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THE IMPURITY TRUTH:
HOW POPULAR MEDIA TAUGHT MILLENNIAL MALES
TO GET LAID AND "DO IT" AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

May 2013

ABSTRACT
THE IMPURITY TRUTH:
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PATRICK R. JOHNSON, B.S., CJE

Marquette University, 2013

This thesis is the story millennial males told about their experiences with media serving as an educator during their adolescence and beyond. By using depth interviews, an oral history was developed and a concept I have called the impurity truth, where media are teaching the millennials that their virginity is a gatekeeper to becoming a man, was crafted from the narratives. Twelve males, ages 18 to 24, from geographically, racially, and sexually diverse backgrounds, were interviewed. A fantasy theme analysis of the interview transcripts revealed a masculine hierarchy where the millennial males decoded a media message that men should cast their virginities aside in order to cement their place in a masculine hierarchy. The analysis of the narratives revealed four character themes: the virgin, the player, the ideal man, and the role model. The character themes provided the context to a hierarchical structure of masculinity that was in turn grounded by theories of adolescent identity development (Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1969) and a challenge to R.W. Connell's (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Patrick R. Johnson, B.S., CJE

When it comes to being thankful, I have a lot to be thankful for. I can happily say that I have been incredibly fortunate in life, love, and education. For those very reasons, I have a lot of people to thank for getting me to this point in my life. These people are the most critical to my desire to obtain an incredible education from an incredible university. These people are my inspiration and guidance. Because of these people, completing this thesis would never have been possible.

MY FAMILY

The women in my life have shaped me into the courteous, kind, and intelligent man I am today. They've taken care of me and guided me along the way. These inspiring ladies happen to be my mother, my grandmother, and my wonderful aunts (or, the better way to describe them, my second mothers). The men in my life have taught me how to be a man, how to grow up and take care of others and myself, and how to never settle for anything less than perfect. These strong men are my uncles and my grandpa. My cousins, who really are my siblings, have pushed me my whole life to succeed. Lauren, you are my best friend. Alex, you are my rock. Hayley, you are my confidant and partner-in-crime. Logan, you are my heart. Madilyn, you are my spark. Thank you all for teaching me to never give up. I hope I have inspired you, no matter how tough it is or how stressed you get, you never give up on anything.

MY TEACHERS

I've always wanted to be a teacher. I've always wanted to make a difference in someone's life—even if it was just one person. This adventure I have embarked on will allow me to make an impact on an industry that I love dearly, as well as contribute to the research to better future generations of students and educators. I can be the difference. However, I can make a difference because of the people who showed me what it means to be an educator and a researcher.

Ms. Mary Rooney, my 3rd grade teacher and my idol. You have always inspired me, and I will never forget what you have done for me. I learned my love of teaching and Catholic schools from you. Your service to teaching is astounding, your heart is gigantic, and because of both, you have inspired hundreds of children to be themselves and follow their dreams. I am happy to now call you my friend.

To the College of Education: specifically Drs. Francesca Lopez and Sharon Chubbuck. Dr. Lopez, you taught me all about adolescence. You took a spark in my mind and turned into a drive to understand more. Even deeper, you taught me that masculinity needs to be better understood and you challenged me to take up that cross. Dr. Chubbuck, there are very few things I can say in this thank you that I haven't already said to you. You have been a true friend and model educator. You taught me how to teach. You taught me that I can do anything. You taught me how to succeed. You gave me the tools to be the best teacher I can be, and I hope some day I can do the same to others. It is, in

many respects, because of your guidance I feel I am ready to enter the real world of teaching.

The faculty of the Diederich College of Communication: Dr. Erik Ugland, thank you for giving me a chance and proving to me that Marquette and the Diederich College are a second home to me. Dr. Gee Ekachai, for always making me feel good about myself, my abilities, and always encouraging and inspiring me to do more. And thank you for helping me learn what it means to be a researcher and a good one. Ms. Linda Menck, for always being someone to talk to and get advice from. You've always been able to turn my frown upside down. Dr. Karen Slattery, for reminding my why I am an educator and why this project can contribute to a field I love so dearly. And to the many others who have contributed to my successes in undergrad and grad school. This place has helped me to grow and mature.

To two of the strongest, most put together women I know, Drs. Pamela Hill Nettleton and Ana Garner. There are only four words that can accurately describe what you both have done for me: *thank you for everything*. Dr. G, you have never let me fail. You constantly push me to be better, to prove my abilities, and to never give up. Pam, you made a lot of this possible. You are a mentor, a friend, and an inspiration. You advised me through the good times and the bad. You have taught me how to be a writer, a researcher, and a phenomenal teacher. I am so grateful you came to Marquette when you did, because I would have felt robbed if I never had a chance to work with you.

Dr. Bonnie Brennen: my mentor, advisor, and chair. You have helped me find my way into academia, encouraged me to challenge myself and my critical thinking skills, and you have never let me down—no matter how many changes I've made, ideas I've bounced off of you, emails I've sent, or meetings we've had. Thank you for showing me what it is to be a quality academic and an exceptional advisor. Even more so, thank you for teaching me how to be a better human being.

MY FRIENDS

To start, thank you to my roommate and friends for putting up with the countless hours of research, mood swings, late nights, and stress. I am so appreciative of you all participating in this process with me. I am forever grateful for your participation, conversation, and reverence.

To my best friend in the entire world: Shannon Carton. You and I embarked on our journey of high school together. From there we were inseparable and destined to be on similar paths. Now, both of us have received our Masters degrees. We've fought over what is more important to study: communication studies or media studies. We've duked it out over qualitative versus quantitative methods. We've written our theses and defended them. Even more special, we are on our ways to becoming honorable scholars and educators in communication (both communication studies and media studies). Life doesn't know how much of a gift it gave me when you came into my life. Thank you for absolutely everything you do and the friendship you have provided me. I love you always and forever.

Most importantly, I want to thank all of the men who participated in this project. Without them, this project would not have existed. Your stories were invaluable, inspiring, and heartwarming.

This project is full of my blood, sweat, and tears. With the help of all of these people, and those who I did not mention, I would not have been able to take on such a large project.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

"All children, except one, grow up."

"If growing up means it would be beneath my dignity to climb a tree, I'll never grow up, never grow up, never grow up! Not me!"

"There could not have been a lovelier sight; but there was none to see it except a little boy who was staring in at the window. He had ecstasies innumerable that other children can never know; but he was looking through the window at the one joy from which he must be for ever barred."

from Peter Pan *by J. M. Barrie*

Peter Pan is the story of a boy who refuses to grow up. A boy who feels pain at the thought of leaving behind childhood fun, climbing trees, dancing with fairies, and having adventures with his Lost Boys. Peter Pan lives the dream that many young boys wish their real lives could be. He never has to grow up. He does not have to face responsibility. He can play forever and ever. His home, Neverland, is a protection from the fears Peter Pan has of the real world. Most importantly, Neverland lets Peter always stay a boy and never become a man.

Peter Pan has the privilege of never having to deal with the fears of life as a man. Peter never has to watch someone die. Peter never has to get a full-time job to support a family, or be made fun of by patriarchal society for being a stay-at-home dad. Peter never has to learn how to drive or choose what to drive. Peter never has to feel ridicule for being too different from his peers or too much like them. Peter never has to experience middle school or high school or college. Peter never has to worry about if he is meeting society's standards of manhood. Peter never has to defend his sexuality. Peter never has

to deal with the race to be the first in his peer group to have sex. Peter never has to be a man. He will forever be a boy.

The story of Peter Pan is fiction. It will never happen, even though some have probably attempted to live it out. Although some might argue that society supports the immaturity of men, men would never be allowed to stay boys forever. Boys must become men. Boys have to grow up. While some manage to make these childish things a real life career, like the casts of *Jackass* or *Rob Dyrdek's Fantasy Factory*, most boys eventually cast aside childish things to become men. It is what men are supposed to do. Men are supposed to grow up, and encounter the real world with all of its problems and obstacles. However, men all too often seem far less eager to grow out of immaturity and childish ways.

This study seeks to address how boys become men. In particular, this research is aimed at better understanding one of the rites of passage from being a boy to becoming a man: sex. Sex is intriguing, discouraging, fun, and downright weird. Sex is explored, experimented with, and talked about. Losing one's virginity seems to be a symbol of manhood. Upon losing it, one symbolically becomes a man. Learning about sex is communicated across multiple channels—parents, friends, and, most important to this study, the mass media. Therefore, my thesis is not only about what it means to grow up from a boy to a man, it is about how sex is critical to this growth and how the popular mass media teaches boys that the best way to become men is to get laid and to lose their virginity as early as possible. This thesis explores how millennial males have learned about sex from the media.

Growing Up

"The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story, and writes another; and his humblest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it."

J.M. Barrie

Being an only child has its perks. You get all of the attention, you get all of the toys, you do not have to share birthdays or presents from Santa, and you do not have to compete with or be compared to anyone. But, being an only child is not always fun. You go on family vacations without siblings to fight with in the back seat of the car, you have to invent imaginary friends to play with, and you can never blame someone else for putting a dent in the driver's side door.

I come from a non-traditional family. I was not raised by two parents, I did not have a dog, and I was not one of 2.5 children that constitute the perfect American family. I am an only child. I have a mother. When I was a junior in college, my mother came out of the closet to me. For eight years she had been in a relationship with my now (according to Iowa state law) stepmother. My aunts and uncles knew. My older cousins knew. But my mom felt like she always needed to keep it a secret from me because she thought I would look at her differently. She thought I was too conservative to accept her. After all she had done for me, she could not trust me to accept her as a lesbian. Now, I have two moms—my mom and my stepmom.

My mother worked long hours and often the third shift; I often went days or even weeks without seeing her for any length of time. Since it was just my mom and me growing up, we did not really have the money to live in our own house. I grew up living in my grandparents' house with my grandma, grandpa, aunt Dale, and my mom. My

grandma raised me; there is no denying it. I was no momma's boy; I was a gramma's boy. She did everything with me: got me ready for school, played games with me, talked to me, comforted me, watched Power Rangers with me, played Bomberman and Caesar's Palace with me on my Super Nintendo that she bought me. My grandmother was my primary caregiver and, in a sense, my mother. When I was in seventh grade, she passed away, and it felt as if I had lost a parent. Shortly after that, a serious rift occurred between my mother and grandfather. She moved out of the house and I stayed with my grandfather and aunt Dale. I did not understand what happened and no one explained it to me. Why did she not take me with her? My mother came over for dinner some nights, but always left and then I would cry myself to sleep. I felt like I had done something wrong. My grandfather was not interested in raising me, either. To him, I was a bastard since my mother never married and chose to raise me without a father. With my mother out of the house and my grandfather refusing to care an ounce about me, my aunt Dale stepped in to make sure I was well fed, prepared for school, and that I was not hurting. It was not until my mom came out of the closet to me that everything began to make more sense. My grandpa kicked her out because he did not agree with her lifestyle. My aunts and uncles could not talk about it because my mother asked them not to do so. Instead of including me in the conversation that was going on between everyone else, I was left in the dark. I felt like I was nothing, but my family made it clear I would never be alone.

I was raised by women.

My aunts all took care of me. Aunt Dale was with me daily. After high school, I moved in with my aunt Dawn. My weekends and breaks during college were spent in a lime green and purple bedroom (magically called the Dopey room because of my aunt's

love of the goofy dwarf from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*) that I have come to call my own. My aunt Darlene made sure I had money and got my schoolwork done, and she has called me every day since my mom "left." My aunt Diane never lets me down and always makes sure I have everything I need. These women shaped me into who I am today. They took me shopping and on vacations. They taught me how to crawl, walk, and talk—which I am sure they are regretting. They taught me how to read and write. They taught me how to be kind and courteous, gentle and thoughtful, happy and sad. They helped shape me into the man I have chosen to be, but they could not form me into the man society expects me to be.

Since I do not have any siblings, I have always been close with my nine cousins. Lauren is eight short months older than I am. We grew up playing games and sports together, Barbie and Ken, cooking and baking, getting dirty and clean, fighting and making up. She is my best friend. My cousin Alex is three years younger than me. We grew up fighting and hating each other. I was jealous that his dad could do everything with him and I did not have a father. He was the all-star athlete, he got all the praise, and I could not stand it. It was not until we both were in high school, he a freshman and me a senior, that he became the person that I would find myself talking to about everything. In the end, neither Lauren nor Alex was ever able to teach me what it meant to be a man according to society's standards.

I have four uncles. One is a hairdresser who is widowed and has four children. Another is divorced and refuses to marry again. One gave up being the breadwinner to become a teacher and a stay-at-home dad. And the fourth runs his own small business, but my aunt is still the head of the household. Each has taught me something about what

it means to be a man, but each has broken that mold of American society's ideal male in some way, shape or form. They helped me realize that masculinity is not easily defined. My uncles became potent role models of men who invented their own ways of being masculine that looked different from mediated masculinities and social stereotypes. They taught me there is no one definition of masculinity; there is just what society says it is supposed to be.

Shaped by these non-traditional forces, raised by women and without a father or brothers, I grew into the man I am today. I have flaws. I have had many learning experiences, both good and bad. I will never be David Beckham, Brad Pitt, or George Clooney—walking and breathing absolute machismo. I am a blonde-haired, blue-eyed, 5-foot-11, 23-year-old man. I am happy to have become the man I am today.

Throughout my life, I rarely had male teachers. I have known eight, one of whom was my uncle. I played baseball, basketball, and volleyball, but dropped those in high school to be a writer and the school spirit coordinator. I chose to become a high school teacher, and study and work in a traditionally female-dominated field. My field, journalism and mass communication, is often dominated by women in undergraduate classes and in the workforce. I am creative, not logical. I like stories, not numbers. I am good at English, not math. I love clothes and being clean. I do not mind colors like pink, but blue is still my favorite. I was the editor of a magazine, not a newspaper. I am plagued and drained by body image issues. I struggled with bulimia in middle and high school and into college. I became obsessed with my physical appearance. I fussed over how I looked and what others thought of me. My characteristics that I am so proud of are

not characteristics of the ideal American man. I have always had female and male friends, and was made fun of for not siding with women over men.

In those ways, I resist the social stereotype of hegemonic masculinity. In other ways, I reclaim it. I was popular and made sure people knew it, often treating those who were "different" as lesser people. I loved watching and playing sports. I often flaunted my sexual conquests to convince myself that I was better than others. I was a stereotypical frat boy and in many ways still am. I dated the president of a sorority for over a year before commitment issues kept me from getting down on one knee and proposing. I want a son who is a football player and a daughter who is a cheerleader or a dancer or a gymnast. I want the white picket fence and a wraparound porch with a porch swing. I want the stereotypical American ideal, and yet, it is the image that I currently see myself writing to break.

I keep a lot of my life secret; much of what I have written here is a secret. I am afraid I will be looked at differently because I have two moms, because I was raised by my aunts, because I do not fit the mold that society expects me to fit. Ironically, I keep my life secret for the exact reason my mom was so afraid to tell me hers. I feel ashamed of it because it does not fit the mold. Because it does not fit the mold, I am looked at differently. Sadly, I have yet to grow up enough to realize what society says should not really matter.

I never learned about sex from my mom, or anyone else in my family, for that matter. The closest to the sex talk that I ever got was from my uncle on the way home from high school during my freshman year. He had heard rumors that day that I had slept with my girlfriend. Although the rumors were true, I did not get the conversation I

thought I would have. I thought I was going to be scolded, disciplined—the "let us talk about what sex actually is" talk. I thought my uncle was going to tell my mom—he did not. Instead, I got the "way to be a man," the "good job I am proud of you" talk. I did not get in trouble. It has been nine years and I still am shocked that I did not get punished. I was 14 years old. I was a baby. At this point, I felt different. I still had the mindset of Peter Pan; I was never going to grow up. That is why *Peter Pan* was my favorite story. If I could live like Peter, I could live young, wild, and free, and never have to worry about being a "grown up." Well, my uncle informed me that since I had had sex, I was a grown up now. I was a man. All because of one act that got my friends talking and let people in school learns I was no longer a virgin. I did not think I changed too much because of this event. I still went to the mall and the movies. I still hung out with my friends on the weekends. I still was popular, and I had thought sex made you more popular. It did make me more popular. I began to realize shortly after I lost my virginity, and continued subsequent sexual experiences with my girlfriend. My conversations changed from being about what I wanted to do with girls to being about what I did with girls. My weekends were split between hanging out and causing trouble with my friends and making time to sneak around to have sex with my girlfriend. Once my boyhood was gone—and it had apparently disappeared with my virginity—it did not think it was ever coming back. I had no chance to dance around with fairies and play with the lost boys. I was cast out of Neverland, never allowed to return to innocence. From then on I felt would be defined by the masculine codes of society, never being able to retreat to the innocence and safe haven of boyhood.

Like the J. M. Barrie quote at the beginning of this section, my diary was beginning to be filled with my life stories. My childhood diary closed all too soon, and now I would need to begin stuffing the diary of manhood with what, according to societal pressures and ideologies, I imagined manhood to be—stories of sexual conquests, bad behavior, and no regrets. I would be a true testimony to the sex, drugs, and rock and roll lifestyle because that is what society told me how a man was supposed to act.

I learned very little about being society's ideal man from my family, some I learned from my friends, but almost all of it learned from what I saw in movies, magazines, television shows, advertisements, and books. From the media, I learned how to be a man, what sex was, and how my best option for success in high school was to not be the last virgin in my group of friends. The societal ideal of a man was not something I learned just from my family; I also learned it from the media. While it takes more than one act to make a man, it seemed to me as though the media constructed this concept that sex was equal to manhood. The Abercrombie and Fitch bags and advertisements screamed at me to be taller and work out enough to get a six-pack so I could be on the walls of adolescent girls all over the country. Stifler from *American Pie* (1999) taught me that virginity was the worst thing to have in high school. The first *Playboy* I ever saw filled my mind with Barbie-like expectations for every girl I would ever date. Watching *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990) with my aunt every week led me to believe that high school and adult romantic relationships would be like a revolving door. If only I could be like Dylan McKay, I could have had any girl I wanted (and I was not even a teen yet when that show was on). *Dawson's Creek* (1998) was a manual for screwing up relationships and how to get back together with a girl. *Cruel Intentions* (1999) gave me the impression

that casual sex in high school was not only common but pleasurable and occasionally

vindictive. Masculinity and sex were all over the media I consumed. For me, and

probably for many men, magazines, pornography, television, and film were my sex

educators all throughout my adolescence

And that is where my research begins. I wanted to understand how others had

been taught by the media about what it means to be a man. I wanted to find out how

others learned what sex is, what sexual relationships are, and why boys are supposed to

be impure and shed their virginity while girls are supposed to be pure and wholesome,

keeping their virginity intact. My research is meant to understand one of many influences

on male sexuality—the media. This is work about attitudes and growing up. I wanted to

understand how these attitudinal ideologies have developed in a generation of males

about whom very little research has been done to date. My heart belongs to stories, and

that is what this thesis is all about: the narrative that becomes an educational tool and

experience for young males.

CHAPTER 2
AN AGE-OLD TRADITION: THE PORTRAIT OF MAN

"If you would convince a man that he does wrong, do right. Men will believe what they see."

Henry David Thoreau

"Men do not quit playing because they grow old; they grow old because they quit playing."

Oliver Wendell Holmes

"A child, from the time he can think, should think about all he sees, should suffer for all who cannot live with honesty, should work so that all men can be honest, and should be honest himself."

José Marti

The structure and rules of high school are distinctive: peer groups become a way of survival and success (Freyberg, 2009) and gendered identities develop as a result of peer groups (Eiselel, Zand, & Thomson, 2009). Cliques become status symbols and can institute a hierarchical structure within the school. The cliques result in tension between groups and popular cliques picking on peers considered to be less popular (Certo, Cauley, & Chafin, 2003). Stresses at home and in school create additional struggles for adolescents, such as an inability to exercise forward thinking skills—only living in the moment, unable to think about future plans or accomplishments (Eisele, Zand, & Thomson, 2009). Adolescents feeling an increased lack of autonomy and restriction and captivity by their teachers and parents that leads to a feeling of alienation from the rest of the adult world is also common (deCharms, 1968; Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996). For some young men, especially for those interviewed for this thesis, their high school careers were defined by the activities in which they participated, their friends were made by playing sports, and their relationships resulted from their reputation for masculine behaviors. The millennial males interviewed for this

project considered their high school careers the start of who they would later become in life. This study attempts to look specifically at this turbulent time in the lives of millennial males and at how this time period is one of learning how to function as and become a man. As will be shown in this chapter, the media create gender ideals and ideas about sexuality. The messages encoded by the media—film, television, advertising, magazines, and the Internet—are then decoded by adolescent boys, leading to an adoption of certain gender constructs and identities. Adolescence is a particularly impressionable time for young men to be educated by these messages. The messages received by the adolescent boys can then form attitudes that buttress patriarchy and support hegemonic masculine ideals. Therefore, this thesis addresses the role the media play in the education of adolescent boys about their gendered identity and sexuality. To better understand this, this study asks *what is the story millennial males tell about the role of media in their education about sex and masculinity*?

Cultural Studies: A Theoretical Model

Cultural studies provides an appropriate theoretical perspective to engage in an academic conversation on the implications of media's representations to educate adolescent males of the millennial generation about sex and masculinity. In cultural studies, the goal is to examine a subject matter in terms of cultural practice in relation to power. Culture is looked at in all of its forms (television, film, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, rituals, clothing, performances, interpersonal and relational communication, for example) and the manifestation of culture in social and political contexts is explored. Cultural studies is not concerned with only the cultural artifact,

however. Cultural studies research also situates the cultural artifact within greater society, addressing larger concerns such as gender gaps, racial disparities, and socioeconomic hardships. Cultural studies has an ethical commitment to society, while dissecting and discussing the cultural knowledge exemplified in the artifacts (Sardar & Loon, 2005).

Cultural studies grows out of the work of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams. Hall (1996) believes cultural studies to be conversational. In his eyes, to practice cultural studies, one must interact with multiple discourses, engage in interdisciplinary research, and recognize that the movement of cultural studies has been fluid and fractured. Hall (1996) envisions cultural studies to be a theoretical approach that examines power, race, gender, linguistics, culture, and representation. In his pivotal essay "Culture is Ordinary," Williams (1958) sees culture as everything. The key to critically thinking about culture is to work to understand the relationship between society and culture.

Cultural studies considers how mediated texts construct what humans, as cultural, political, and social beings, think of the world (Williams, 1981). To understand these constructions, cultural artifacts are collected to examine a shared meaning of the world between humans: physically, socially, and attitudinally. Material symbols, such as novels, films, or magazines, often results from a physical embodiment of lived experience and culture (Williams, 1981). The symbols become evidence of daily practices, customs, and social conventions. The uses of symbols allow for a shared life and experience among peers—creating something social and shared. Attitudes also help build culture. Attitudes exhibit the predominant ways a culture makes sense of the world and itself, including values, systems of belief, and philosophies (Ott & Mack, 2010).

While culture is critical in cultural studies research, a discussion of cultural studies is not complete without addressing the concept of ideology. "An ideology is a pattern of beliefs that determines a group's interpretations of some aspect of the world" (Foss, 2009, p. 209). The beliefs reflect a group's "fundamental social, economic, political or cultural interests" (van Dijk, 1998, p. 9). Beliefs are disseminated in communities, nations, and/or the world. These beliefs define a population. Groups also have the ability to change and have alternative beliefs and viewpoints that are not reflective of a dominant ideology (Foss, 2009). The ideologies a culture or society upholds often become the foundation for the motives, knowledge, and behaviors of the groups associated.

The dominance and privilege of one group over another is reinforced through the ideologies, beliefs, and actions of members of a society (van Dijk, 1998). This dominance becomes hegemonic ideologies held among privileged members of the society (Foss, 2009). Hegemony is a concept greatly influenced by the thinking of Antonio Gramsci. He saw that a culturally diverse society is ruled by a dominant social class. The social class's dominance is achieved through the manipulation of the beliefs, perceptions, values, and culture so the ruling-class's worldview becomes the societal norm. This worldview becomes the dominant ideology that then justifies economic, political, and social decisions by the status quo (Gramsci, 1992). Williams (1977) saw hegemony as a lived experience that exceeds ideology. Hegemony can be seen as a dynamic process that attempts to neutralize opposing or competing viewpoints (Williams, 1977). Hegemony, according to Sardar and Loon (2005), are "what binds society together without the use of force," and the values that are considered hegemonic are "negotiated through a whole

series of encounters and collisions between classes. Culture is one of the key sites where the struggle for hegemony takes place; and it is in the arena of popular culture that the issues of moral and intellectual leadership are resolved" (p. 49). When an ideology becomes hegemonic, it accumulates "the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others" (Hall, 1988, p. 44). Foss (2009) suggests that hegemonic ideologies can only continue to exist if there is a desire and continued need to renew, reinforce, and defend the ideologies. This reinforcement is often seen in cultural products that are consumed daily. Coming from a Marxist perspective, Terry Eagleton (1984) envisioned ideologies as having a material existence and being embodied in everyday encounters and institutions. In cultural studies, cultural products such as novels, magazines, films, television shows, fashion, and advertisements are thought to be everyday practices. Cultural products embody the culture and construct the identity of the society and the individuals in it (Foss, 2009).

A Masculine Cultural Ideal: Hegemonic Masculinity, Patriarchy, and Structural Politics

Defining masculinity is no easy task, and it should not be. In contemporary American society, hegemonic masculinity typically means being muscular and athletically gifted, having a deep voice, and having a high-powered job or partaking in some kind of work with your hands (Dyer, 2002). These characteristics are examples of a dominant masculinity, one that is treated as hegemonic and superior to all other forms of masculinity, and "the closer a boy's masculine embodiment aligns with forms that are most valued and supported, the more likely his masculinities will be privileged" (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011).

Masculinity scholars examine how the male gender is constructed in society and culture, and, if at all possible, understand how a better knowledge about masculinity could assist in a change from a hegemonic masculine center to a more unified construction of society. A goal of masculinity scholars is to better understand how some or certain males assume themselves at the hegemonic center while marginalizing the other (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002; Kimmel, 2008). Scholars have attempted to unpack what is actually meant to be a man and how masculinity plays its role in cultural ideologies.

Masculinity refers to the behaviors, meanings, and social roles set for men in any given society at any one time (Kimmel, 2000). Masculinity emphasizes gender, not sexualities, and a diversity of identities among different groups of men. Kimmel (2000) situates gender as an internalized facet of identity that is often produced through daily interactions and within our societal institutions. There are four dimensions where masculinities can be developed and changed: historical, sociological, psychological, and anthropological. In each of these dimensions, masculinity is constructed and changed to accommodate the cultural discourse of the population. However, Kimmel (2000) argues that masculinity is an incorrect term; masculinities would be more appropriate. By pluralizing the word, he acknowledges that masculinity means different things to different people, cultures, and times periods (Kimmel, 2000).

Early research in masculinity assumed that masculinity was inherently and exclusively male, which means that masculinity must be tied to one's sex and is thus a biological construct (Halberstam, 1998). This literature emphasized sex roles, or roles that are biologically prescribed and developmentally predetermined (Carrigan, Connell,

& Lee, 1985). In the 1940s, Parsons (1942) rejected biological predeterminism and, instead, described sex roles as social patterns and considered them instrumental and expressive within the operation of the conjugal family. For Parsons (1942), sex roles were a part of the very foundation of the person, developed through emotional dynamics in the family. Parsons (1942) did not see sex roles as a negotiation of power, rather, sex roles were complimentary experiences primarily founded in the family structure and economic stability.

Research in adolescent masculinity places boys primarily in three categories: juvenile delinquency, educational underachievement, and absence of a father. Each category was believed to be a social problem needing to be attended to and remedied (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). Boys with distant relationships with their fathers were found to be often expressive in their distaste of everything feminine, ultimately constructing simplified and overmasculinized identities within their peer groups (Hartley, 1959). Hartley (1959) saw boys afraid of having feminine traits:

> …overstraining to be masculine, in virtual panic at being caught doing anything traditionally feminine, and in hostility toward anything even hinting at 'femininity,' including females themselves (p. 458).

This fear was said to have stemmed from the rigid rules and socialization of masculinity upheld by "adults in society where feminine roles were changing rapidly and the emancipation of women was well advanced" and a father-figure not being around to educate young boys on these roles (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985, p. 560). Hacker (1957) introduced homosexuality to the sex role conversation. He suggested that masculinity varies and is constructed by various situations (Hacker, 1957). For men, maintaining societal expectations of masculinity is far more critical to attaining societal

acceptance and power. Essentially, "masculinity is more important to men than femininity is to women" (Hacker, 1957, p. 231). Patricia Sexton (1969) expressed what she viewed the image of the real man to be:

> What does it mean to be masculine? It means, obviously, holding male values and following male behavior norms…Male norms stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure, and a considerable amount of toughness in mind and body (p. 20).

While her work glorified the traditional male role, which would later be known as the hegemonic male, and was verbally hostile toward a masculine counter-culture, she began to engage in a conversation of patriarchal power. Sexton (1969) suggested that men assumed masculine roles as a result of sexual division in labor and home, leading to women negotiating and relinquishing power to the traditional male norms and values (Sexton, 1969).

Scholarly work about men primarily came out of the women's and men's liberation movements and the gay movement. Second wave feminism and women's liberation led to substantial critiques of the patriarchal structure of society. Patriarchy is when the male is the head of the household and all other members are subordinate. This led to increased attention of research on masculinity (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). This literature, unlike the research of Sexton's time, was highly critical of men's patriarchal roles. For these researchers, masculinity was considered to be an unobtainable expectation (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). For Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985) the existence of hegemonic masculinity leads to two common problems. First, it increases competition between males and oppresses women. Second, traditional masculinity creates role strain between men and women, develops an internal struggle for men leading to a

crisis of masculinity, and results in men feeling they cannot live up to their image and feel less about themselves (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). Essentially, hegemonic masculinity is as detrimental to society as it is to the individual—men are oppressed by their desire to fulfill an unattainable male role.

Connell (1987) saw a crippling inequality among masculinities. To her, there is a masculinity that will always be more privileged in a society and this model of masculinity is what all other masculinities are compared and contrasted against. This is hegemonic masculinity. The hegemonic definition of masculinity is "constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (Connell, 1987, p. 183). One's own masculine identity is developed based on the structure of hegemonic masculinity. The hegemonic definition of masculinity is used as a reference point for defining one's own masculine identity (Kimmel, 2000).

Gramsci's concept of hegemony influenced Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity involves influencing a sizeable percentage of the population how masculine constructs dominate culture—hegemonic masculinity appears normal, in control, and goes unquestioned. The hegemonic male stimulates a culture of patriarchy and defines what it means to be a real man in society. Most importantly, especially to this study, heterosexuality becomes the defining characteristic of the hegemonic male. A gay man could embody all qualities expected of the hegemonic male, but he is still gay. By being a homosexual, the man is cast out of the hegemonic center of masculinity (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1987; Frank, 1987; Donaldson, 1993; Connell, 1992; Connell, 1997; Connell, 2002; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2008).

For hegemonic masculinity to be maintained, there must be varying hierarchical levels of subordination of other masculinities in society. The hegemonic image is dominant in the structure of masculinity (Connell, 1997; Kimmel, 2008). Below the hegemonic male there are complacent and marginalized masculinities. A complacent male is not interested in interrupting the current structure, but does not necessarily embody all true characteristics of the hegemonic male (autonomous, courageous, sexually experience, aggressive, for example) (Connell, 1997). The marginalized male exhibits hegemonic characteristics, but comes from a minority group such as a minority race, ethnicity, or religion (Connell, 1997). Both the complacent male and marginalized male are heterosexual (Connell, 1997). At the lowest end, there is the subordinated male, the male who is politically and emotionally bound to the gay community because of his homosexuality. The subordinated male could have strong masculine traits and still be considered subordinate to the hegemonic, complacent, and marginalized males because of his homosexuality (Connell, 1992; Connell, 1997).

Connell revisited her theory in 2005. After confronting critiques on the original theory of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggested looking at masculinities at a specific geographic level to better examine alternatives to hegemonic constructions of masculinity. One geographic level is "constructed in the arenas of face-to-face interaction of families, organizations and immediate communities, as typically found in ethnographic and life-history research" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.849). Two other levels of geographic categorization also exist. The first is regional and demographic research. The second is global, or transnational arenas of research (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The introduction of these levels came as a response to

masculinities varying across societies, cultures, histories, and psychologies, showing that there is no one definition of masculinity and that masculinities must be studied in relation to their context: historically, socially, culturally, and psychologically (Demetriou, 2001).

Masculinity is often referred to as the anti-femininity, and a major component to being masculine was the anti-feminine characteristics a man exhibited (Connell, 1987; Plummer, 1999; Kimmel, 2000; Connell, 2005; Kimmel 2008; Reeser 2010). What it means to be a man often is what is means to be unlike a woman (Connell, 1987; Connell, 2005). These gender identities, as West and Zimmerman (1987), Butler (1990), and Halberstam (1998) put it, are performed. It is the act of "doing gender" that makes certain behaviors, experiences, and traits inherently masculine or feminine. These traits then are considered part of what it means to have a certain masculine identity (West & Zimmerman, 1987), which is most often the hegemonic identity (Connell, 2005). "A person's gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, what one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 140). Butler (1990) approached this idea of gender performance as a way to breakdown barriers she saw developing between sex, gender, and desire. Sex, gender, and desire were seen as a continuum with sex causing gender and gender causing desire. Gender being performed, not prescribed, allowed for flexibility for concepts and identifications of gender and desire (Butler, 1990). Halberstam (1998) examined gendered performance as it related to female masculinity. In *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam (1998) sought out to understand how females performed masculinity, and how it was understudied in academia. What she saw was masculinity that was rewarded. The rewarded masculinity is promoted and those that would be considered different, such as females performing

traditionally masculine characteristics, are displaced. She (1998) argues that female

bodies can perform masculinity, too, and if this is recognized, masculinity itself might be

better understood from this perspective. Halberstam (1998) identified a female

masculinity known as the tomboy, a girl who behaves like a boy. During adolescence, the

behaviors of the tomboy are seemingly allowed by peer groups, but with much criticism

and ridicule. If the performative identity of the tomboy continues, the girl is looked down

upon for acting like a male (Halberstam, 1998). A masculine female is unable to live out

her personal performance identity because of hegemonic societal constructs that hinder

her personal expression.

The Other in the Hegemonic Structure of Masculinity

During the encoding and decoding of messages, culture and ideologies are

negotiated. This study looks at both the hegemonic image of man, as well as the other

qualities of masculinity this hegemony establishes. The concept of the other is key in

cultural studies research. Cultural studies research deals with the ideas of representation

and the other. In contemporary American society, those found at the center are white,

male, and heterosexual. Those found at the margins are considered the other. "Othering is

the process of marginalizing minorities by defining them in relationship to the (white)

majority, which is assumed to be the norm or the natural order" (Ott & Mack, 2010).

hooks (1992) sees the other as difference. She refers to the engagement in this difference

as a process of eating the other. hooks sees this process as a literal consumption of

othering images by white media men and women. Connell (1992) views the subordinate

masculinity (or the homosexual experience) as being the most significant form of

othering when it comes to hegemonic masculinity. Historically, homosexuality was seen

as a negation of masculinity. Being homosexual meant one was effeminate and unable to

experience hegemonic male roles, experiences, and values (Connell, 1992).

Homosexuality has also been traditionally seen as deviant or mentally immoral behavior.

By placing homosexuality in this way, the dominant society equates this behavior with

being wrong and oppresses the group as a result (Connell, 1992). Although

heterosexuality is a number one priority of hegemonic masculinity, whiteness would not

be too far behind. hooks assumes by exploring these othering ideologies hegemonic

whites will receive an intense pleasure unlike any other—seeing as the difference in the

other is so foreign that it could not possibly have occurred in the everyday life of the

normal white person (hooks, 1992). If whiteness and heterosexuality dominates, then

blackness displaces minority men into a lower seat in the masculine hierarchy (hooks,

2003). Knowing minorities and homosexuals are placed lower in the masculine hierarchy,

being a combination of both would place a man lowest in the hegemonic masculinity

hierarchy. These othering qualities associated with hegemonic masculinity creates

significant distresses on contemporary males in society (Connell, 1992).

The Media Model of Masculinity

Kolbe and Albanese argue that he "defining attributes of the American man have

remained virtually unchanged over time: individualistic, insensible, cold, and implacable"

(1996, p. 2). In a 30-year study of all the media in the world, Macnamara (2006) found

that men behave badly, are dangerous, and reckless. Most male heroes in media produced

during the last three decades are increasingly violent, whether it is in comics, television,

film, or news (Macnamara, 2006; Moss, 2011). Films such as *Fight Club* and *American Psycho* exhibit aggression and glorify violent outbursts (Nathanson & Young, 2001; Moss, 2011). James Bond's uber-heroism and machismo casts unobtainable expectations of style, sex, and propriety. His ability to bed any woman who crosses his path presents a kind of man who is rarely rejected. The ease with which Bond finds sex partners creates an increasingly fearful attitude for men who may be unable to be as successful with women as Bond is (Tungate, 2008).

Television's hegemonic male is not much different from images found in television and film. Typically, the situational comedy (sit-com) portrays the father figure as lazy, irresponsible, chauvinistic, and stupid (Nathanson & Young, 2001). The working-class male's image is historically unflattering. This man is dumb, fat, and unable to advance from his blue-collar job (Fleras & Dixon, 2011). The working-class male is glued to the television, his sports, and his snacks (Fleras & Dixon, 2011). The televised sports figure promotes a heroic idolatry, rooted in traditional masculine roles identified by the Ancient Greeks (Moss, 2011). In sports and sporting culture, men are aggressive, unforgiving, and powerful (Moss, 2011). The sports figure is often seen with a woman on his arm, a toned body, and a wallet full of money (Moss, 2011).

Condom commercials emphasize traits the average man finds himself struggling to maintain or even achieve. The commercials Tungate (2008) studied show men rarely being rejected by women and often emphasize a man who has no problems getting a girl or getting her into the bedroom (Tungate, 2008). The image of the modern man in television tends to embody traditional, hegemonic masculine roles: warrior, patriarchal father, boss, and hero (Jowett, 2009). However, the modern man also expresses some

inherently feminine characteristics not seen until the 1990s and 2000s. This modernized version of the traditional man is allowed to be fashionable and have feelings—to only a certain extent. Extending oneself out of the traditional male roles too far may cause a rift between the hegemonic man and his group of male friends (Jowett, 2009).

Advertising contributes to the image of hegemonic masculinity. Men in advertising are predominantly strong and muscular; they are pictured in business suits, conservative attire, or other clothing representative of an upscale lifestyle. Men in advertising are seen as aloof and detached and are rarely depicted in an objectified manner (Kolbe & Albanese, 1996). Throughout the 21st century, the Marlboro Man was an iconic image of masculinity. His rugged appearance, hard features, "mythical frontiersman" (Anderson, 2001, 142) archetype (similar to John Wayne and John Ford) and country charm gave men a reason to smoke and men a reason to idolize them. The Marlboro Man pushed risky behaviors, like smoking, to the forefront of masculine identity (Cortese & Ling, 2011). Even political advertising and campaigns contribute to the idealized masculine identity. Parmelee (2009) saw political campaigns, particularly Bob Dole's 1996 Presidential campaign, as another means of reflecting societal ideologies. Political advertisements in Dole's campaign expressed the need to be a "better man for a better America." This mantra was carried across Dole's conservative dress, country home, and war stories and contributed to the concept of him being the man that America needed as president (Parmelee, 2009). Media have helped frame what it means to be a man in American culture.

Men in many aspects of media are sometimes seen as beastly and over-sexed in many media representations. Oftentimes in media, men are seen in pursuit of sex rather

than romantic love. In media, men are infantile and require time and attention. Men often take domineering and aggressive roles toward women (Macnamara, 2006). Many of the representations could be considered hegemonic; few are endearing. Nixon (1992) and Moss (2011) saw the representations of masculinity in media as being manuals for being successful, being a man, and getting somewhere in life. Men use media to tell them how to behave, what to value, and how to get the girl (Moss, 2011). Moss's assumption is critical to this thesis project. By accepting Moss's belief that media educate men about behaviors and values, one can assume this could be true of the young men interviewed for this study.

Adolescent as Other: Going Forward

Hegemonic masculinity becomes an idealized image reiterated and heroically lionized in the media. A political structure is developed and maintained to keep those without hegemonic privilege in an oppressed state. The structure is defined by hegemonic masculine qualities. Those who are not hegemonic are seen as the other. The other's existence is at the margins of a hegemonic center. One group that has historically been marginalized in society is adolescents. Adolescents are at the margins of an adult-defined center. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity implies an adult-defined hierarchy of behaviors and values. Much of the hierarchal structure is driven by adult attitudes and behaviors. Adolescence, as will be shown, is where identity is developed and wrestled with. In using Butler (1990) and Halberstam's (1998) ideas of performative identity, it becomes clearer that in order to comprehend how gender identity is performed during adulthood, examining the development of identity during adolescence is critical.

Adolescence, particular adolescent gender identity development, may be the key to better understanding gender binaries in American society and culture. In light of the theoretical frameworks posed for this thesis, the literature on adolescence will first be reviewed and then synthesized to reflect how the concept of the adolescent is used in this study.

Adolescence: From Boy to Manhood

By 1904, Stuart G. Hall had written numerous texts regarding the physical growth of adolescents. Hall (1904) saw three distinct biological considerations for adolescence: puberty, reproduction, and a termination of growth. Although defining exact timelines when puberty is initiated is difficult (Meece & Daniels, 2006), going through puberty is a biological process involving sexual maturation that signifies that the child, now adolescent, is able to sexually reproduce. Puberty involves the growth of pubic hair, growth of breasts for females, and growth of the testes and the production of seminal fluids for males (Meece & Daniels, 2006). Hall (1904) also noted that a termination of growth occurs as a biological sign that adolescence has ended. Most tissue and organ systems are involved in the process. Hormonal changes, vertical growth spurts, and voice changing are all results of the final stages in adolescence (Meece & Daniels, 2006). Adolescence begins with a large amount of changes and growth and ends when this growth is terminated (Hall, 1904).

> This study accepts Ford and Beach's (1951) definition of adolescence:
>
> Adolescence is the period extending from puberty to the attainment of full reproductive maturity. … Different parts of the reproductive system reach their maximal efficiency at different stages in the life cycle; and, strictly speaking, adolescence is not completed until all the structures and processes necessary to fertilization, conception, gestation, and lactation have become mature (p. 171-172).

This definition focuses on the adolescent's development of gendered and sexual identities, and how media play a role in the education of the adolescent male into his adulthood. While most of the scholarship in this field provides the foundation necessary to understand the developmental process of one's identity, there is a noticeable gap in the research for how exactly culture impacts the development of identity. The overarching goal of this project will be to assist in filling those gaps in the research.

Theories of Adolescence

For Hall (1904), adolescence corresponds to a stressful transition period in cultural evolution. Adolescence is a shift in relationship patterns of heterosexual adolescents and the development of a shift from an affinity of same-sex to opposite-sex mates. Additionally, the adolescent time period marks a distinctive era where peer group socialization, peer group affiliation affiliation, and hero worship become extremely important (Hall, 1904). Adolescents have a greater need for social interaction and parental approval than they did as children. Adolescents also experiment with identities that are often similar to parents, peers, media characters, and media figures they view as heroes. Adolescents will often rebel against what is traditional, which would include familial and societal traditions (Hall, 1904). While many of his descriptions of adolescents apply today, Hall's concept of adolescence, however, did not go unchallenged.

Freud offered important the theoretical and developmental insights into adolescence. Freud's (1953) theories of psychosexual development attempted to place sexuality at the center of adolescent development. Freud stressed that adolescence is the

last phase of human development, the genital stage. The purpose of this stage is to achieve independence and acquire psychological detachment from one's parents (Freud, 1953). It is helpful for adolescents to resolve psychosexual conflicts with their parents in order to function as a healthy and competent adult. Freud (1953) saw this detachment as a form of adolescent rebellion—an attempt to separate oneself from one's parents. Adolescents also attempt to free themselves of heterosexual attachments to parents from the early stages of human development and the homosexual attachments of early pubescence prior to entering adolescence. Freud's (1953) theory positioned children as having a strong attachment to their opposite-sex parent in their infancy and toddler years, and positioned pre-pubescent children as having an innate attachment to same-sex friendships (not necessarily homosexual attachments). Independence from parents can lead to increased emotional instability, anxiety, and aggression (Freud, 1953). Freud (1953) believed this was a result of feelings of inadequacy and of power struggles between adolescent and parents, as well as between adolescent peers. Adolescent self-perception and social influences affect the bodily self-image of the adolescent. During adolescence, the adolescent libido is working in over-drive leading to emotional attachments and intimate relationship development (Freud, 1953). After Freud, psychosexual development branched off into a line of developmental research that continued to stress the role of sexuality in adolescent development.

Harry Sullivan's (1953) work is best known for a discussion of the role of interpersonal relationships, particularly intimate relationships, on adolescent development. Adolescents have an inherent "need for an intimate relation with another person of comparable status" (Sullivan, 1953, p. 33-34). As did Freud, Sullivan (1953)

determined that adolescents' maturation process and the role of puberty leads to changes in psychological attachments. Specifically, heterosexual adolescents begin to leave behind same-sex attachments to opposite-sex attachments due to "lustful sensations" (Sullivan, 1953). Anna Freud (1957) claimed emotional upheaval, libidinal energy, and impulses to be strong effects on opposite-sex attachments during adolescence. Sullivan (1953) confronted the role of lust on the psychosocial development of the adolescent, finding the heterosexual need to be stronger than the homosexual need in adolescence. Intimacy and security in relationships are also priorities for a lustful commitment starting in adolescence (Sullivan, 1953). Early researchers often used heterosexuality as a catchall for intimate relationships, claiming homosexuality to be something children left behind to become adolescents (Freud, 1953; Sullivan, 1953). These early attitudes and approaches to adolescents left out a distinct population that is recognized in contemporary society: the homosexual man or woman. When discussing this former research, it is important to acknowledge the lack of emphasis on homosexuals.

Identity development contributes significantly to the decision-making processes of adolescents, particular in relation to their gender and sexual identities. Erikson (1968) saw adolescence as the developmental stage where major physical changes and sexual awareness assisted in the construction of personal and social identities. One's personal identity is how one defined him- or herself to the rest of the society. One's social identity is defined by the rituals, characteristics, behaviors, and ideologies being held by a group (Erikson, 1968). During adolescence, identity is formed based on both the personal and social identity. Adolescent males find themselves to be most concerned sexuality during adolescence (Erikson, 1968). Peter Blos paid close attention to the manifestation of

sexual maturation in the adolescent. Blos (1962) felt boys began to put up a defense against homosexual desires and tendencies in order to develop their heterosexual identity. American adolescents emphasized hierarchical social structures and conformed to social expectations held by their peers (Blos, 1962). Spranger (1955) conceptualized adolescence as being a time where social interaction and approval of one's peers are critical. His work resulted in an understanding of the adolescent as an emotional being who seeks approval, rebels against tradition, choses a vocation, and experiments with identities modeled after heroes (Spranger, 1955). Adolescents start to gain the ability to separate reality from fantasy, self from the world, and sexuality—defined as one's participation in the act of sex and one's preference for sexual relationship—from pure love—defined as the ideal form of love and relationships (Spranger, 1955). Sexual maturity leads to a distinction between sexuality and pure love, with acceptance of pure love being a sign of adulthood (Spranger, 1955).

Vygotsky's research explored the role of interpersonal communication and cultural mediation on child development. By observing interactions among children and adolescents, he found higher mental functions developing in those he observed with a shared knowledge of the culture shared by the children and adolescents. He called this process internalization (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) defined internalization as knowing how to do something. For example, this could mean knowing how to brush your teeth, read a book, or riding a bike. The children and adolescents Vygotsky observed developed these behaviors by learning from interpersonal relationships. What actions adults deemed culturally acceptable were internalized and practiced by the children and adolescents. Children and adolescents practice these internalized activities, leading to

what Vygotsky called appropriation, or the taking of a tool and making it one's own—an example being learning to brush one's teeth. When an adult teaches, or models to, a child how to brush his or her teeth, the behavior is internalized. When the child continues to practice brushing his or her teeth, appropriation occurs. This learning model is adopted for this thesis to understand how mediated experiences are internalized and appropriated by the millennial males interviewed for this thesis. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) founded ecological systems theory, a theory of child development that situated development at the center of four nested systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. The microsystem examines development in the context of the family or the classroom. The mesosystem looked at how development occurred when two of the microsystems interacted. The exosystem are external environments that indirectly influenced development, such as a parent's workplace. Finally, the macrosystem place development in a larger sociocultural context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Development is shaped by sociocultural norms, rules, and roles. each of the systems played. Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed strongly in the nurture side of the nature versus nurture debate.

This study draws on components from all of the aforementioned developmental psychologists. Freud's theory serves a dominant perspective in this thesis since it pertains to the sexual growth and maturity of the adolescent male. Sullivan's construction of lust and sexual eruption of the adolescent is important to the understanding of the adolescent as sexual being. Since cultural studies serves as the overarching framework for this project, the sociocultural influences of Vygotsky and Brofenbrenner are important.

Understanding identity's place in development is critical to grounding this research on masculinity and sexuality.

Identity: A Developmental Perspective

Erikson (1968) believed adolescence was a time of finding one's self and developing a role and identity in society. Identity and role development, such as the development of a masculine identity and associated roles, contributes to the development of hegemonic masculinity and the education of boys and their notions of masculine right and wrong. It also assists in developing constructs of femininity, such as the idea that girls inherently possess feminine and maternal tendencies (Pipher, 1994; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000). Identity is developed most during adolescence. An adolescent's sexual and vocational decision-making process is wrestled with most (Erikson, 1968), leading to a noticeable rift between men's and women's roles in society (Pipher, 1994; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000). Adolescence is also the place where constructions of masculinity, heteronormativity, fraternity, and homophobia begin to emerge as an outcome of codes and ideologies serving as educational models (Nixon, 1992; MacInnes, 1998; Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2008; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Tischler and McCaughtry saw ridicule and separation between dominant masculine boys and other boys in their 2011 study about adolescent boys' participation in physical education. As a result, the dominant masculine boys in the class ridiculed many of the boys who did not like to participate in physical education. Some of the boys claimed they were called names, made fun of, and left out of the group because not liking or participating in physical

education made them less of a man (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Spanning from age 12 to 20, adolescence is a time of questioning and discovery (Erikson, 1969).

In high schools, some students struggle with developing a personal identity. Many films and television shows in the teen genre capitalize on the insecurity of adolescent identities. *American Graffiti* (1973)*, Grease* (1978)*, The Breakfast Club* (1985)*, Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982)*, American Pie* (1999), and *Mean Girls* (2004) are examples of how film develops a battle between identities high school. Tina Fey's *Mean Girls* (2004) script puts it stereotypically, but best:

> You got your freshmen, ROTC guys, preps, J.V. jocks, Asian nerds, cool Asians, Varsity jocks, unfriendly black hotties, girls who eat their feelings, girls who don't eat anything, desperate wannabes, burnouts, sexually active band geeks, the greatest people you will ever meet, and the worst. Beware of plastics.

Each of these identities are characterized by particular clothing, behaviors, friends, and social status in the high school setting. Identity is first established in early adolescence and continues to grow and change with age. With the development of identity comes the learning of values and direction (Erikson, 1968). There are also, as in all of Erikson's (1968) stages, negative outcomes to adolescent development. For adolescents, identity is not an entirely fluid developmental process. Instead, many adolescents will find themselves struggling with role and identity confusion (Meece & Daniels, 2008). During this time period, adolescents struggle with the question "who am I?" Additionally, adolescents continue to battle with what they value and how they are going to live out the values they will adopt or change (Erikson, 1968). As a result, during late adolescence where intimacy becomes a critical discussion (Freud, 1953; Sullivan, 1953; Spranger, 1955), value-based decisions about issues such as when to have sex are called into question (More, 1955; Blos, 1962).

Kroger (2000) and Newman and Newman (2001) believe group identity, rather than personal identity as Erikson suggested, becomes the dominant theme for development in the adolescent stage. The desire to belong to a certain peer group pushes an adolescent to change his or her values and personal identity to fit the needs of the members of the peer group (Kroger, 2000). This social identity requires a need to belong to the dominant group, thus resulting in value and identity changes in early-adolescence that may impact how the adolescents will function during mid- and late-adolescence where belonging to a group may require making anti-social decisions, such as alcohol consumption or drug use (Newman & Newman, 2001). Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggested this in their development of social identity theory. The desire to belong to a group increases personal self-concept and self-esteem, which leads to a stronger personal identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Teichman, Bar-Tal, and Absolrazeq (2007) believe that adolescence, especially early- to mid-adolescence, is an especially critical time for identity development. Their findings show during puberty there is a markedly higher need to be reassured and develop a stronger desire to have an in-group bias. Early-adolescents seek stronger group identification and a stronger social identity (Tanti et. al, 2010). As the adolescent progresses through the mid- and late-adolescence, social identity begins to diminish and a stronger personal identity begins to evolve from it. The later in adolescence one gets, the more developed his or her affinity for personal and intimate identities becomes (Tanti et. al, 2010). What the research implies is that adolescents, especially those in the high school range (ages 13-18), will begin to develop their identities in social contexts from those adolescents find to be most identifiable as their friend groups. These social identities ultimately develop into the personal identities

and self-concepts that affect intimate relationships in the late stage of adolescence and the early stage of adulthood (Tanti et. al, 2010). For most boys, much of their identity is tied to their sexual orientation, as Connell's (2005) research suggests. The dominant man is seen the heterosexual one and the subordinate man is seen as the homosexual one. According to Remafedi, Farrow, and Deisher (1991), these identities develop during middle to late adolescence. In another study, gay males reported knowing their sexual identity between ages 15 and 17 (Downey, 1994). Knowing this, it is important to investigate the educational power media have in potentially shaping these sexual behaviors, attitudes, and experiences for adolescent males. For the purpose of this project, the social identity developed during adolescent years is considered to have a direct impact on how adolescents function into early adulthood.

Identity: A Heroic Perspective

Identity emerges from multiple sources—self, family, friends, religion. The media are another influence on identity development. As a result of having similar values and identities as characters portrayed in the media, adolescents see these characters as potential social influences. The choice to assign ideals and identities to media characters and heroes often leads to adoption of the particular mediated character's ideologies and sociocultural constructs (Bromick & Swallow, 1999). These media-constructed identities are a central focus of this thesis.

Every person is born into a collective unconscious in which archetypes, the primordial images of our collective experience, reside (Jung, 1979). The hero can be understood as one of these archetypes. Joseph Campbell (1988) sees myths as a cultural

script in which good and evil wrestle and are often resolved. These cultural scripts are developed in archetypes that are played out in popular culture through images of superheroes and everyday heroes. These heroes triumph over all odds and evils, including their personal evils (Jung, 1979; Campbell, 1988). The hero archetype involves a personal quest, whether it is to make peace, find love, and learn humanity (Voytilla, 1999). The hero must take this journey in an effort to bring something back to the world he came from, and to become a changed man. During the journey, the hero's courage, strength, and skill are all tested. Ultimately, the hero returns to the original world and restores it to the way it was before, gaining respect and admiration from all (Campbell, 1988). The hero's story often teaches a social lesson about what we should aspire to be and how we should act when faced with adversity in our own lives. The hero often exudes power and nurturance, two qualities of an effective model (Bandura, 1997). Because people look up to and emulate media heroes, these heroes can inspire children to greatness (Anderson & Cavallaro, 2000) or cultivate aggressive or anti-social behaviors (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 2001). Anderson and Cavallaro (2000) found that youth selected particular heroes because they reflected characteristics the viewer wanted to embody. Kellner (1995) saw the media stories providing "symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture" (p. 5). The stories and characters presented in the media become models people adopt and function from in society and culture.

Greenwood (2007) saw the social identity of the group was often negotiated and challenged when it comes to the desire of adolescents to be similar to the characters they idolize in the media. Instead of merely adopting media characters into their social clique,

adolescents take hero worship one-step further by assuming characteristics of those heroes (Greenwood, 2007). Greenwood's research stems from Albert Bandura's (2002) social learning/cognitive theory, which explains how observers imitate performances and behaviors of models. Although much of Bandura's research initially centered on media violence, the application of his research is transferrable to this study. Bandura and Greenwood's findings help demonstrate how media characters become critically important in the identity development of the adolescent male. The mythical heroism embodied in American history prescribes specific goals, experiences, and values that we as Americans are supposed to have. More specifically, masculine heroes are a vision of manhood and success. The prevalence of hegemonic masculine heroes in contemporary society, especially in media, reiterates the desire to maintain hegemonic roles and values. The hegemonic male is naturalized in the form of the hero in film, television, magazines, books, and sport. "To be culturally exalted, the pattern of masculinity must have exemplars who are celebrated as heroes" (Donaldson, 1993, p. 13).

These heroes impact the identity development of adolescent males and their understanding of hegemonic male behaviors: going wild, showing off, getting in fights, driving drunk, defending prestige, and having sex with many female partners (Donaldson, 1993).

Adolescent Media Ownership and Uses

The millennial generation (born 1982-2002) is popularly considered to be the greatest users of commonly available technologies, particularly those related to personal computing, and has grown up with a significant amount of media and technology options

to own and use (Howe & Strauss, 2000). To grasp the impact media have on adolescent men, it is important to first comprehend what media these millennials own and use in their everyday lives. The Kaiser Family Foundation (2010) study of millennials and their media ownership and use suggests that 99 percent have at least one television in their homes, 97 percent have at least one DVD or VCR player, 94 percent have a radio, 93 percent at least one computer, 87 percent at least one video game console, 87 percent a CD player, and 52 percent have TiVo or another DVR system in their homes (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). Each of these media technologies is more available than in the previous generations (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). There has also been a 10 percent increase in Internet access in homes, rising from 74 percent in 2004 to 84 percent in the current study (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). The most significant increase from the last study was in mobile media use. Current 8-18 year olds are using iPods, MP3 players, cell phones, laptops, and handheld game players at a significantly greater rate than was reflected in the 2004 study (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). This tells us two things: first, the second half of the millennial generation (10 to 20 years old) is going to have greater access to media content, specifically sexual content. Second, the portion of the millennials (20 to 30 years old) interviewed for this thesis owned and used more forms of media. The Kaiser Family Foundation also assessed current media use. In 1999, children and teens were consuming a steady 7:29 hours of media a day. In 2004, this number rose to 8:33 hours of media exposure and consumption. In the latest study, the number grew significantly to 10:45 hours of media consumed in a single day (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). These numbers show there is an exponential growth in media

consumption and exposure. Overall, boys use and are exposed to more media than girls in a day (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010).

Boys Will Be Boys: Adolescent Males' Role in Society

"Since masculinities are (by definition) the configurations of practice associated with the social positions of men, the life histories of boys are the main site of their construction" (Connell, 2005b, p. 13). Connell's belief grounds the necessity to address the roles adolescent boys are expected to fill in society. Adolescent boys consistently are placed at the center of public discussion and controversy (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002), for example more boys than girls have troubles succeeding in school (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Male violence and extreme aggression are often brought to the forefront of public debate (Collins, Noble, Poynting, & Tybar, 2000; Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). The role of adolescent boys in society is one often defined by failure and aggression.

It is not uncommon that adolescents participate in and try out very adult behaviors (McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Meece & Daniels, 2008). The role of adolescent boyhood in society often includes sexual experience and conquest. The developmental period of adolescence is one of sexual awakening, autoerotic experiments, and early sexual relationships. Many teenage boys feel great pride and masculine honor in sexual experience (Connell, 2005; Connell, 2005b; Kimmel, 2008). Heterosexual boys begin to understand the pressure of heteronormativity. In teen girl magazines, the boy is aggressive, wild, and unwilling to commit (Enck-Wanzer & Murray, 2011). In film, the teenage boy seeks experimentation, is competitive, and makes pacts to lose his virginity

by the time he graduates high school (Baxter, 2011). Television portrays young men as adventurous, daring, violent, rebellious, and constantly in need of sex (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009). The horror genre uses males as violators of female characters and often portrays men in stereotypical roles (Clover, 1992). Disney portrays teenage boys as being hyper-masculine, saviors of women, and unable to advance a plot line without a kiss or a battle scene (Davis, 2006). Young men cannot escape the media images that define what it means to be a hegemonic man (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002). The next section wrestles with how sex developmentally, socially, and culturally functions as a passage to manhood for teenage boys.

Sex: The Passage to Manhood

Gender and sexuality are ingrained in many aspects of life. Sex is political. Sex is power.

> Millions of women know what their sex lives are limited to or dictated by financial dependence upon men. Millions of women have experienced the inadequacy of abortion facilities and know that this is the result of political choices. Millions of young people know that their sexuality has been restricted by living with their parents. And many people know that their sex lives have involved power relationships and that these power relationships are in some way wrong and unnecessary. The link between sex and politics, the way in which sex is political, is not just a concern for left political activists; it is already an important question of the majority (Gough & MacNair, 1985, p. 3).

Sex is an act that is often glorified in print, on television, in film, and on the Internet. To have sex means that you have power over someone else. Sex becomes a passage to adulthood. As will be seen in later chapters, for adolescent boys, having sex means being a man.

Michel Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) that the cultural construction of the sexual self emerged at the same time as the rise of the modern nation-state and is linked to modern beliefs of citizenship. Essentially, comprehensive categories of national or cultural belonging have become contingent on values attached to sexual behavior (legal/criminal, good/bad, moral/immoral) and have produced the concept of sexual identity (heterosexual and homosexual) (Foucault, 1978). Foucault's view of sexuality explains how teenagers perceive and partake in sexual behaviors. Some teenagers see sex as socially regulated behavior, meaning that by participating in sexual activities, one will be able to elevate his or her status in their peer group (Milner, Jr., 2004). Teenagers use sex as a way to obtain social status, prove love, force intimacy, or appear more like an adult (Milner, Jr., 2004). One of the most archetypal tales of high school romance is the head cheerleader and the captain of the football team; many teens feel that this is the ideal to live up to in the high school environment (Milner, Jr., 2004). This idealization is just one of many *sexpectations* placed on adolescents. Sexpectations are defined as an emphasis on, obligation to, or anticipation of sexual acts from a partner (Urban Dictionary, 2012).

Rounding the Bases: Adolescent Insecurity, Media, and Sex Education

Media are a key source for adolescents learning about and developing their sexual identities and ideologies (Sutton, Brown, Wilson, & Klein, 2002). In some cases, media ranked just below peers and above parents when it came to developing sexual behaviors and attitudes (Amonker, 198; Andre, Frevert, & Schuchmann, 1989). The accessibility of media leads to an increased ability to use the media as a primary source for sex

education. In the absence of effective and widespread sex education at home or in schools, media have arguably become the primary source of sex education in the United States today (Strasburger, 2005). In the print world, magazines provide explicit visual and written codes of sexual experience, etiquette, and behaviors (Garner, Sterk, & Adams, 1998) and advertisers use sex to see virtually any product they can from hotel rooms to shampoo (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009). On screen, television and film increasingly push the envelope of sexually explicit material (Sutton, Brown, Wilson, & Klein, 2002). The media repeatedly show adolescents images and stories of sex that are unrealistic, inaccurate, unbelievable, and often harmful (Basso, 2003). "On television each year, American children and teenagers view near 14,000 sexual references, innuendoes, and behaviors, few of which (less than 170) involve the use of birth control, self-control, abstinence, or responsibility" (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009, p. 213). The media are everywhere and imparting unhealthy views that often cause anxieties for adolescents, including performance anxieties (Basso, 2003). For boys, a consistent message is prescribed about sex: the more women a man has sex with, the more he is a real man (Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2002).

The millennial generation is the first to grow up with the Internet at its fingertips (Howe & Strauss, 2000). With the Internet being easily accessible, pornographic material becomes more easily accessible. Pornography also serves as a visceral sex education tool that is accessible in print, on screen, and on the Internet (Purcell, 2012). This ability to access many forms of media increases the chances that adolescent boys are being educated about sex from the media. Researchers have examined how the media have educated youth about sex. Roberts (1982) claims the media are important sex educators

for adolescents for three reasons: First, teens have limited access to countervailing ideas or information; second, much of the media content is for adults and depicts sexual relationships and roles; and, third, media messages about sexuality are relatively consistent. Media have ranked close to first as a source for adolescents' sexual information (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1996). The research about males, millennials, and the media as sex educator, however, is limited. This study attempts to address what prior research has not.

The Hard Copy: Sex and Print Media

Some of the most accessible and common depictions of sex are found in print forms: magazines and advertisements. Magazines are often seen as an important source of information for teens (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1996). Print forms of media are the most likely of any media source to provide information regarding contraception and birth control (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009). Print media, particularly magazines, are found to influence adolescents to have sex a year earlier than adolescents who do not have print media as a part of their daily media diet (Brown, L'Engle, Pardun, Guo, Keneavy, & Jackson, 2006). Advertising has consistently used explicit visual imagery to promote and sell products (Kilbourne, 1999). Women are often dismembered, submissive, sexually displayed, or involved in violent imagery in contemporary advertising (Kilbourne, 1999). Men have also been increasingly sexualized in advertising. Underwear advertising shows fit men with bulges and alcohol ads often show nude men in sexual positions with bottles covering only their penises (Strasburger, Wilson, &

Jordan, 2009). The increased sexualized imagery of the male body in advertising may be references for how the millennial males interviewed for this thesis define masculinity.

Garner, Sterk, and Adams (1998) were some of the first researchers to examine sex, particularly sexual etiquette, adolescents, and media in regard to magazines. Their study looked at teen women's magazines, finding that they encourage young women to be sex objects. The magazines are places girls can go to find out what it means to be a woman and how they should relate to men (Garner et. al, 1998). A significant finding of the Garner (1998) study for this research is that when it comes to the "sexual community" it "belongs to men, and women survive by containing themselves and by adapting and subjecting themselves to male desires" (p. 72-73). This finding shows that media are framing male sexuality as the dominant force in relationships. Additionally, women should be subordinates to males and modify themselves to the sexual needs of men at a young age. This study attempts to address a concern posed by the authors: "if young people take these messages to heart, they will continue to enact a vision in which men are the citizens of the world and women are citizens of the world of men" (Garner et. al, 1998, p. 75).

Sex in Motion: Electronic Media and the Sexualized Male

Sexual content is not available only in a print format. Scholars have attempted to address sex and its role in television and film.

Television has an increasingly large amount of sexually explicit material. Since 1997-1998, the amount of sexual content in prime-time television has risen from 67 percent to 77 percent, with only a slight increase in content related to sexual

responsibility (Eyal, Kunkel, Biely, & Finnerty, 2007). There is consistent exposure to sexual content for viewers—usually sexual intercourse, both married and unmarried, with unmarried intercourse as the most prevalent sexual act in prime-time television shows (Greenberg, Stanley, Siemicki, Heeter, Soderman, & Lisangan, 1993). Late 1990s television, programs most relevant to the millennial population used in this study, has been termed "Happy Days with hormones" for its consistent use of sexual innuendoes and behaviors leading to teenagers just doing it (Tucker, 1999). More recently, researchers found that young men are interpreting and interacting with television messages about sex more frequently than females (Ward, Gorvine, & Cytron, 2002). Television has been found to be where adolescent boys learn about sex and contraception most (Sutton, Brown, Wilson, & Klein, 2002). Television can teach young men a great deal about sex roles: What does it mean to be a woman or a man? What makes someone attractive? Cool? Successful? How should one behave around the opposite sex? (Signorielli, 2001; Strasburger, 2005). Television maintains a place in young boys' educational understanding of who they are, who they can become, and how their roles and behaviors impact society (Strasburger, 2005).

After the lifting of the Hays production code in the 1960s, which prohibited the production and viewing of films based on morality and questions of "wholesome" material (Mondello, 2008), portrayals of sex and teenagers became more explicit than films released prior to the lifting of the code (Jamieson, More, Lee, Busse, & Romer, 2008). In many films since the lifting of the Hays code, sexual promiscuity is illustrated as something for young people to practice (Jamieson, More, Lee, Busse, & Romer, 2008). Greenberg, Siemicki, Dorfman, Hetter, Stanley, Soderman, and Linsangan (1993) found

there were seven times the amounts of sexual activity found in R-rated films than in traditional television programming. Films of the late 1990s, particularly *American Pie* (1999) and its sequels, added to what critics saw as an era of sexploitation, with films acting as teaching tools for how to have sex, get sex, and treat one another as sex objects (Glieberman, 1999).

Adolescents' media diet, particularly with film, has a strong impact on their sexual activity (L'Engle, Brown, & Kenneavy, 2006). Some researchers believe the more sex and sexual behaviors an adolescent sees, the more sexually promiscuous the adolescent becomes (Pardun, L'Engle, & Brown, 2005). Filmic exposure to sex can also lead to an increase in intentions to have sex and partake in sexual activity. These portrayals elicit unsafe behaviors, rarely depicting the use of condoms of contraception (L'Engle, Brown, & Kenneavy, 2006; Jamieson, More, Lee, Busse, & Romer, 2008).

This Project

Adolescence is full of changes: physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and culturally. Adolescent males are bombarded with mediated images of hegemonic masculinity and sexual promiscuity. Many of the messages are internalized by adolescents and assimilated into the everyday culture of the adolescent male. These messages become ideologies that permeate society, and are perpetuated as the adolescent male consumer grows into an adult male message producer. By using cultural studies and hegemonic masculinity as theoretical models, this project looks at how the adolescent male learns the messages that media send him about sex. It also considers how this message is constructed and received, or as Hall (1980) puts it, encoded and decoded. Hall

expects an interaction in this process, as the consumer is actively engaged in decoding the message. The next chapter begins to address how these messages are received by the millennial generation of adolescent males and interacted with the development of their masculine identities and sex roles and behaviors.

CHAPTER 3
EXPLORING THE SEXUAL IDEOLOGY OF MILLENNIAL MALES

"Being a good actor isn't easy. Being a man is even harder. I want to be both before I'm done."

James Dean

"Young people are in a condition like permanent intoxication, because youth is sweet and they are growing."

Aristotle

"Can you blow my whistle baby, whistle baby
Let me know
Girl I'm gonna show you how to do it
And we start real slow
You just put your lips together
And you come real close
Can you blow my whistle baby, whistle baby
Here we go"

Flo Rida
Lyrics from "The Whistle Song"

I love telling stories. I am a journalist, a teacher, and a scholar. My grandfather was the ultimate storyteller. I grew up listening to countless stories about growing up in the Great Depression, fighting in World War II, encounters in Chittagong and the China-Burma-India road, and what it was like to drive stick shift in a torrential downpour with no windshield wipers. My family learned all of their long-windedness from my grandfather. I learned how to tell stories from him. This love and desire to tell stories has lead to my selection of method for this thesis.

This chapter includes the research question and explanation of methods used for the study. By utilizing depth interviews, I conducted an oral history of how millennial males feel popular media have educated them about sexuality, sex roles, and sexual behaviors. I conducted a fantasy theme analysis on the interview transcripts to generate

setting, action, and character themes as well as establish a rhetorical vision related to their media use and masculine sex roles and behaviors.

Posing the Question: Contribution and Statement of the Research Question

On screen, in print, and in conversation, sex permeates the visceral core of contemporary society. Sexualized imagery is inescapable. In this study, sex and masculinity are central to a conversation about gender roles and hegemonic ideologies in American culture and media. As a 23-year-old white male and a member of the millennial generation, I am used to the over-sexualized and highly masculinized male images depicted in media. Growing up, I became interested in the media and how it impacted others or me, particularly in relation to the topic of sex. I knew media served as a primary sex educator for me. After entering college and hearing stories from my floor mates and fraternity brothers, the media appeared to be a sex education teacher for not just me, but many others, as well. Many late night conversations later in the study lounge of my residence hall or the living room of my fraternity house, I began to realize that media was also our educator about masculinity. The media flooded our lives with images of the ideal man: athletic, muscular, tall, dark, and handsome. Thus, I became interested in how media serves as an educator for adolescent males and the development of their masculine identities, especially in relation to their sex roles and behaviors. This study asks: *What is the story millennial males tell about the role of media in their education about sex and masculinity?* The hope is that the findings of this study will shed light on the pervasive image of hegemonic masculinity in American culture. In attempts to

understand these questions, an oral history was compiled of males born in the millennial generation.

A History of Male Millennials: Oral History as Methodological Approach

"When researchers depend on the voices of historical actors to narrate the history of sexual identities, that is, how individuals understood their sexual selves in relation to larger social forces, the meaning of the self-disclosure is always constructed around historically specific norms and meanings."
~ Boyd, 2008, p. 179.

Boyd's description of oral history grounds the methodological discussion for this thesis. The method of oral history, according to George Chauncey (1994), is the most important in understanding the interworking of cultures and the people in them. The ability to examine how actors in a particular culture view the cultural artifacts and the impacts the artifacts have on the individual actors must be considered textually. Chauncey's (1994) oral history of gay men in New York shed light on how sexual identities and politics are established in large urban areas, and how this identity is expressed and communicated about in relation to the culture of the city. His oral history emphasizes the need to find a story that is not being told and tell it. By doing so, the oral historian is able to help voices of the voiceless. Chauncey (1994) conducted 75 interviews and uncovered a significant amount of print sources to compile his oral history. For this oral history, the interviews of the millennial males are the primary source material for analysis. Dominant media sources that arise from the interview narratives were also acknowledged.

According to Brennen (2013), oral history provides important information and aides in the ability to recover and share the stories of peoples' lives. No man interviewed in the project was able to fully remove himself from the discursive practices and language

of modern society. That is a benefit to this thesis. Instead, the voices of the male narrators provide information traditional media sources could not provide, and each narrator's story was read as a text that was open to interpretation. In doing so, I was able to able to "preserve the life experiences of individuals who did not have the time or the ability to write their own stories" (Brennen, 2013, p. 125). I drew extensively on the oral history interviews with critical analysis of common themes found in the interviews (Brennen, 2013). David Plummer (1999) utilized this strategy in his oral history about masculinity, homophobia, and modern manhood. He interviewed thirty young men ranging in ages 18 to 33 with various degrees of sexual orientation. Each of Plummer's interviews lasted from three to four hours and audio recordings were transcribed. After transcription, themes were identified and analyzed (Plummer, 1999). The method section of Plummer's research serves as a model for this project.

The Choice of Method

Oral histories are used to ask questions to best learn about the lives of the interviewees (Brennen, 2013). In doing so, "oral histories may provide you with important insights about all types of individuals and groups who lived at a particular place and time in society" (Brennen, 2013, p. 126). Oral history was selected as the method for this project because it allows for the elucidation of meanings and significances, explores untold stories, investigates how young men develop identity, and identifies the importance developmental sequences, media influences, and social processes have on the lives of young men. By procuring a comprehensive history of events and experiences, a profile of how media serves as a sex education tool for

millennial males was compiled. Conducting oral history involves lengthy interviews that require setting aside a large amount of time for the interviewee (or narrator) to tell his or her life story (Brennen, 2013). The longer interviews allow for the narrators to disclose information that has the ability to add to the larger cultural narrative. Plummer (1999) saw disclosure, privacy, and security as being key components to successfully conducting a history involving subject matter relating to sex and sexuality. The disclosures of the young men in their interviews are seen as a reconstruction around limited sets of meanings (Boyd, 2008) and are developed into a richer history of how media served as a sex education tool for men of the millennial generation. Each interview was then analyzed individually and compared with others to identify similarities and differences and establish themes. By compiling a profile of experiences with media as sex educator for millennial males, it was possible to identify some of the ways the media and sex shaped the actions and identities of young men.

Participant Selection and Description

Participants were recruited through personal contacts and recommendations of the interviewees, utilizing a snowball method for participant selection. Selecting participants randomly did not seem plausible or appropriate. Due to the nature of the subject matter, only males were used in this study. The participants were diverse in age, race, ethnicity, and sexuality—ranging from ages 20 to 24 and coming from the west, Midwest, south, and east United States. The participants all attended high school. These millennial males were able to draw on their experiences involving adolescence and high school. The participants were able to critically reflect on their media use during that time period, their

personal experiences with media, masculinity, and sex, and to remove themselves from adolescence and high school (Milner, Jr., 2004). Participation in the project was entirely voluntary and all participants were required to sign a consent form detailing they were aware of the project goals and the purpose of the interviews. This can be seen in *Appendix 1: Institutional Review Board*. All participants are members of the millennial generation and were born between 1988 and 1993. The participants are all labeled by the real name. A brief description of each participant is included below.

Mark, 24, is a Caucasian, heterosexual male from the Midwest. He lives with his parents, is a huge hockey fan, and identifies himself as politically conservative.

Jack, 23, is a Caucasian, heterosexual male from the Midwest. He considers himself a simple man and has a passion for helping others.

Joe, 22, is a Caucasian, heterosexual male from the west coast. He loves football and business and considers his family to be the greatest influence on his life.

Mitch, 21, is a Caucasian, heterosexual male from the Midwest and is an avid weightlifter and sports fan.

Derrick, 21, is a Caucasian, heterosexual male from the Midwest. He enjoys running and hopes to be a doctor.

Steve, 21, is a Caucasian, heterosexual male from the east coast who loves playing basketball and wants to be a corporate executive.

Merit, 21, is a Caucasian, heterosexual male from the southwest who enjoys engineering and construction.

Alex, 20, is a Caucasian, heterosexual male from the Midwest. He plays baseball and is actively pursuing a career in the sport.

Jimmy, 21, is a Latino, heterosexual male from the west coast. He loves to dance, tell jokes, and wants to pursue a graduate degree.

Eric, 20, is an African American, heterosexual male from the Midwest. He is self-conscious about his size and doesn't consider himself good at anything. He enjoys playing video games like Halo and Modern Warfare.

William, 20, is a Caucasian, homosexual male from the Midwest. He calls himself a "glitter lover" and an "excellent personal shopping attendant." He has been openly gay since he was in grade school.

Curtis, 22, is a Lebanese American, homosexual male from the Midwest. He is a lover of sports, playing many different sports his whole life. He also is in pursuit of a graduate degree. Three weeks before his interview, Curtis came out of the closet and now openly identifies as a homosexual male.

The millennial males all come from socioeconomically diverse homes. Two consider themselves to come from a low-income home, nine consider themselves middle-class, and one considers himself upper class. None of the millennial males interviewed for this project come from single parent or divorced homes. All twelve millennials have a mother and a father who have been married for over 20 years. One millennial male is adopted. Ten of the millennial males have siblings. Two are an only child in their family.

Developing (and Demanding) History: The Millennial Generation

The millennial generation spans from 1982 to 2002 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). In 2013, millennials span from the youngest at age 10 to the oldest at age 30. "Generation Y" (what became known as the millennial generation) was first coined in the August 30,

1993, issue of *Advertising Age. Ad Age's* unsigned editorial bashed the laziness of

Generation X (born between 1965 and 1982) and praised the philanthropic drive of the

Gen Y kids. Additionally, the article claimed the newest generation was brand loyal is

and seeking out real life solutions to problems the Gen X-ers seemed to neglect, such as

AIDS, child abuse, and abortion (*Advertising Age*, 1993). Seven years later, Neil Howe

and William Strauss gave the Ys a new name and wrote an oral history of the millennial

generation. Howe and Strauss (2000) viewed the millennials as a generation dominated

by a need to be "special, one of kind" (p. 3). The millennial generation finds itself

surrounded by technology and destined to dominate the 21st Century. The millennials are

also believed to be highly educated and exceptionally diverse (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Howe and Strauss sought to understand how the millennials see themselves in relation to

the rest of the world. They used interviews and popular culture texts from the 1990s. The

history concludes by citing the millennials as the next great generation in American

history and culture (Howe & Strauss, 2000). The millennials are destined for triumph,

greatness, and intent on building community, according to Howe and Strauss. Stephanie

Armour (2005) of *USA Today* sees the millennials as lazy, disrespectful, and downright

rude. To Armour, millennials are self-absorbed, pampered, and expect everything to

come to them rather than working for it. She expects them to encounter conflict in the

work force and in relationships because millennials are always seeking instant

gratification and reassurance over patience and collaboration (Armour, 2005; Hoover,

2009). Hoover believes Howe and Strauss made sweeping generalizations in their book

because most of their interviews were from one affluent city in Virginia. Hoover (2009)

echoes Armour (2005) in saying the millennials expect to be special. They are an entitled

generation that does not want to solve problems for themselves. There is also a belief that the millennials are narcissistic and lack empathy for others (Twenge, 2006). Scholars across the country, many of whom are from the Baby Boomer generation (which Armour said clashes with the millennials most of all other generations), see the millennials as a generation doomed by its own vanity, privilege, and ignorance (Twenge, 2006; Bauerlein, 2009; Hoover, 2009).

Interview Structure

The approach to interviewing and the procedures involved were based on those described by Brennen in her book *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies* (2013).

Twelve interviews were conducted for this project. Each interview lasted between one and three hours. The interviews were conducted where the interviewee felt most comfortable in a mutually agree-upon safe and private location, such as an interviewee's apartment. The interviews were recorded and the audio files were then used to create transcripts of each interview.

Topics were used to structure and guide the discussion about the media and how the millennial males had learned about sexuality and the male's role in sexual experience and sexual behaviors. The interviews were loosely structured in the following way:

1. Introduction and informed consent

2. Collection of background information and small talk

3. History with media as sex educator (Topics included: magazines, advertising, television, film, Internet, sex, relationships, and masculinity)

4. More specific questions to individual interviewee and cross-checking interview findings

5. Any last questions or concerns from the interviewee

The principal task of the interview was to obtain a meaningful history of sex education and masculine identity. The interviews were constructed around this task. All questions were presented in a brief and open-ended manner (Brennen, 2013). Utilizing topics rather than a structured set of interview questions allowed the conversation to flow wherever the interviewee felt most comfortable and encouraged follow-up questions to expand on the experiences. If the interviewee began to get off topic, I provided a friendly reminder of the subject matter and the conversation continued.

Within a day of the interview, each interview was transcribed. The audio version was then archived for future use and reference. The transcripts were printed and crosschecked for accuracy and transcription errors against the original audio recording. The audio version was considered as the raw version of the transcription. The transcriptions were sent to the interviewees to allow them to read through his responses, add any additional information they might have forgotten, or retract any information they no longer felt comfortable publishing (Brennen, 2013). Participants did not delete any material from the interviews. Minor revisions were made to clarify meaning of what the participant was trying to say in the interview. After edits, the final transcription was printed again and a preliminary analysis was performed. This analysis involved making notes that summarized the key findings of the interview and a discussion of theoretical issues that the findings raised.

Drawing from History: Identifying Fantasy Themes from Stories and Symbols

The narratives of the millennial males provided stories and symbols for analysis. A fantasy theme analysis was conducted using the transcripts of the interviews. Fantasy theme analysis utilizes three major components: fantasy themes, fantasy types, and a rhetorical vision. Fantasy themes are the narratives about people in a communication episode that begin to shape and organize an experience. In many respects, the themes provide ways for people to account for similar experiences and explain events in the same way (Bormann, 1985)—they are "the means through which the interpretation is accomplished in communication" (Foss, 2009, p. 98). This analysis utilized the three types of fantasy themes: character, setting, and action (Foss, 2009). Character themes "describe the agents or actors in the drama, ascribe characteristics and qualities to them, and assign motives to them" (Foss, 2009, p. 99). Setting themes "depict where the action is taking place … they not only name the scene of the action but also describe the characteristics of that scene" (Foss, 2009, p. 99). And action themes "deal with the actions in which the characters in the drama engage" (Foss, 2009, p. 99).

When common themes are developed involving certain characters, settings and actions, this is called a fantasy type. "A fantasy type is a stock scenario that encompasses several related fantasy themes" (Foss, 2009, p. 100). The fantasy types are able to be easily recalled and follow a very general story line.

The rhetorical vision pulls together the characters and scripts to garner a more general view of a culture's social reality. The rhetorical vision is comprised of fantasy themes of the character, setting, and action (Bormann, 1972). Motives of the rhetorical community come from the rhetorical vision, thus impelling participants to partake in a

particular action. "Actions that make little sense to someone outside of a rhetorical vision make perfect sense when viewed in the context of that vision because the vision provides the motive for action" (Foss, 2009, p. 101). The use of fantasy theme analysis allows for the symbolic reality of the millennial males to become more apparent.

In conducting the analysis, each of the transcripts of the interviews were read through three different times: the first to understand the narrative, the second to identify and address themes of sexuality and masculinity, and the third to fill in gaps and establish a larger picture connecting the narratives. Each transcript was examined for character, setting, and action themes as they concerned stories related to sexuality and masculinity. References to sexuality and masculinity were extracted from the interviews and later interpreted utilizing Maykut and Morehouse's (2001) constant comparative model. This model allows for comparing and contrasting themes that emerge in the interviews. As new themes are selected and analyzed, they are then compared to other themes that have already been mined from the interview transcripts. Comparing and contrasting the themes allowed for categories to be created (Maykut & Morehouse, 2001). Final fantasy themes were created and used to guide the remainder of this research project. Finally, the rhetorical vision was constructed by looking for patterns in all of the themes (Foss, 2009).

Going Further

Oral history enables media, sex, and masculinity to be analyzed from several key perspectives. First, themes can be identified that recur in individual accounts. By linking themes to prior research conclusions can be drawn about media serving as a sex education tool for males and the implications that has on masculine identities and

gendered politics. Second, by identifying how individuals' descriptions vary in how they experienced media as a sex education and identity development tool, a profile of the diversity of sexuality and masculinity is constructed. Finally, this oral history pursues the impact the American ideal of masculinity and sexuality has on individual men and shows that mediated constructions of masculinity are pervasive in American culture. The oral histories tell a story of masculinity and sex in America.

CHAPTER 4
THE STORY OF SEX, MEDIA, AND THE MILLENNIAL MALE

"Playboy isn't like the downscale, male bonding, beer-swilling phenomena that is being promoted now by [some men's magazines]. My whole notion was the romantic connection between male and female."

Hugh Hefner

"Clinton lied. A man might forget where he parks or where he lives, but he never forgets oral sex, no matter how bad it is."

Barbara Bush

"Sex is a natural function. You can't make it happen, but you can teach people to let it happen."

Dr. William H. Masters

Losing one's virginity was not out of the ordinary for any of the millennial males interviewed for this thesis. All 12 of the millennial males interviewed for this thesis are not virgins. Seven of the 12 lost their virginity while they were in high school. William, as homosexual male, emphasized that gender did not matter when it came to losing one's virginity. William said, "it is important to realize that gay men can lose their virginity too. Just because I didn't have sex with a girl doesn't mean I'm still a virgin" (November 5, 2012). Most often, losing one's virginity was characterized as a nerve-racking event that did not reflect what each millennial male expected his first time having sex to be like. Steve's discussion of losing his virginity is representative of how the other millennial males described their first experience having sex.

> I remember [my first time]. I was a junior in high school. You know, the first time is so awkward: your pits start to sweat, your palms get all clammy, and then it's all over in a second. It took all of like five minutes. Sadly, it wasn't as exciting as TV or movies make it. I actually thought I did something wrong. Then I asked my best friend. He only lasted like three minutes. I make fun of him for it now. Obviously, it wasn't me that did something wrong (Steve, October 22, 2012).

The narratives of the young men in this thesis tell a story of the media serving as a sex educator. The media have served as an educational tool, assigning specific masculine roles and expectations of what it means to be a man to the millennial males. For the millennial males, what it means to be a man is closely connected to sex and sexual relationships. By closely examining the narratives, it becomes clear that the story the millennial males are telling is one that links the definition of an ideal masculinity with sexual experience and promiscuity. And that one's virginity becomes the gatekeeper to becoming a man.

What follows is a fantasy theme analysis of the narratives of the millennial males interviewed for this thesis oral history. The fantasy theme analysis revealed important setting, character, and action themes in the narratives of the millennial males. The media discussed in the narratives of the millennial males predominantly comes from the 1990s and 2000s. The media examples provided by the millennials come from television, film, advertisements, magazines, the Internet, and pornography. It is important to note that media or interpersonal relationships do not exclusively define the descriptions of masculinity provided by the millennial males. Rather, the two are negotiated by the millennials to develop a better understanding and a personal definition of masculinity. How media and interpersonal relationships are used, and to what degree they are used, to cultivate a working definition of sex and masculinity often depended on the setting in which the millennial males were experiencing media or interpersonal relationships. In regard to setting, media education occurred most commonly in the home. More specifically, three subthemes of the home setting emerged, categorized by the groups that occupied the settings: home with parental supervision, home with group bonding, and

home with private viewing. Character and action themes were also synthesized, resulting in four dominant character themes developed from the millennial males' narratives: the virgin, the player, the ideal man, and the role model. Both media and interpersonal relationships define the characters that emerged from the narratives of the millennials. The first two character archetypes—the virgin and the player—result from both experiences with media and interactions with interpersonal relationships. The third character theme, the ideal man, is exclusively defined by the millennial males' experiences with media. The final character theme, the role model, is exclusively defined by the millennial males' interpersonal relationships with their fathers. Results of the fantasy theme analysis are discussed below.

The Home: Finding Comfort in the Setting

The millennial males found the home to be the most comfortable and common place for media viewing and learning about sex to occur. The twelve interviewees each described their homes in different ways. The millennial described their as the location where they were educated about sex and masculinity by the media. Very rarely did any of the young men mention that their experiences with media and sex occurred outside of the home, unless it was at another friend's house, which would still fall under the theme of the home. The settings named in the interviews were often described as comfortable. Merit (November 30, 2012) described his home as the place he "felt most relaxed." William echoed Merit's feelings. "I kind of really liked to curl up on my bed and read the magazines my mom just bought me" (William, November 5, 2012). The magazines William mentioned were most often fashion magazines, not magazines that would be

considered pornographic in nature. Rules also seemed to confine the young men to their homes. Steve (October 22, 2012) said he wasn't allowed to go see rated-R movies as a teen, so he often had to watch them at a friend's house or at home with his parents. Mark (December 18, 2012) said, "I used to memorize the parental control password so that I could watch the 'forbidden' channels on the TV."

Sex scenes the millennials recalled from television shows or films were described as being in the home setting. Jimmy used FX's hit drama *Nip/Tuck* as an example, saying "Christian's apartment was like a revolving door of beautiful women. He got laid all the time" (Jimmy, October 24, 2012). Derrick recalled watching primetime television with his parents and sex being central to the plot. "My mom and dad were obsessed with *Grey's Anatomy*. Every five minutes it seemed like someone was having sex on some random bed. Sometimes it was on hospital beds, sometimes on hotel beds, and other times it was on beds in their houses. It was everywhere" (Derrick, December 5, 2012).

Three subthemes emerged in the narratives. Each subtheme was discussed based on actions that occur within them: parental supervision, group bonding, and private viewing. The subtheme of parental control involved the least amount of comfort for the millennial male and the strictest rules. Millennial males felt very comfortable in the group bonding setting, but recognized they still had rules. Most often, the rules associated with the subtheme of group bonding revolved around guy code. The millennial males' rooms define the private viewing setting. When the millennials were in their own rooms, they not only felt the most comfortable, but they also made and followed their own rules.

The one exception to the overarching theme of the home involved the interviewees' recollection of advertising. "I'd look at magazines when I was younger and

every hot girl was on a beach or somewhere exotic. Why couldn't they just be in normal places?" (Curtis, October 20, 2012).

Parental Control: Minimal Comfort, Strict Rules

Back when the millennial males were in high school, their parents were in charge of what went on their homes. "My mom and dad were in charge. When it came to what was going on in the house, I followed their rules. If I broke any rules, I did whatever I could to make sure they didn't find out" (Jimmy, October 24, 2012). Mitch's experience was similar to Jimmy's. Mitch (October 2, 2012) said back in high school "My mom would flip out on me if she ever found a *Playboy* or saw that I was watching a movie or TV show I really wasn't supposed to." Jack did not see a change from high school to college. Whenever he came home from school (high school or college) he was under his parents roof, which mean his parents rules. "I still feel awkward watching movies like *40 Year Old Virgin* or *Knocked Up* with my parents around. I feel like they're one, judging me for watching it, and, two, like I'm really not allowed movies like that in their house" (Jack, November 18, 2012).

The millennial males often changed the media they viewed as a result of being in their parents' homes, or at least in the public spaces of their parents' homes, such as a living room. "We always had really homey things on the TV growing up. Even as my brother and I grew up, we still never risked watching anything too violent or sex-filled on our parents' TV." (Curtis, October 20, 2012). Joe was the oldest sibling of four. His experience with sexualized media content in his parents' house often was dependent on his younger siblings being around. "We had TVs in the kitchen, family room, and

bedrooms. If you wanted to watch something 'violent,' or heaven forbid, someone's butt showed up, it was not on one of the TVs everyone could see. We had every kid's show imaginable on our 'family' TVs" (Joe, November 10, 2012). For one millennial male it was not siblings or a shared television set that stopped him from watching sexualized media content around his parents, it was his sexuality.

William is openly gay. He said, "I was attracted to guys, and the stuff I wanted to watch, there was no way that was happening around my parents. They are big ole Catholics. They accepted me being gay, but I wasn't going to go about talking about how I wanted to get with the main guy character around them" (November 5, 2012). William felt that his desire to watch male characters behaving sexually was not going to happen in his parents' home. He also stressed that while he was open about being gay, he never felt comfortable having pornography around. "Every teenage guy has porn hidden somewhere in his room, but I never though it was okay, since I was in my mom and dad's house" (William, November 5, 2012).

In each of the interviews, the millennial males traded in risqué media choices for more tame ones when they were with their parents, or at least in the confines of their parents' home and rules. When they left their parents' rules, however, the millennial males became more comfortable with their personal media choices. In the next subtheme, group bonding, the millennial males' media consumption occurred with friends.

Group Bonding: The Importance of the Man Code

If the millennial males were not under their parents' roof or by themselves, they were with groups of friends at a friend's house. In most cases, the viewing was not in a

bedroom or a living room, but in a basement where the door could be locked. "We used to always go to my friend Cam's house if we ever wanted to watch movies like *The Girl Next Door*. Once we went downstairs and shut the door, his parents never bothered us" (Alex, December 20, 2012).

The media viewed when the millennials were with friends sparked conversations about sex and relationships. "There was no way you weren't going to talk about [sex]. I remember the first time I saw *American Pie* with my friends. All we could talk about after was hot Nadia was and how awkward Jim was. Then we'd talk about how it was like our lives" (Joe, November 10, 2012). What was critical to this subtheme was that the conversations and setting in general could not break what several of the millennial males called the "guy code." This code included many unwritten rules, most about interaction with the other guys in the room: "You don't talk about good looking guy characters" (Mark, December 18, 2012); "Don't sit too close to another guy, that'd be weird" (Alex, December 20 2012); and "Do not, under any circumstance, get a boner. If you do, that is the worst thing ever" (Joe, November 10, 2012).

Though parental rules were not present, the societal guy code still dictated how the millennial males acted in the setting. Some of the millennial males recalled sexually explicit media being viewed when they were with friends. "My best friend and I used to steal his older brother's *Playboy* because we weren't old enough to have copies and [his brother] was at college. They were staples anytime I stayed over" (Derrick, December 5, 2012). Eric thought watching movies that had sex scenes or nudity were easier with friends. "It never seemed to weird to see a naked girl around other guys my age. We all thought it was pretty cool" (Eric, November 16, 2012).

When the millennial males were able to retreat from parents and friends, they found themselves alone, most commonly in their rooms. When this setting occurred, the millennial males became comfortable with viewing more sexually explicit media and felt they were able to make their own rules.

Personal Viewing: Making Rules

Television, film, magazines, and websites were all fair game when the millennial male was alone in his room. In this setting, the millennial male felt very comfortable in his surroundings and had minimal to no restrictions placed on him. Most of the time, the millennial males viewed the most explicit media in this particular setting. On the other hand, some of the millennial males believed they were breaking rules, but since they were in their own rooms, they ignored them. The subtheme of personal viewing can easily been seen as the most important setting subtheme because the millennial males are alone with the media they are consuming. There were no other outside social forces or other educators, just the media.

When the millennial males were in the comfort of their own rooms, they found very minimal restrictions on what they could watch or read. "I used to remember watching Hefner and his girlfriends on TV, but only when I was alone. That was not a show I would ever watch with my mother" (Steve, October 22, 2012). Merit saw his room as an escape. "It wasn't that all I did was watch dirty movies or hide dirty magazines, but my room was a place where I knew I could get away with things" (Merit, November 30, 2012). While Merit didn't see an influx of sexual content when he was in his room, other millennial males responded differently.

"I used to have *Playboy* stuffed all over my room. I used to think I had the best hiding places, but I bet my mom found them once or twice when she was cleaning" (Mark, December 18, 2012). Mark was not the only millennial male who hid sexually explicit media. "It was that teenage boy thing to do. You would go into your room, pull out some rated-R movie with a boob shot in it and watch it. I probably could still pick out some of those scenes to this day" (Joe, November 10, 2012). The millennial male's room was all about breaking the rules their parents gave them. Mitch was not *supposed* to watch *Nip/Tuck* when he was in high school, but he did anyway, in the privacy of his own room, without parental control. "*Nip/Tuck* is one of my favorite shows…but my mom didn't like it because it was all about sex and that sex got you money. I still managed to find time to watch it" (Mitch, October 2, 2012). Eric's mom would not let him buy or read *Sports Illustrated*'s annual swimsuit edition, but he managed to get his hands on a copy. "Everyone always talked about [the swimsuit edition], and I didn't want to be left out. I had my friend get me a copy once and I snuck it home in my backpack and then up to my room. Now it is a staple on my apartment coffee table" (Eric, November 16, 2012).

The overarching theme of media being viewed in a home setting and the subthemes of parental control, group bonding, and personal viewing are all important to understand how the ultimate rhetorical vision was formed. By recognizing how certain media choices occurred as a result of certain settings, it becomes easier to separate the media from parental and group forces as the sex educator. Since the home is the dominant theme, it can be seen that the millennial males were learning most from the media while in their homes, without outside interruption, and according to their own rules. The

messages they were receiving about who they are supposed to be and how they are supposed to act are discussed in the next section.

Characters in the Narratives of the Millennial Males

A goal of this thesis is to understand how millennial males view masculinity in relation to sex, and how they were educated about this image of masculinity from mediated messages as teenagers and early twenty-somethings. What follows are the resulting character themes from the fantasy theme analysis. The character themes were synthesized with action themes to properly identify four key themes associated with media, masculinity, and sex. The four themes that emerged were the virgin, the player, the ideal man, and the role model. The virgin and the player themes surfaced from the experiences the millennial males had both with media and their interpersonal relationships. The ideal man character is exclusively defined by the millennial males' experiences with media. The role model is defined by the millennial males' interpersonal relationships, particularly that of their fathers. The role model also developed as a result of the millennial males' self-proclaimed skepticism of the media and the influence it may have on their development of a masculine identity.

The character of the virgin provided significant insight into how the millennial males viewed the importance of sex at a young age, and how media contributed to that belief. The player exemplified what none of the millennial males aspired to be like, but what they all viewed as being what the media deemed as being especially important in society. This theme of the player most accurately embodied Connell's concept of the hegemonic male. The ideal man has many similar characteristics to the player, but was

seen as much more regal and esteemed in the eyes of the millennial male. Rather than the successes of the player being solely based on his sexual prowess and aggression, the ideal man was successful because of his stable heterosexual relationships, money, good looks, and even temper. Finally, the fourth character was the role model. In the interviews, a distinction surfaced between what was seen as ideal in the eyes of the media and what was ideal in the eyes of the millennial males. The character of the role model is as simple as the title. This character served as the genuine role model of the millennial males interviewed. What will be shown is a deliberate disconnect from media expectations of masculinity by the millennial males' stories. This disconnect was an attempt on the part of the millennials to show that the role models of the millennial males were not representations seen in the media. The millennial males purposely discussed how their role models, particularly their fathers, were not like the men seen in the media. Each character theme provided insight into the story the millennial males told about how the media served as a sex educator in their lives and how masculinity was a concept closely tied to the sex.

The Virgin

Virginity played a critical role in defining sexual experience and for providing a definition of masculinity for these millennial males. "Waiting for marriage is a joke. If you didn't do it in high school, you got made fun of. If you didn't have sex in college, well, that was worse. Being a virgin was not cool" (Joe, November 10, 2012). Joe's disdain for virginity was tied to being ridiculed by others. This particular character theme was rooted in the millennial males' relationships with their friends, and was most often

discussed in relation to the setting subtheme of group bonding. Mitch saw sex as

something that could build an image with friend groups. The virgin, however, is

"ridiculed by his friends for being the last one. If he was holding out for the perfect girl, it

kind of became a joke to my friends" (Merit, November 30, 2012). The virgin character

in social circles was not taken seriously, and usually made fun of, and millennial males

saw the media as a contributing factor to this image.

Virginity in the media, according to Mitch (October 2, 2012), is "cast aside" with

the virgin character along with it. "Have you ever seen *American Pie*? The whole movie

is about losing your virginity. They made a pact, for Christ's sake" (Mark, December 18,

2012). The scene Mark was referring to shows the film's main group of guy friends—

Jim, Oz, Finch, and Kevin—making a pact with one another to lose their virginity by

senior prom, claiming they must become…

> …the masters of [their] sexual destinies…No longer will our penises remain
> flaccid and unused! From now on, we fight for every man out there who isn't
> getting laid when he should be! This is our day! This is our time! And, by God,
> we're not gonna let history condemn us to celibacy! We will make a stand! We
> will succeed! We will get laid! (American Pie, 1999).

By making this pact, the four characters go in pursuit of losing their virginities. As Mark

acknowledged, the film is predominantly about the struggle and pressure for high school

students, particularly high school boys, to have sex. At one point in the film, Jim, the

main character, emphasizes how important it is to lose one's virginity by the time the

male characters go to college. He said, "You realize we're all going to go to college as

virgins. They probably have special dorms for people like us" (American Pie, 1999).

Steve Stifler, the party boy character in the film, ridicules the other characters because

they are all virgins, much like both Joe and Merit claimed their friends did when one of

their friends was still a virgin in high school. Stifler expects to see his four friends at his party that night: "I'll see you guys tonight, in the 'No Fucking Section,' right?" (American Pie, 1999). The character of the virgin is central in *American Pie*. The film was mentioned by all twelve millennial males as a key film in their understanding of sex, as well as a media text that "added to the pressure of needing to have sex" (Curtis, October 20, 2012). However, the film was not the only media in which the millennial males found the virgin character theme.

Eric was one of the few who refused to lose his virginity while he was in high school. His belief was not tied to religion or parental rule; rather, he knew that he was not ready. "I was really small, awkward, and immature. There is no way I should have been having sex, but it wasn't like I didn't ever think about it" (Eric, November 16, 2012). The pressures placed on him by his friends and the media made his decision difficult. "By the time I got to college, I was praying I wasn't going to end up like Steve Carell in *40-Year-Old Virgin*. I finally caved my sophomore year" (Eric, November 16, 2012). Eric was 19 when he lost his virginity, 21 years from matching Steve Carell's character in the film. The fear of being a 40-year-old virgin, and the stigma it carried, was echoed throughout the millennial males' narratives. In *40-Year-Old Virgin*, Steve Carell's character, Andy, works in an electronics store and has very little going for him. He rides a bicycle instead of driving a car, collects action figures, and is afraid to talk to girls. When his friends at the electronics store find out, they immediately set out on a quest to help Andy lose his virginity. In the process, Andy is revealed as someone who knows very little about sex, asking, "where do you put the penis?" and "what is mutual masturbation?," as well as

questions about how to talk to and date girls (40-Year-Old Virgin, 2005). In the end, Andy is celebrated for finally shedding his virginity.

"The media makes being a virgin look like it is the worst thing ever" (Jack, November 18, 2012). The image of the virgin character was rarely a positive one for the millennial males. "I think of *Big Bang Theory* when I think of virgins, or some other nerd. If you are socially awkward you can't talk to girls. If you don't talk to girls, you aren't getting laid" (Alex, December 20, 2012). In the end, the virgin was a character the millennial males did not aspire to be. None of the millennial males wanted to be the virgin, and one even went as far as saying something was wrong with someone who wanted to maintain his virginity. "What 'normal' dude would want to be a virgin? If you have sex, you don't face problems and you usually are pretty successful. People like you and you go places. I don't see what a guy wouldn't want that" (Steve, October 22, 2012). Steve credited the media as a dominant force for his reasoning, saying, "Come on, you just have to pick up a magazine or watch a movie. They guys who are getting laid are good looking, have money, are successful, and have a women on their arm." This idea that sex equals success will be explored more thoroughly later.

Instead of celebrating virginity, the millennial males often compared the virgin character to another character, the player. The player was everything the virgin was not. While the millennial males did not necessarily say the character qualities and actions of the player were admirable, his most important characteristic is that the player was highly experienced with women and sexually promiscuous.

The Player

Having sex, and lots of it, defines the player character theme. The player's sexual experience and promiscuity, highly aggressive behaviors and mannerisms, and over-confidence were evident in the narratives and media examples of the millennial males. The player emerges as a negative character in the narratives of the millennial males. Even though the millennial males all felt this type of media masculinity was one they did not want to emulate, they still preferred it to being a virgin.

> Derrick provided a description and the name of the player archetype.
>
> I really love watching the TV shows where there is that one dude who just gets it in with a different girl every episode. He's a total player and he doesn't even care. He really doesn't care about anything other than himself. … He drinks a lot. … He never actually dates a girl, but always is with one. Most times he is really mean to the girls he is with, too. They literally have sex and then he just kicks them out like they didn't mean anything. … On top of everything, his ego is untouchable. He doesn't care about anyone other than himself and that is totally obvious in his interactions with others, especially the girls he sleeps with (Derrick, December 5, 2012).

Even though he did not refer to this character type as the player, Curtis provided a description similar to Derrick's. "I can't stand the guy in movies or on TV who just has his way with women. It's like they're a toy, or just another notch in his bedpost to brag about to his friends. So many shows have this guy: *Blue Mountain State*, *Nip/Tuck*, *Two-and-a-Half Men*" (Curtis, October 22, 2012). It almost does not matter the genre or the medium. The player, according to millennial males, is everywhere.

One television show, and one of its main characters in particular, surfaced consistently in the millennial males' interviews: Christian Troy from *Nip/Tuck* (2003). Jimmy mentioned Christian from *Nip/Tuck* in his interview and *Nip/Tuck* is Mitch's favorite show. Curtis saw the player character in the show. The show is known for risqué

storylines, nudity, harsh language, and glorification of plastic surgery. Christian is a character known for his many sexual conquests, high profile, inflated ego, and inability to behave. He sees himself as a superhero: "I'm a wildly successful plastic surgeon with great hair, pro-white teeth, and a 33-inch waist. I'm a goddamn superhero and I'm going to put my cape back on, fly back into every singles bar in town, and bang myself" (Nip/Tuck, 2005, S3:E11). Christian takes pride in his extravagant lifestyle and career. "The line that divides the porn industry and the plastic surgery [industry] is a thin one. We're both selling fantasy, aren't we?" (Nip/Tuck, 2003, S1:E4). He refuses to accept monogamy, "Ever notice how monogamy rhymes with monotony?" (Nip/Tuck, 2003, S1:E5). And his stories about his sex life make women out to be lower-class citizens: "I rode you like a triple crown jockey" (Nip/Tuck, 2003, S1:E6). The player lifestyle emulated by Christian Troy is one the millennial males do not see themselves living out.

The player's oppressive treatment of women was the most difficult characteristic of the player for the millennial males to accept. Merit found the player's treatment of women to be inexcusable: "I'm never going to have the body of the guys in magazines, or on TV, or in movies. I'm definitely not going to have the sexual godliness that they have either. I'm kind of okay just being Merit. There is one thing I would never want, and that is to be a douchebag and use women" (November 30, 2012). Jack felt he could not even watch the characters on television that put down women because it reflects poorly on American culture because it is what he feel American culture idolizes. "Mike the Situation gets paid thousands of dollars to show off his stomach and make fun of the different girls he sleeps with every night. I'm sorry, but the fact that *Jersey Shore* is one of the most popular shows and it's all about stupid people getting drunk and having sex

makes America look stupid" (Jack, November 18, 2012). In some cases, as Derrick describes, the player is all about sex because that is what he is expected to be about. "The man dominates and sex is what sells products. It's part of playing the role of human nature in that we have to reproduce and [he's] fine doing it" (Derrick, December 5, 2012). By being attractive, the player is able to have sex with more women. "Women are there for men's use. The goal is to look your best so you can have a girl that looks good and will do anything for you" (Jimmy, October 24, 2012).

The millennial males who self-identified as marginalized, Jimmy being Latino and Eric being African American, or subordinated masculinities, both William and Curtis identifying as gay, according to Connell's theory struggled most with recognizing qualities of the player in their personal lives. Eric saw his skin color and size as obstacles to him living out the player lifestyle. "I'm a scrawny black kid. The closest I got to someone who was like me on TV was Urkel and that was in re-runs. How am I supposed to get something out of TV characters if none of them are anything like me?" (Eric, November 16, 2012). Eric was not the only millennial male who saw the over-indulgent lifestyle and misogynistic ways of the player as being difficult to identify with. William and Curtis both identify as homosexual. Both found it difficult to adopt the player's qualities in their own lives because of the player's heterosexuality. William said, "You never see a gay guy getting all the guys he wants. You very rarely see a gay character getting anything he wants. Me being gay meant finding something good out of a joke made on TV" (William, November 5, 2012). Curtis struggled with defining his sexuality as a result of the masculinity portrayed by player characters:

> I knew I was different then my teammates and friends. They'd talk about girls in
> the locker room and I'd pretend. It was what we were supposed to do. Look at

shows like *Blue Mountain State*. The team is always talking about getting laid in the locker room or in the house they all live in…The first day Alex [the main character of the show] gets to campus, he is all about how many girls he can have sex with and every episode it is a different girl and then he kind of throws her away…When Thad prances around in thongs and gets emotional, his teammates tell him to knock it off because he is being gay, and then he goes off and has to have sex with some girl or his pocket pussy to prove he isn't gay…That's a lot like how my locker room was and how some of the organizations I am a part of today all act. I wasn't about to tell them I was a virgin, and, oh, by the way, that I'm gay. So I hid it (Curtis, October 20, 2012).

Curtis's narrative often recognized his feeling of being marginalized by attitudes toward his sexuality, positioning the heterosexual player character against his homosexuality. Curtis's response, while very specific to his experience, revealed how characters in a show that aired in 2010 brought back experiences and memories of his time in high school. Several of the millennial males' interviewed mentioned the experiences they had viewing the same show with player characters. The player is known for his insatiable appetite for women and lots of them, and his ability to cast them aside without a care in the world, cementing his reputation in the minds of the millennial males. This character type's machismo and misogynistic qualities placed him at the forefront of hegemonic masculinity, but his idealized counterpart, the ideal man, provided the millennial males an ideology they *actually* wanted to aspire to be.

The Ideal Man

Mediated hegemonic masculinity, according to the millennial males, has two very different, yet similar expressions: the player and the ideal man. While the player can be seen as an expression of bad, the ideal man is often expressed in terms of good—even when many of the characteristics of the two are similar. Sex serves as a dominant distinguishing factor between the hegemonic characteristics of the player and the ideal

man. According to the millennial males, sex is a means to an end for the player, but a sign of affection and structure for the ideal male. The ideal man's sexual experience resulted in both success and lineage. His life is balanced between his high-powered job and his ability to be a father. The millennial males recognized the ideal man as a positive image of masculinity in the media.

Sex is the foundation of the ideal man's successes, but it's not foregrounded as being insensitive, like the millennials' descriptions of the player. The ideal man's strong heterosexual relationship, his ability to support his family, his good looks, and his wealth were qualities many of the millennial males found to be admirable. They are also qualities that relied on an expression of faithful, loving, and affectionate sex within a marriage.

As a heterosexual, the ideal man is portrayed by media as being successful in his life and his career. Both of the millennial males that identified as homosexual vehemently agreed that the portrayal of the ideal man's heterosexuality in the media is what aides in his success. William did not think he could ever be the ideal man. He found the mediated models of masculinity, particular those of the ideal man, to be unobtainable. "He always is so perfect. He's hot, he's got a hot wife, he's got a great job. He's not me, nor will he ever be. Wearing glitter doesn't fit the mold…His body has to be rockin', too. Having the tan skin and washboard abs. Superman, great example. I will never be him, but I did have a thing for him. I would kill to look that good in red tights" (William, November 5, 2012). Curtis did not see the ideal man as an unobtainable goal, but being that guy was a goal he consistently chased.

> I've always been an athlete. They have great lives and they are always doing
> positive things. I'd see them in magazines and on TV and just wish I could have

perfect lives like theirs. So I stayed in sports. The more sports I played the more like them I could be, and the closer I could get to fame and fortune. … No athletes ever really say they're gay, so that kind of threw a wrench in my plans. No matter how good at sports, I was never going to look or live like [David] Beckham, and I certainly wasn't getting his wife either (Curtis, October 20, 2012).

The ideal man's ability to embody, as Mitch would call it, "the American dream," made him different from the virgin and the player in a positive manner. The millennial males identified certain characteristics outside of the ideal man's sexual prowess they felt made him stand out from other men.

"The ideal man sets a standard for himself that is higher than the average man would. He is constantly striving to be better to be a good husband and a good dad, while the average guy would be complacent to his spot in life, not trying necessarily to improve—just coasting on and living life. … The ideal man, I'm going to say, looks like a Ken doll. That's what I feel would be the American dream. Like, if you can imagine the Ken doll with the suburban Stepford wife's-type ideal right here—khaki pants, blue dress shirt, strong jaw line, good job, family, supports his family, loves his wife, athletic, gets along with everybody… [He's] good at everything that a man would be good at. He doesn't have a whole lot of faults" (Mitch, October 2, 2012).

Mark found that the ideal man is prevalent in media choices for children, particularly in Disney-produced films and programming. The ideal man, to Mark, has an essence of power and is a woman's saving grace. "Not to be all girly, but think of Disney. Prince Charming is totally that ideal guy. Parents are always so worried their daughters are getting the wrong idea with the princess, damsel-in-distress bullshit. Maybe they should have tried telling their sons that they can't always be like the prince. I still think I'm going to need to save my future wife from a dragon or eternal sleep so she'll marry me" (Mark, December 18, 2012).

The millennial males each identified a media figure they felt embodied the ideal man. Mark's idea of the contemporary ideal man is George Clooney. "My main man-crush is totally George Clooney. Just look at him. He has it all. Women love him, he has

money, he gets to be idolized by dudes everywhere, and he is one snazzy dresser" (Mark, December 18, 2012). Steve and Joe also saw certain male celebrities as examples of the ideal man. Steve grew up watching Westerns with his dad and John Wayne happened to be one of his biggest idols: "If I had to pick that ideal man, it would be him…He got the girl, was totally nice about it, and still got to shoot guns, ride horses, and beat the crap out of the bad guys" (October 22, 2012). Joe says, "I've always been skeptical to think the actors I saw on TV or in movies or the athletes I saw in magazines or live were idols. That's my dad's job…The older I get and the more I think about myself in grade school and high school, yeah, I had my dad as my role model, but the clothes I wore, the way I acted, the dreams I had, that was all from on screen. After all, what guy wouldn't want to be like Brad Pitt" (Joe, November 10, 2012). William's example of the ideal man is Johnny Depp. William said he "didn't grow up idolizing sports guys because I never played sports. I crushed on actors" (November 5, 2012). Depp is William's ideal man because "he just is quirky and cool and different. He's been married a while and is really successful at what he's done" (November 5, 2012).

Jimmy's example of the ideal man is Ryan Gosling. "He has it all. Girls love him. He does all of those sappy movies where he does everything right to get the girl and then they end up happily ever after" (October 24, 2012). Jimmy went into depth to describe Gosling's character Noah in *The Notebook* (2004). "He walks around always put together. He always surprises [Rachel McAdams] with flowers or gifts or other things girls like to make them happy. He makes-out with her in the rain. He holds her hand in the last scene as the both pass away" (October 24, 2012). Jimmy said he was "embarrassed that *The Notebook* is the example I thought of. It is a totally chick flick I

shouldn't have seen. My ex-girlfriend made me watch it" (October 24, 2012). The embarrassment Jimmy felt was because his example was supposed to be a movie men are not supposed to see. Four of the millennial males' examples of the ideal man came from a description of a character or celebrity from a chick flick.

Derrick was the only millennial male to describe a musician as an example of the ideal man. Justin Timberlake, a musician and actor, was the first person Derrick thought of. "He's totally clean-cut and someone parents would want their children to be like. On top of that, he's always been good at keeping his personal life on the down low and has made a lot of money" (Derrick, December 5, 2012). Timberlake is well known for being part of the late 1990s/early 2000s boy band 'N Sync. He would later have a highly successful solo career and venture into acting.

Jimmy, Joe, Curtis, Mark, Mitch, Alex, Derrick, Steve, and Jack all considered sports as being critical, not only to to masculinity in the media, but to masculinity in society. As a result, they all played sports. When Jimmy grew up, the athletes he saw on television and the sports he played more than a way to maintain his masculinity. Playing sports and being like the athletes he watched daily provided Jimmy an outlet for escape.

> I grew up in Los Angeles and you were not idolizing the other guys on the street. Some of my friends joined gangs, others sports. It was one of the two…You found that guy you wanted to be like in movies or in magazines. My dad subscribed to *ESPN* and *Sports Illustrated*. I grew up dreaming of being on the cover. They had the life and they weren't hurting for anything. If I could be like them, I could escape LA and gangs. I'm a good athlete, but I'm no professional. I realized I didn't have to be the next Sammy Sosa or ARod to make something of myself. They just helped me push to get out (Jimmy, October 24, 2012).

In interviews, the ideal man was described as an archetype that was very difficult for the millennial males to achieve—Merit felt that many men viewed their aspiration to be the ideal as "unhealthy." Merit, the only millennial male to recognize this openly, saw

the media's ideal man as " the fantasy world that American men strive to attain to, but can never reach. We kind of just fall flat on our face and still go for it" (Merit, November 30, 2012). The millennial males all recognized someone very real as the role model character, their fathers.

The Role Model

The role model character provided the millennial males with idealistic characteristics that were more easily attainable and closer to home. The millennial males consistently equated the role model to the ideal man and often aspired to be like it. The major difference between the role model and the ideal man is that the role model is interpersonally defined and the ideal man is a media example. All 12 millennials made a distinct difference in their discussion of both character archetypes. The ideal man emerged from media examples the millennials encountered. The role model surfaced from the millennial males' interpersonal relationships, especially the relationship they have with their fathers. The distinction is also as a result of the millennial males skepticism of media messages.

The role model is "fatherly" (Derrick, December 5, 2012), "successful" (Mitch, October 2, 2012; Steve, October 22, 2012; Eric, November 16, 2012; Jack, November 18, 2012), "committed to family" (Jimmy, October 24, 2012; Merit, November 30, 2012), "good looking" (Joe, November 10, 2012), "caring and protective" (Mark, December 18, 2012), and "supportive" (Curtis, October 20, 2012; William, November 5, 2012; Alex, December 20, 2012). The descriptions the millennials provided of the role model were very similar, if not identical, to the descriptions they provided of the ideal man. The

millennials specifically chose to differentiate between the two, even though they were

providing similar descriptions. This deliberate making of distinctions resulted from the

millennials cynicism of the media. The fathers of the millennial males were the primary

role models in the millennial males' lives. Alex mimicked his father and what he has

taught him:

> I'm really cliché. My dad is obviously my role model. He played football and
> baseball, so I played football and baseball. He went to college, so I went to
> college. He told me to treat women with respect, and that's just what I do…I can't
> imagine a better person to be like. My dad has done a lot with his life and I want
> to do the same (Alex, December 20, 2012).

Derrick idolizes his father:

> Who doesn't idolize their dad? He is the coolest. He is who gets you into sports
> and teaches you about girls and gets you out of trouble with mom. He isn't always
> the most vocal person in my life, but I certainly do whatever he tells me to, no
> question. Well, I do now more than I used to. When I was kid, I didn't want to do
> anything my parents said, but if my dad wanted something I usually did it just
> because it was him (Derrick, December 5, 2012).

Merit's father has left a lasting impact on his life, pushing Merit to be the same kind of

role model as Merit's grandfather was to his father:

> My father is by far my greatest role model in life. He is the definition of a hard-
> working American. He is an honest, hard-working man that treats his job as a
> father and a businessman seriously. He is a happy man, overall. He definitely has
> his faults, however, which makes me realize that even the best of people can be
> the meanest and hypocritical at times. He was an entrepreneur who only went to
> technical college to start a welding business that made him millions in his
> twenties in the 1970s. He was a commercial pilot, a consultant for Merrill Lynch
> in Laguna Beach California, a crop-duster, a top manager for an AIDS research
> company, and a self-made businessman. I have gotten to see just in my lifetime
> his great times during the 1990s and the bankruptcies of the 2000s. His attitude in
> dealing with each situation has always been to go forward and to never stop. He
> never received help from others with money and didn't think it was ever right to
> feed off the taxpayers. I follow my life after his working hard and moving
> forward no matter how tough life gets. He is one of the last true Americans. He
> does what he needs to do to support the family, even if it doesn't make it him
> happy, has a good reputation, doesn't rip people off, is well-trusted in the
> community, is friendly to the neighbors, and takes damn good care of my mother,

who has been ill for quite awhile. Although his career hasn't made him happy, I think having this type of recognition is all he could ask for (Merit, November 30, 2012).

The millennial males described dominant characteristics of their fathers that they wished to embody themselves. These characteristics defined how they wanted to grow and develop as men. Not living up to these idyllic expectations burdened the millennial males, as well. Curtis struggled to openly identify as a gay man. This fear was present in his relationship with his father:

My brother was really flamboyant our whole lives. He came out when we were freshmen and my dad was disappointed. I couldn't be that to my dad. He is my idol, and being gay meant not living up to his expectations or being like him. I finally realized in college that maybe I needed to be like me because I was never going to be just like my dad (Curtis, October 20, 2012).

Jack was the only millennial male to name a role model in addition to his biological father. His primary role model was his father, but he had another: Father Greg Boyle. Jack does not want to be a priest, but he "admires [Fr. Boyle's] modesty and ability to avoid the hastiness of everyday life and care more about others more than himself" (Jack, November 18, 2012). Fr. Boyle is also the only role model named by an interviewee that was not in extensive personal contact with the subject. Jack's interactions with Fr. Boyle occurred solely within the church and on community service trips during his high school career. Jack last spoke with Fr. Boyle two years ago. Jack was 21 then. Even though Jack has had little-to-no contact with Fr. Boyle for two years, he still reveres him as a role model.

Many of the millennial males were skeptical of the media's image of masculinity because it conflicted with their real-life role models for masculinity. Joe (November 10, 2012) called himself a "skeptic of the media" because "the media can't really tell me how

to act or behave." Derrick (December 5, 2012) claimed that "media are not the ruler, and I don't have to do as they tell me to." While the millennial males attempted to differentiate between mediated life and, as Alex (December 20, 2012) called it, "the real life," millennial males' descriptions of their role models were similar to their descriptions of the mediated ideal man. Alex differentiated between media fantasy and lived reality this way: "It is really hard when I know I've disappointed [my dad]. He gets this look on his face, but doesn't say anything. Instead he just goes about his business and doesn't really talk to me for a little bit. It is one thing to not live up to some fake character, its totally different to screw up to someone real" (December 20, 2012).

If one uses the logic of the millennial males interviewed, their role model descriptions should be different from their descriptions of the ideal man because they stated the media did not have an impact on how they perceive and learn about characteristics of masculinity. Mark (December 18, 2012) felt that "society is much more powerful in deciding how I'm supposed to act." Steve (October 22, 2012) said, "my friends are mostly why I am the man I am today. The media just give some false sense of reality." Only Eric, a communication major, placed emphasis on the role the media plays in educating society. "Media are a huge component of society and what society thinks about. It isn't hard to connect the dots from people make media and media then assist people in how they think and learn about things" (Eric, November 16, 2012). Yet, in the descriptions of the millennial males' role models, many of the qualities of the ideal man were present—the ones that the millennial males felt the media prescribed for the ideal man character. The millennial males were not explicitly recognizing the connection

between the descriptions, perhaps because of their high distrust and cynicism of the media and its influences.

In the narratives of the millennial males, the role model had one significant difference from the ideal man: sex. The millennial males strip their role models, their fathers, of sexual experience, potentially for two reasons: they do not know how experienced they are and they do not care to know. The millennial males chose not to engage in a conversation about sex in relation to their fathers. What is important, however, is that the role models were all seen as being in strong heterosexual relationships that have been sustained over time and resulted in children. The emphasis on fatherhood and heterosexual relationships in the millennial males' narratives is key to recognizing the millennial males' affinity toward adopting and mimicking the characteristics of the role model in their everyday lives. Mitch's father lived out this role, making him a definitive example of masculinity:

> Masculinity is like taking on the father figure role. People are looked down upon in America if you don't fulfill that role…masculinity means asserting a fatherly role and masculinity obviously has to do with attracting girls and girls being attracted to men. The father has a duty to the family to provide a means of living, so they don't have to worry about going hungry…That has always been the father's type of role in the United States…[My dad] is probably one of the most caring people in the entire world…he took care of my grandmother, my aunt, and both my great aunts. He mows all their lawns…He's my role model because no matter how late he has to stay up, he will do anything in his power to help anybody that will ever need help, and that's good…I think that the way he parented me has a lot to do with how he wasn't parented. His father was an alcoholic and he rarely played sports with him and was rarely around. He wanted to provide that for his child and he promised himself he'd never be like his father (Mitch, October 2, 2012).

The responsibility of the role model has two parts: being a father and being a successful husband. Mitch's description emphasized how important fatherhood and care were in his life, and how his dad was Mitch's primary example of how to accomplish both. Jimmy's

description of his father emphasized the second responsibility, being a successful husband. "I can't imagine someone better than my dad. He did everything for me and for my family. … My mom was able to stay at home because my dad worked late hours and ran a company" (Jimmy, October 24, 2012). William's father gave everything to his family. "We have a big, big family. All of my siblings and I used to drive my parents nuts. My dad never seemed to get mad about it. He still used to go out and throw a ball with my brothers or took my sisters and me shopping…He worked long hours. My mom spent lots of hours dealing with us. I can't imagine having someone different in my life" (William, November 5, 2012).

The millennials' narratives provided context to better understand how the role model, as well as the other characters, to develop a hierarchy that is based on how the millennial males chose to adopt and retain characteristics related to sex and sexuality. The hierarchy is discussed in the next chapter and will be used to understand how the millennial males recognized, defined, and lived out masculinity during their adolescence and into their early adulthood. A more lengthy discussion of how all of these themes contributed to a larger cultural discourse surrounding masculinity, sex, and the media follows in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5
THE IMPURITY TRUTH:
HOW POPULAR MEDIA TAUGHT MILLENNIAL MALES
TO GET LAID AND "DO IT" AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

"Women need a reason to have sex. Men just need a place."

Billy Crystal

"Most men are very attached to the idea of being male, and usually experience a lot of fear and insecurity around the idea of being a man."

Andrew Cohen

Feminist author and blogger Jessica Valenti is known for tackling the gender binary in American culture and society. Her works have been published in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and *The Nation*, to name just a few. In her second book, *He's a Stud, She's a Slut*, *and 49 Other Double Standards Every Woman Should Know* (2008), Valenti argues that women are held to a different sexual standard than men. This standard is often based on their sexual experience and fortitude and a smattering of over-the-top stereotypes. Valenti (2009) argues that women are expected to be pure and wholesome. *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women* (2009). As someone who would like to eventually be considered a scholar of media, society, and masculinity, I wanted to read more of Valenti's argumentation against the domination of men and the double standards set for women. I saw my path of research as being similar to the work Valenti, but more specifically about masculinity rather than Valenti's feminist thought. Essentially, Valenti (2009) believes that American culture links a woman's worth to her sexuality rather than to her altruistic values. A woman's virginity is a sacred gift (Valenti, 2009). Valenti (2009) wants scholars to wrestle with the concept of masculinity and how the idea that losing one's

virginity is somehow a masculine triumph. In this thesis, I want to begin a conversation centered on the millennial generation of males and how mediated ideologies of sex and sexuality have served as an educational tool. What follows in this chapter is the overall rhetorical vision of the millennial males and how popular media taught them to get laid and do it as early as possible. This chapter explicates a concept I base on Valenti's purity myth and call *the impurity truth*.

The Impurity Truth and a New View of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Rhetorical Vision of Masculinity, Sex, and the Media

The rhetorical vision of masculinity, sex, and the media is one that is shared among the narratives of the millennial males, and, according the Bormann (1985) the experiences are shared among many members of a culture. The rhetorical vision established in the final chapter of this thesis is one that may apply to millennial males in general. The narratives of the millennial males interviewed may reveal larger social and cultural ideologies commonly held by more millennial males. If what Bormann suggests is true, more millennial males may commonly hold the themes that emerged from this thesis. From these narratives, I have developed a concept I call the impurity truth. The impurity truth suggests that the media message being decoded by the millennial males is that virginity is a gatekeeper to masculinity and that in order to express a certain form of masculinity, one must lose his virginity as early as he possibly can. The impurity truth implies media teach heterosexual men that losing their virginity early makes them better and more dominant men. The media education of the impurity truth occurs during males' adolescent stage of development when gender and sexual identities are developed and strengthened (Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1968). The narratives of two homosexual millennials

interviewed for this project indicate this ideology is presented in heterosexual media characters and heroes. The homosexual male "is funny and he has lots of girl friends. He doesn't get that same treatment as the straight guys" (William, November 5, 2012). Only William acknowledged the role of the homosexual male in media messages and interpersonal relationships. William's description of the homosexual male in media positions homosexual masculinity outside my current definition of the impurity truth. By not explicitly discussing the homosexual male with the interviewees, there is a limitation to this study. In future research, this project should be expanded to more properly address the homosexual experience as it contributes or opposes the concept of the impurity truth. This ideology, the impurity truth, is the answer to my research question: *what is the story millennial males tell about the role of media in their education about sex and masculinity*?

Stuart Hall (1980) posited that we encode and decode media messages in a variety of ways and that the communication process is not linear. Encoding takes place when ideas are interpreted into a set of codes or symbols within a particular format, in this case media—film, television, advertisements, magazines, Internet, or pornography as discussed by the millennials in their narratives, to create a message. Decoding takes place when meaning from the symbols or codes is processed and removed from the message (Hall, 1980). Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model suggests that all images are encoded with meaning when created, whether this be a conscious or unconscious decision by the creator of the text. every text we see around us comprises distinct signifiers encoded within the text to carry the message the encoder hopes the reader will comprehend. By subscribing to this theory that media are encoded with messages that are

then decoded in many potential ways by a reader, viewer, or listener, it becomes clearer as to how the young millennial males came to their conclusions about the role the media played in educating them about sex and masculinity. The millennial males decoded the media messages based on three decoding strategies outlined by Hall (1980): preferred, negotiated, and oppositional.

The preferred reading occurs when the millennial males accepted the meaning of the media messages about sexuality and masculinity as the message creators intended them to be read. While the millennial males did not employ this type of decoding strategy often, they still accepted the intended meaning of the media messages. Media messages, particularly those in film and television, portrayed virginity as a humiliating quality. The millennial males said the media portrayed the need to lose their virginity as soon as possible.

The virgin's power in the media or the lives of the millennial males was very strong. Although the message was very negative, the virgin character's impact on the millennials was so strong that the millennials resisted the label at all costs. Alex saw virginity as a painful experience because the media message he decoded was that, "you get publically ridiculed and left out of things" (December 22, 2012). The virgin was cast as an outcast or someone who lacked masculine characteristics. If a millennial male were to assume the characteristics of the virgin, his peers would not respect him. The millennials felt they would be considered less masculine, and would have very minimal power in society. "I wasn't about to be the guy who couldn't prove to his friends that he couldn't have sex or at least have oral sex. I was on the football team, everyone talked about and I didn't want to be left out" (Mark, December 18, 2012). The virgin was placed

at the margins while the sexually experienced man inhabits the hegemonic center of masculinity. The millennial males decoded a preferred message that shedding one's virginity was one way to obtain societal power and express one's masculinity. Media send this message in only a few films and television shows. These particular films and television shows are aimed at a niche market that targets the millennial males interviewed for this project. The virgin character had an assumedly poignant and lasting impact on the millennial males, leading to them seeing virginity as a gatekeeper to their masculinity. The millennial males accepted with no negotiation that virginity was a masculine flaw. This acceptance helped form my concept of the impurity truth which argues that media educated millennial males that losing their virginity at a young age is critical to expressing, maintaining, and developing a dominant masculinity.

A negotiated reading is when receivers agree with certain aspects of a message, but disagree with others; to understand the intended meaning, but also bring their own experiences and beliefs to decoding it. The millennials reflected on their experiences with media and in their interpersonal relationships in order to formulate judgments and opinions about sexuality and masculinity. Sex dominated the lives of the millennials as adolescents. Locker room conversations, sex talks with parents, and mediated imagery colored and defined the ideologies of the young men. Joe feared "the guys in the locker room" because they "made fun of all kids who couldn't get laid" (November 10, 2012). Jack and Eric were the only two millennial males to discuss sex talks with their parents. Jack said his "father talked all about how I need to wrap it up before I end up a dad. It was pretty much the end of the conversation after that, or at least in my head it was the end of it" (November 18, 2012). Eric's sex talk was with both his parents: "I had to sit in

between them when I was like 15 and listen to how I wasn't old enough or ready for sex and that it could lead to diseases or getting a girl pregnant" (November 16, 2012). Both of their descriptions assumed negative consequences to having sex, particularly teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. These consequences were not reflected in the narratives of the other millennial males, especially when talking about media examples. Curtis said, "you get to just have sex and come out of it with no issues" (October 12, 2012). Alex felt that characters in advertising have "no worries. Dudes in advertising look good, they've got a girl bent over in some way, and it's like they just go on with their daily life" (December 22, 2012). The preferred messages from media were negotiated by the millennials to better fit these ideologies. When identifying the roles, responsibilities, and characteristics of the mediated ideal man, the millennials relied heavily on their personal experiences with their fathers. The narratives identified key features of the mediated ideal man that also appeared in the descriptions of the millennial males' role models—their fathers. Their personal experiences and beliefs also were apparent in their understanding of the player archetype. The millennial males were aware of his characteristics—being overly aggressive, highly sexually promiscuous, and extreme confidence—but were not necessarily in agreement with the benefits of the player's characteristics. The player's sexual promiscuity was the only characteristic the millennial males found desirable. His ability to have sex with many women made him admirable to the millennials, but the player's oppression of and disrespect for women made them see him as someone they would not want to emulate.

An oppositional reading opposes or dismisses media messages completely. This type of reading was rarely mentioned in the narratives of the millennial males, outside of

the two homosexual males. The homosexual males' decoding of media messages can be considered oppositional as they both expressed their inability to identify with media characters. Instead, the homosexual males' narratives are marginalized by the lack of media heroes available for the homosexual males to identify with. Consistent across the narratives was the millennial males overall skepticism of the media messages. The messages were strategically decoded, revealing a message that led to the education of the millennial males about sex and masculinity. Media messages are what the millennials had the hardest time accepting. Eleven of the 12 millennial males felt they were not learning anything about sex and masculinity from media because they described themselves as skeptics of media messages. In examining the narratives, an understanding by millennials of how media serve as a sex educator can be located. This is most clearly seen in the descriptions of the ideal man and the role model characters. The ideal man was explicitly defined by the millennials according to media examples, lacking any reference to interpersonal relationships. The role model was the millennial males' fathers and lacked any discussion of experiences with media. The millennials purposely separated the two, using their claim of being skeptics as the primary reason. However, by placing examples of the narratives side-by-side it is clearer that the two resemble one another, almost identically. For example, Mark identified the ideal man as George Clooney. Mark's description of Clooney is as follows: "He has it all. Women love him, he has money, he gets to be idolized by dudes everywhere, and he is one snazzy dresser." Mark would go on to give context to his description of Clooney: "He is composed and refined. He carries himself with a certain level of composure that make men want to idolize him. I don't know of any other actor who appears more refined or kindhearted when he speaks on

camera, and I don't think that is an act" (December 18, 2012). Mark's description of his father has very similar qualities: "My dad is the kind of guy who will do anything for anyone and does so with poise and confidence. My friends used to love coming over to my house because my dad would just hang out and talk to us like we were normal people. My dad has also never let me my mom down. He takes care of her without any question" (December 18, 2012). Mark uses "composed and refined" to describe Clooney and "poise and confidence" to describe his father. To two descriptions are incredibly similar. He describes both Clooney and his father as being idolized. Both Clooney and Mark's father are considered to be caring and kind-hearted by Mark. While on the surface it may seem as though the millennials completely oppose the influence of any media message, the language they use to describe the mediated ideal man and the fatherly role model are all to similar to not attempt to draw a connection, thus assuming meaning is being decoded by the millennial males from media messages that would imply learning of characteristics of masculinity.

The concept of the impurity truth is drawn from the decoded media messages the millennial males received during and after adolescence, and have reflected upon for five years or more. While in most cases, the millennial males claimed they were cynical about the media serving as any kind of educator about sexual matters, many of the descriptions they provided of real life people were reflective of the descriptions they provided for mediated examples. The millennials say they do not accept media messages as being an influence on their lives, but what they have to say about how they live their lives and/or whom they emulate reveals that they do credit media.

The impurity truth was is a concept encoded in mediated messages that lead the millennial males to decode a message that having sex and losing their virginity as early as possible was the way to define their masculinity. The millennial males may have been educated by media to function within and subscribe to a cultural ideology of the impurity truth. The impurity truth is that the millennials males need to lose their virginity as early as possible in order to establish themselves as a dominant male in American society. The millennial males saw a consistent narrative across their media choices that male virginity was not sacred. The millennials feel that losing their virginity at a young age benefitted them during their adolescence, ultimately leading to a belief that sex with provide power and success. Mitch provided context for this concept:

> I watched *Nip/Tuck*. It was all about having sex and the money and power you can get from it. It was all about having sex with a lot of women whenever you want to. *American Pie*, same thing. High school is about the pursuit of losing your virginity because you don't want to be the last one. I didn't have sex in high school, but I at least had sexual encounters. The kids who didn't were looked down upon (Mitch, October 2, 2012).

The media messages the millennial males decoded served as an educational tool that taught them that masculinity is defined by their ability to be sexually active and experienced. The archetypal characters—the role model, the ideal man, the player, and the virgin—defined in chapter four were all reflections of this ideology.

The millennial males interviewed for this oral history project provided individual narratives that, when considered together, establish a rhetorical vision of masculinity, sex, and the media that is the impurity truth. What follows is an explication of how this impurity truth leads to a proposal for how we must strive to reconsider Connell's (1987) structure of masculinity and consider the role adolescent development plays in the decoding of media messages by the millennials. For the millennial males interviewed for

this research, masculinity was not as much of a conscious decision as it was a daily routine based upon mediated messages. Merit's definition is rooted in how media encode a message about who or what a real man is.

> We think we have an idea of what it means to be a man. Or many ideas. The media are really who teach us who a really man is. He is strong and confident and cool and everyone loves him and he plays sports and he's attractive and can get whatever girl he wants whenever he wants her. That's the real man. Then they tell us we're all unique and special. Kind of funny, right? (Merit, November 30, 2012).

Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity places varying types of masculinities on a hierarchical scale based on how a particular society ranks certain actions as markers of masculinity. The hegemonic male is at the top. Merit's description of "a real man" could be considered hegemonic. The character archetypes of the ideal man outlined by the millennial males could also be hegemonic, as could the player. The role model's sexuality is hidden. The millennials refused to engage in a conversation about their fathers' sex lives. The role model would be considered a complacent male according to Connell's theory. The problem with Connell's hegemonic hierarchy of masculinity is it neglects a critical time in development, adolescence, in order to focus on societal ideals that may come later in life such as long-term relationships, high-powered jobs, money, and extreme confidence. Connell doesn't acknowledge adolescence as a formative actor in creating masculinities. As seen in chapter two, identity development is most critical during adolescence where much of who a person becomes is formulated, experimented with, and solidified (Erikson, 1969).

This study specifically addresses the role of media education during the adolescent stage of the millennial males. The millennial males have only recently left the adolescent development stage, and have a limited amount of time to develop into the

hegemonic structure Connell describes. During adolescence, young men and women tend to experiment with sex and sexuality (Basso, 2003). Because identities are being formed, adolescents' sexual identities are then molded by their sexual experiences and thoughts (Erikson, 1969). Identities might be developed with exposure to media heroes because the adolescents are adopting behaviors media heroes are modeling for them (Campbell, 1991; Greenwood, 2007). By decoding the messages in the media, particularly those regarding media heroes, the millennial males were developing their identity by emulating the characters they saw in the media. For the millennial males, their adolescent memories, beliefs, and impressions of masculinity and the media were colored by the notion that being sexually active with women was absolutely critical to developing and sustaining status in a hierarchical structure of masculinity. Mitch's experiences with *Nip/Tuck* and *American Pie* are key to understanding the role media have played in developing one's masculinity based on sexual ideologies. Mitch felt that *American Pie* glorified partying and sex, both being critical to proving one's masculinity: "There is always this huge party, you're hooking up with girls, and there are these great adventures. You get in little troublesome incidents, but you are having a good time with your buddies all while being in pursuit of having sex. It is what guys do" (October 2, 2012). Joe said, "The media says [men] should be having sex, and lots of it" (Joe, November 10, 2012). Having sex and lots of it contributed to the development of the impurity truth.

The impurity truth can be described in more depth using a structure of masculinity developed from the narratives of the millennial males. The four character themes explicated in chapter four—the role model, the ideal man, the player, and the virgin—can easily be placed in a hierarchical structure with the virgin at the base and the role model

at the top to establish a new and different structure of masculinity, one based on media messages of sex and sexuality during the adolescent experience. The structure is based on the millennial males' desire to model their personal lives on particular character themes the millennial males decoded from media messages. Each of the archetypes serves as a level in a hierarchy of the impurity truth, thus reinforcing the illegitimacy of virginity and the importance of losing it to be ideal.

The virgin's inexperience and social ineptness led the millennial males to easily oppose a desire to fulfill this character role. The millennial males' media examples provided an educational message that supported much of what their social circles were telling them: by being the virgin, you are at the bottom of the social totem pole. Even when a millennial male wanted to keep his virginity until marriage, he chose to lose it out of fear of being socially stigmatized. The player character oppressed the virgin for his sexual inexperience.

The player's over-confidence and sexual promiscuity were reasons why the millennial males did not want to be like the player. His mistreatment of women and inability to sustain a relationship were contributing factors for millennial males to refuse to affiliate themselves with this particular character. In the end, the player's sexual prowess, regardless of his treatment of women, positioned him higher in a hierarchy than the virgin in terms of sexual relations. The player and the virgin are extremes. A general sentiment of the millennial males is that you did not want to be the virgin not having sex and you did not want to be the player who uses sex as a way to oppress women. By not wanting to be either, the millennial males sought out both media and interpersonal examples of what they aspire to be. The mediated ideal is the ideal man character. The

ideal man is seen in a positive light—especially as a result of the millennial males' emphasis on family life and the treatment of women. Sexual relations are no longer used as a tool to oppress women and express one's dominance in an aggressive and over-confident manner, as seen with the player. The negative hegemonic qualities of the player were cast aside and rejected. The positive (and often similar) hegemonic qualities of the ideal man were often supported and aspired to.

According to the narratives of the millennial males, the ideal man can be seen as the media's attempt to provide a positive image of masculinity. The ideal man's strong heterosexual relationship, ability to support his family, good looks, and wealth are all qualities that the millennial males find desirable. Both of the millennial males that identified as homosexual strongly agreed that heterosexuality is important to maintain the ideal man status, especially in the media. One of the millennial males has never identified himself as heterosexual, the other recently began identifying as homosexual. His narrative expressed a fear of being homosexual because if he did not fulfill the role of the ideal man, he feared success would not come to him. William's inability to see himself in the mediated ideal man was difficult for him. "When your only role model is someone who gets made fun of, you kind of lose hope that you'll find someone like you. Then again, no one is really like me and I'm okay with that" (William, November 5, 2012). Curtis recently began openly identifying as homosexual, but he did not express similar difficulties to William. Instead, Curtis felt that the heterosexual characters gave him a reason to want to be a strong homosexual role model. "I'm a soccer player. I've always loved watching and playing. Cristiano Ronaldo is a beloved soccer player and he is known for being successful with women, but he carries himself really well. He also is

very successful in terms of his finances, too. I'd love to prove that you can be good looking and successful like Ronaldo, but also be a gay man" (October 12, 2012).

When looking closely at the narratives of the millennial males, especially those related to the role model character, it is clear that each of the millennial males still ascribed much of their role models' characteristics to a patriarchal system. Mitch's dad did the grilling and his mom did the baking (October 2, 2012). Derrick's dad worked and his mom stayed at home to raise the children, and continued to stay home even after Derrick and his sister left for college (December 5, 2012). Both of Eric's parents worked, but he said that "my dad was the man of the house, what he said is what we did" (November 16, 2012). Jimmy's dad played sports with Jimmy while his mom "was either in the kitchen cooking or [participating] in tea parties or dress up or something girly with my sisters" (October 24, 2012). The millennials said they modeled themselves most from their role model fathers. By attempting to model their masculinity on the masculinity of their role models, the millennial males are doing just as they are attempting to say they were not. The millennial males were contributing to a patriarchal society by following the masculine examples media and their fathers were setting for them, even though the millennial males claimed their skepticism of mediated messages. I do not argue that Connell's hierarchy should be completely disregarded. Rather, by considering the narratives of the millennial males, particularly that of the rhetorical vision of the impurity truth, Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity should consider adolescence as a critical stage of identity development—especially as it relates to sexuality and gender (Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1968).

Toward a New Masculinity: A Lifetime of Future Research

First and foremost, I am an educator. I believe in the importance and relevance of research, not just because it enhances our worldview and helps us understand our greater cultural and societal issues and narratives, but because it helps me to be a better teacher. For me, being able to be a teacher is one of the greatest gifts to me in the entire world. Being a researcher is a close second. Together, when theory meets practice, my future classrooms will be full of critical thinking and experiential learning. Even though I plan to leave the university setting for a brief while, I will never stop researching.

During senior year of high school, many students are asked to write a letter to themselves about their goals for the next five, ten, twenty, and thirty years. This end to my thesis is my attempt at returning to an adolescent tradition: planning out my future. Masculinity research, particularly in the areas of adolescent sexuality and the media, should continue in the world. I am a firm believer that to better understand the gender binary that exists in our American culture, research on masculinity cannot end. In the next five, ten, twenty years, while I am in a high school classroom working with adolescents, I do not plan on ending my research. What follows are considerations for future research that the results of this study prompt.

Research that examines the millennial generation further is needed to gain a better understanding of the educational messages they are decoding from the media about sex and masculinity. At the time of this study, nearly half of millennials were over the age of twenty. That leaves a significantly large group that has yet to be interviewed to create a more thorough oral history of the millennial generation of males. The responses from the young men in this oral history seemingly challenge cultural ideologies of masculinity of

the past generations, thus research into other generations should also be conducted,

allowing, down the line, a comparison of media and sex education for American males.

Would the sexual revolution of the late sixties and early seventies color the views of the

Baby Boomers? Would the cynicism and disaffection of Generation X change how they

encode or decode the mediated messages of their adolescence? This thesis also does not

go into depth about the homosexual male's experience with media, or the application of

the concept of the impurity truth to his life. Further research should be done to better

understand how the experience of the homosexual male engages with or challenges my

concept of the impurity truth. The millennial males interviewed in this thesis all come

from two parent households. No millennial male has divorced or separated parents. None

of the millennial males has had a parent die. As a result, future research could be done

exploring a larger variety of family constructions. The character of the role model may

change if the structure of the family were to be different. This is a lifetime of future

research I hope to be a part of, and will continue to be a part of as long as I am able.

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