute of the school as an opportunity and motivating platform to address masculinity and gender.

politics because we do have boys and families that range the full political spectrum."	*(John, Walter)*
Identity work is adaptive and motivated by socioemotional needs.	The faith-life, religious identity/tradition of the school. *(Christopher, Walter)*
Walter reflecting on the middle school years and leading preadolescents:	
"what happens in middle school can have a really lasting impact on someone. And so the responsibility of being able to work with a group of boys at this particular time in their life is a privilege…a responsibility."	
Inner work is practical and instrumental.	
John considering how actions, beliefs and decisions convey meaning in parenting and leading:	
"[my son] sees me leading meetings. He sees me as a school leader and my wife as a psychotherapist…She works from home, and we've talked deliberately about how that can reinforce…that women and mothers stay at home and men work."	

Table 13 indicates that over time participants have developed intentional pathways to foster reflection and critical consciousness. Their routines create the time, space, and access needed for personal grappling aimed at healthier living, better relationships, and more effective leadership. Their identity work resembles an elaborate network of checks and balances on their thinking and acting, suggesting a newfound openness to change and growth; it resembles the intentional mindset they preach to their community.

A presentation and analysis of data for each instrument below through the lens of engagement explains the nature of participants' critical stance on masculinity. Understanding

their engagement informs our attempts to trace the development of their gender and how it

impacts their personal and professional lives.

Presentation and Analysis of Data for the Digital Video Journal

Participants utilized the video journal to make sense of their lives as men at home and at

work and reveal the ways in which they keep their minds and behaviors in check. The

presentation and analysis of data for research question #2 below follows the three main meaning

codes (inner work, interpersonal work, and institutional work).

The Routines and Resources of Inner Work

All participants have developed pathways to test their beliefs and confront their

worldviews. Putting their thoughts in writing, having conversations, or participating in

intentional professional development helps keep their gender consciousness sharp. Table 14

illustrates the main strategies participants employ to stay current and heighten awareness.

Table 14

The Strategies of Routines and Resources for Inner Work

Strategy	Description of Resource or Routine	Exemplifying Statement
Follow the experts.	Participants take the initiative to follow experts on boyhood and psychosocial development.	"And now that we are looking towards next year, all of our faculty reads this summer are focused on masculinity. All of the podcasts that we're doing, all of the films that we're watching are all based on masculinity, and that's under the umbrella and under the framework of our cultural competency commitment." (John) "just tons of reading. I'm sort of very into article reading and obviously I think over the last four or five years in particular, you know more and more reading about masculinity ended up being something that you know was really a, you know, has given me a lot of

		important details and information to think about the topic of masculinity" (Christopher)
Rely on natural resources in the environment.	Participants rely upon natural resources in their lives to be a network of checks and balances in their work as male influencers. Most notably, they recalled lessons from family and mentors, the legacy of relational ghosts (Raider-Roth, 2015), and demographics as things to draw upon for clarity and refinement.	"…becoming a dad probably of a boy who's now 10. I think if there's training in masculinity – it's everything that he does and asking questions in my mind - how did I do that? How did my dad teach that? How do I want my son to learn that and be thinking about masculinity through sports and how he treats people and how he handles tough situations and things like that." (Christopher) "in the relationships I've developed, in the women that I've listened to overtime, as well as some of the men that have been involved in my life that have actually helped mentor and guide and a fair amount of reading as well." (Graham)
Calling upon the memory bank of lived experiences.	The memory bank of lived experiences with their own fathers and grandfathers provides a readily available hero or anti-hero model for participants to call upon.	"we didn't have heart to hearts; we didn't have sort of those growth moments together. And I feel like I did have them with my sons." (John) "he's very firm and there was some fear for me at times of him and…I think at times there's a healthy fear…but I definitely want to make sure that [my children] know that they're loved." (Christopher)
Harness and capitalize on the makeup, culture, and ideology of the school setting,	Some participants acknowledged the makeup, culture, and ideology of the school setting can impact buy-in on identity work, inclusion, and belonging.	"I felt much more comfortable there…I really have found the East Coast to be my home...and I think it's geographically more in the liberal areas and where I tend to align myself." (John) … it's really been coming to an all-boys' school that has been my greatest intrinsic and extrinsic motivator to better understand masculine, feminine roles, stereotypes, perspectives and realities, and part of that is through, I believe, the necessity of recognizing that we are an all boys' school and part of it comes from the introspection and reflection that is caused for me to look back on times in which I was proud of the way in which I acted or the approach that I

		had but times in which I probably did fall into some of the trappings of a traditional masculine and maleness that…I probably could have done things that were different." (John)

Table 14 reveals that participants hold their past experiences close, scan their environment for threats or opportunities, and harvest past and present relationships for actionable wisdom. Most notably, fathering provides ample opportunity for participants to practice compassion, patience, and role modeling. Their attempts to fully see others (Brooks, 2023) helps them to come to peace with their own self, thereby making them more humble, approachable, and curious leaders. Study participants demonstrated their adeptness at developing routines and creating critical frames that keep their own identity work front and center in their home and school lives.

Interpersonal Work – Managing Perception and Embodying Values

Participants worked hard to present themselves as relationally committed, emotionally receptive, and professionally reliable. They communicated a responsibility to live out their school's values, carry themselves positively, and wield their influence with intention and care. Their intentionality served their efforts to model prosocial behaviors and values for students and colleagues.

Emotional intelligence and flexibility served their leadership. For instance, Graham described emotional attunement as "being very aware of how I am perceived in the moment…for a man, understanding the power they bring in the room." He strived to make "sure I am always in touch with where I am in terms of directing folks and answering questions and then being supportive and not coming across as anything less than all the positive aspects of masculinity." In addition, he wanted to make it known "where I stand in terms of supporting feminist thoughts and making sure that our team is one that supports each other." Christopher also emphasized a

metacognitive approach, where he cautiously wondered "how they see me interact, and I take that very seriously. I don't want them to see me in a way that would be negative. I have to check myself."

As head teachers, the participants understand the power of actions to transmit lessons about values. Christopher has high expectations for staff – "do they treat the boys with respect…do they set good expectations for the boys? Do they lead in a way that shows that they're always honest?" Personally, Christopher aspires to be in alignment:

> I want to always be…honest, willing to admit mistakes, courageous, and I want the boys to see me in that role. I also have an important role as a middle school head of putting teachers around the boys who are going to show strong, you know, female and male teachers, but of the male teachers I want male teachers in the rooms that are going to be good stewards for the boys and show them healthy masculinity.

Their leadership reflects a reverence for their role as chief mission officer; the quickest way to build trust and culture is to consistently embody and teach others about the most fundamental qualities of the school's culture.

Institutional Work – Assessment, Alignment, and Action

The middle school directors spent significant time evaluating the impact of gender in their organizations to maximize leverage for support and equity. They focused on goals, gaps, and locating where good work had been done. Graham highlighted his efforts to distribute leadership to women and students on campus to ensure "we always have a wide range of folks applying for positions." John similarly emphasized the striving for allyship with women on his campus by identifying ways to "partner with, collaborate with and work with, particularly our

faculty who identify as female…and that includes a lot of the stereotypical ways in which men

have spoken over, interrupted, usurped authority from their female colleagues." John signaled

the growth of his school in marking patriarchal moments and altering sexist behaviors:

> we are becoming more and more tuned into making sure that there is equity in
>
> terms of the platform, the proverbial microphone, the time that is offered to speak,
>
> and all of that, and when there are faculty that usually sub or unconsciously speak
>
> over someone or do the 'mansplaining,' I and we take an opportunity to call them
>
> on that privately, respectfully, but directly because that is absolutely critical.

He also lauded efforts to broaden inclusivity through special programs and speakers that promote

cultural competency and pride like "Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and really

try to create a construct with those that addresses – yes, racial, gender all of that - but also how it

pertains to masculinity, and so that's really important."

Participants reflected on their school's effectiveness in promoting health and an inclusive

vision of success for boys. John described efforts to understand boys as learners by learning

"from an attitude and motivational side but also the neurological and biological aspects and

differences between an adolescent and pre-adolescent boy and an adolescent and pre-adolescent

girl in terms of their learning style, their development, their maturation." Christopher discussed

the need for and success of athletics to be a space for whole person growth and to plant seeds for

an equity mindset. He proudly suggested:

> I think [sportsmanship is] a key aspect that can come out of a sports program and
>
> put the boys in situations where they fail. How do they fail? Do they fail
>
> properly? Do they fail in a way that is going to help them learn going forward
>
> about the right way to lose and how we treat our opponents and all that goes along

with sportsmanship for male and female athletes, I think definitely is an important

part of masculinity and trying to help the boys avoid that you know, maybe false

bravado that goes along with being an athlete.

Graham highlighted a moment in his school that set a tone for future athletes: the removal of a

sign with an outdated message. He remembered, "One of my memories in this role was about 15

years ago, we actually took down a sign that said 'wrestlers don't cry.' And like wrestlers

absolutely do cry."

Presentation and Analysis of Data for the Document Analysis Worksheet

The document analysis worksheet allowed participants to grapple with institutional

impact or contradictions related to gender dynamics. The exercise illuminated the delicate

balance between the larger company mission and their explicit mandate as institutional actors.

Their narratives revealed clear hopes for progress butting up against larger complexities of

institutional and societal forces. Below are data related to reflections aimed at the institution;

analysis of this reflective engagement is organized according to the coding scheme of goals,

good work, and gaps.

Personal Engagement inside the Institution: Honing the Message and Disrupting Masculinity

In discussing their institutions, participants recognized where they could individually

make a difference inside the larger institutional context. They discussed attempts to convey and

crystallize messages about masculinity via assemblies and other communications. Graham

reported weekly letters to the community that "speak about our boys and the many ways parents

can help them grow to be young men of character… [and] the struggles our boys face in our

school, on social media and in the real world." He also shares lessons with various audiences on

"insights and expectations about manhood and what it means to be a gentleman in today's

world." In regular assemblies, John speaks to his entire division about "social situations, current events, and news that is related to masculinity… [I also] identify those moments in which men outside of our community act in ways that represent what we strive to achieve." Unfortunately, John also noted that "it is not difficult to find [and discuss] situations in which celebrities, athletes, politicians, etc. display characteristics that run counter to what our expectations are of the boys." Lastly, John discussed using his school's advisory program, conversations with parents, and faculty meetings as forums and avenues to review messaging and priorities. These resources for winning hearts and minds are leveraged in "deliberate and prescriptive" ways to counter "what we see in society today," as well as inform "conversations that are taking place" on campus.

Participants also relayed efforts to promote positive and healthy masculinity for students. They acknowledge their role and visibility in embodying empowering masculinities that recognize potential and reward humility. The men emphasize traditionally positive masculine associations like hard work and honesty, but also challenge the community to embrace a wider range of behaviors, emotions, and dispositions. They wield an action-based philosophy of manhood that ties values to intentional behaviors. Christopher highlighted his goal to be seen as caring, grateful, and vulnerable, readily "being willing to admit when I am wrong or mess up. Apologizing is another area where I try to model doing the right thing." Showing gratitude and humility for those "who make things possible for us" rather than competitiveness and control also are important to Christopher. Similarly, John mentioned his school's commitment to a definition of masculinity that speaks "of confidence, of pride, of vulnerability, of service, of purpose." Walter mentioned his full transparency and modesty in dealings with students:

I am honest with the boys about my life. I share mistakes that I made along with

triumphs that I had. I speak to them about what I learned from those mistakes and

how the learnings helped me become a better man. I share that I go to therapy once

a week, to normalize the practice of mental health.

Graham also expressed mindfulness for how he relates during conflict. When encountering

frustrated stakeholders, he "calmly listen[s] and ask[s] relevant and supportive questions" to

model and "demonstrate what appropriate masculinity is" and set expectations for students.

Reflective Engagement with the Institution

In completing the document analysis worksheet, leaders audited their schools around

gender and working with boys. They were able to discern key goals, major gaps, and good work

being done inside the institution. Table 15 lays out the main themes and examples for the major

engagement codes for institutional work.

Table 15

Categories and Examples of Reported Institutional Goals, Gaps, and Good Work

Institutional Goals		
Major Categories within Findings	**Descriptive Summary**	**Exemplary Statement(s)**
Teaching Morality and Character.	Participants described the need for boys to be future moral leaders and the communal training that requires.	"A few times a year, we have discussions regarding our boys' behaviors and our reflex reactions that support a negative masculinity. Instead of responding to poor student behavior with impatience and intolerance, we also need to remember that our boys require time, attention and understanding as we continue to teach a healthy masculine culture." (Graham) At Walter's school, character "means having a strong sense of self and connection to community all grounded in a common set of values," and it is rooted in action, which "bring[s] our 'character' to

		life." It is imperative students "understand right from wrong and to live that in every moment." "Our focus on character, centered on the school's core values of honesty, compassion, and respect, gives our boys the opportunity to develop and practice qualities that will help them become respected citizens of the school and of the world." (John) "We espouse values for our boys all the time - be honest, don't lie, be respectful, work hard, etc. These are all things that would be a part of what we want our boys to see as masculine." (Christopher)
Creating a culture of safety. and belonging for boys.	Participants acknowledged their school's responsibility to know, appreciate, and nurture boys.	Graham spoke passionately about creating a "male environment that is safe and actively works against toxic masculinity and stereotypical ideology about boys' schools." At Graham's school, the boy landscape is safe and diverse, and "being a boy is more than being strong. Future success at our school is built on the foundation of support and inclusivity…in a judgement free environment where they are celebrated for being boys." "inclusion means building a community whose spirit and purpose is based on mutual respect and care. It is vital that each member feels recognized and valued. Inclusion is an essential part of our mission to cultivate each student's potential and develop each boy's mind, character, and heart. We believe that differences of backgrounds, perspectives and cultures are integral to preparing boys to be successful young men in a global community. Ongoing, mindful practice of inclusion requires both individual and institutional commitment to self-examination and learning. We further our mission to be a joyfully inclusive community by aligning policies, curriculum, and decision-making to support diversity and inclusion." (John) "That we do not have to do anything alone and that we can always rely on our brothers. That we can trust our brothers. Trust is a difficult one, especially for communities of color or marginalized communities, for whom historical oppression has

		left them skeptical at best. We ask the boys to trust themselves and each other because men, especially men of color, are taught to distrust their own emotions and to be skeptical of the intentions of others." (Walter)
Developing boys as whole, healthy people beyond academics.	Participants articulated their school's commitment to the whole personhood of the boy to advance their full humanity.	Graham expressed the "desire to fully understand boys and provide them with a safe space for conversation, opinion and growth." "Boys are encouraged to explore their competitive spirits and learn that the strong bonds of friendship, teamwork, and social interaction are what matter most in life." (John) Walter explained a golden triad of boy work – fostering "the head, the heart, and the spirit." They should graduate "aware of their emotions and the emotions and experiences of others. Finally, we ask them to think about the ways in which they are connected to each other and to the outside world."

Institutional Gaps		
Major Categories within Findings	**Descriptive Summary**	**Exemplary Statement(s)**
The need for a meaningful, clear, and integrated vision for manhood.	Participants wished for more consistent, intentional messaging about masculinity on their campuses; they encountered more passive and uncoordinated attempts to teach the boys.	Christopher claimed students "can go here and live it and pick up on messages throughout the year that we want boys to act a certain way, but it isn't described as detailed anywhere." He felt a full school audit or study on gender materials and lessons may help "ensure teachers and boys are in-line with that the expectations are." "As a faculty I think we have a similar understanding about how we want our boys to grow up and act as men, but I am not sure we are intentional enough about passing that along to our boys. I don't know the US curriculum as well, but I would assume they are tackling the topic of toxic masculinity in classes and talking about the perception they have of that topic." (Christopher) Graham argued that the school needs "more conversations, teacher to teacher, between divisions, about how we can deliver the best and most meaningful messaging around masculinity to our students, our parents, and our alumni."

		"The next level, for me, would be to create a prescriptive program for parents regarding what our ambitions are for the boys. This is a major undertaking as the parent generation (to which I belong) have not been exposed at the same level to these types of conversations and introspections as we are asking from the boys." (John)
The uncertainty of whether the school contributes positive long-term impacts on student life skills.	Participants regretted the lack of a clear link between the school's program and lifelong healthy student outcomes.	"We have different internal and external documents that are intentional in measuring the effectiveness of our program, but our tagline has no way of determining its accuracy. It is in many ways a false statement since we are a college preparatory school, and therefore our students leave us prepared for college but are we so confident that they are prepared for life? Also, are we sure they are committed to our masculine ideal in the underlying preparedness? Who is to say our graduates go to college, engage in binge drinking, frat bro culture or narcissistic behaviors. These are completely contradictory to what we teach but we have no way to measure the effectiveness of our program in preparing boys for life." (Graham) "The biggest tension is with the world around us. Our boys enter the building with preconceived notions of masculinity that may not necessarily align with our approach. Those notions come from family, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and society at-large. We work to find ways to honor what they bring into the building while finding commonality with our approach. Ultimately, the rest is up to them. As long as they leave with a genuine belief in community and brotherhood, then we did a least a little bit right." (Walter)
Fear of missed opportunities to educate or more fully embody the mission.	Participants reflected on the numerous possibilities to expand on their good work and reinforce their messages.	Christopher argued his school could highlight more "pop culture mis-teachings "to illuminate ethical moments, but also more effectively redirect students "when we overhear or see boys doing or saying some things that are not in line with what we want to teach." "I often think about a boy going home and not feeling like he is known at all at school or not having quality relationships and what that can mean

		for a boy/young man, especially in the recent years where we think about mental wellness and disconnected males who are depressed or turn violent." (Christopher)
		"I would imagine boys also hear/see things from some coaches or teachers or classmates that might not be in line with what we hope they will understand as masculine. (Christopher)
		"we sometimes fall victim to our own insensitive or thoughtless remarks that fit a stereotypical "boys will be boys" mentality…instead of responding to poor student behavior with impatience and intolerance, we also need to remember that our boys require time, attention, and understanding as we continue to teach a healthy masculine culture." (Graham)
		"There is one contradiction that is incredibly frustrating on so many levels. Despite all of the work that we are doing along the lines of masculinity and diversity, equity, and inclusion, there is still a very traditional dress code…This has become a huge issue at the school in which the dividing lines are pronounced and becoming increasingly contentious. I will not hide my perspective that our current dress code represents not only an outdated idea of what men wear, but it completely contradicts our stated commitment to inclusivity." (John)

Institutional Good Work		
Major Categories within Findings	**Descriptive Summary**	**Exemplary Statement(s)**
Preparing boys for life.	The narratives described collaborative attempts by the schools to ready the boys for the future.	Graham described the school's intentional commitment working "towards the development of men who will graduate with the capacity to contribute to society in positive ways based on the cultural skills boys need to exist as a citizen of our ever-changing world."
		John suggested that character and compassion "will prepare boys for a globally connected existence

		where morality and empathy can serve communities."
		Walter revealed that "leadership is the final core value at GJA. Our ultimate goal is to help develop young men who will serve their communities and the world."
		John suggested "inclusion is an essential part of our mission to cultivate each student's potential and develop each boy's mind, character, and heart. We believe that differences of backgrounds, perspectives and cultures are integral to preparing boys to be successful young men in a global community."
Creating a safe space for total development.	Participants highlighted attempts by the school to provide social and emotional guardrails for the boys' development.	Graham indicated his school allows "all students [to] learn to find their passion, think creatively, and make good choices…teachers help our students find confidence, thoughtfulness, and joy in school." Students in this model discover that "being a boy is more than being strong. Future success…is built on the foundation of support and inclusivity…in a judgement free environment where they are celebrated for being boys."
		Graham's faculty "have patience in working with and educating our boys at their level."
		John's school creates a space where "everything is a boy thing," whether it be "the arts …leadership …service…[or] compassion." Single sex institutions allow boys to "start school on a balanced playing field" where "all things are possible."
		John believes "our school is designed to bring out the best in boys." He heralded its "sincere desire for [their] boys to be reflective about who they are and who they wish to be for themselves and in the greater community."
		"We speak about brotherhood at GJA. That is intentional. Our goal is to have the boys consider the world outside of themselves, beyond their individual experience. We ask them to think about

| | | how they impact others so they can understand their innate agency. If they accept that they have a voice and power, then we can work on teaching them how to use those things in a responsible manner." (Walter)

"Masculinity has been butchered and presented as a zero-sum proposition that demands dominance over the other and is devoid of a meaningful interrogation of the emotional world of men. We reject that worldview. Instead, we believe that masculinity is grounded in brotherhood which requires us to believe in and support other men. Competition does not require dominance, but rather doing your absolute best and in the hopes that those around you will do their best as well. (Walter) |

Table 15 highlights the major foci reported by participants in their document analysis. Their narratives suggest a dual attention: (a) taking pride in the consistent and thoughtful way their schools put students first, and (b) acknowledging areas for growth in their schools' ongoing and iterative stewardship of masculinity.

Generally, participants believe their schools seek to understand and empower the modern boy. Participants laud efforts to "see boys fully" and foster an ecosystem of psychological safety, depth of friendship, and a student culture of mutual care. Walter eloquently described the virtuous cycle of compassion when boys become agents of positive change and "think about how they impact others so they can understand their innate agency. If they accept that they have a voice and power, then we can work on teaching them how to use those things in a responsible manner." Similarly, Graham relayed the importance of community and "being part of something bigger than just an education, but a member of a family. The boys often talk about the brotherhood and the love that they share with each other." The stories of these participants go further than highlighting the lack of sexualized distraction in single-sex schools; they highlight the presence of a strong fraternity and brotherly connection marked by love, not competition.

By analyzing the data presented above, we see participants' schools actively trying to flip the traditional masculine paradigm of "power over" to one of "power with," (Matheus, 2020) a much less costly construction of success. Walter acknowledged that, in this evolving model:

> It takes integrity to be honest with your own feelings about a situation. It takes courage to then draw from those experiences to try and understand what is happening for another person in your community. For most of us, empathy is a learned skill, something that we have to practice. When we work at empathy, we achieve a greater sense of connection to the individuals around us and therefore with our community.

By envisioning each other as stewards of the community, the boys learn the importance of vulnerability and interdependence. Taking a connected stance, the boys can move past broad generalizations to begin to see each other as magnificently and uniquely created (Brooks, 2023). This one gift of boys' schools – mutuality - could be considered their greatest gift to society: the sharing of self and interests for the greater good. This transition toward a new standard of community life in all-boys' schools will continue to face pockets of stubborn opposition in popular media and lingering stereotypes, but hopefully continue to promote patience, compassion, vulnerability, and reliance on others in a world that traditionally has demanded individual men to be better and do more.

Despite the good work, the men benefit from a mild skepticism and critical perspective to stay sharp and hunt inefficiencies. Reflective engagement promotes the dual mindsets of pride and dissatisfaction necessary for consistent, progressive leadership. While aspirational school statements may sound noble and speak to excellence, participants yearn to know if the campus lessons and experiences are enough to produce men of character and value. They crave more

clarity on the empirical and longitudinal causality between the educational program and intended

outcomes. Document analysis afforded scrutiny on some of the inconsistencies, contradictions,

and shortcomings in their setting. With shifting school priorities and polarizing, antisocial

societal influences, participants called for more consistency in messaging and teaching

masculinity and school values. They feared competing priorities, missed chances, and lack of a

unified vision for gender across the community.

Presentation and Analysis of Data for the Semi-structured Interview

In-depth interviews allowed participants to expand on the ways they confront, question,

and approach their work and life as men. Several additional patterns emerged related to their

engagement with gender identity.

The Female Factor

Several participants addressed the challenge of female belonging, implicit gender

favoritism in all-boys' schools, and lack of real-world coeducational experiences for students.

John acknowledged that boys sometimes treat women teachers differently, and male teachers act

as saviors, speaking over female teachers – which "creates just a ton of contention and

complexity." Christopher highlighted his community's debate over the concept of *brotherhood*

and "female teachers who don't feel a part of that." He also suggested the need for male buy-in to

advance equity since men "don't have to work as hard for the boys' attention, I think, as female

teachers." Graham feared whether future graduates would be sexist or abusive towards women

when they arrived on college campuses and hoped that they would develop a sense of shared

power with females. Instead of identifying challenges, Walter reflected on a mindful approach in

collaborating with women:

> Am I going to exert some sort of dominance? Am I going to acknowledge that
>
> you have agency and you have your own power as well? Am I going to try to
>
> collaborate with you? Am I going to try to be in solidarity with you or am I going
>
> to try to overtake the situation? [The key is] preserving the agency of the woman.

A range of challenges, solutions, and awareness of female issues were presented. Some

participants spoke at length about how feminism relates to healthy masculinity and gender

identity, while others avoided pondering the space of women in the collective gender identity

inside their schools. The variation in participant narratives, suggests a possible area of further

study.

Wherever You Go, There You Are

In various ways, participants articulated a feeling of a divided (personal and

professional), carefully managed self – described as a "mask" or a label ("Upper School Head")

or a title (Mr. or Dr.). Understanding power and privilege is at the root of building trust and

stewarding relationships as a leader. Balancing presentation and authenticity well can mean the

difference between being understood and being resented. For instance, John acknowledged that

as a faculty boarding resident, "you worry about favoritism." Graham spoke about his

commitment to emotional intelligence around space and people's needs: "It's not easy. It takes a

fair amount of humility and modesty." Walter described the backpack of experiences and

worldviews participants address in their leading:

> I think wherever you go, there you are. So you bring all of your stuff into every
>
> space that you occupy, whether you access it or whether you access it
>
> intentionally or unintentionally. It is a part of you, right. And so whatever pain or
>
> experiences you had, if they remain unresolved, they will have an impact.

Christopher called his mindful practice "checking himself" to regulate emerging emotions or messages, and Graham referred to it as "consciousness," a crucial outcome he wanted for himself and his students - an "opportunity to wake a few guys up" around the position they occupy in relationships.

Coaching the Coach

Participants described the usefulness of affinity and wisdom in their personal and professional development. They enlisted therapists, spouses, bosses, former bosses, professional learning groups, and mentors as resources for sustenance and support. Graham described these resources as "vital for our health and wellness" and crucial for feedback when "you've got spinach between your teeth." John, a member of a middle school directors' group and mentee to a former female boss, heralded folks who "opened my proverbial eyes" and are "constantly both inspiring and validating and pushing me."

Delineation of Findings for Research Question #2: What do male middle school directors of all-boys private middle schools consider the extent and nature of their active engagement in their gender identity development?

Finding # 3: Participants have customized routines and resources to heal their past hurts, make meaning of their journey, and refine their masculinity to advance their relationships, leadership, and self-concept.

The third finding indicates participants have taken a more active and engaged stance with their gender identity as they have matured and aged. Table 13 suggests the methods, qualities, and diversity of engagement techniques participants have developed around masculinity. The evolution has been both instrumental – to meet the complex demands of their roles – but also therapeutic – to reconcile the confusion and inadequacies of their early gender training. Through

reflection, dialogue, and mentoring, participants have unlearned aspects of their masculinity and worldviews that have blocked relationships and compromised full personhood.

Digital Video Journal. Table 14 illustrates the various ways participants have engaged with resources and methods to heighten consciousness. Flipgrid data reveal the men employ an intentional triad of foci to maximize impact in their work and home – a dedication to internal work aimed at personal growth; an interpersonal awareness of perception and intention; and school supervision that promotes safety and belonging. Graham captured the intensity and discipline needed for this triple focus: "emotional IQ is really, really important. Being thoughtful and having a certain level of emotional intelligence… being very aware of how I am perceived in the moment…for a man, understanding the power [I] bring in the room."

Document Analysis. In their writing, participants focused on their individual priorities as middle school directors, but also on crucial institutional outcomes. Reflections focused on aspirations to crystallize the narrative around boys and the gifts of single-sex education. Participants craved clear messaging that reflects an expansion of the masculine universe to include softer relational traits. Table 15 organized institutional engagement data into several categories, reflecting a transition in boys' education away from social mobility and the reproduction of privileges as core outcomes. Modern goals reflect a progressive view of men as fuller humans with a diversity of needs and purposes (moral grounding, holistic health, emotional safety, being "seen" and appreciated, and feeling connection and belonging).

Semi-structured In-depth Interview. Interviews allowed participants to veer slightly from the scripted prompts of the other instruments. Participants acknowledged that part of their masculine identity work involves their allyship with, beliefs about, and support of women at home and in their schools. Tension does exist, however, in the degree to which participants

embrace a feminist stance, confront their privilege, or acknowledge patriarchal systems to

enhance their main mandate to protect and care for boys.

Participants are clear in their efforts to cultivate an awareness of the formal power and

influence behind their roles, and the energy expended to perform publicly as directors. The

pressure to constantly manage perception truncates their freedom to be fully human and leaves

their guard constantly up. To manage strain and reconcile emotional stress, the directors have

relied upon mentoring, coaching, and affinity spaces that crowdsource strategies to sustain the

work and reconcile the demands of personal and professional life.

Finding #4: Participants' identity work manifests as a mission to advance models of healthy

and moral masculinity; know and support boys; and embody compassionate, thoughtful

leadership in their schools.

The fourth finding summarizes how participants expressed their learning and evolving

masculinity in their relationships and work. Their worldview, via identity work, changes to

match modern norms and their expanding identities. Figure 6 connects findings three and four

visually – showing how engagement links inputs (resources and routines) to outputs (progressive

outcomes for health and leading). As the men continue to evolve, they simultaneously reconcile

their past and transmit their learning for future generations through their childrearing, domestic

partnerships, and work in schools.

Figure 6

Gender Engagement: Changing minds and hearts to heal, grow, and lead
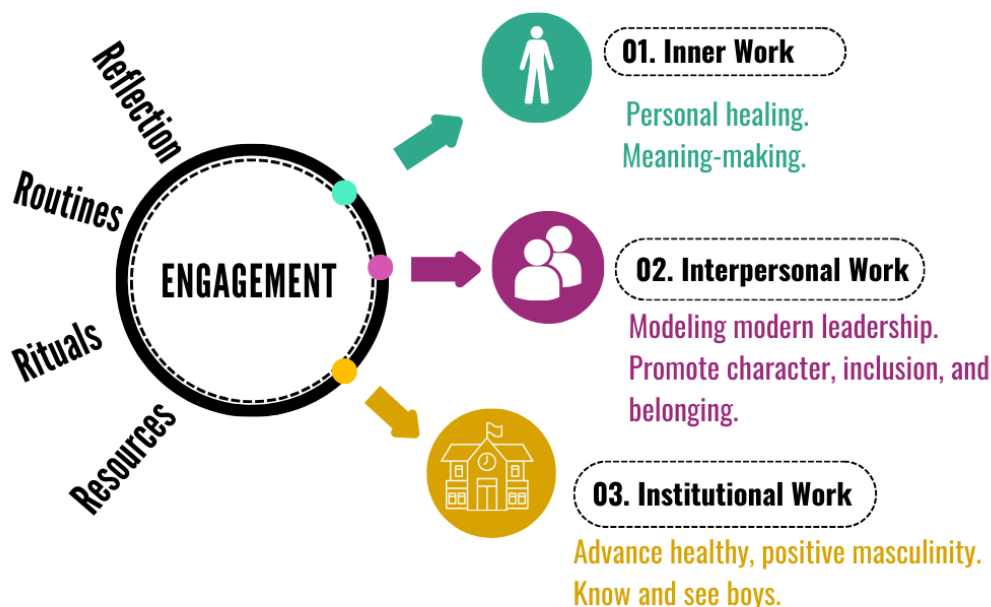
Digital Video Journal. Participants understand their directorship and role as fathers make them standard-bearers for masculinity and gender equity; they know people are watching and take their modeling seriously. They revealed diverse support structures to promote accountability to values, challenge their beliefs, and refine their leadership. Through consistent engagement, participants come off autopilot and integrate practices to maintain a critical stance on their thinking, behaving, and sense-making of circumstances. By regulating their existence thoughtfully, they advance organizational mission and their care for dependents.

Document Analysis. The instrument allowed participants to make sense of their institutional context and their status as leader. With competing demands and conflicting social norms, the men wrestled with what is said and done in their schools. Table 15 outlines the gender audit the men performed – addressing the questions of: a) what is a boys' school for? (b) why does it work? and (c) where does it fall short? Unanimously, the men appreciated the exercise for the ability to evaluate their school's impact. Reflections focused on single-sex effectiveness, changing expectations for boys' schools, and the counterproductive riptide of outside forces.

Data indicates that modern boys' schools now reflect more than the reproduction of male privilege and socioeconomic exclusivity. There is a broader commitment to boys' inner lives, a need for belonging and safety, and their future as collaborators with a diversity of people. It is important to keep in mind the subjective nature of narrative reporting; responsible evaluations of gender in schools are transparent with the positionality and bias of the narrator.

   Semi-structured In-depth Interview. Interviews revealed more specific issues participants have encountered in their identity work. They expressed a range of consideration of the female viewpoint as they navigated personal and institutional masculinities. Participants articulated clear stress in carrying around the dual responsibility of inner work and external image management. The intense pressures of balancing personal and professional identities pointed participants in the direction of coaches and mentors to hold them accountable and challenge their behaviors and mindsets.

Research Question #3: In what ways do male middle school directors of all-boys' private middle schools believe their understandings and experiences of masculinity impact their school leadership and personal wellness?

   This research question asks participants to consider the costs, benefits, or unresolved processes related to their gender development and leadership. It addresses the types and forms of strain, the nature of recovery and self-care, and the changes to default gender settings. Participants manage impacts for sustainability, question them for renewal, or ignore them and face burnout. A review of instruments through the lens of impact traces the nature of coping and strategic redress to maximize self-care.

Presentation and Analysis of Data for the Digital Video Journal

   In their FlipGrid responses, participants mentioned the nature of burdens and

responsibilities they experience in their roles. While some of the leaders were well on their way

to resolving stress and childhood trauma, the intensity of their work and wider gender

expectations weigh heavily and impact wellness.

Participants honestly addressed the consequential, overlapping effects of self-imposed

expectations, residual male norms, and the diversity of life obligations. Their narratives reveal a

longing for balance, a desire for more dedicated recovery, and an acknowledgment of how their

operating systems have evolved to promote survival and usable wisdom. In their accounts, strain

is attributed to professional dedication, the heaviness of responsibility and power, and the

rigidity and mercilessness of masculinity over the life span.

The work of leading schools is hard. Graham captured the difficulty of managing

perceptions as "understanding what you project every day." People notice leaders'

communication, which can be violent, confusing, or honest. Graham listed the ways he remains

aware of his influence:

How I approach my work, how I talk, what I complain about. What I don't

complain about, how I support, and how I listen. How I interact, communicate,

how I manage by walking around. How I engage. How I smile. All those things

helped to put people at ease because I have that power in the organization, right?

Graham is realistic about formal authority and insecurities inside hierarchy. Accordingly, he

remains "very conscious and aware of that and not only listen to folks' fears but try to ally with

them as much as I can." He also knows that trust is the main currency in his leadership. Graham

spoke about leading through transparency and integrity:

I have had folks that have questioned me with regards to where I stand on certain

issues. Whether it be political, whether it be gender issues, whether it be toxic

masculinity, whether it be how we raise our students and help direct and drive

them. And I unfortunately sometimes feel defensive about that and have to tell my

story.

Graham has vast experience in navigating the dual burden of performance and authenticity in

management.

Male operating paradigms can carry scars from earlier socialization. Walter discussed the

constant proving of masculinity being "always a goal, and it was always front and center." He

spoke about the confusing personal war to reconcile polar tensions in masculinity, and the quest

to address the paternal gap in his life, which he "was constantly trying to fill." Social survival

and threat management stained his gender worldview. Lacking trust, he developed

hyperawareness of surroundings and spoke about the need to play out scenarios:

> [I learned to] size up everybody in the room, know where the exits are in case you
>
> got to get out. And really like to know who's in the room, like who's in the room. If
>
> you got to fight, you know, how are you going to fight this person who's with whom,
>
> like? It was that. And I mean like I'll go into a restaurant and that'll still kind of be
>
> there.

At the same time, he eventually harnessed his instinctual awareness and natural empathy for

good. He realized he had always been "sensitive…I've learned to accept my curiosity about

emotions in others and with myself." This realization made him a strong advocate for diversity

work in schools.

In terms of survival and wisdom, participants have learned more flexibility and courage

to step off the male proving grounds. Christopher hoped to be okay with imperfection, avoiding

the need to "be so headstrong that you can't get something wrong because everyone messes up,

and I think that is…that's human." Walter also added that, at its core, masculinity is about self-forgiveness and humility, saying that "what I do hold on to as it relates to masculinity and what it means, is the power of vulnerability, you know, the courage that it takes to be vulnerable." John hoped to model help-seeking, and he took pride in "being the first person to say you know what I'm…I'm having a tough day. I need some help. I can't figure this out." Having survived school leadership in Covid times, John aspired "to be someone who is looking for support and looking for encouragement and looking for tenderness…because I learned pretty quickly that this was not something that I could solve on my own."

Presentation and Analysis of Data for the Document Analysis Worksheet

Participants noted external factors compromising their aspirations and effectiveness. Their answers reveal a mild frustration at society and a welcoming of their work to be countercultural. Their stance represents a broader activist, mission-based approach for boys' schools to build communities that lift boys up, promote compassion and connection, and uphold the highest standards of morality and civility. Tensions articulated included (a) leading against the social tide, and (b) upgrading masculinity through critical thought.

All four participants wrote about the uphill battle of forming upstanding boys. They lamented pervasive toxicity in the wider world off campus. Through philosophy and practice, their leadership proves optimistic and moral, condemning outdated and harmful traditions of the gender binary. Participants decried the limited repertoire of feelings availed to most men. Graham offered that "the narrow cultural definition of masculinity is hurting our boys," claiming the messages are "societal, parental, and stereotypical." Walter elaborated on the challenges:

> The biggest tension is with the world around us. Our boys enter the building with
>
> preconceived notions of masculinity that may not necessarily align with our

approach. Those notions come from family, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and society at-large. We work to find ways to honor what they bring into the building while finding commonality with our approach.

Christopher pointed out the proximal stakeholders who make the work more difficult. He regretted contributions of "coaches or teachers or classmates that might not be in line with what we hope they will understand as masculine. And…what they are hearing from home and popular culture makes our message even harder to pass along." John, leading a global residential school, found the international soup of masculinity tricky, with contradictory variation occurring most significantly with patriarchal treatment of women staff. More traditional masculine cultures reward "the bravado and bluster with which 'masculinity' is often correlated. On occasion this has manifested itself with a greater showing of respect towards male teachers."

All participants highlighted the need for more support from home for the school's efforts to broaden masculine expression, respect women, and embrace emotional safety. Graham reflected about some difficult experiences:

Parents are also creating issues when they make sweeping generalizations about masculinity that are also in direct conflict with our mission. Personally, I have struggled with parents who seem intent on raising bullies and have negative language regarding boys' perceived weaknesses. They use terms like wimps, nerds, and sissies that are direct contradictions to our values.

John similarly expressed challenges with sexism from his international families as a "difficult[y] to find true partnership from the parents for whom this [chauvinism] is normal." He hopes for a future "prescriptive program for parents regarding what our ambitions are for the boys" with inclusion because many parents "have not been exposed at the same level to these types of

conversations and introspections as we are asking from the boys." He highlighted the difficult

conversations around support for the LGBTQIA+ community, where dissenting voices can be

"rather caustic and loud."

Participant writing noted transformative gender learning coming from unsettling

experiences and social disruption. Walter described pushing a new agenda where everyone wins,

and interdependence is necessary: "we do not have to dominate others in order to be masculine.

That we do not have to do anything alone and that we can always rely on our brothers." Walter

arrived at dependency rather than shame later in life; he asked "the boys to trust themselves and

each other because men, especially men of color, are taught to distrust their own emotions and to

be skeptical of the intentions of others." Christopher wondered critically whether programs for a

wide swath of boys overgeneralize their needs. He suggested gender is an incomplete and

immature criterion:

> …we often make decisions based on "most boys" need this. Although when you
>
> look at decisions being made for the majority in other areas it comes off as not
>
> inclusive. We look out for the boys who don't fit the norm because of this. Three
>
> recess periods a day and PE works for lots of boys, but not all.

Christopher interrogated claims of unique boy-centric services, as girls often have similar needs

and "would benefit from most of those things as well."

John similarly carries a healthy skepticism of all-boys' schools, where gender exclusion

serves as the means and ends for rigorous and principled education. Having experienced

successful coeducational models, John remained timid in making the switch to single-sex, "I

dismissed it rather quickly. I had no experience and very little knowledge of all boys' schools

and my wife and I (as parents of two boys) felt like a co-educational environment would be best

for them and for us." Perhaps the outsider frame has helped John stay critical, challenge

assumptions, and champion feminism.

Presentation and Analysis of Data for the Semi-structured Interview

      In their interviews, participants dove deeper into the costs of their work and their

attempts to actively remain whole people. Table 16 below reveals several patterns around

workload and endurance demonstrated in the data.

Table 16

The Leadership Costs and Attempts at Self-Care by Participants

The Costs of the Work		
	Descriptive Summary	**Exemplary Statements**
Feeling Constantly on for Others	Participants described their main stress as having to manage the needs and requests of others. Their work-life balance suffered as they struggled to manage boundaries and turn off their work minds. Their burden manifested as stressors of time, decisions, and isolation.	"I have been in the hospital because of stress. And it's directly related to this job." (Graham)
Time	The to-do-list never stops, and participants are always on call. Figuring out what is a command performance, what is expected, and what is voluntary can be tricky when you are the visible leader and pace car for the organization.	"I have to…I don't have to, but I have to go to this parent event tonight because I'm expected to be there, to an email that comes in after hours. And my wife always oftentimes says, you're doing this because you want to be liked, not respected. And I push back on that. But there may be some truth to that. I don't want to let people down. I don't want to have them feel like I'm not there for them, and quite often I overextend myself." (John)
Decisions	Teachers and students constantly push their issues and agendas. Participants spoke about perpetual "decision-making fatigue" (Christopher) and "[managing] everyone's stuff" (Walter).	"every time I walk down the hall, it's questions of 'tell us how to do this. We need a decision on *blank*.' And it's sort of that fatigue that comes from that power." (Christopher) "My biggest anxiety is the unknown. I don't know what's going to walk through that door on a day-to-day basis and am I

		going to be able to react in a conscious manner and be emotionally intelligent? If somebody is screaming in my face about something I have no control over and it's not my fault, but in that moment it's my problem and, I have to deal with it." (Graham)
Isolation	Participants expressed some loneliness and vulnerability in carrying their schools and families on their shoulders. Their sense of duty, empathy, and fatigue feels almost unrelatable. It manifests as "failed relationships," exhaustion, discomfort in sharing experiences, and a guilt related to self-care as a luxurious personal priority to pass over.	Graham described how he feels more alive and less pressure to "code switch" when traveling, Christopher acknowledged he needed to ask for help more. John suggested his openness in our interview was more personal than that in some of his most cherished male friendships.

Self-Care		
	Descriptive Summary	**Exemplary Statements**
Making Attempts at Self Care	Facing immense pressure and stress**,** participants committed to health and wellness strategies to recover and rejuvenate. Participant narratives suggested a couple of dominant paths towards self-care aimed at making professional life more bearable and personal stewardship less difficult.	"people see me and think I can take it and they just yell and scream and or I have a mountain of work and I'm overwhelmed and I just can't do it…I practice mindfulness daily, multiple times a day to try to make sure that my stress is safe. And in the process of getting my doctorate I heard from a former superintendent of schools how important it is to stay active, how important it is to be healthy. How important it is to be mindful and reflective and share your pain and that kind of bag you carry over your shoulder. Because if you don't, yeah, your health and wellness is a real issue." (Graham)
Personal Down Time	Men craved time to step away from their roles and expectations.	Christopher attributed mental benefits to coaching his own children's sports as a healthy way to "[be] willing and able to step away from work." Walter prefers to decompress by staying up late and watching reruns of old sitcoms because "I know what's going to happen…I don't have to think about it. I don't have to make a choice." He also

		enjoys purposefully silent car rides and moments of "uninterrupted space to be present with myself."
Expending and Conserving Energy	Physical activity clears the head and declutters the mind. At the same time, an alternative strategy is to audit energy and ration it out very carefully.	Christopher chooses to run or ride the bike and use the time to reflect. Walter prefers early morning walks and rides on his Peloton bike. John prefers competitive fitness events to drive his training. Graham runs half-marathons. -- "I'm tired…And so I think that's just so important to me now, like being like, okay, I'm not going to engage in this conversation. I don't need to engage in this conversation, this moment or I'm not going to expend my energy on this thing. I think there's a bigger…there's a better use of my time and my energy in this moment. And it's not arrogance. It's just trying to be smart." (Walter) "And so understanding that if I go into a situation and I'm trying to save some kid or some family – fuck that - I'm not doing that; I reject that. Me - I'm not saving anybody. No, because I'm not going to be there with you all the time. I'm not going to be there with you for every decision that you make. I can't save you. I can help you. And so being…what I've tried to do is just be smarter about how I allocate my energy." (Walter)
Safe, Private, and Authentic Spaces.	Men relished opportunities to let their guard down and be authentic and free from perception management.	John relishes opportunities with friends – mostly female - "to be my true self and to be open and honest." These are friends who know him as *John*, "not as these monikers and the titles and things like that…it's people who understand me as an outdoors person, as an environmentalist." Graham considers home a safe space to "relax, kind of do what I need to do, ask

		permission occasionally to say, 'Hey, is it okay if I do this?... I'd like to take a minute. Is that okay?'"
		Walter suggested that counseling therapy "kind of saved my life. And so I needed to heal in a lot of ways….to confront certain things as it related to masculinity… to be more effective as a leader."

Table 16 highlights the tenuous space between health, productivity, and a reasonable threshold of work volume. Participants often arrive first and leave work last; they understand their role in modeling presence and accessibility. The men portrayed relentless demands and identified preferred strategies to recover from the unreasonable pace. The grind can become cause for concern, as Graham noted:

> There have been a number of principals and superintendents that have taken their life because they just can't handle it…We need to have other people that we can rely on and lean against, whether it's about masculinity or anything else for that matter and have those conversations and watch out for each other.

Careful management of energy – its creation and its stewardship – allows participants to be ready for looming daily challenges. The leaders privately yearn for the wholeness and health envisioned for their students.

In interviews, participants reported several impactful benefits of participation in the study. The men unanimously reported new levels of scrutiny and hyperfocus on gender. The process was therapeutic (Walter), intentional (Christopher), deep (John), and validating (Graham). The questions prompted self-assessment and organizational diagnostics allowing the men to plot their own development on top of their school's progress. The prompts allowed time and motivation to delve into gender without interruptions or competing priorities. Participant

descriptions of the study experience included "deep dive," "take stock," "audit," "reevaluate," "forced me to think," "stop and reflect," "relish the opportunity just to pause," "reminded me a little bit of therapy," and "excavating our language."

Delineation of Findings for Research Question #3: In what ways do male middle school directors of all-boys' private middle schools believe their understandings and experiences of masculinity impact their school leadership and personal wellness?

Finding # 5: Participants experience significant strain and stress in their professional roles; yet they have only partially developed and inconsistently deployed healthy coping strategies.

The fifth finding summarizes the gap between awareness of chronic stress and committing to healthy habits and life balance. Because of the seriousness of their vocation, the men overwork and under recover. The visibility of the role, the legacy of male norms, and the love of their community drives them to improve, succeed, and make a difference for every stakeholder. As the protector and provider of their flock, the men juggle the accountability of leadership with the benefits of stepping back and practicing distributive leadership. Their difficulty lies in their will to not only know how to take care of themselves, but to embrace the discipline and priority shifting to do so. While many of the described demands and stresses of participants' work are universal to all forms of leadership, leading private middle schools is unique: the feeling of owing one's best to parents, students, and staff; the level of pastoral presence as all stakeholders "grow up" together; the place of schools as a center of character and identity formation; the likelihood of seeing parents, staff, and students "out and about" off campus; and the endless number of evening and weekend events that require presence and engagement.

Digital Video Journal. Participants described the repeating cycle of expend, refuel, and adapt – where their energy, time, and empathy become more efficient and wiser to ensure a healthier and more sustainable leadership. Via lessons learned, new experiences, and the rejection of old behaviors, participants have "become more tuned into [their] own masculinity" (John) and rewritten new operating principles. Life experiences have caused participants "to dig deep and reflect on [their] relationship with [their] own masculinity. It gave [them] the opportunity to begin to organize a bunch of different thoughts and experiences into something cohesive" (Walter). By evolving, the men have positioned themselves to enact the lessons they are teaching their students about self-love and respect for the whole person.

Document Analysis. The leaders acknowledged the contextual difficulty of developing boys amid competing priorities. In an ideological era where "woke" agendas threaten family values, participants struggle to advance masculinity with community consensus. Elitism and privilege sometimes thwart the call to be inclusive and gender equitable. John noted adeptly that "*inclusion* often times has different meanings." The document analysis exercise spawned critical reflection and called to mind the continuing tensions and incompleteness of most gender models and worldviews.

Semi-structured In-depth Interview. Participants realize the mental and physical toll of walking the tightrope between effective work and presence at home. They cope the best they can with compounding burdens of constantly showing up for others. While vulnerability, seeking help, and taking one's foot off the pedal are not natural for most men, these leaders have learned to integrate leadership approaches and recovery methods that promote self-care and self-preservation. Graham revealed his own progress in rewriting a family gender norm – male sacrifice at all costs:

My father didn't [take care of himself]. Hence the reason he died at age 48...I

think it's vital. As a man, part of our masculinity is to take care of ourselves so we

can be there for others when they need us.

Participants' learning edge for continued inner work resides in this delicate balance –

demanding results for students and school while embracing their own personal needs to

thrive and experience full humanity.

Narrative Analysis of the Critical Case

John's intriguing and sophisticated worldview spurred further research and analysis as a

pivotal case for this study. Throughout the course of the study, John emerged as a notable leader,

enlightened male, and dedicated champion of boys. He revealed courage to understand and

address his own story, fight for full and inclusive belonging in his school, and advocate for a

robust and sophisticated vision of masculinity for his boys. He prioritized making his own

masculinity visibly conscious and available for review. Accordingly, I chose to select him as a

critical case for further study and follow up site visits on his campus, where I observed his work

over several days. Such an approach helps build a "thick description" (Yin, 2016, p. 227) to

emphasize the deeper forces of one case inside its socially significant contexts. The section

below explores John's larger metanarrative through site visits and follow up conversations. The

following analysis and description illustrate the complexity, bravery, and richness of John's story

as a man and school leader.

I am Not Your Guru

On the first site visit, watching John on stage as he ran an assembly for his divisional

students and faculty, I was struck by a mental association to an image from a movie I had seen

before. The image of John (see Figure 7), on stage, sweating, working so hard to connect with

the audience, to hit the nerve where community is built, and lessons are learned, I was reminded

of the *Netflix* documentary on self-help and mindset guru, Tony Robbins. His *Date with Destiny*

program brings thousands of impressionable, hungry, lonely people together who are yearning

for some insights or wisdom to set them on their path to self-actualization and meet their

potential as humans (Berlinger, 2016).

The scene was poignant for me, as someone in the same role, who often feels isolated,

always on the public stage and under scrutiny, and always striving to inspire and reach others.

The grind is real. *I am Not Your Guru* is a vivid portrayal of the costs and benefits for those who

gruel away as leaders in the caring professions. Tony Robbins' productivity and self-care

routines are superhuman, but necessary for the deep investment he has in his paying clientele. At

one point, Tony looks into the camera and states, "I'll do whatever the 'F' it takes it takes to

break the patterns so you can reclaim who you really are." In working with young, socialized

boys and faculty with varying levels of self-interest and bias, Middle School leaders carry a large

arsenal of tips and tricks to rally their team, thwart generational pain, and help people come to

know who they really are.

Figure 7

The Man on the Stage

Observation Description

The site visits occurred during school hours over several days. Observation experiences followed John's normal schedule for the day, and I was by John's side for most of the visits barring a need for a private space or conversation. John explained my presence in shadowing him as a part of our professional learning network to which we both belonged. The observed activities fell into three main categories:

- Formal meetings: whole school assembly, academic leadership meeting, John's grade 7 health class, Upper School administrative meeting, parent association meeting, student support team meeting, and grade level meeting (7th).

- Informal, organic conversations: phone calls with colleagues and parents, lunch periods, and student meetings.

- Personal moments (resulting from John's participation as a residential faculty/staff member): breakfast with John and his son, walking with John to drop his son off to a local public school, a visit to John's campus house, and follow up debriefs in his office at the end of each day.

Narrative Analysis of John's Case

The narrative analysis below integrates elements of a "fully formed" narrative structure (Riessman, 1993, citing Labov 1972, 1982, p. 18), incorporating literary frames into the data analysis to capture both *plot* (interesting aspects of the story making it exceptional or different) and *story* (temporal arrangement of life events) (Reissman, 1993).

Plot Development

Exposition. John grew up as the son of a school administrator, traveling to different locations and alternating between being in the supermajority (all-white population) to one of only a few whites (on First Nations land schools). The school life rhythm is in his veins. While he comes from and benefits from privilege, he cherishes most dearly the moments in his life where he was outside the majority, exposed to new cultures, or put in situations where girls and women could be his equal.

Ordeal. Switching to an all-boys, boarding school was a big change for John and his family. Most notably, John's entrance to his current school was marked by a combination of forces: curiosity around all-boys, skepticism of male privilege, and hesitation around the boarding model. John and his wife had to take a hard look at whether the school was the right fit for their boys or not. How would John's worldview align at a traditional boys' boarding school?

Evaluation. John's acclimation to his school has accelerated his own masculine growth and development. Combined with the inward facing impact of Covid and a relentless focus on

boys, John has come to understand and refine his own masculinity. This inner work has better prepared him to be an ally and advocate for all marginalized groups, as he works to advance inclusivity and equity in his community. John has developed a unique position to compare his experience in coeducational day schools with boys' boarding to evaluate the costs and benefits of both models. John spends significant time reviewing his own privilege and positionality to move past imposter to influencer in the feminist and boys' advocates spaces.

Resolution. John has grown into an exemplary servant leader – one who models a thoughtful, healthy masculinity for students and staff; but also a white man who champions cultural humility, a global awareness, and a firm commitment to women on his campus. John continues to operate as a skeptic and realist as he considers his role, his school, and his vocation. At the time of the site visit's conclusion, I left unsure of where John would land long-term. He takes nothing for granted – his privilege, the reputation of his school, or the outcomes of all-boys' education – nothing is promised, and everything is earned. This approach makes him a great human and a great leader.

Chronology and Time

Time is an important aspect of all participants' stories, as it is imperative to the maturation, healing, and wisdom resulting from the gender journeys under study. Such attention paid to elapsed time, signals the narrative researcher's understanding of "temporal change that is conveyed when individuals talk about their experiences and their lives" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 69). Feiler's useful paradigm of life transitions (2020; 2021) confirms Creswell and Poth's (2018) emphasis on "the lead-up and consequences," (p. 69) and "transitions or interruptions" (p. 69) as organizing structures.

Epiphanies. John's consciousness is generally high. However, several moments disrupted John and his evolving masculinity. John cited the powerful experience of both living with a foster girl and then having the painful reality of separation as she rejoined her nuclear family. The emotional tumult crushed John, and he allowed his full, true self to be on display on his campus as he mourned the loss. In fact, he spoke openly about his pain at a public assembly with students and staff.

John's relationship with his partner and children keeps his privilege, his primary breadwinner role, and the full, wide range of gender expression of his sons at the forefront of his mind. They actively and subconsciously keep him in check as he advances the mission of his school (one that excludes girls), tries to keep his home together, and attempts to architect a feminist, ant-racist, and socially just ecosphere around him. He carries around unspoken conflict and discord as he serves multiple masters – what he wants and needs as John, what his family needs from Dad, and what it takes to lead as Upper School head.

Narrative Themes

Narrative analysis of John's case revealed several themes that occupy the three dimensions of *narrative inquiry space*: interaction (relationships), continuity (time), and situation (place) (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). Clandinin and Connolly (2000) suggested that comprehensive narrative meaning connects the inner life of actors' hopes and fears; the existential life of the setting; and the temporal evolution of the phenomenon under study.

Man on The Stage. John is the big man on the stage. When he is able to teach – he feels alive - the lights, the wireless mic, the podium, the slide deck. He savors the pressure and the challenge of reaching 200 boys from 44 countries. He sweats, pleas, wills the boys to connect with him and his message. He knows where he wants them to go, and he seizes every moment to

evangelize. He learns their names to validate them and show them he honors their story. He does not consider this performance an act – he believes it is who he truly is. He says, "I just love it. I love thinking back to when I was in seventh, eighth, ninth grade. And what would I have wanted to hear?...[not] bullshit speeches and things that were written down and scripted."

He does not eat lunch. He prefers to converse and show face to students and faculty during the lunch period. If he is lucky, he will fill a to-go container and scarf it down when he gets back to the office, if at all. He enters space after space as the expert and authority – one such meeting involved twelve mothers from the parent council and John. He read the room, took stock of his positionality, and anticipated what they needed from him: "that I know their kids…I know kids this age…they're looking for follow-through and follow-up…someone who doesn't overpromise and underdeliver…and I try to be pretty honest with them."

The Unavoidable Tax. Walking with John is a whirlwind – you witness a constant stream of praise, reminders, feedback, encouragement, and inspiring micro doses of wisdom, humor, and love to everyone he encounters. Being present to people and getting to know them takes time, and it leaves a tax. At the end of one day, John acknowledged the fifty emails he would have to respond to that evening, instead of watching the World Cup with his family. His mind stays in two places – replaying the school day while also being present to his family. Living on campus hurts – as he constantly feels like the Upper School Head. He remembers fondly his old thirty-minute commute where he could decompress and then become John, and dad, and husband more readily. In conversations, we hinted at the irony that a boarding situation could lead to more loneliness at school, as relationships dance around formalities, favoritism, and the inevitable conflict in manager-report relations.

School Life. Soul Life. Nostalgia. John's office is carefully organized. It represents a thematic, intentional layout, with school life pictures on one side, personally meaningful private life images on the other, and nostalgic mementos from early life in the middle as the north star (see Figures 8 and 9). The strict demarcation is interesting – as the reality of boarding school leadership blurs those distinctions and leaves boundaries more fluid and harder to regulate. The outdoors adventure images and memories of his childhood time in first people's lands keep his spirit and sense of adventure alive. He regrets, however, that going into administration has "cut out" that adventurous, exhilarating part of his life. His self-care has also suffered – he is 25 pounds heavier, not sleeping well, and finds himself lonely and isolated from real, deep relationships. He knows he may have to fire a friend or avoid getting close to avoid perceptions of preferential treatment.

He has a standup desk to support his crazy, mobile schedule, and a couch to support his counseling role as pastor of his upper school division. People come in and out all day long. Some to say hello, some to provide feedback, some to ask questions. He makes time for all of them, making sure to add a personal touch to every professional inquiry.

Figures 8 and 9

Images of John's Office Walls

Protect the Space. Keep the Whole. John protects the intentional time to bond with his

sons on and around campus as vital to his self-care. On one morning I joined him for his weekly

routine – breakfast with his older son (a student at his school) and then a walk to his younger

son's local school for drop off. I was struck by the sight of John, dressed in professional attire,

roaming the hallways hand in hand with a mini version of himself, so at ease with intimacy and

connection with his child (see figure 10). The purposeful engagement seemed like a spiritual

retreat for him, where he recalibrated and spent the rest of his day focusing on students and

centering their experience. John also protects time he dedicates to his non-profit board

leadership, as it helps him grow as a leader and connects him to a wider purpose and passion –

environmentalism and outdoor education. He maintains a home in rural New England that acts as

a personal harbor from the sweeping currents of roles and expectations, and he fixates on

manual, generative handyman projects that have tangible outcomes – to feed his desire for

control, linearity, and finality.

Figure 10

John and His Son on the Way to School

Never One Decision out of One Mind. John builds relationships and distributes

leadership to arrive at the best answers. I estimated 85% of my observation time was spent with

John as the facilitator or in dialogue with decision-makers. In one powerful meeting, John took a

backseat as a colleague, and participated on equal footing with his grade level teaching team. He

called the difference in that meeting "exciting," as a leader "puts people in positions to lead

themselves." He is more secure in this approach now after maturing on the job and seeing

various leaders model democratic practices. He acknowledges that "this job is getting bigger and

bigger and more and more complicated. And I just can't do everything. I can't even do 50% of

what I used to do." His philosophy of "never one decision out of one mind" assists his belief that

"it would be very naïve for me to think that I understand what the feelings and the

understandings are of everything." He has limited time with various groups each day, and he

often carries a partial picture of the full reality of the organization.

Until You're in this, You Just Don't Understand. John and I commiserated at the end

of my final visit about our shared experience. We discussed the emotional energy, the difficult

life balance, the never-ending demands, the self-sacrifices we all make to do it well. He

admitted, "each meeting before I go in there, I'm like, okay, which personality is this right now?

You know?...I'm just emotionally drained, right?" We laughed about the lack of time to actually

think and process the day, the talent faculty have of making demands without saying hello, or

coming into the office without knocking. We asked who takes care of us as humans when we

need some supports. We discussed the following understanding:

> You and I have learned over time that to do our job effectively, our needs have to
>
> be suppressed. They just have to be suppressed. And we're dealing with 35 adults
>
> who don't have that same instinct. And we're dealing with children who don't

have that instinct. So you have exponential people who are all trying to have their

needs met. And ultimately, you're the person that everyone goes to when all the

other layers and steps have been unsuccessful.

John acknowledged "that's a lot of pressure, and that's hard to articulate to

people…we've been sort of trained ourselves to always accept the blame and deflect the

commendation."

Connecting the Critical Case to the Major Findings

John's story adds depth and nuance when considering his journey relative to the study's

five findings. The complexity and layers of John's narrative complements the common

themes expressed in the research instruments. Table 17 elaborates on John's life through the lens

of the study's five findings.

Table 17

John's Journey and Elaborations on Each Major Finding

Major Finding	Descriptive Summary for John's Case
Finding # 1: As boys and young men, the courageous leaders of this study learned and internalized various aspects of hegemonic masculinities and patriarchal belief structures.	John grew up in a patriarchal household with rigid gender roles; however, his experience as the "other" in first people, indigenous lands and need to resettle several times for his father's work required him to negotiate his identity in each environment. The "bush education" he received challenged many norms and gender scripts of the typical white male upbringing of his generation. His early life experiences opened his eyes to other ways of knowing and being.
Finding # 2: Participants experienced meaningful gender turning points that ignited a critical consciousness and new ways of knowing and being in their personal and professional lives.	John recounted major moments in his development where women were significant. He remembered an influential woman mentor who encouraged him to teach and lead, female students and athletes he grew fond of mentoring, and memories of girls who paddled as far and long as he did at his childhood summer camp. He also became a foster parent to a girl while at his current school, and his best friend at work is a female faculty member. John spoke at length about honoring his wife, collaborating with female colleagues, and actively pushing men on his staff to be allies to women. Accordingly, John's

	masculinity actively works to "see" women and build bridges towards them, not exclude or gaze past them.
Finding # 3: Participants have customized routines and resources to heal their past hurts, make meaning of their journey, and refine their masculinity to advance their relationships, leadership, and self-concept.	It appears that John has found a major critical thought partner in his wife. Her independence, gender equity lens, and skepticism of boys' schools, constantly challenges his engagement and identity formation. Rather than being an accessory or accomplice to his career, she plays the devil's advocate role and asks John to justify and articulate his choices and perspectives while in predominantly male spaces. John's wife and marriage have assumed the role of antagonist gender force – a ready counterweight to the taken-for-granted modes of typical male being and thinking.
Finding #4: Participants' identity work manifests as a mission to advance models of healthy and moral masculinity; know and support boys; and embody compassionate, thoughtful leadership in their schools.	John's leadership and parenting are grounded in an equity and justice mindset that confronts privilege, empowers the voiceless, and demands transparency and integrity with core beliefs. John is a committed antiracist, feminist, and ally to those on the margins. He is honest about his healthy skepticism of single-sex boys' education; this manifests as a deep desire to prove and earn the outcomes associated with developing boys. He defies the entitlement or perceived social exclusivity of selective schools for boys. Instead, he sees boyhood as a journey to shed privilege, relearn social and emotional health, and develop the skills to lead with compassion and inclusivity in the world beyond campus.
Finding # 5: Participants experience significant strain and stress in their professional roles; yet they have only partially developed and inconsistently deployed healthy coping strategies.	John faces difficult challenges creating balance in a residential school setting. Of all participants, he has the most difficulty separating his professional world from his personal life, and the pressure to convince his family of the worth of his work proves stressful. John wrestles with a tension-filled conflict of individual family members seeking authenticity and growth while saturated by a monolithic, uniform school environment 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. John is weary – he not only must fight for his school, but he must fight for his family and create a space for all to thrive and meet their potential. John's outside work for his family's nonprofit meets a need for a meaningful diversion, but John clearly needs more separation from school and time with friends in his life.

Table 17 indicates that John's narrative contains teachable seeds for future leaders

as they navigate leadership in all-boys' schools: the benefit of clear boundaries between

home and life, the role of minority status experiences in fostering greater consciousness,

and the importance of feminist approaches in fostering healthy gender climates. John's

selection as a critical case added depth to this study because he embodies a hearty, intentional commitment to be an ally, confront his privileges, and lean into critical feedback. As a white male, he has integrated a robust toolkit to practice reflection, engage in his identity, and confront the ways his own masculinity and upbringing impact his work. While one can never fully control the scenarios life presents, one can identify and seek opportunities that minoritize typical majorities, combat privilege by building meaningful relationships with women, and embrace critical partners in our development that challenge bias and comfort.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed explanation of how data were organized, evaluated, and synthesized according to the three main research questions and three main research instruments. In addition, an exploration of the coding scheme for the paradigmatic analysis suggested some unifying patterns that comprised the five emergent research findings. The concluding narrative analysis section emphasized one participant's journey as a critical case to inspire further reflection and meaning.

An elaboration of select major findings in Chapter Five is intended to promote a deeper reflection and call to action. The scope of the following discussion includes outlining practical and theoretical implications and suggesting recommendations for practitioners in the field. Chapter Five is presented in five sections (a) an introduction, (b) a study summary, (c) a discussion of findings, (d) suggestions for future research, and (e) final reflections.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND FINAL
REFLECTIONS

Introduction

This chapter is divided into five sections: (a) Introduction, (b) Study Summary, (c)

Discussion, (d) Future Research, and (e) Final Reflections. The Study Summary reconsiders the

importance of the study and reviews the critical points made in Chapters One through Four as a

background for understanding the ideas offered in the Discussion, which provides the practical,

theoretical, and leadership development recommendations informed by the findings. Considering

the delimitations and limitations of this study, I also recommend future actions and inquiry for

practitioners and researchers in the section headed Future Research. That section on future

research will inform attempts by male school leaders in single sex schools to improve and sustain

their work and continued growth through committed gender identity engagement. Finally, this

chapter contains a Final Reflection, which is designed as a capstone reflection on the

development and execution of the study, a disruptive process that promoted my own inner,

interpersonal, and institutional work.

Study Summary

A wave of recent media, books, and press coverage has focused on the plight of boys and

men to survive, be healthy, and keep up with women in school and at work (Brooks, 2022;

Emba, 2023; Farrell & Gray, 2018; Kahloon, 2023; Reeves, 2022; Reeves & Smith, 2022). Emba

(2023) suggested men are in the middle of "a widespread identity crisis — as if they didn't know

how to *be*…[they] find themselves lonely, depressed, anxious and directionless." Public health

trends suggest that boys and men are anxious, depressed, lonely, and taking their lives at

relatively higher rates at the teenage and older ages (Barker et al., 2023; Reeves, 2022). Based on

the problematic trends in male health and the stubborn male norms that stigmatize help-seeking,

the APA (2018b) released its report on best practices for counseling professionals on how to

reach and support males effectively. Their report notes that "there is a particular constellation of

standards that have held sway over large segments of the population, including: anti-femininity,

achievement, eschewal of the appearance of weakness, and adventure, risk, and violence" (p. 2).

Brooks (2022) argued that men, dazed and confused, have "lost an empire but not yet found a

role" (paragraph 12), and Kahloon (2023) offered that "contemporary American men are mired

in malaise" (paragraph 2). Boys' schools are in a unique position to set the vision for modern

masculinity and healthy manhood and counter the increasingly problematic trends for men and

boys. They can help address the urgent questions of "what *are* men for in the modern world?

What do they look like? Where do they fit?...Whatever self-definition men settle on will have an

enormous impact on society" (Emba, 2023, paragraph 24).

   As we have seen in this study and over time, the mandate of boys' schools is changing to

reflect a progressive blend of relational skills, social and emotional health, and identity

consciousness (Reilly, 2019; Strauss, 2019). Kahloon (2023) referred to the enlightened space

for modern men as "prosocial masculinity for a postfeminist world" (paragraph 14). The task of

developing young men is no longer just about teaching toughness, hard work, and the skills and

mindsets for social elitism and capitalist dominance. What people ask of men, today, is

relational sensitivity and *moral integrity* (Degges-White, 2018) - timeless desirable human

qualities which can effectively bridge the gap between men and women and old notions of

manhood and new models of masculinity. Yes, aspects of gentlemanliness and chivalry can still

teach us something (politeness and protecting others); the masculine sands of time are not gone

forever. What now matters most for men is unseen – developing "a heart of masculine virtue"

(Guzman, 2018).

At this juncture, trial by fire and surviving the academic and athletic crucible of prep school life are outdated tests of worth; the fallout from that antiquated hero's journey is real and rampant. Male-identifying leaders of all-boys' schools can bridge this gap of masculinity's meaning via the ways they consider, embody, and model agency in healthy gender expression. How they construct masculinity matters; for synergy between identity, mission, discourse, and behavior ensure better outcomes for all humans close to them at home and school. Modern men are shedding patriarchy's wounds and reimagining manhood. This process has lasting, tangible impacts on their parenting, their leadership, and their ability to thrive amid the stressors and complexity of their personal and professional lives.

Simultaneously, women are beginning to outpace men in higher education enrollments and close the representation gaps in credentialed professions like law and medicine (Reeves, 2022). Boys and their schools face a different, equitable gender reality – one where, relative to previous generations, women are more likely to be the primary family earner, a corporate boss, or a mid-level professional teammate. With a modern higher premium on allyship (Reed, 2023) and accompaniment (Brooks, 2023), leaders of all-boy schools must expand their gender focus beyond their students to include the female-identifying members of the community in the work of raising young men. To do this work effectively, male leaders especially, need to model a masculinity that is patient, inclusive, healthy, and deliberate. The process of identifying, dissecting, and analyzing privilege – whether patriarchy or white supremacy – helps leaders in the majority collaborate with, represent, and incorporate a diversity of perspectives and talents. It is time for male school directors to heal themselves, do the inner work of allyship, and help change patriarchal systems that injure all and exclude women from conversations and decisions.

Discussion

In this section, the major theoretical and practical implications of the findings of this study are explored, along with recommendations for individuals interested in identity work, sustainable leadership, and gender equity. The theoretical and practical implications for schools, leadership development, and men's health are significant and transferable across industries and vocations that care for others. However, this section's discussion primarily concerns the implications of the study that are relevant to men leading boys in single-sex secondary schools where gender is a bedrock aspect of mission and service.

Finding #1

As boys and young men, the courageous leaders of this study learned and internalized various aspects of hegemonic masculinities and patriarchal belief structures.

Theoretical Implications

These four men climbed heroically out of the man cave and have brought powerful windows and mirrors into their communities. Narratives about their upbringing and early gender understandings support the literature that suggests dominant models of masculinity can be developmental, generational, context-dependent, and fluid over time (Connell 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; O'Neil, 2015). The tropes explained by participants who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s reflected the brand of masculinity of the time – strength, independence, performance, and stamina (Anderson, 2018, as cited in David & Brandon, 1976) – and the accompanying cognitive distortions that go hand in hand with such a brand of manhood (Mahalik, 1999). Their narratives supported the defining qualities of patriarchal ideology and hegemonic masculinity. Their stories reflected certain kinds of men being prized over other men and all women, the marginalization of subordinate masculinities, and the prioritization of establishing individual credibility and power over health and connections with others (Connell,

2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Their childhood and

adolescent journeys involved forsaking some authenticity and interpersonal connection for

independence, social capital, accomplishment, and "growing up" to meet expectations (Way,

2011; 2013).

Practical Implications

While the boyhood of the four study participants does not represent the gender experience of

all male school leaders, the beginning parts of their stories suggest the opportunity for personal

healing and giving back by preventing future trauma and neglect in boys' worlds. There are some

practical implications for leadership in all boys' schools. Two areas of concern include hiring and

mentoring: screening leadership candidates for their gender worldview since it may guide their

behaviors, discourse, and management; and also providing opportunities in the way of mentoring for

male leaders to continue (or start) to work through some of their early socialization and its lasting

impacts. Assessing whether the masculinity of male administrative candidates aligns with the

mission, values, and vision of boyhood of the school can contribute to the overall success of the

hiring and onboarding program. Post hiring, having to later direct men to unlearn unhealthy or

injurious aspects of their masculinity while on the job could prove to be a messy and costly process.

Integrating ways to assess where men are at with their feminism and ideas on gender equity can only

contribute to organizational performance, diversity efforts, and a culture of belonging and

collaboration (Bava & Greene, 2023; Reed, 2023). Identifying whether male leaders have considered

and worked through their privilege and intersectionality can predict their ability to act reflexively,

practice social awareness, and undo gender dynamics that isolate and exclude (Martin, 2001; 2003;

2006).

Recommendations

Because gender is the primary identity addressed in all-boys' schools, understanding the

gender worldview and relevant narratives of leadership candidates in the hiring process may

prove crucial. Male school leaders will be in a position to communicate hallmark stories of the

school, expectations for students, and a brand of citizenship for all community members. This

dependence on the narration and vision-setting of school leaders suggests the benefit of integrity

and synergy for those occupying the top spot. Inner turmoil, stubbornness, or clinging to implicit

paradigms of self or work can add dissonance or incongruity to messaging, marketing, and

leading. Doing due diligence in understanding the gender story of candidates can help ensure that

their future leadership and interpersonal behaviors are in alignment with the school's mission

and values. Determining if applicants have "undone" any aspect of their early gender training

may signify an openness to modern masculinity or demonstrated capacities for introspection,

managing organizational change, or responding to changing times. Integrating carefully designed

interview questions around gender or conducting a reflective exercise around school mission and

personal values can indicate a willingness to point a critical lens at oneself or the articulated

objectives of the school. Providing candidates with example scenarios of allyship or sexism for

comment and reflection may indicate their capacity for reflexivity and relationship building.

Finding #2

Participants experienced meaningful gender turning points that ignited a critical

consciousness and new ways of knowing and being in their personal and professional lives.

Theoretical Implications

Participants reported life transitions and gender identity disruptions that promoted more

nuanced and mature gender beliefs and understandings. This evolution in participants' meaning-

making processes supports literature that highlights: (a) the critical place of story in human

experience to cope with surprise, conflict, and change (Feiler 2020, 2021; Lehrer 2020); (b) the

malleability of the human brain and possibility of transforming neural patterns that guide human

behavior (Kegan, 1995; Mezirow, 1997); and (c) the existence of a range and distinct stages of

gender consciousness and gender equity (O'Neil & Egan, 1992; Rusch & Marshall, 2006; Smith,

et al., 2022). The purpose of narrative study is to explore the meaning and reported experience of

participants related to a phenomenon or social construct (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018;

Kim, 2016; Maxwell, 2000; Yin, 2016). This study added weight to research suggesting gender

identity is dynamic, fluid, and impacted by significant life experiences and the meaning applied

to those events. The rich descriptions participants provided about gendered life experiences

affirms the decision to frame this research as a narrative study based on the explicit purpose to

understand the dynamic processes of meaning-making around masculinity over time.

Practical Implications

Study participants revealed their greatest transformation came from vulnerability or loss,

honest feedback, shame, or facing discomfort. Feiler (2020) offered:

> William James said it best a century ago: Life is in the transitions. We can't
>
> ignore these central times of life…We have to accept them, name them, mark
>
> them, share them, and eventually convert them into fuel for remaking our life
>
> stories. (Transitions are Essential section, paragraph 8)

Finding #2 suggests that ongoing critical consciousness can be a boon to health, personal agency,

and self-discovery. Understanding the power of identity disruption for personal and professional

evolution may inform adult learning opportunities for division leaders that challenge their

assumptions or bias. Through experience and an intentional, critical frame, leaders open

themselves to better problem-solving, more inclusive leadership, and a healthier identity as

collaborators, allies, and mentors to school stakeholders. Their commitment to and reflections on

inner work provide valuable data and experiences to guide them in their counsel, decision-making, and empathy. This study shows that school leaders still bring their inner, wounded, and socialized child to work with them. The question becomes – Do they allow that person to cling as a silent, complicit coconspirator, or do they consciously honor that little person by holding their former suffering in mind to guide their continued work with others?

Recommendations

Study participants reported two main pathways to personal transformation: being taught explicitly or personal journeying through destabilizing life experiences. Accordingly, schools invested in gender dynamics and personal development can increase self-awareness and socioemotional learning through direct instruction of critical gender theory or experiential moments that ignite identity work. Examples might include (for single-sex schools) – intentional collaboration and representation with females as equal partners; carefully crafted experiences supporting emotional vulnerability and disclosure; a curriculum that confronts gender norms and male privilege; and activism and advocacy projects that promote gender equity or challenge patriarchal structures. In addition, meaningful professional learning can incorporate activities that promote self-discovery, interdependence, critical feedback, and meaningful collaboration with unfamiliar, diverse people. Programs like staff retreats or off-site school visits in leadership teams can provoke a helpful level of reflection and consciousness. In addition, routine meeting protocols that act as group reflective exercises can ignite further openness to new perspectives, voices, and framing of experiences.

There may be a benefit for developing a workshop that incorporates elements of O'Neil's *Gender Role Journey Workshop* (2015) or Raider Roth et al.'s (2008) *Teaching Boys Study*

Group to identify gender dynamics, gender role transitions, or points where gender worldviews impact identity or behavior. Critical gender reflection aimed at work and bias may promote "mastering developmental tasks, resolving psychosocial crises, and facing [personal and professional] dilemmas with maturity" (O'Neil, 2015, p. 97). Gottlieb (2019) suggested that life's most important task is "deciding which stories to listen to and which ones need an edit" (15:33) because meaning-making and discernment directly impact the quality of our lives. Lastly, schools can attempt to diversify their leadership teams and break down *male gatekeeping* and *boys' club* cultural dynamics (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2023) by adding women or gender nonconforming folks to enhance representation and the likelihood of a multitude of perspectives and ideas.

Finding #3

Participants have customized routines and resources to heal their past hurts, make meaning of their journey, and refine their masculinity to advance their relationships, leadership, and self-concept.

Theoretical Implications

The four men revealed a significant range of agency, interdependence, and proactive attempts to counter stress, complexity, and demands of their role fulfillment at school and home. The span of quality and intensity in their inner work likely reflects the diversity of identity work experiences in any larger cohort of male school directors. Some study participants sought support through therapy and mentoring, while others preferred private reflection and independent tinkering. To be clear, not all men need to reinvent themselves or shed significant misogyny and sexism all at once. The research suggests that men overcome various degrees of insecurity, fragility, and ignorance as they encounter destabilizing life experiences and knowledge. Gender

stories and gender journeys occur over the lifespan, and some benefit from advanced, enlightened starting positions and life contexts.

Literature abounds that illustrates men's difficulty seeking help and their exposure to significant gender role strain across their lifespan (O'Neil, 2015; O'Neil & Denke, 2016). Public health data indicates the continuing impact of traditional male norms on isolation, loneliness, and despair coming out of the constant need to validate worth and find meaningful purpose in early adulthood and midlife (Barker, 2000; Barker et al., 2010; Burke 2002; 2014; Courtenay, 2000a; Smith & Robertson, 2008; White, 2002). In addition, social critics highlight the reality that most men are not conscious of gender dynamics, male privileges, nor men's role in promoting gender equity (Feuerstein, 2006; Hall, 1997; Kelan, 2018; Martin, 2003; Smith, et al. 2022; Stromquist & Fischman, 2009). In fact, there is especially little training in gender or identity work in current paradigms of school leadership development programs (Feuerstein 2006; Whitehead, 2001; Young et al., 2006). Lastly, little research exists that explores the inner worlds of men and how they engage with their identity to promote healing and health.

The recent social trend of men's support groups and retreats coming out of the mythopoetic movement indicates a continued need for men to reclaim affinity, vulnerability, and support for overall health (Hansen-Bundy, 2018; Packman, 2022; Seligson, 2018). Siegel (2024) highlighted men's need for "community care" (paragraph 3) and "the [important] role of elders who had traversed the territory, learned the hard lessons, and assumed the responsibility to guide other men" (paragraph 4) in their formation and development. Recent trends validate the "healing power of male affinity groups" (Siegel, 2024, paragraph 7) for a population traditionally reluctant to self-care.

Practical Implications

To further promote inclusivity and gender equity, school leadership training would benefit from incorporating some intentional work on gender identity and allyship. Schools could also intentionally foster engagement and dialogue around gender dynamics in their community; promote formal and informal mentoring; and establish regional affinity groups for school leaders or single-sex school staff. Facilitating inner work and interpersonal work will help leaders undo the pernicious effects of traditional gender constructs that impact personal health and undermine collaboration and performance at the institutional level. If gender is indeed an organizing structure of school life (in this case single-sex boys' schools), then a priority must be placed on reflexivity and gender consciousness. At a time where "boys being boys" is no longer an acceptable rationale for turning a blind eye to old male expectations and values, modern boys' school leadership asks leaders to promote authentic and inclusive boyhood, while also building allyship skills in order to enhance representation and participation for women in education and professional life. To do all this, men who lead benefit from updates and edits to their masculinity and gender worldviews.

Recommendations

If traditional masculinity and manhood can be littered with problematic landmines and behavioral maladaptations, then boys' schools hold a unique social position to evolve and model new paradigms. Male school leaders bear the burden of addressing the male adaptive issues at both the organizational level and in their own personal struggle. Their leadership embodies and expresses the internal work they have done to make meaning and build agency in the gendering process. To support this crucial work, the leaders require heightened awareness and thought partners who can help guide the journey. Participants spoke of the significant value of mentors, affinity groups, therapy, and intentional boundaries between work and home to promote privacy

and anonymity. Accordingly, school leaders may benefit from a detailed recovery and wellness plan that they design and revise and for which they are held accountable. Just as leaders often prepare a leadership *entry plan*, they could also develop a *sustainability plan* with their employer that ensures greater balance and longevity over their leadership term. A specific component of their plan could be the use of an industry mentor or life coach to promote balance, introspection, and conscious leadership (Siegel, 2024).

Finding #4

Participants' identity work manifests as a mission to advance models of healthy and moral masculinity; know and support boys; and embody compassionate, thoughtful leadership in their schools.

Theoretical Implications

Boys' schools are changing to meet updated gender expectations. Their work addresses the problematic public health trends for men and boys, crystallizes their unique value proposition, and more adequately represents the diversity and complexity of modern life (Abrams, 2023; Fyles, 2018; International Boys' School Coalition, n.d.; Jargon, 2023; Reilly, 2019; Strauss, 2019). Participants' meaning making and reflections on school life reflect this modernity and call to change. Literature on gender and school leadership suggests that men are more strategic and tactical, while women assume a more relational stance and intentionality (Bruner, 2005; Coleman, 2003; Eagly et al., 1992; Eckman, 2004; Kruger, 1996; Little, 1983; Reynolds, 2005; Shaked et al., 2018). This study challenges that binary dichotomy; while it may not come easy for them, the men here fight hard to be relational and employ social intelligence in their communities.

Significant research exists that supports the male role model influence for adolescent boys, especially the role of male school leaders for the health and development of male students (Cushman, 2008). Research also exists in business that links vulnerability and emotional safety to increased performance in predominantly male work and sectors (Ely & Meyerson, 2008). Literature also suggests that men and women report higher overall employee and life satisfaction when gender equity features prominently in organizational culture and society (Audette, 2019; Carosella, 2020: Johnson & Smith, 2022). However, there is a lack of research on how intentional masculinity and gender consciousness benefits the male school leader doing the work or the impact of male leaders' inner work on school culture or the satisfaction of school stakeholders.

Practical Implications

In boys' schools – male leaders are likely tuned in to the inner and outer worlds of boys as an extension of their professional interests and responsibilities. Immersed in this world, they ideally reflect equally on their own development as individuals, understanding how such introspection can impact their ongoing engagement and personal growth. However, as research shows, those with more privilege tend to be less critically conscious and consider themselves more inclusive than others perceive them to be (Martin, 2003; 2006). To continue to steward "progressive" and "expansive" masculinities in their schools that ally with women and girls and more fully integrate social and emotional vibrancy, male school leaders require access to experiences and opportunities that sharpen their reflexivity – a mindful stance that blends agency with intention (Martin 2003; 2006). In other words, to lead in the thoughtful, inclusive ways their schools require, male school leaders benefit from support and accountability – whether self-imposed or externally supported. Having mentors or therapists who can directly challenge their

language and statements, confront irrational or ineffective leadership behaviors, or unpack

unhelpful operating beliefs can save a career or even a life. Sharing the burdens and complexities

with qualified thought partners and colleagues can ensure sustainable, consistent checks and

balances on one's leadership and personal development.

Recommendations

Unless they are confronted and challenged to develop gender mindfulness and reflexivity,

men may subconsciously consider themselves "genderless" and take their masculinity for

granted (Feuerstein, 2006; Kimmel, 1993). In an all-boys' school, lack of gender consciousness

may reenforce patriarchal and hegemonic patterns of masculinity. Boys' schools may benefit

from developing vision and values statements on gender and their identity as a single-sex school

to guide their work and serve as a living rubric of their mission-centered inclusion. Because

modern masculinity partners with women, whereas patriarchal masculinity separates from

women, contemporary male school leaders need to be able to champion and model feminism and

gender equity filters that "modify conduct and enhance equity" (Rusch & Marshall, 2006, p.

239). This process starts with confronting male privilege and addressing the professional reality

of women who are often excluded from all the ways men typically mobilize their masculinity

(Feuerstein, 2006; Fisher & Kinsey, 2014; Martin, 2001). School leadership education programs

and school staff onboarding programs typically ignore or do little to promote gender equity and

feminist dialogue that exposes typical organizational gender dynamics (Cushman, 2012;

Feuerstein, 2006).

Finding #5

Participants experience significant strain and stress in their professional roles; yet they

have only partially developed and inconsistently deployed healthy coping strategies.

Theoretical Implications

Men have traditionally been driven by myths and instincts that promote (a) fighting and winning, (b) providing and protecting, and (c) mastery and emotional control (Dobransky, 2023). These instincts manifest as "unconscious processes that inspire male passion for those we love and passion for the tools of survival, which today pertain to one's career" (Dobransky, 2023, paragraph 26). Finding #5 supports the literature around gender role strain (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; White 2002). Participant stories reflected the pressure for men to represent the public self and ideal worker type (Feuerstein, 2006; Whitehead 2002), and the tendency for men to validate their masculinity through work and accomplishment (Burke, 2000; Empson, 2018). This finding also validates a common inverse relationship for men between stress and coping. As the complexities and demands of school leadership rise (Ray, et al., 2020; Rice & Williams, 2022), men's capacity to seek help, disclose their suffering and stress, and put their own health first often remains inadequate (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Barker, 2000; Gough, 2006; O'Brien et al., 2005). The men in this study lived and articulated the constant tension between the personal and public self (Walsh, 2014) and an obsessive pursuit in serving their purpose (Burke, 2002; Whitehead, 2002). They worked hard for their students and staff but displayed some ambiguity about what they wanted and needed for themselves (Kimmel, 2014). Participants encountered significant emotional spillover to home and personal life that made their recovery challenging (Bartolome & Evans, 1980, Burke 2014). Their regard for self and health was mixed at best – taking an overall of approach of "get to it if I can." This deferment and passivity in relation to personal wellness manifests as disappointment and guilt in participant reflections (Robertson, 2006).

Practical Implications

Leading schools is difficult. School leaders are forced to make difficult decisions among the steady stream of choices in their days. Their negotiations must prioritize personal care or professional engagement, family life or professional life, deciding or facilitating, and digging in or letting go (O'Brien et al., 2005). The frame for their work and engagement matters, and men can bring certain schema and values into the role that hinder their coping and balance. They may see themselves as saviors, stewards, or servants in their work, and this frame may change as they themselves change. As guardians of the health, mission, and culture of the school, school leaders are in a prime position to model growth mindset, work-life balance, and personal wellness for their community. However, the very real demands of the job make that nearly impossible. Participants strive to fully give and serve, thereby leaving very little left for themselves. They face very real and well-intentioned empathy burnout (Zaki, 2024), and there is often "no button to turn off the broadcast feature on [their] feelings" (Frei & Morriss, 2023).

In a post-Covid world, we see professionals making hard choices, deliberating their involvements, and assessing the costs of their leadership and commitments. If we are to address the sustainability of school leadership, then traditional, socialized expectations around work and gender must be strategically addressed. The boys in our care are watching. Will we reward balance and comprehensive wellness? Or will we continue to esteem hyper competitiveness and work obsessiveness? With the knowledge that boys and men tend to perform and measure themselves against unrealistic standards (and the accompanying health issues when they feel they fall short), how can the leaders in the building model humility, modesty, and vulnerability in the way they approach their leadership and work? Will their discourse and modeling embody and celebrate a revised and more forgiving model of excellence?

Recommendations

From an evolutionary perspective, men in society have advanced beyond Dobransky's (2023) primitive schema of male instincts. We are at an inflection point of changing needs and evolving motivators –primal male instincts do not promote health nor address the current expectations of modern men. Men in leadership and caring positions can reject the ancient, bygone predisposition toward sacrifice at all costs and balance self-care with care for others. Walter's warning to never try and "save" others as a strategy to set boundaries on energy and investment offers a golden ticket to self-preservation. Zaki (2024) advocated for sustainable empathy and endorsed self-compassion for managers to mitigate empathy burnout. Helpful strategies for leaders include: (a) acknowledging the stress that comes with caring about the pain of others, (b) treating oneself with the same grace one offers others, and (c) not being afraid to ask for help (Zaki, 2024).

To attract and keep healthy leaders, school leadership graduate programs and school leadership teams could integrate learning opportunities focused on mental skills and wellness. School leaders need education on and permission to set realistic boundaries and construct pathways for professional endurance and life balance. Normalizing help-seeking, vulnerability, and self-care in school leadership professional learning could change the expectations and demands of nearly impossible professional roles. Human resources offices in schools could develop a menu of wellness benefits that become baked into senior leadership contracts. Under the assumption that dedicated leaders will choose work over rest, policies need to account for the very real feelings of guilt at play in leadership choices. Schools should consider institutionalizing practices that promote rest (periodic mandated sabbaticals or required monthly personal days); flexibility (options for remote workdays and professional travel); health and leisure (a stipend for gym memberships and family vacations); and wisdom (providing a leadership or performance

coach). In the case of boarding schools, resident leadership may benefit from the ability to have a consistent weekend retreat off campus once per month or academic quarter. Those supervising and administering school leaders can develop a practice and stance of "self-care supervision" (DeMatthews et al., 2021) to ensure that organizational stewards can enhance the wellness of their most public and influential managers.

Luckily, recent years have seen an explosion of mental health services and professionals being added to schools to serve students. However, the adults often suffer in silence, putting their students first. Perhaps it is time for school leaders to demand a set of humble, realistic expectations of the work and the requisite holistic wellness support that ensures effective self-care (Rice & Williams, 2022). Similar to how the Hippocratic Oath for doctors represents a standardized moral frame by asking them to "first, do no harm," an ethical pledge for school leaders in line with the modern age could be to "first, heal thyself" (Zaki, 2024).

Future Research

The end of Chapter Two posed some questions and interesting challenges for men leading all-boys' schools related to gender awareness, feminist activism, and attempts to upend the systemic injuries of masculine hegemony and patriarchy. School leaders who take gender for granted and operate at the liminal level run the risk of being unimaginative and leaving untapped human potential on the table. Gottlieb (2019) championed the revision of life stories to inspire and promote change and freedom – a process where "Getting to know [oneself] is to unknow [oneself]" – (7:50). The visionary leaders of single sex schools balance action with introspection, speaking with listening, control with surrender, and confidence with humility. They are not afraid to rewrite their life story in service of their communities. These leaders are often in search of the missing voice, the brutal realities backed by data, and the blunt truths of critical feedback.

Effective leaders – having faced and welcomed disruption and discomfort - become master organizational storytellers. The best storytellers know their own story inside out – they honor the past, provide a clear vision and need for change, and map out a hopeful path forward (Frei & Morriss, 2023). Areas for future research related to boys' school leadership and masculinity will take a similar path in that they can stimulate change and hope for further gender liberation and healthier social constructs.

   With that in mind, the delimitations and limitations of this study should once again be noted. Because a narrative study explores the self-reported representations of experiences and concordant personal meaning of those experiences, the depth and nuance of individual stories do not allow for high numbers of participants, generalizable results, or vast demographic representation within the study cohort. Any commonalities or patterns within or across participant cases should not be extrapolated or extended beyond the study's participants. In addition, the researcher can act as biased gatekeeper of stories and voices; inclusivity is a vital concern. Loh (2013) spoke of the *doxa* inside communities which can be reflected in stories – "a set of practices and conceptual understanding that has become familiar and comfortable, and that will be disseminated and transmitted within those communities [by the 'dominant classes']" (p. 1).

   My role as an insider researcher familiar with boys' schools clearly added value to the study's ontological validity and reconstruction of significant narratives from the four participants. The totality of those narratives created thick and rich descriptions of personal gender significance leading to five major findings. The study's findings are important; however, they are limited in scope and reach. Research on masculinity and gender in boys' schools may be strengthened by focusing on three additional areas of current underrepresentation: (1) a wider

spectrum of men, (2) a wider spectrum of gender, and (3) more specialized focus within

masculinity and leadership.

Future studies might broaden the participant pool of men and include different

generations of men, men of different sexualities, and men with different family arrangements

(for example single, married without children, divorced). Additionally, studying participants that

span a wider spectrum of gender (for example non-binary, non-conforming, women, transgender)

might add a richer comparative frame or feminist standpoint to studies on masculinity and school

leadership. Further, selecting boys' schools from other geographic regions of the United States

(West, Midwest, South) or from other countries might affect study findings and offer a more

robust comparison of masculinity in boys' schools nationally and globally. Lastly, future

research might focus more specifically on narrower aspects of masculinity and leadership in

boys' schools – mainly wellness and self-care, allyship practices, and philosophy around gender

equity.

1. Wider Spectrum of Men

Future studies would benefit from exploring a wider spectrum of men to enhance

representation and include different voices and views. Men in this study were exclusively from

the East Coast of the United States, were of similar age, and were all heterosexual, and married

with children. Considerations for enhanced study of masculinity in school leaders may include:

(a) different generations, (b) different sexualities, (c) different family arrangements, (d) other

moderating factors on masculinity, and (e) insider status in all-boys schools.

Different Generations

Anderson (2011) and Roberts (2012) theorize a dramatic shift in the masculinities of

younger men to be more inclusive, less homophobic, more emotionally healthy, less confined to

traditional gender roles, and more connected to other men. In addition, theorists have explored

the emergence of "new" and "hybrid" masculinities that challenge the monolithic traits of

hegemonic masculinities in different contexts and time periods (Messerchmidt & Messner,

2018). Reiner (2020) explored the possibilities for an updated, contemporary version of

masculinity that embraces vibrancy, authenticity, and social and emotional freedom. Future

studies of male leadership in all-boys' schools might compare the meaning and impact of

masculinity across leaders from various age cohorts. School leaders in their late 20s or 30s might

narrate very different experiences and philosophies of gender and leadership than their older

counterparts who grew up in the1980s or earlier.

Different Sexualities

The participants in this study identify as heterosexual. Accordingly, their sexuality

represents the traditional standard of sexuality that aligns with masculine power and advantage.

Hooker (2019) and deLeon and Brunner (2013) explored the inner and outer worlds of gay

educators. They discovered (a) varying degrees of openness and authenticity with significant

unease and fear; (b) experiences of harmful discourse and language; (c) guarded relationships

and intentional boundaries that balanced collaboration with privacy and discretion; and (d)

coping through assimilation, silence, and emotional muting. deLeon and Brunner (2013)

described the typical gay educator's experience as "tolerance, but unequal" (p. 162). Within their

communities, there lingers a strong preoccupation with *reputation* and *separation* as tools for

survival; gay educators strive to earn validation and protect aspects of self from unnecessary

scrutiny.

A study that explores masculinity for gay men who lead all-boys' middle schools would

be an interesting exploration of how a different sexuality might inform leadership attempts to

expand and honor diverse experiences of men and boys on campus. Understanding the

experience of gay male administrators may help illuminate the continued level of

heteronormativity and "heteroprivilege power" (deLeon & Brunner, 2013, p. 178) in boys'

schools. There is also potential for optimism since studies regularly show a negative relationship

between contact and sexual prejudice (Hooker, 2019). As more people build relationships with

gay people, their previous prejudice erodes. The effective partnership between boys and openly

gay male administrators could change the trajectory of inclusion and allyship for a generation of

boys educated in single sex schools.

Any future study that explores the stories of gay men in boys' schools may find difficulty

in securing participants due to the possibility of exposure, alienation, or marginalization. Gay

educators' freedom, authenticity, and career advancement in schools are often blocked by a

metaphorical "lavender ceiling" (deLeon & Brunner, 2013, p. 179). However, this research may

be critical to further illuminate the gender constructs inside boys' schools. Gay educators have

journeyed through cycles of fear that injure (through losses) and heal (through gains) (deLeon &

Brunner, 2013). Thus, their likely increased reflexivity and identity consciousness could elevate

them as thought leaders on their campuses around inclusion, storytelling, courage, and

compassionate leadership.

Different Family Arrangements

Participants in this study all experienced fatherhood and raising children. The

transformative experience of parenting supported their identity growth and expanding

perspective, while also allowing practice in partnerships with women and the care of children

and self. A study that explores the differing views on gender, masculinity and leadership for

single men, divorced men, or married men without children could prove helpful in understanding

the role of family in enhancing the capacities for mentorship and leadership.

Other Moderating Factors on Masculinity

Participants in this study came from schools on the East Coast and north of the

Carolinas, and they spoke about how the demographics and ideology of their region contributed

to or hurt their work to liberate boys, enhance belonging, and promote gender equity. However,

male attitudes about masculinity change based on spatial, geographical context (Silva, 2022) and

other moderating factors tied to ideology and identity (Horowitz, 2019). Generally, masculine

ideology becomes more conservative the further one goes from the city to the countryside,

although the "relationship between spatial contexts and masculinity attitudes, in other words,

depends on racial/ethnic identity, sexual identity, and level of education" (Silva, 2022, p. 393).

Horowitz (2019) described the influence of political party, education, and race on views about

what is prized in traditional masculinity. Broadly, black men, Republicans, and those with less

education displayed more patriarchal and traditional masculine stances (Horowitz, 2019).

Research that explores the prized brand and vision of masculinity for school leaders in different

geographic areas of the United States, internationally, and according to other identity

intersectionalities like education, race, or political party, might illuminate contextual differences

and regional pressures in the mission and masculine ideology inside schools.

Insiders and Outsiders

Participants in this study who had experience in coeducational settings demonstrated

advanced consideration for gender equity and allyship. Future research on male leaders in all

boys' schools might focus specifically on men who have worked exclusively in boys' schools

versus others who have more experience in coeducational settings and how their gender

worldviews might be different. A possibility may be that male leaders most familiar with boys'

schools might be less engaged in their identity or gender equity work around leadership. In these

instances, it might be worth noting the kinds of gender disruptions or tipping points these men

have encountered and the possibility of creating/supporting more situations or experiences that

ignite further consciousness.

2. Wider Spectrum of Gender

If gender equity is a priority of modern boys' schools and an evolving society, then future

studies require the elevation of the voices and experiences of women and those not subscribing

to the traditional gender binary. Narrative studies, by their first-person nature, are vulnerable to

the bias and conscious thresholds of the men describing their masculinity. Accordingly, studies

that explore manhood and masculinity in boys' schools would benefit from triangulating

experiences and progress with the stories of other genders.

Women

The main deficit in this study is the lack of female voice and perspective on masculinity

inside all-boys' schools. A study that explores how female administrators view the mission and

gender dynamics inside boys' schools would further illuminate the pursuit of gender progress at

a critical time for schools for boys. Any attempt to explore the intersection or tradition, privilege,

patriarchy, contemporary purpose, and modern vision benefits from the female perspective.

Contemporary changes in gender roles, increased women in industry management, and shifting

gender demographics in higher education require that women have a prominent place in research

that explores bias, social constructs, and normative expectations inside predominantly male

spaces. Feminist standpoint theory suggests that women's perspective provides an "epistemic

advantage" and "double vision" emanating from their understanding of "social contexts broadly

because they are not only experiencing their own realities but also witness other realities through

their engagement with dominant groups" (Gurung, 2021, p. 110). Women leaders in all-boys'

schools, as "insider-outsiders," can "point to patterns of behavior that those immersed in the

dominant group culture are unable to recognize" (p. 111).

MacKinnon (2019) and Crowley (2006) discussed the realities of female school leaders

and pervasive gender bias: (a) significant work intensification to counter harsh judgments and

prove credibility, (b) internal struggles like chronic second-guessing, (c) expectations to model

stereotypical female traits like compassion and nurturing, (d) receiving different treatment than

men from students and parents, and (d) difficulties in finding their voice and opportunities amid

a "good old boys" network (Crowley, 2006, p. 98). There has also been a tendency for women in

school leadership to tap into and leverage different identities (like motherhood) to build trust and

buy in within their community (Crowley, 2006; MacKinnon, 2019). Women principals often

display less popularly regarded competencies like "presenting a deeper understanding of children

and families in the home, being perceived as tough but caring, having a people-oriented focus,

and carrying personal and professional ethics adaptable to the local community" (Murakami and

Tornsen, 2017). While women can be celebrated for their democratic leadership approach; their

professional identity rooted in care for others; and their continued development in the hopes of

striving for respect, value, and recognition; they still face a "perpetuation of biases" where

"gendered discourses…[impact] the development of professional identities (Murakami and

Tornsen, 2017, p. 820). When women become administrators in all-boys schools, they run the

risk of being seen as outsiders because of the "abnormal" (p. 821) occurrence of the position

being held by a female.

Future research exploring typical, current experiences of women leaders in all-boys'

schools may indicate the relative health, inclusion, belonging and gender freedom inside school

cultures and mission. Females' assessment of, meaning making around, and personal impact

from the prized masculinities in their schools can inform the continued maturation and liberation

of healthier gender constructs that guide human development and performance in schools.

Non-Binary, Transgender, and Nonconforming Identities

Progress has been made in recognizing and supporting a diversity of genders inside

single sex schools. Participants in this study relayed experiences and moments that primarily

reflected the traditional gender binary construct. There was some mention of growth, learning,

and increased understanding of the experience of non-binary and transgender students and staff.

More research is needed to understand how all-boys schools are creating spaces for students and

staff to break free of binary thinking and consider gender as a dynamic range of personal

expression. School leaders – both cisgender and transgender – inside all-boys' schools are in a

position to advance the work of inclusion, representation, and safety for students and staff

exploring their gender identity.

3. Specialized Focus within Masculinity and Leadership

While this study addressed three important research questions around masculinity, further

study may benefit from specialized foci to address gaps and shortfalls in competencies and

mindsets. The study revealed that male school leaders struggle with life balance and

inconsistently reflect on the experience and perspectives of women on campus. A renewed

priority of leadership health and gender equity can ensure the work is rewarding and sustainable

for all in the community.

Wellness and Self Care

Of the three research questions, study participants achieved the least consistent progress

with assessing masculinity's impact on their own wellness and strategizing ways to improve self-

care. It is clear that "knowing" "what to do" and having the discipline and intention "to do it" (care for oneself) amid competing priorities are two very different things. Future research that focuses specifically on the sustainability practices of men in school leadership may illuminate ways these leaders may better balance home and work and model self-compassion for younger generations of boys. It is clear that if given the choice, these men will not take care of themselves over their commitment to their community, their family, and their work. Professional burnout is a very real topic coming out of the global pandemic, and future studies might assess the connections between gender and feelings of burnout for men and women who lead schools.

Perhaps it is time for schools to force school leaders - whether men or women – to invest in wellness through required health policies and practices. Studies that explore the correlation between masculinity ideology, self-care, and leadership in boys' schools can ensure that educational leadership remains a viable, flexible path for capable educators for the foreseeable future. Unless we consciously explore the linkages, there will likely continue to be a relationship between masculinity, work addiction, school directorship, and burnout.

Allyship and Gender Equity

The work of all-boys' schools focuses on the formation of boys becoming citizens and men. It is not surprising, then, that the lived experience of women often exists in the community's background. Study participants revealed a range of reflection on and commitment to meaningful collaboration with women. The degree to which participants saw feminism and gender equity as a core tenet of their work with boys varied and seemed to reflect the male bell curve of gender awareness and feminist emotional labor (Reed, 2023). Future studies might explore the nature of gender equity and feminist thought and action in all-boys schools through the work and vision of male and female school leaders.

The final section of the chapter offers concluding reflections about this study, its personal impact, and the promise of a more liberatory gender space for students and faculty of all-boys' schools. A final call for action and words of encouragement close out the study.

Final Reflections

Nobody showed up. Ever. Around the same time as my doctoral journey began, I was at a crossroads. We had recently relocated to the area for a new position to settle and start a family. Focusing on my professional work, I felt relationally lonely and isolated. Accordingly, I attempted to start some male affinity groups to promote meaningful connection – young father's groups, book clubs for men, and a semiregular men's group breakfast. The problem is nobody came again and again. While the moms in town routinely met up and networked, the dads stood on the sidelines on their phones and on their laptops or stayed that extra hour at work. This personal experience fueled my questioning around male behaviors and tendencies – why did men's needs often come last, and why were they actively avoiding the things they needed most?

Modern men are held captive by outdated norms and constructs that implicitly guide their behaviors and thinking. They routinely put others first, place themselves last, and equate achievement with self-worth. My own story is riddled with tremendous accomplishments coupled with insufferable pain. How could a man with two Ivy league degrees, a former collegiate and professional athlete, able-bodied and healthy, a homeowner with a beautiful and wonderful partner, and a successful career as a middle school director in his mid 30s be so miserable, insecure, and low in confidence? Being socially built to hunt for external validation and perfection can be a cruel, merciless game. With male mental health issues, suicide, heart disease, addiction, and loneliness on the rise, society is called to course correct the traditional masculine path. We all need to ask an essential question, on behalf of and for men – "in our

modern world, what are men good for?" One response could be instrumental – they fill roles and produce value. Another response could be intrinsic and spiritual – they are inherently "good" by virtue of their creation and uniqueness. If we can get to a place where men already feel worthy, then maybe we can put the confusing, agonizing puzzle pieces back in the man box and burn it.

When I began my current school directorship, I weighed 300 pounds, was on antidepressants, and embodied all the ruinous health indicators for middle-aged men. The traits and strengths I had wielded to achieve in my 20s and early 30s helped me land my first leadership position, but also left me broken and lacking no real mental skills or habits for resilience or health. My paradigm of performance and leadership was hegemonically masculine – built around control, work addiction, perfection, and accomplishment. I had no real mentors, no critical thought partners, and no routines or space for reflection and reflexivity. I had trouble sleeping, worked around the clock, and had nobody with whom I could commiserate. I also missed the deep friendships I had cultivated as a colleague at previous schools through my coaching and teaching. Now, I was in a new role, with no effective coping, and a burning desire to deliver on complex outcomes.

My personal and professional momentum changed as several forces intertwined: becoming a parent, shedding old environments and ecologies (organized sports and locker rooms), building health habits, and surrounding myself with people and ideas that confronted my biases and patterns. Leaving athletics, finding a close tribe of male and female friends through group fitness, trying on parenting approaches, and allowing myself to be vulnerable and uncomfortable in my doctoral studies paved pathways for new identities and behaviors. Over time, I built a stable of resources – books, mentors, men's groups, female role models, behavioral therapy, personal retreats, and creative hobbies. I was becoming a new man. And surprisingly,

though I was working less and was healthier, my work did not suffer. I felt rejuvenated, inspired, and purposeful; the evolution was addictive. I became more forgiving of others, more merciful to myself, and more inclusive in my love and leadership.

This study aimed to review the inner and outer masculine worlds of men leading other boys' middle schools. How did my experience compare to their experience and engagement with masculinity? How were they similarly or differently impacted by their maleness? Where might they be situated in their gender journey? What kinds of men have found success and health in their leadership of boys' schools? What were they struggling with? Can a study about masculinity and male leaders say something about gender equity and the space of women on campus?

The results of this study highlighted five main findings. Participants had actively experienced: (a) patriarchy in their upbringing; (b) transformational disruptions to their gender understanding; (c) routines and tools for identity growth; (d) a progressive and healthier vison of masculinity and leadership in their schools; and (e) limited success in caring for themselves like they care for their families, colleagues, and students. Their reflections and stories signaled they had actively orchestrated a personal gender renaissance which directly affected their worldview and their mentorship of others. If gender is an organizing principle of single-sex schools, leaders who can prioritize liberating inner work and connective interpersonal work will enhance authenticity and safety in their community. A study like this that explores the intersection of masculinity and leadership in boys' schools can inform the continued project of forming healthier men and boys in sustainable ways. Cultivating further gender mindfulness in male leaders can help make gender more visible and conscious in school settings that privilege uncontested, invisible, and male-centered gender dynamics. This study illuminated practices and

experiences that have allowed male school leaders to identify strain, hasten recovery, and adapt their internal gender settings. By healing their wounds and actively addressing their ideologies, they make space for others and develop more self-love.

Study participants reported the benefit of the time and instruments to stop and reflect on their relationships and sense of being and knowing. To a man, they acknowledged they had never had the time and space like this process to reflect so intentionally on their gender story and schools. They expressed pride in the good work they are doing to expand their sense of self in the world. They conveyed a deep sense of purpose in their mission, and they implicitly understood the crucial role of modeling healthy gender constructs amid all the competing priorities in managing boys' schools. They appreciate their role as chief organizational storyteller and have learned the power in their stories is revealed in their vulnerability, their relatability, and their humility. To their credit, they realize their identity work is never-ending, as the next edge of their learning zone and increasing school demands are just around the corner.

This doctoral project ultimately changed me. Professional colleagues have noticed and remarked on my clarity of thinking, my greater ease with emotional transparency, and my willingness to put myself out there. I feel more aware of situations, contexts, and spaces; my heart is more open to the experience of others. I speak with confidence about the healing power of facing your shadows, committing to inner work, and utilizing the resources available to address and master the socialized masculine self. Now when I counsel boys, I can speak from experience, and emphasize process over perfection. I can journey with them because I have learned how to walk in my own shoes while holding acceptance, peace, and grace. I tell my students that masculinity is not just one monolithic, predictable, and unchangeable story about men. Manhood is having the strength and courage to let the story of your true self unfold.

I will assuredly employ my learnings from this work and venture to share the power of stories, healing, and gender equity to better live and lead together. I hope to continue to be involved in the International Boys' School Coalition and annually present to their membership about gender mindfulness and inner work. I will continue to advance gender equity work in my own school setting and find opportunities to mentor and champion healthy masculinity among my male network of friends and colleagues. Writing will always continue to serve my further attempts to model healing and self-care for others. My hope is to turn this journey into a far-reaching platform to save the lives of men one conversation at a time. The next phase of my life will involve turning knowledge and experience into further activism and advocacy.

Packman (2022) described the etymology of the term *mythopoetic*: "It does not necessarily mean myth and poetry. It means to re-mythologise, to re-story. I like the term, as I believe we need to 're-story' ourselves, in order to re-store the world" (paragraph 2). This narrative study suggests that health and impactful leadership emerges with robust, authentic, and healing gender stories. Recovery and strength come from being seen, from feeling safe, and from feeling worthy. The gender stories we tell and teach our boys can have multiple heroes, space for remarkable female protagonists, and plotlines that expand what is socially and emotionally possible for boys. They can even have "compassionate truth bombs" (Gottlieb, 2019, 10:04) that disturb their thinking and open their minds to nuance, complexity, surprise, and discovery. Ultimately, our gender narratives reveal a "moral stance" (2:59), and our ability to liberate ourselves and others involves gripping a pen, turning on a light, and accessing our inner critic and artist. So let us all build a communal fire, feel the warmth of authenticity, and share some stories that make all genders proud.

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Appendix A

Email to Head of School / Principal

Dear Head of School,

My name is Jason Larocque, and I am a graduate student at Lesley University (Cambridge, MA) working on my dissertation and Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. I am writing to ask for your support and assistance with a study that may contribute to enhanced understanding of leadership in all-boys' schools.

My research project is titled "Understanding Masculinity: Exploring the Personal and Professional Lives of Male Middle School Directors of Private, All-boys Middle Schools." This research study will explore the ways in which masculinity is understood, practiced, and experienced by male middle school directors of all-boys' middle schools. Anticipated contributions to the educational field may include insights into gender identity development, professional sustainability, and personal wellness. Since masculine formation and gender is an important element of your school's mission, I am hoping you will support my efforts to contribute to the emerging field of positive masculinity within men's health, leadership discourse, and single-sex schooling for boys.

I have sent you this email and the attached "Letter of Informed Consent for Survey Participation" in the hopes that you might forward the email and attachment to your middle school director/ division head to encourage them to participate in my research.

After reviewing my email, I can answer any questions that you may have about study participation or the goals of my research. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jason Larocque
Ph.D. Candidate, Lesley University

Appendix B

Invitation to Participate

Dear _____ (Insert name of Middle School Head):

My name is Jason Larocque. I am a doctoral candidate at Lesley University in the Educational Leadership Program. As you know, I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: "Understanding Masculinity: Exploring the Personal and Professional Lives of Male Middle School Directors of Private, All-boys Middle Schools." The intention is to assess and discover the ways that male middle school directors of all-boys middle schools interpret and engage with their own masculinity in their work and personal lives.

Being in a similar professional role as you, I am deeply invested in this research, as I have come to believe that mindful, healthy masculinity helps boys and men lead more meaningful and satisfying lives. As leaders in boys' schools, we are in a unique position to model and teach boys about their full human potential.

The study involves several steps:
- Video journaling in ten-minute intervals according to several prerecorded prompts.
- Written analysis of selected excerpts from your school's communications and messaging about masculinity.
- One 60-to-90-minute in-depth Zoom interview.
- One participant from the study will be selected for a multi-day site visit for observation.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The study is completely anonymous; therefore, it does not require you to provide your name or any other identifying information beyond basic demographic information. All documents and files associated with this study will also be kept in secure storage and locations. At the conclusion of the study, I will send along to you the results and main findings.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at 202-409-4874 or write my faculty advisor, John Ciesluk, Ed.D. at jciesluk@lesley.edu if you have study related questions or problems. If you would like to participate in the study, please read and complete the Informed Consent letter below. You can email me back signed and scanned copies.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Jason Larocque, Doctoral Candidate, Lesley University
4 Main St.
Wenham, MA 01984
(202) 409-4874
Jlarocq2@lesley.edu

Appendix C

Participant Agreement

Researcher: Jason Larocque (jlarocq2@lesley.edu)

Affiliated Institution: Lesley University

Study: "Understanding Masculinity: Exploring the Personal and Professional Lives of Male Middle School Directors of Private, All-boys Middle Schools"

Faculty Advisor: John Ciesluk, Ed.D. (jciesluk@lesley.edu)

By signing below, you agree to participate in this research study. Your signature below will indicate that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant; that your questions have been answered satisfactorily; and that you have read and understood the information provided to you in your invitation to participate.

If you desire, you may be furnished with a copy of the approved Dissertation upon completion of this study.

_____ Yes, I would like a copy of the approved dissertation resulting from this study.

_____
Print Name

_____
Signature of Participant

_____
Date

Appendix D

Document Analysis Worksheet

Thank you for your continued participation in this study. The objective of this exercise is to examine and reflect upon your school's messaging and communications regarding masculinity, boyhood, and how the school's mission relates to the formation of men. All responses to this section will be confidential. Aliases will replace participant names, and schools will be referred to by number and general demographic and school characteristics.

Directions:
Select three separate excerpts from your school's documents or literature related to masculinity, male formation, or gender identity development. You may select language from published school documentation regarding mission statements, school values, or educational philosophy. In addition you might select text from admissions publications, the school website, or other archival literature.

For your analysis, using document excerpts and your own practitioner experience, respond to each prompt below in 350 words or less. Please type your responses in a Word document and return the completed file via email attachment within two weeks of receipt.

Excerpt #1 (include description of source)

Please respond to excerpt #1. What does this excerpt mean to you? What does it say about boyhood, manhood, or masculinity?

Excerpt #2 (include description of source)

Please respond to excerpt #2. What does this excerpt mean to you? What does it say about boyhood, manhood, or masculinity?

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Excerpt #3 (include description of source)

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Please respond to excerpt #3. What does this excerpt mean to you? What does it say about boyhood, manhood, or masculinity?

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PROMPTS

What are the "master narratives" or "unquestionable truths" of your school's espoused version of masculinity? (Davies & Gannon, 2005; Simmons, 2020)

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What opportunities or benefits do you see or experience in your school's vision and/or teaching of masculinity?

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What tensions or contradictions do you see or experience in your school's vision and/or teaching of masculinity?

How do you model your school's vision and/ or teaching of masculinity in your work and leadership?

What would you change about your school's vision and/ or teaching of masculinity?

Appendix E

Participant Interview Protocol

Interviewer begins by reminding the participant of the informed consent letter previously emailed and the measures taken to reduce bias and ensure confidentiality, including:

- To facilitate notetaking, I will be recording our conversation through Zoom with participant acknowledgement and consent.
- The recording will live on the Cloud and be moved to my password-protected laptop hard drive once the transcription is complete.
- Audio and video files will be named and saved using aliases.
- Participants may change the name on their Zoom screen to an alias or use initials only.

Interviewer begins: Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop participating at any time in the interview if you feel uncomfortable. In addition, you can choose to not respond to any question in the protocol.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than ninety minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. I also may probe your answers further to pursue a line of questioning deeper. In line with narrative inquiry, my questions are open-ended.

My study does not aim to evaluate your beliefs or experiences. Rather, I am trying to learn more about how male middle school directors at all boys' middle schools understand and experience masculinity, and how this may impact their work with their students and their own personal wellness. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study.

<u>Questions:</u>

<p align="center"><u>Previous Instruments Questions:</u></p>

A. Describe the experience and / or impact of journaling and analyzing your school's

   messaging on masculinity.

B. Please describe any outcomes or surprises you would like to discuss.

C. Please explain anything you learned or discovered while performing these exercises.

D. In regard to your video journal, I have two follow up questions:

   a. Question 1

   b. Question 2

E. In regard to your document analysis, I have two follow up questions:

    a. Question 1

    b. Question 2

Meaning Questions

1. What values, behaviors, or concepts do you think of when you consider masculinity?

2. Where and how do you see contradictions in the dominant models of masculinity available to you?

3. What are some counternarratives of traditional masculinity you have seen, experienced, or embodied at various points in your life?

4. Talk about the roles you fill as a man at work and home and what success means in those various roles.

5. Tell me about your most influential male role models.

6. Where, when, and how do you feel the most comfortable or empowered as a male?

7. Where, when, and how do you feel the most restricted, challenged, or threatened as a male?

Engagement Questions:

8. How often are you aware or conscious of your masculinity? What does that look like and when and where does it occur?

9. How would you characterize the development of your masculinity? Has your masculinity evolved at all or changed over time?

10. How does masculinity emerge in your life outside of work?

11. Where and how is masculinity most important in your work leading all-boy middle schools?

12. How do you reflect upon, develop, support, or challenge your gender identity in your professional or personal life?

13. What is one major insight you have learned about masculinity that you wish you may have known earlier?

<u>Impact Questions:</u>

14. How does masculinity shape your identity or blend with other characteristics or elements of your identity?

15. Describe any privileges or benefits you may have experienced as a result of being a man.

16. Describe any challenges or burdens you may have experienced as a result of being a man.

17. Describe how your work with boys has helped inform your masculinity or gender development.

18. How and to what extent might your masculinity affect your health and wellness?

Appendix F

Video Journaling (Stage 1)
Email to Participants

Dear (Participant Name):

I hope the end of your school year is going well. I reiterate my excitement and appreciation for your willingness to participate in my research. I am writing to reconnect and begin the first stage of the process with you as a study participant.

Due Date: Monday June 20. Suggested approach might be to respond to one prompt per day for a week or respond to a different prompt every other day.

Format and Context: Participatory Video Journaling
        The participatory video journaling format offers a private space for you (with no researcher present) and time flexibility to engage in some reflective thinking about the gender story of your life. In this way, participants can enter later interviews and artifact analysis having already undergone some independent and unrestricted thinking about masculinity. No preparation is necessary for this first stage of research. You may use an outline for the prompts, but please do not feel the need to write out your answers to the prompt or feel pressure to cover every aspect of your gender history in this stage of research.

Technology Platform for Video Journal:
Part 1 of the research is a video journal using the digital tool FlipGrid (www.flipgrid.com). There will be digital video prompts related to your experience and understanding of masculinity.

Research and Goals:
This element of the research will address research question #1 which is:

What do middle school directors of all-boys' private middle schools report are the patterns of meaning ascribed to masculinity in their personal and professional lives?

For purposes of this study, the word *meaning* is defined in the following way:

> Meaning refers to the associations, values, definitions, and labels used to describe, articulate, and conceptualize masculinity as a social phenomenon and personal lived experience. Meaning also suggests the relative level of significance and salience of masculinity as an identity marker.

Further Instructions for Participatory for Video Journaling

- Please visit www.flipgrid.com and enter the following code: a94ef940 to join the research participant group.
- I will have to approve your request to join the discussion group. This helps with security.
- You will need a camera/video recorder on your laptop or device.
- You will have five prompts to answer, each with a ten-minute maximum length. You may start and pause and resume your recording at any point. You may also delete the recording and restart at any point.
- The prompts include the following:
    - Describe in your own words the story of your masculinity.
    - Describe your "training" in masculinity Be sure to describe any turning points or major revelations in your experience with or understanding of masculinity.
    - What does masculinity mean to you?
    - Where and how and when is masculinity important or relevant in your personal and professional life?
    - What are some vivid or important memories you have related to masculinity?

Privacy and Security

Settings for the Flipgrid responses will be set to private, so that only individual participants and researcher can view video responses. In addition, the discussion board (grid) is password protected by the registered user, and each grid has a unique link to access. FlipGrid allows transcripts of video recordings to be downloaded. Once all prompts and answers are completed and downloaded, the researcher will delete the responses on the FlipGrid Account. The researcher's laptop is password protected and subject to the privacy and security features of the researcher's school's infrastructure.

Assistance and Support

If you would like assistance in how to record and add video responses on Flipgrid, please let me know, and I would be happy to assist you.

Thank you again for your time and investment in this process. I look forward to hearing the insights you may have gained from this stage of the project.

Sincerely,

Jason Larocque
Researcher

Appendix G

Document Analysis (Stage 2)
Email to Participants

Dear (Participant Name):

I appreciate your recent completion of the participant video journal on FlipGrid. It is exciting to begin to collect some data. I am writing to reconnect and begin the second stage of the process with you as a study participant.

Due Date: Two weeks after receipt of email (ideally). Suggested approach might be to respond to one prompt per day over two weeks or respond to a couple different prompt every other day.

Format and Context: Document Analysis Worksheet
  The document analysis format offers another private space for you (with no researcher present) to engage in some written analysis about the messages, impacts, and perceptions your school delivers around masculinity.
  Having recently reflected around the meaning and experiences of masculinity in your own personal life, you can now consider alignment of personal gender identity and beliefs with school values and culture.
  The written responses to each prompt can be 350 words or less. Please consider speaking in a tone and vernacular that is authentic to you.

Technology Platform for Video Journal:
Part two of the research will be conducted using a Word document. You will open the Word document attachment and type right inside each box below the prompt. When finished you may return the completed Word document to the researcher via email.

Research and Goals:
This stage of the research moves from identifying personal meaning (stage 1) to active engagement with masculine identity at the school and professional level. Stage 2 presents an opportunity to take inventory of school values and norms and identify where school messaging conflicts with or compliments personal and professional worldviews. This instrument applies to all three of the guiding research questions, but most prominently question #2:

What do male middle school directors of all-boys private middle schools consider the extent and nature of their active engagement in their gender identity development?

For purposes of this study, the word *engagement* is defined in the following way:

Engagement*: engagement involves the extent and nature to which study participants*

> acknowledge, feel, critically reflect on, question, perform, modify, customize, develop, or deny their masculinity in various settings. Engagement describes behaviors that span a range of agency, power, or resistance on one hand; and compliance, uncertainty, powerlessness, and oppression on the other. An example from literature explaining gender engagement would be the Gender Role Journey concept as presented by O'Neil (1996; 2015).

Further Instructions for Participatory for Video Journaling
- o Participants must select three different sources or excerpts from school artifacts for analysis through a gender lens.
- o Instructions and suggestions for which sources to use are included on the worksheet attachment.
- o Several of the prompts address the three different sources/excerpts selected, while several prompts ask for more general responses around the site school and its professed and practiced masculinity.

Privacy and Security

Assistance and Support
I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about this stage of the research, whether it be clarifying a prompt or explaining how to use the Word document worksheet.

Thank you again for your time and investment in this process. I look forward to hearing the insights you may have gained from this stage of the project.

Sincerely,

Jason Larocque
Researcher

Appendix H

Semi-Structured Zoom Interview (Stage 3)
Email to Participants

Dear Participant,

I look forward to speaking with you tomorrow for our 90-minute interview on Zoom. Just a reminder that I will be recording the Zoom for the transcription purposes, and I will be asking questions related to masculinity's meaning, your engagement with your masculine identity, and the impact of masculinity on you as a person and professional. Your participation is voluntary, and you can ask to end the interview at any point. I will read a script at the start of the interview that explains the interview, confirms its confidentiality, and describes its purposes and format. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Jason Larocque
Researcher

Appendix I

Christopher Narrative Excerpts

Appendix I

Interview Statements from Christopher

Interview Statement 1	Yeah, I guess that's another one of those things where I probably…I don't think about masculinity very often. [Researcher – "Why?"] I guess probably privilege…no… I guess. I don't know. I mean, I think about being a good role model. I think about wanting to teach boys lessons. I think about trying to make sure that they're following our expectations of them as a school. But I don't really think about my masculinity as a part of that too often.
Interview Statement 2	I mean, I guess part of privilege is that you don't realize it's a privilege. And that's how it becomes a privilege. So I don't know. Probably working in a boys' school has been…I think there are elements of being a male teacher at a boys' school that you're probably…you don't have to work as hard for the boys' attention, I think, as female teachers.
Interview Statement 3	I would want my female teachers to behave the same way that I behave and that I hope to behave. And if the boys see them and say, "Well, that's healthy, you know, that's a healthy feminine, you know, teacher, female teacher…I don't know if I could pinpoint things that I would want to be different, you know.
Interview Statement 4	And I think then probably for the boys that I'm modeling for, I think the hope is that then they see that as okay, that is what a healthy, masculine man does. But I don't think I really…I don't do those actions like, all right, I'm doing this because this is what a man should do, but more of, hey, you should be honest. And I would want my female teachers to be honest. I would want my… if there was a middle school female head at my school, I'd want her to be honest, you know, take responsibility, be hardworking, you know, admit mistakes, like all of those major things. I don't see those as being particularly manly as much as just you know a good person.

Appendix J

Graham Narrative Excerpts

Appendix J

Interview Statements from Graham

Interview Statement 1	It's a shame in many ways that as a society we have gotten to a point where if you don't pick sides, you have to tell me what side you're on before we can have a conversation. How about we have a conversation first, and then you can determine what side I'm on or we can just agree to disagree and part as friends because that's how it used to work. I remember as a child, conversations that my parents and their friends would have that were conversations now that we can't have.
Interview Statement 2	So I worry sometimes that we've created in our society a situation where people are now feeling restricted and not knowing what to say for fear of offending someone versus just going out and having a conversation.
Interview Statement 3	I'd like to say the right thing the first time and get away from perceptions and judgments about me and my character. Because what's the, what's the line from Ted Lasso? Right. Better to have a conversation than judgment, and let's have the conversation about that…
Interview Statement 4	I know nobody down there. I am extraordinarily comfortable in that in that area. There's no pressure to be anybody else but me. And it's interesting, and I love it down there because I don't run into anybody from up here. So there's no need to wear a different mask, right. Or to code switch. Just be me. Just be normal.

Appendix K

Walter Narrative Excerpts

Appendix K

Interview Statements from Walter

Interview Statement 1	I don't think I would have been able to do this job had I not done a lot of the therapy work that I did. I did a lot of work in therapy. It was part of my program in grad school that really kind of kicked it off for me. And then I really, really committed about four years ago to it and needed it, you know, it kind of saved my life. And so I needed to heal in a lot of ways. I needed to confront certain things as it related to masculinity, like in regard to my relationship to my father. I needed to do that, I think, to be more effective as a just a leader. I think as a human, first of all, um, and then connecting that to my masculinity and then to my role as a leader. I whole heartedly think I needed to do that. Especially working with boys because when I sit and I talk to them, um, you know, empathy is one of our four core values. And empathy takes work that's like some people, maybe they're, they're naturally good at it, but they still have to work at it. Most of us aren't. We have to work at it. It's a skill. Um, and so if I hadn't done some of the healing that I needed to do. Whatever healing my student, a student, had to do or a colleague had to do, it might have triggered something in me, and I might not have been able to be as present as I needed to be for them. And that would have affected how effective I could be for them.
Interview Statement 2	I think what I've learned is that, okay, the baseline may look different. But as it relates to masculinity, as it relates to power dynamics. It's the same shit, right? There's still power. Who has it? Who doesn't? Who has access to it? Who doesn't? Who presents as if they have power? Who presents it if they don't? And what does that mean? And then how do you how do you manage yourself and navigate that system? Right?... then kind of figuring out…this is who, this is what's powerful here, and trying to figure out what that meant. And that was an important lesson that I still struggle with today. Um, and part of it is definitely attached to being a black man, you know, man of color. That's, that's, that doesn't go away, man. That shit doesn't go away. Um, kind of trying to understand yourself in the context, in spaces in which you are a black man. A Latino man in spaces that are predominantly white.
Interview Statement 3	In terms of today, I was actually talking to my therapist about this and what I've kind of like…it feels like I can't be angry. Um, and that is particular to my racial and ethnic identity in the context…in the professional space and within the context of whiteness. The cost of being angry feels so high. You know, like if you're angry, you're the angry black man - you're threatening and all that crap. And the risk is just too high professionally to be perceived that way. And it does a disservice because I get angry because I'm a human, you know? So really, I think understanding anger within the context of masculinity is something that I think also needs to be explored. Like, am I allowed to be angry and not like

	performative angry, or not like, I'm only allowed to be angry, Right? Because if the idea is like I'm only allowed to be these certain handful of emotions, anger being one of them. What if I'm, like, genuinely and legitimately angry? Am I allowed to feel that or am I stripped of that because I'm supposed to only feel that way. But do you understand what I'm trying to say?
Interview Statement 4	I came to a similar conclusion through my DEI work, especially with teachers. Um, the idea…I think the antiquated notion that you're as a teacher, you're a blank slate and you don't talk about your experiences in the classroom or that's not brought into the classroom. I think that's straight up bullshit. I think wherever you go, there you are. So you bring all of your stuff into every space that you occupy, whether you access it or whether you access it intentionally or unintentionally. It is a part of you, right. And so whatever pain or experiences you had, if they remain unresolved, they will have an impact. I mean, and that's based on my psychological training. And I saw that in particular around DEI work, around bias, as it relates to…just to say, race and gender. Um, and so I saw that kind of manifested with teachers where their biases would impact the way they interacted with students. And building relationships is so important to an effective classroom. Right. And that would affect the relationships they were able to build, I thought. And when I would point that out to them, they'd be like, Oh, no, what are you talking about? I'm like. You have a bias. Just like I do. We all do.

Appendix L

John Narrative Excerpts

Appendix L

Interview Statements from John

Interview Statement 1	I wish I had a better understanding of my own privilege. You know? And part of that has to do with being a man. But it is also a white man who grew up without, you know, the worries or concerns about money and things like that. But I wish that I had…and this isn't about me. I wish that I had school leaders and teachers that talked about privilege and talked about opportunity and talked about suppression the way that we do here, because that was just absent
Interview Statement 2	Most of my closest friendships now in which I feel the opportunity to be my true self and to be open and honest tends to be with women. I don't tend to do that as much with men. I don't know why. Um, so, you know, I feel like I've grown a lot in terms of being able to be comfortable having these conversations, and often it requires a reciprocal type of relationship.
Interview Statement 3	So but we've had a lot more situations where Mrs. So and So, whomever will tell a boy to do something, he won't do it. And then a male teacher will tell him the same thing and he will do it. And that creates just a ton of contention and complexity. And I work really hard and I talk to my male faculty. And say - do not come in and be a savior, do not speak over…like we can have conversations later on, but you can't usurp the authority of the women because of the cultural ways that it's working here.
Interview Statement 4	That's when it really and a tremendous, tremendous amount of this goes to my wife, who is, as I mentioned, far smarter than I. She's always been really tuned in. She was brought up with a father who was already tuned into inequities along race, culture, religion, gender, etc... So she grew up in a family structure in which her mom, as a public school teacher, made more than her dad as a private school teacher. Her dad was much different than my dad in that he was always challenging the status quo. And so fast forward to when we're partners and then fiancé, engaged and then married. She's always pushed back on some of the stuff and has called me out on some of the privilege that I have had, especially when I didn't recognize it to start with. And being married to her has really opened my proverbial eyes, but more so motivated me to get a better understanding of inequities across the board, but particularly along the lines of gender.
Interview Statement 5	I really…when I was a teacher…I was a science teacher. The closest association I always had was with female students and I'm not sure why. I'm not sure because historically and systemically, girls haven't been afforded the opportunities in the sciences and the maths as much as boys have. But there was part of me that reflected on some of those relationships that I had with female students. And I was also the girls' varsity basketball coach. And there is particularly in this adolescent and pre-adolescent age, there's a level of sophistication that girls have that is just absent with the boys.