

# Intersection of Masculinity and Faith in College Men's Identity: A Grounded Theory of Spiritual Crossroads

Author: Daniel Anthony Zepp

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# BOSTON COLLEGE

## Lynch School of Education

Department of  
Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Program  
Higher Education

### INTERSECTION OF MASCULINITY AND FAITH IN COLLEGE MEN'S IDENTITY: A GROUNDED THEORY OF SPIRITUAL CROSSROADS

Dissertation

by

DANIEL ANTHONY ZEPP

submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **INTERSECTION OF MASCULINITY AND FAITH**

#### **IN COLLEGE MEN'S IDENTITY:**

#### **A GROUNDED THEORY OF SPIRITUAL CROSSROADS**

Daniel A. Zepp

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán

The purpose of this study of college men of faith was to posit a theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity. This study was conducted from a social constructivist epistemological paradigm through an intersectionality social justice theoretical lens utilizing a constructivist grounded theory methodology. The following research questions guided this study: (a) how do masculinity and faith identities intersect in college men who actively participate in faith-based communities, and (b) how does this intersection inform college men's development? Two interviews were conducted with twelve Christian college men from Catholic and Protestant traditions at two large, four-year, highly residential, and high research activity universities in the Northeast with parallel offerings for faith-based communities.

The theory that emerged from this study was grounded in the participants' experiences at the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity through constant interaction with cultural expectations of them as men of faith. In order to meet these expectations at the intersection of masculinity and faith, participants described a meaning-making process of accountability and affirmation, where they negotiated masculinity and faith identities and were more likely to receive accountability and affirmation from their faith communities than a hypersexualized and very individualistic

masculine culture, which resulted in a greater conformance to faith and religious principles. Through this process, participants were able to create a more harmonious identity at the intersection of masculinity and faith. The theory of accountability and affirmation is present in three major themes of this study: (a) family and relationships; (b) career, calling, and vocation; and (c) sex and sexuality. The theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity has implications relevant to theory development, student affairs and campus ministry practice, and future research.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Mom and Dad. This dissertation is a reflection of your deep and abiding love. Mom, thank you for your unwavering support. I have vivid memories of the summer of 1995, when we spent countless days together reading aloud *Walk Two Moons*. It is through this experience and many more during my childhood that I began to cultivate a love of learning that has animated my academic career. You inspire me each and every day to pursue my dreams. I cherish our relationship. Dad, I know you are smiling down from heaven wearing your Boston College polo, so proud of the man I have become. Thank you for always being in my corner, whether it was in the classroom or on the sidelines. You were with me the first time I visited BC in the summer of 2006, encouraging me to use my athletic scholarship to gain admission to an academically rigorous university that would prepare me for life beyond football. Suffice to say, my decision to attend BC is still paying dividends today. The values of hard work and determination that you instilled in me growing up have proven critical to my success and persistence in this program. As I write this dedication, I can feel you giving me a hug and a kiss on the cheek saying, “I love you big boy.”

I also dedicate this dissertation to my fiancée. Avila, you have been by my side through the entire program. You believed in me when I doubted my abilities as an intellectual and as a scholar. You were patient with me when I struggled to accept myself as a work in progress. You prayed for and with me when I needed to be reminded that God’s hand was leading me. You have been my rock. You make me a better person and a better man of faith. I love you and I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with you.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Statement of Problem

While men as gendered beings has been the focus of a number of scholarly inquiries (e.g., Davis, 2002; Harper & Harris, 2010; Harris & Edwards, 2010; Kimmel, 2008), there has been scant examination of how masculinity intersects with other identities (e.g., race, class, sexual orientation, religion, ability), or what Harper and colleagues (2011) call the *man of multiple identities*. The Harper study posits that men are not simply gendered beings with one-dimensional needs and patterns of identity development. Consequently, researchers and practitioners should attend to more than gender identity developmental models alone to more fully understand the complexity of the male college student experience. Men's identities can be explored from both dominant (of the majority) and subordinate (oppressed) identities. However, a more subordinated identity approach needs to be attended to with the caution that it too could lead to additional stereotyping, conflict, and differential treatment on college campuses. For example, men who are not White, middle class, heterosexual, and Christian may experience one or more oppressed identities simultaneously, and therefore, need additional support in negotiating the multiple dimensions of their identity.

Boys and men have been socialized into a particular understanding of what it means to be a man from an early age, from boyhood through emerging adulthood, as lessons learned about masculinity and traditional male gender roles are produced and reinforced by societal power structures and institutions and through complex cultural interactions (Kimmel, Hearn, & Connell, 2004; Kimmel & Messner, 2012; Ludeman, 2004; Pleck, 1981; Pollack, 1998). Studies suggest that adolescent and college-aged men

tend to enact gender more traditionally and are more likely to experience gender role conflict, when compared to men across different points of the lifespan (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; O'Neil, 2008; O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986; Thompson & Pleck, 1995). In response to empirical trends, men and masculinities scholars posit that colleges and universities play an important role in shaping men's understanding of themselves as gendered beings. Scholars and practitioners of higher education have wrestled with a variety of negative student outcomes related to college men. For example, while in college, men study less, engage less in community service activities and career services, and spend more time playing sports and video games, drinking, and partying (Sax, 2008). College men also suffer from higher rates of depression, suicide, and alcohol consumption, and are more likely than women to be involved in campus judicial proceedings (Capraro, 2000; Courtenay, McCreary, & Merighi, 2002; Ludeman, 2004; Pollack, 1998). College men and masculinities scholars provide a gendered response to these issues by examining how a dominant, hegemonic notion of masculinity is not only patriarchal and sexist towards women but also have damaging effects on college men's development (Davis, 2002; Edwards, 2007; Harris III, 2006; Kimmel, 2008). By rejecting singular notions of masculinities and promoting the fluidity of masculinities, scholars and practitioners can provide developmental frameworks to mitigate the harmful effects of masculinity.

While negative characteristics associated with masculinity, as noted above, are often the focus of college student outcomes, higher education researchers are coming to understand in new ways that the dimensions of students' faith and spiritual identities are possibly correlated with a number of positive student outcomes. In a seven-year national

study of college students and their search for meaning and purpose, Astin and colleagues (2011) discovered that students who engaged in spirituality during their undergraduate years experienced enhanced outcomes in their academic performance, psychological well-being, leadership development, and satisfaction with college. They provide strong empirical support that spirituality deserves a central place in the academy, as 80% of entering freshman reported that they were interested in spirituality, while 48% of students reported that integrating spirituality into their lives was essential. The Astin study reflects an increased interest in questions about the place of spirituality and religion within the academy. There seems to be a growing acknowledgement that a liberal arts educational culture that does not attend to the spiritual development of students is incomplete (Chickering, Dalton, & Auerbach, 2006; Kazanjian & Laurence, 2000; G. D. Kuh & Gonyea, 2006; George D. Kuh & Gonyea, 2005; Lindholm, Millora, Schwartz, & Spinosa, 2011; Love & Talbot, 2000; Palmer, 2010; Parks, 2000).

Faith, spirituality, and religion are heavily gendered constructs (Barry, Nelson, Davarya, & Urry, 2010; Bryant, 2007; Buchko, 2004; Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2010). However, scholars of spirituality and religion in higher education have historically centered their research on identity development from a singular lens – faith development (e.g., Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). Major studies of spirituality and religion in adolescent and college-aged students (e.g., National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), UCLA Study of Spirituality in Higher Education) have largely neglected the role that gender may play in the process of faith development. The Pew religion study (Funk & Smith, 2012) is an exception to this rule, providing a glimpse into a discrepancy between genders in religious affiliation. The study found that, when compared to the general

public overall (48% men, 52% women), men are overrepresented in the religiously unaffiliated (56% men, 44% women) and atheists/agnostics (64% men, 36% women) (Funk & Smith, 2012). Moreover, women are overrepresented in nearly every religiously affiliated group when compared to the general public overall. The Pew study corroborates with quantitative studies on college students, as college men are less likely than college women to see the importance of religion to their development (Barry et al., 2010; Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2010).

In college, there are also significant sex/gender differences in attitudes, beliefs, practices, and values related to faith, spirituality, and religion (Bryant, 2007; Buchko, 2004). Prayer and meditation tend to be a more regular part of college women's daily lives, while college men tend to only pray during times of stress or need (Buchko, 2004). College women are also more likely than college men to have a strong spiritual and relational component to their religious faith (Buchko, 2004). Likewise, Bryant (2007) found that peer groups have stronger effect on college women's spirituality than college men's spirituality. Despite empirical support for sex/gender differences in faith, spirituality, and religion, no study has specifically examined the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men through a sociological lens.

Definitions of faith and faith development also seem to suggest some tensions in gendered realities for young adult men. For example, Parks (2000) describes faith as a meaning-making process in the development of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in one's life. She suggests that faith development requires a capacity for reflection, imagination, commitment, dependence on others, and openness to mentorship. Parks posits that persons of faith fundamentally orient their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors

towards relationships and the creation of a broader, more inclusive community.

However, from a gendered perspective, these notions are antithetical to dominant, hegemonic notions of masculinity by which boys and men are socialized, such as fear of femininity, restrictive emotionality, insubordination, individualism, competition, power, success, domination, and aggression (Connell, 2005; Kimmel & Messner, 2012).

On a macro level, a cursory view of organized religions, including their founding patriarchs, teachings, institutional leadership, attendance and participation, suggest some gendered realities and tensions. For example, the three major monotheistic world religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are borne out of a patriarchal worldview, with major/salvific figures universally represented as men (i.e., Abraham, Joseph, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus Christ, and Muhammad). In American Christian communities (Protestant and Catholic), the religious leadership (clergy) is largely dominated by men (Chaves, Anderson, & Byassee, 2009; Zikmund, 1998), while women are more represented in the laity and in church participation and attendance (Funk & Smith, 2012; Gallup, 2010). The central tenets of Christian discipleship also present some gendered tensions for Christian men. For example, Christians are called to love God and neighbor (Matthew 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-34) and to turn the other cheek, love enemies, offer the shirt off of one's back, carry someone else's baggage an extra mile, and to give to the one who asks (Matthew 5:38-42; Luke 6:27-31). Christian tenets of love, subordination (e.g., through service, charitable acts, and relationships to others and God), nonresistance and nonviolence appear to be in direct contradiction with hegemonic notions of masculinity that encourage power, domination, violence, aggression, insubordination, competition, and individualism (Connell, 2005; Kimmel & Messner, 2012).

The college and university as a microcosm of broader social dynamics is a rich setting in which to ask questions of faith, spirituality, and religion in college men for three primary reasons: (a) the college environment is a multi-faceted community including multiple mentoring communities, where students have the permission and space to ask and reflect with support and guidance upon big questions and as a consequence imagine themselves in new and possibly previously unexplored ways (Parks, 2000); (b) these questions are emerging organically from students about the college student experience – as the UCLA Spirituality Study suggests, students are yearning to engage these questions (Astin et al., 2011); and (c) adolescent and college-aged men tend to enact gender more traditionally and are more likely to experience gender role conflict, when compared to men across different points of the lifespan (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; O’Neil, 2008; O’Neil et al., 1986; Thompson & Pleck, 1995).

This study examines masculinity and faith as developmental characteristics of the human experience, in the context of a college and university environment. This study of college men of faith sought to posit a theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith and understand how this intersection informs college men’s identity development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Intersectionality & Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity**

Intersectionality explores the relationship between personal identity, social identity, and interlocking systems of power and oppression (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). This includes an analysis of intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup relationships – these are all intricately woven, as one cannot be separately



from the other (Bowleg, 2008). In other words, it is impossible to separate “micro” identities and “macro” identities. Power and oppression are not experienced unilaterally but bilaterally, as identity construction is mutually constitutive – a constant interaction between internal and external influences of privilege and marginalization. Intersectionality recognizes the social construction of identity, as there is a fluidity of identities and a fluidity of individual identity dimensions.

A distinct yet overlapping concept is *multiple identities*, which examines intersections of identity through the conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The MMDI describes four different aspects of an individual’s identity: the core, surrounding identity dimensions, intersecting rings, and contextual influences. The core identity is one’s personal identity, including personal attributes and characteristics. It is more complex and less visible than surrounding identity dimensions, and therefore, is less susceptible to external and contextual influences. The core is surrounded by various social identities (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religious, etc.), each represented by a dot. True to the work of Deaux (1993), the way in which one identifies personally is informed by their social identities. In the MMDI, social identities vary in distance from the core depending on the salience of that particular identity dimension.

In order to more adequately reflect the concept of *intersectionality*, Jones and Abes (2013) recently created the Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (IMMDI). The IMMDI incorporates a micro and macro analysis, using the initial MMDI (Jones & McEwen, 2000) at the individual level and intersecting systems of power (sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, etc.) at the macro level. Between the micro and

macro levels is the RMMDI filter (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007), which demonstrates how meaning-making influences experiences and how experiences influence meaning-making. This comprehensive understanding of intersectionality includes all systems of power, just and unjust, and their cumulative impact on identity construction at the micro level. Since the IMMDI is a relatively new model, it has not yet been applied to empirical research.

Consequently, in this study, intersectionality and multiple identities is operationalized through an aspect of the Intersectional Model of Multiple Identities (Jones & Abes, 2013), where masculinity and faith identities represent two intersecting rings around the initial MMDI (Jones & McEwen, 2000), surrounded by the meaning-making filter (Abes et al., 2007) and intersecting systems of power and oppression.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) How do masculinity and faith identities intersect in college men who actively participate in faith-based communities?
- 2) How does this intersection inform college men's development?

### **Review of Literature**

Over the past few decades, literature on college men and masculinities and the faith of college students have received increased scholarly attention. However, little attention has been paid to how these emerging areas of research can inform, shape, and challenge one another. In short, research on spirituality and faith needs a more gendered perspective, while research on men and masculinities needs to more deeply consider the spiritual and religious dimensions of college men.

The relationship of faith identity and other identity dimensions has largely focused on faith and race (Dancy, 2010; Patton & McClure, 2009; Stewart & Lozano, 2009) and faith and sexuality (Abes, 2011; Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005). These studies are mostly qualitative and exploratory, as they often understand faith as an independent and isolated identity dimension. Relatively few studies have observed faith identity using intersectionality, identity integration, or identity interaction as a theoretical framework (Abes, 2011; Love et al., 2005; Patton & McClure, 2009). To date, Abes (2011) is the only study to consider both intersectionality and faith identity along with other identity dimensions, in connecting Jewish identity to social identities (race and social class) and systems of oppression (anti-Semitism and racism).

Men and masculinities scholars have long called for an understanding of *multiple masculinities* (Connell, 2005; Kimmel & Messner, 2012). That is, masculinity related to other identities such as race, class, sexual orientation, and, in the case of this study, the faith identity of college men. Harper and colleagues (2011) recently punctuated this argument through a case study of a college man, Tyson, whose college experience was characterized by the need to lead with and perform different social identities, depending on tensions that arose in multiple contexts and situations. Harper and colleagues called for further research on men of multiple identities, particularly those who encounter harmful stereotypes due to the multiplicity of their identities.

The relationship of masculinity and other identity dimensions has largely focused on masculinity and race (Dancy, 2012; Harper, 2004, 2006). There exists minimal scholarship considering the relationship between masculinity and disability (Gerschick, 2011), masculinity and class (Reed, 2011), and queer masculinities (Berila, 2011; Dilley,

2002). Masculinity and sexuality are rarely studied in isolation (Rhoads, 1997), as sexuality is often associated with race (Harper et al., 2011).

The relationship between masculinity and faith is a relatively recent phenomenon in empirical literature. Most literature has focused more heavily on faith identity rather than masculinity (e.g., Herndon, 2003; Ward & Cook, 2011). A more balanced account has been provided over the past few years with two grounded theory studies on the interrelatedness of masculinity and spirituality (Longwood, Schipper, & Culbertson, 2011; Wilcox Elliott, 2012). These two studies are limited as they both treat masculinity and spirituality as discrete identity dimensions, rather than looking at them with a complexity of individual and social identities as suggested in intersectionality research. These studies do not account for race, class, and other privileged and/or oppressed social identities in their research design, while also ignoring religious oppression and marginalized faith identities in their models. Finally, these studies do not account for the interaction between multiple identities and interlocking systems of power and oppression as suggested in intersectionality research.

### **Research Design**

This grounded theory study of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity development is from a constructivist epistemological paradigm. Grounded theory was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and has since been refined to reflect a constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2006). While Glaser and Strauss assumed a strict objectivity on the part of the researchers, Charmaz's revision allows researchers to be transparent and reflexive about the bias and assumptions they bring to the inquiry.

Given the nature of the research, I will operationalize *masculinity* and *faith* in the following sections.

### **Faith**

Faith is a meaning-making process over the lifespan, in the development of meaning, purpose and fulfillment in one's life (Parks, 2000). Parks acknowledges that faith, for many, is largely associated or equivalent with religion and religious belief. However, she describes faith as much broader than religious belief as "the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience" (p. 7). Therefore, faith is an inclusive term that includes both the religiously affiliated and, in some cases, the religiously unaffiliated. For example, a person of faith may have a strong spiritual identity, but may not be affiliated with a particular religion.

Consequently, in this study, *faith* is understood in terms of one's faith identity from a developmental perspective, as the degree to which one comes to understand, identify with, and/or ascribe to aspects of spirituality and religion (e.g., spiritual identity, religious affiliation, practices, beliefs). For example, Harper and colleagues (Harper et al., 2011) tell the story of Tyson, who has a salient spiritual identity, is affiliated with Christianity, yet does not attend local churches and practices his faith in a deeply private and personal manner (prayer and personal devotions), partly due to conflicting beliefs with local church teachings and viewpoints on homosexuality. This study operationalizes faith in a manner that is inclusive of Tyson's faith and spirituality, recognizing that Tyson's religion and religious identity is shaping the way he conceptualizes and practices his faith, as Christianity and its teachings may enhance, conflict, and/or detract from his

experience. I was sensitive to how religious identity shapes faith identity both positively and negatively in this study, particularly with gay men and men of color.

### **Masculinity**

Masculinity is a socially constructed concept that informs the ways that men should act, think, and feel. As gendered beings, boys and men are socialized into dominant masculine behaviors and norms through complex social interactions with culture, such as experiences, events, and actions (Kimmel & Messner, 2012; Weber, 1998). As a result, men learn and adopt the gender scripts for society's definition of what it means to be a man (Kimmel & Aronson, 2004). *Masculinity* is overlapping yet distinct from men's gender identity, which is the sense of oneself as a male. An individual is *cisgender* when their gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth, and an individual is *transgender* when their gender identity does not match their sex assigned at birth. While gender identity was not the focus of this study, it was one of several social group identities considered in the maximum variation sampling strategy.

Consequently, in this study, *masculinity* will be understood as the degree to which men come to understand, identify with, and/or ascribe to traditional notions of masculinity (i.e., actions, thoughts, feelings). This study is concerned with gender socialization, gender role conflict, and gender norms.

### **Identifying Participants**

In order to purposefully select participants for this study, I employed a combination of intensity, maximum variation, and theoretical sampling. Intensity sampling identifies information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but are not unusual or extreme cases (Patton, 2002). I sought Christian men from Catholic

and Protestant traditions who participated in nationally recognized faith-based organizations with college chapters in the Northeast, including Catholic student centers (e.g., Newman Connection) and interdenominational Christian fellowships (e.g., InterVarsity and Cru). College men from these faith-based organizations richly identified with the phenomenon of interest, the intersection of masculinity and faith, given their self-selection into the groups as well as their gender socialization as boys and men. The inclusion of men from various Christian denominations sought to ensure the inclusion of privileged masculinities (e.g., White, affluent, athletic, and heterosexual, and cisgender) and marginalized masculinities (e.g., non-White, working class, physically disabled, gay, feminine, and transgender).

In order to solicit participants, I visited faith-based organizations at two institutions in the Northeast with similar institutional profiles and levels of support for religious belief and faith development. Organizational leaders (chaplains, campus representative, and executive board) notified members of the study by electronic mail. Interested participants were asked to complete a participant profile form with demographic information related to their faith background, social group identities, and college experiences. Of the potential participants, 38 expressed interest in the study by submitting a participant profile form. Of the 38 interested participants, I selected an initial group of twelve participants (six participants from each institution) using maximum variation sampling to explore college men at intersection of masculinity and faith from a variety of Christian faith backgrounds, social group identities, and college experiences. Theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014) was achieved after eight participants when participants repeated themes and subthemes related

to family and relationships; careers, callings, and vocations; and sex and sexuality. The remaining four participants were utilized to add contradiction, variation, breadth, and depth to the categories and themes emerging from the data. For example, the remaining four participants helped me unpack and clarify subthemes of careerism and pre-professionalism and regretted sexual acts (e.g., sex, hook-ups, masturbation, pornography).

Given the fact that there are no firm guidelines for sample size in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002), the rationale for the initial group of twelve participants is appropriate given the research questions, methodology, and number of institutions in the study. Grounded theory is an emergent method, as it employs a theoretical sampling strategy (Charmaz, 2008). This allowed me to select a small initial sample (Patton, 2002) and then, if necessary, add participants beyond the initial group until the data emerging from the participants reached a level of saturation (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014) or redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since my sampling procedures outline a specific set of criteria (self-identified men who are members of a practicing faith-based organization), additional participants were not necessary. Since saturation and redundancy were achieved with the initial sample (after eight participants), rather than select additional participants, I used the final four participants to add depth, breadth, contradiction, and variation to the concepts, categories, and themes emerging from the data.

### **Data Collection: Interview Procedure**

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, which allowed participants time to reflect on the intersection of masculinity and faith between



interviews. The first interview was broken up into two halves: the first half focused on faith, while the second half focused on masculinity. This interview lasted approximately an hour a half, broken down into two forty-five minutes sections. Following the first interview, each participant was instructed to reflect on how masculinity and faith come together, if at all. This reflection prepared them for the second interview, which focused on the intersection of masculinity and faith. The second interview lasted approximately an hour.

The first half of the first interview focused on faith and asked questions about how participants have come to understand their faith and what it means to have faith. I asked participants to describe and provide examples of what it means to be a person of faith and to what degree they internalize and/or ascribe to society's definitions. I also asked participants to describe contextual influences (i.e., people and situations) that have helped to shape their faith identity. This interview protocol was guided by faith development theory (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000) and literature in the field of spirituality and religion in higher education.

The second half of the first interview focused on masculinity and asked questions about how participants have come to understand their masculinity what it means to man. I asked participants to define and provide examples of what it means to be a man and to what degree they internalize and/or ascribe to society's definitions. I also asked participants to describe contextual influences (i.e., people and situations) that have helped to shape their masculinity. This interview protocol was guided by men's gender identity development theory (Harris & Edwards, 2010) and literature in the field of college men and masculinities.

The second interview examined the intersection of masculinity and faith, building on themes that emerged from the first interview. I asked questions that had the participant talk about the intersection of masculinity and faith; specifically, their perceptions of how these two identity facets interact, inform, construct, and come into conflict with one another. This interview protocol was guided by literature related to intersectionality and student development theory, specifically the Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & Abes, 2013).

In order to member check and triangulate the theory that emerged from the data, I conducted focus group feedback sessions at each institution. All twelve participants attended the optional focus group, which demonstrated their strong interest and engagement in the topic itself, the experiences of other eleven participants, and the overall outcomes of the study. The focus groups served as an opportunity to gather feedback from the participants on whether the initial themes of the study were true to their experience.

### **Data Analysis**

Utilizing the interview transcriptions, data were analyzed using initial, focused, axial, and theoretical/selective coding consistent with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). At the initial coding stage, I engaged in line-by-line coding, separating data into categories and processes, by deconstructing and analyzing events, actions, and experiences, specifically how and why they came to be and what constituted them (Charmaz, 2014). At the focused coding stage, I studied and assessed the analytic value of initial codes by comparing codes with other codes, in order to determine their adequacy and conceptual strength (Charmaz, 2014). At the axial coding stage, I linked

these categories to *causal conditions*, *intervening conditions*, and *consequences* of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). From these connections, I formed initial *theoretical propositions* (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998), which are hypotheses that suggest relationships between conditions, phenomena, and corresponding influences (Creswell, 2013). At the theoretical/selective stage, I identified the central phenomenon that emerged from the data that describes the intersection of masculinity and faith. Through the constant comparative process (Dey, 1993), I determined that theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014) had been reached, meaning that no new themes or categories emerged from the data. Throughout data collection and analysis, I engaged in journaling and memo writing (Charmaz, 2014), which helped me be more reflexive about the research process and track the process of data analysis and interpretation.

### **Limitations**

There are several key limitations that need to be acknowledged in this study. First, given the constructivist paradigm of this study, the findings are context-specific, as participants were portrayed in their unique social contexts. This study was conducted across two campuses with a small number of participants. Despite the fact that these campuses have different approaches to faith-based initiatives, the sample is by no means representative of all college campuses and environments. In addition, this study sought to examine the small number of participants in depth, not to develop a theory that is generalizable to all college men.

Second, selection bias is also a limitation of this study, as the participants in this study self-selected into this study and self-selected into their respective faith-based

communities and organizations outlined in the sampling procedures. Given the fact that organizational leaders notified potential participants of the study by personal electronic mail, the 38 interested participants were likely to be men who frequented their offices, programs, and/or classrooms. Consequently, there may have been other men with differing perspectives on the intersection of masculinity and faith that may not have been invited to participate. This exclusion may have potentially impacted the findings of this study.

Finally, a limitation of any qualitative research is the interpretation of participant experiences. As a key instrument in qualitative research and grounded theory methodology (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002), my subjective role as a researcher undoubtedly impacted the way I conducted and interpreted the research, specifically the data collection, analysis, and outcomes of this study. Another researcher's interpretations and conclusions of the same study would likely differ in some respects. There would also likely be differing outcomes with another theoretical perspective.

### **Significance**

The grounded theory that results from this study sought to make theoretical and practical contributions to literature on intersectionality and multiple identities, men and masculinities, and spirituality and religion in higher education. The theoretical framework of intersectionality provides limitless possibilities for the development and formation of all college students, not simply men. The study of higher education could gain from an intersectional approach, moving beyond a study of multiple identities to a critique of social stratification. Understanding how societal power structures operate on the local level at colleges and universities can serve faculty and administrators to

implement policies and programmatic initiatives that are reflective of how privilege and oppression are experienced simultaneously across multiple identities.

This was the first study to utilize intersectionality as a theoretical framework to examine gender (masculinity) and faith, which represent two intersecting rings of the MMDI (Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & McEwen, 2000). In men and masculinities literature, this study sought to build an understanding of men of multiple identities (Harper et al., 2011), moving beyond an analysis of men as simply gendered beings. In spirituality and religion literature, this study sought to address knowledge gaps in literature related to college men of faith by examining faith development through a gendered lens.

A theoretical understanding of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men grounded in the participants' experience also sought to inform developmental theories related to college men, specifically those related to gender identity development (Edwards, 2007; Harris III, 2006) and faith development (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). In turn, as educators provide gender-specific educational interventions (programs, resources, curricula) for college men, they be more apt to help these students navigate, reconcile, and negotiate the multiple dimensions of their identity (Harper et al., 2011).

In terms of policy and practice, this intersectionality study sought to debunk assumptions that college men are a monolithic group (Harper & Harris, 2010). When treated as such, college men are reduced to stereotypes of power and success in the academy, rendering policy and programmatic initiatives unnecessary and superfluous. Intersectionality tells us that college men are made up of multiple social identities that are simultaneously privileged and oppressed depending on social context and location. Thus,

the success of college men will differ across various social identities and groups. This intersectionality study reminds policymakers and practitioners that no single approach or initiative will remedy the issues plaguing college men.

Persons of faith are also not a monolithic group. However, policymakers and practitioners have often understood faith from a unidimensional perspective, viewing faith in isolation from other social identities. Consequently, policy and practice has often only worked to benefit those who come from multiple dominant social identities (i.e., White Christian heterosexual men), while those from socially oppressed identities and groups, including non-Christian perspectives, have been marginalized in policies and programmatic initiatives. On the other hand, similar to male gender privilege, there is an erroneous assumption that all Christians, especially Christian men, derive substantial benefits from their privileged religious background, and therefore, will have few issues navigating the institutional structure. This intersectionality study helps policymakers and practitioners resist the temptation to oversimplify, make assumptions, and stereotype the experiences of persons of faith. This study also guides policymakers and practitioners to think about how faith intersects with other social identities, particularly how socially oppressed identities and groups experience and reconcile their faith identity with other social identities.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to posit a theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in identity development of college men from a constructivist epistemological paradigm and intersectionality theoretical perspective. The grounded theory that emerged from this study will potentially make contributions to literature related to

intersectionality, multiple identities, men and masculinities, and spirituality and religion in higher education. The emerging theory also sought to add nuance to developmental theories related to college men, which will help to address the myriad of issues facing college men.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Overview

This review of literature examines scholarly research on the central theoretical framework for this study, intersectionality, connecting this critical theory to student development literature, in particular, the relationship between interlocking systems of power and oppression and multiple, intersecting social identities. Consistent with intersectionality theory and the Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (IMMDI) (Jones & Abes, 2013), this review begins with a macro level analysis of intersecting systems of power and oppression and concludes with a micro level analysis of masculinity and faith, which represent two intersecting rings in the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Given the lack of research on the intersection of masculinity and faith, this review investigates men's gender identity (masculinity) and faith identity as independent and discrete identity dimensions. Given the single-identity assumptions of literature related to masculinity and faith, these identity facets are separated into two parallel sections. Masculinity and faith are traced from their unidimensional roots to their contemporary applications with multidimensional and intersectional approaches.

The review then moves into an analysis of literature on the interrelatedness of masculinity and faith, as these two identity facets have yet to be examined with the theoretical perspective of intersectionality. Finally, this review concludes with a summary and synthesis of relevant literature.

### Intersectionality Theory

Crenshaw (1989) coined the concept of *intersectionality* as a Black feminist



critique of antidiscrimination laws, which treated race and gender as discrete categories. This separation of racism and sexism had detrimental effects on Black women, who were experiencing multiple oppressions, and thus, their concerns were relegated to the periphery. Crenshaw (1991) later extended her argument to specific case law, citing how violence against Black women was not only shaped by gender but also race and class. Crenshaw not only called for the Black liberation movement to include analysis of sexism and patriarchy but also challenged the feminist movement to incorporate race in order to reflect the experiential realities of non-White women. In essence, she was calling for a coalition to be formed between the Black liberation movement and the feminist movement. While connecting social groups, Crenshaw also sharply criticized the seemingly bifurcated identity of Black women in the public sphere, as she highlighted “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245).

Collins (1990) extended the work of Crenshaw by incorporating intersectionality into Black feminist thought. She argued that multiple oppressions work together in creating injustice, and that narrowly focusing on a single oppression in isolation was far too reductionist. Power structures often reappear across different forms of oppression, as multiple identities may be subordinated at once. Collins organized these intersecting identities and multiple oppressions into what she called the *matrix of domination*. She posits that multiple identities, like multiple oppressions, are inseparable. Therefore, to separate or dichotomize identity dimensions is fundamentally flawed. The *matrix of domination* represented a paradigmatic shift in the way scholars think about oppression and oppressive systems – from a single axis of oppression to multiple axes of oppression.

Intersectionality holds that categories of difference are interrelated and interacting simultaneously at individual, group, and systemic levels. In order to comprehend the experience of an individual, intersectionality examines the degree to which these identities are dominant or subordinate, which determines an individual's social position. An individual navigates the social hierarchy of society from this social position of privilege and/or oppression.

### **Intersectionality & Identity**

Intersectionality has evolved from its historical roots into a sociological framework for empirical research. Reynolds and Pope (1991) were the first to create a developmental model that incorporated intersectionality theory, called the multidimensional identity model (MIM). This MIM highlights four possible options for identity resolution for members of more than one oppressed group: (a) identify with one aspect of self in a passive manner (society assigned-passive acceptance); (b) identify with one aspect of self in an active manner (conscious identification); (c) identify with multiple aspects of self in a segmented fashion; or (d) identify with combined aspects of self (identity intersection). Identity construction is fluid and dynamic, a continual process of evolution towards a more integrated and coherent sense of self. Identity construction is a passive/active and conscious/subconscious process, a constant dialogue between self and society.

Deaux (1993) observed that a majority of literature had integrated social settings and the importance of context, but had not yet linked personal and social identity. She argued that personal identity and social identity are “fundamentally interrelated” (p. 5). Personal identity, including an individual's multiple identities, is uniquely informed by

an individual's membership in a particular social group. The way individuals perceive themselves and the way others perceive them, directly impacts the construction of personal identity. In other words, one's self-concept is, in part, a derivative of one's perceived membership in a particular social group.

Bowleg (2008) distinguished between additive and intersectional approaches to empirical research, as intersectionality is commonly misunderstood, and therefore, applied incorrectly in contemporary literature. In her work *Black + Lesbian + Woman ≠ Black Lesbian Woman*, Bowleg posited that social identities and inequalities are interdependent (intersectional approach), not mutually exclusive (additive approach). Therefore, a discrete examination is incomplete, as there is a unique experience conferred upon a Black lesbian woman that is qualitatively different than a Black woman or a lesbian woman.

As intersectionality research has evolved from womanist conceptions to an understanding of multiple personal and social identities as well as systems of power and inequality, *intersectionality* has been redefined as “the multidimensional ways people experience life—how people see themselves and how they are treated by others” (Dill & Kohlman, 2012, p. 164). Intersectionality has been expanded to include how systems of power and oppression affect not simply oppressed identities but all identities, including privileged identities. Intersectionality recognizes the danger of an anti-oppression movement narrowly focusing on a social group (race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.) in isolation, as the movement may unintentionally (or intentionally) further marginalize other social groups. Strictly speaking, equality should never be a zero-sum game.

Intersectionality explores the relationship between personal identity, social identity, and interlocking systems of power and oppression. This includes an analysis of intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup relationships – these are all intricately woven, as one cannot be separately from the other. In other words, it is impossible to separate “micro” identities and “macro” identities. Power and oppression are not experienced unilaterally but bilaterally, as identity construction is mutually constitutive – a constant interaction between internal and external influences of privilege and oppression.

### **Intersectionality & Student Development Theory**

The concept of *intersectionality* has presented multiple challenges to the universal claims of developmental theories, mainly because more theories tended to focus on discrete identity dimensions such as race, gender, faith, and sexual orientation. Through the mid-1990’s, student development theorists had not yet addressed intersectionality in its body of literature.

Jones (1995) was the first to explore intersecting identities, in an unpublished doctoral dissertation on the multiple dimensions of identity development of ten undergraduate women. Jones utilized grounded theory methodology to develop *The Prism of Privilege and Difference*, which depicts how privilege and difference interact with various identity dimensions. The prism acts as a lens, representing the nexus of an individual’s inner characteristics and how others perceive those characteristics (or identities). This model depicts a highly variable and complex interaction between individuals and their surroundings (people and structures of power). While there were some common “threads” among the participants, the “fabric” of their identities remained

highly dependent on their interaction with contextual influences. Therefore, multiple dimensions of identity must be understood in terms of multiple oppressions as well as multiple privileges.

In light of Jones' (1995) work, McEwen (1996) called for student development theorists to move beyond discrete identity dimensions, into an understanding as to how these identities interact with one another. She posits that by considering the relative salience of each identity dimension in light of contextual influences, student affairs professionals may glean insights into the complexity of the college student experience.

Grounded in the work of Reynolds and Pope (1991) and Deaux (1993), Jones and McEwen (2000) created a conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI), which provided a more complex framework for intersectionality research in higher education (see Figure 1 below). The MMDI describes four different aspects of an individual's identity: the core, surrounding identity dimensions, intersecting rings, and contextual influences. The core identity is described as an "inner identity," which includes "valued personal attributes and characteristics" (Jones, 1997, p. 383). The core identity (one's personal identity) is more complex and less visible than surrounding identity dimensions, and therefore, is less susceptible to external and contextual influences. The core is surrounded by various social identities (race, gender, sexual orientation, religious, etc.), each represented by a dot. True to the work of Deaux (1993), the way in which one identifies personally is informed by their social identities. In the MMDI, social identities vary in distance from the core depending on the salience of that particular identity dimension. For example, college men each possess a gender identity, however, it varies to what extent they may identify personally with masculinity and

dominant masculine norms. True to the work of Reynolds and Pope (1991), while challenging gendered norms is an active process, an acceptance of norms may be passive or active. These factors may have a direct impact on the salience of gender identity in college men.

**Figure 1**

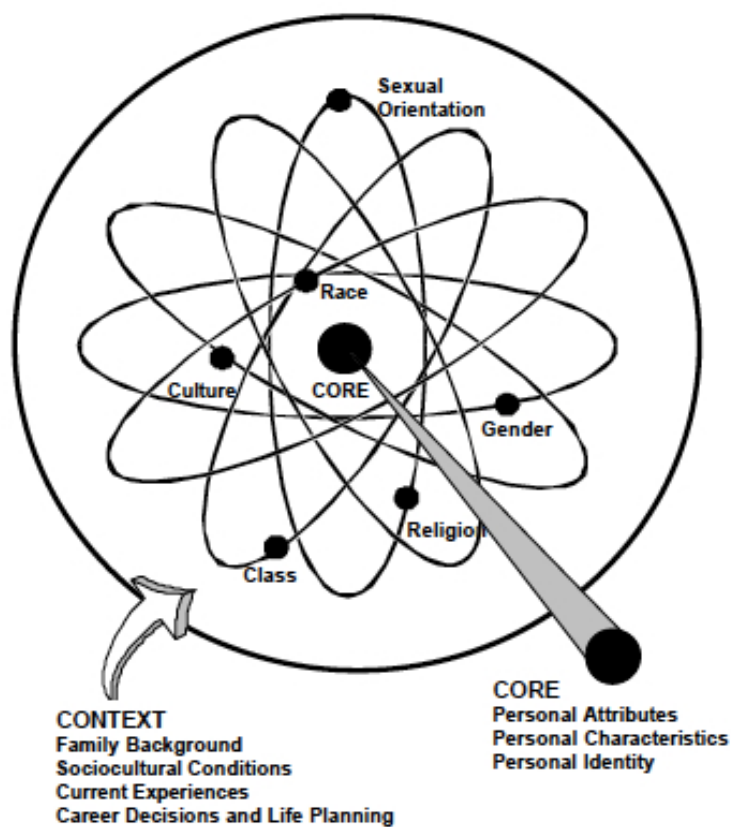


FIGURE 1.  
Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

### **Model of Multiple Dimension of Identity (MMDI)**

(Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 409)

The MMDI also includes intersecting rings, which depict how more than one identity dimension can be engaged at a time, with different degrees of salience. The intersecting rings suggest that “no one dimension may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions” (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 410). While not directly cited in their work, the rings of the MMDI reflect the intersecting qualities of the *matrix of domination* (Collins, 1990), as identities are experienced simultaneously. The fourth component of the MMDI is contextual influences, which are encapsulated by one large circle around the model. Contextual influences such as family background, sociocultural conditions, and life experiences depict how identities are shaped internally as well as externally. Jones and McEwen situated contextual influences into the framework of privilege and difference. When participants in their study experienced difference, identity was formed. Conversely, when participants did not experience difference, they were more likely to defer their responses to others’ experiences of difference. In short, experience and lack of experience of privilege and difference directly impacts the relative salience and intersecting nature of identity dimensions. The findings of Jones and McEwen’s study suggest that beneficiaries of privilege (such as men and Christians) are decidedly less reflective about their experience, and therefore, often lack discursive knowledge of their privileged identities. These findings echo the theory of structuration (Giddens, 1979) in its description of the privileged populations and power structures, who have agency and resources but perpetuate inequality through a lack of consciousness.

The MMDI provides a comprehensive snapshot of an individual’s identity dimensions. This model is time and context bound, as identities may mean different

things to different people in different places. The MMDI builds on previous frameworks, in its illustration of contextual influences, which impact the salience of each identity dimension. The MMDI is limited in that it is only a developmental snapshot – it does not portray a developmental process.

Abes and colleagues (2007) expand on the contextual influences of the MMDI in creating a reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity (RMMDI). The RMMDI incorporates a meaning-making filter into the previous model, describing how an individual may deflect or absorb contextual influences, depending of their degree of cognitive complexity. Baxter Magolda's (2004) theory of self-authorship outlines three levels of cognitive complexity: formulaic, transitional, and foundational. At a formulaic level, an individual has little to no filter, and therefore, is more susceptible to external definitions of social statuses. At a transitional level, an individual has a partial filter in questioning the viability of external formulas and definitions. At a foundational level, an individual has a strong filter – an internally defined sense of self that is less susceptible to external definitions of social statuses.

The reconceptualized model also attempts to account for the postmodern perspective of queer theory, which suggests that identities are constantly in a state of movement (Talburt, 2000). Queer theory argues against a static and fixed nature of identity dimensions, denying the presence of a “core” identity. This critique calls into question not only the MMDI model, but also a vast majority of student development theories, which often start from a modernist, Eriksonian (1950, 1968) understanding of identity. In order to incorporate queer theory, Abes and colleagues reframe their understanding of a core identity using Butler's (1997) understanding of identity as



performative. Butler argues that the repetition of behavior and activity creates one's identity. This repeated enactment "creates a sense of self, including a core sense of personal values, however fluid that sense of self might be" (Abes et al., 2007, p. 15).

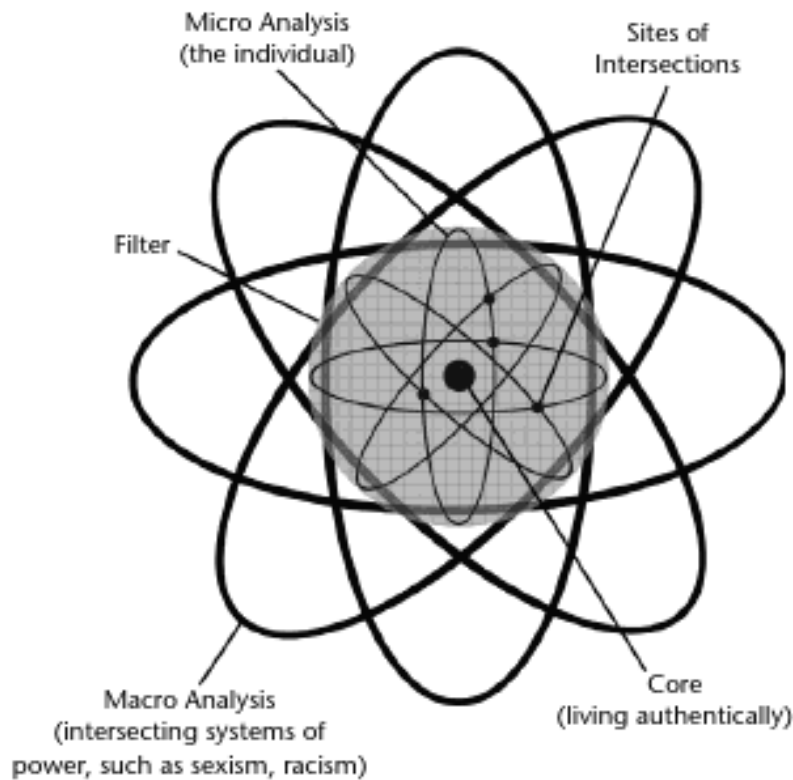
While the MMDI and reconceptualized MMDI have considered multiple, intersecting identities, it is important to note that these models are not true to the concept of *intersectionality*. Surprisingly, the work of Crenshaw (1989, 1991) is not cited in either model. In acknowledging social identities and contextual influences, it is important to not reduce the MMDI and the reconceptualized MMDI to models of "complex" individuals. The concept of *intersectionality* is not simply about personal identity but also a robust examination of the relationship between personal identity, social identity, and interlocking systems of power and oppression.

This critique also highlights a large deficiency in student development literature, as few theories have integrated systems of power and oppression into an analysis of identity formation (e.g., D'Augelli, 1994; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). As Abes and colleagues (2007) noted, student development theorists have been notoriously slow in considering relationships between societal power structures and the fluidity of identities. More recently, Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009) called upon student development theorists to study identity using the notion of intersectionality, which engenders a contextual understanding of intersecting personal and social identities, including interacting power structures in society.

Since this call, intersectionality research has been conducted primarily through autoethnography studies (Drechsler Sharp, Riera, & Jones, 2012; Jones, 2009; Jones, Kim, & Skendall, 2012), where researchers have reflected on their personal narratives

through the lens of intersectionality. Findings suggest that identity construction is heavily influenced by external contexts, requiring both identity negotiation and the need to manage perceptions. Jones (2009) called for more research examining the reciprocal negotiation of the internal and external influences of identity related to performance, addressing the central role of context in the lives of college students.

In order to more adequately reflect the concept of *intersectionality*, Jones & Abes (2013) recently created the Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (IMMDI) (see Figure 2 below). The IMMDI has both a micro (individual) and macro (systems) level of analysis. The micro level includes the MMDI and the reconceptualized MMDI. The macro level includes rings illustrating intersecting systems of power such as sexism, racism, heterosexism, etc. Between the micro and macro levels is the RMMDI filter, which demonstrates how meaning-making influences experiences and how experiences influence meaning-making. A limitation of this model is the macro analysis, which only accounts for oppressive systems. A comprehensive understanding of *intersectionality* must include an analysis of all systems of power, just and unjust, and their cumulative impact on identity construction at the micro level. Since the IMMDI is a relatively new model, it has not yet been applied to empirical research.

**Figure 2**

### **Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (IMMDI)**

(Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 161)

Torres and colleagues (2009) also acknowledge the methodological challenges to intersectionality research, namely implicit data, given the fact that most study participants are unable to fully articulate their intersecting identities. A researcher maintains a unique authority, with a responsibility to accurately depict the lived experience of the participants. The perspective of the researcher is inherently limited, and therefore, Torres and colleagues suggest acknowledging researcher positionality, member checking with participants, and additional measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Despite some methodological concerns, intersectionality is a critical addition to student

development literature, as it not only challenges foundational theories, but also holds much promise in building a more complex understanding of the whole student, in light of contextual influences and systemic oppression.

It is important to note that women have authored nearly all intersectionality research, using exclusively or predominantly female samples. Research has focused on the multiple intersecting identities of women (Jones, 1997), lesbian women (Abes, 2012; Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes & Kasch, 2007), Jewish lesbian women (Abes, 2011), and Black lesbian women (Patton & Simmons, 2008). The MMDI (Jones & McEwen, 2000) was derived from a study of ten college women (Jones, 1997) and was later reconceptualized into the RMMDI using ten participants, eight self-identified women and two self-identified androgenous. To date, there are only three studies focusing on both women and men (Drechsler Sharp et al., 2012; Jones, 2009; Jones et al., 2012; Stewart, 2009). However, these studies do not specifically account for gender or explore gender differences in their models.

Given the history of the concept of *intersectionality*, research has undoubtedly focused on oppressed identity statuses. It remains to be seen whether or not intersectionality research, including the MMDI can be applied to the both privileged and oppressed identities and social groups, specifically the gender and faith identities of college men.

### **Intersectionality & Masculinity**

In order to connect intersectionality and the masculinity of college men, this section examines masculinity from a “macro” social, historical, cultural, and political perspective, citing *hegemonic masculinity* as the most dominant form of masculinity in

society. This is followed by a “micro” analysis focused on intersecting identities and student development theory as they relate to masculinity.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity**

Derived from the concept of patriarchy, the notion of *hegemonic masculinity* encapsulates men’s social constructions of gender by connecting men’s experiences into a broader systemic issue related to power and oppression. A masculinity that is “hegemonic” is a way of describing the dominant male group in a gender hierarchy of masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt understand hegemonic masculinity as distinguished from other forms of masculinity, as it embodies the most time-honored depictions of what it means to be a man. They argue that while only a small minority of men might enact hegemonic masculinity, all other men are required to position themselves in relation to it.

Hegemonic masculinity is deeply embedded in institutions of higher learning and society in general (Horowitz, 1988). This form of masculinity is about “winning and holding power and the formation of social groups in that process” (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645). Hegemonic masculinity is socially constructed, providing a rigid gender script that promotes heterosexuality and homophobia as the “bedrock” of dominant masculinity (Donaldson, 1993). Subordination of women is also a guiding principle of hegemonic masculinity as this pattern of practice allows men’s dominance over women to continue (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity affects men not only on an institutional level but also on a personal level. As men internalize these masculine standards, they position themselves in accordance with hegemonic masculinity by adopting dominant and hyper-masculine

attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, hegemonic masculinity is a strict guidepost in an ongoing developmental process of becoming a man.

### **Studies *Of Men*, *Men As Men*, and *Men As Complex Men***

In order to connect intersectionality to student development literature, this section focuses on the evolution of empirical research on men's gender identity development, as the notion of gender has traditionally been associated with women's experiences (Harper & Harris, 2010; Kimmel & Messner, 2012).

Over the past two decades, identity development frameworks have grown increasingly relevant in men and masculinities literature. This may seem ironic, given the fact that most foundational theories of student development were derived from predominantly or exclusively male samples, based primarily on the experiences of men (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; McEwen, 1996). Harper and Harris (2010) offers three problems with the assumption that literature on the lived experience of men is a foregone conclusion: most foundational theories often ignore non-majority demographic considerations, were based on men of prior generations, and fail to consider men as gendered beings.

A foundational understanding of men as gendered beings has been understood from a psychological perspective, through the lens of sex role strain (Pleck, 1981) and gender role conflict (O'Neil, 2008; O'Neil, Egan, Owen, & McBride, 1993; O'Neil et al., 1986). Pleck's (1981) sex role strain paradigm provided a theoretical understanding of the negative effects of socialized gender roles. He posits that certain gender role characteristics are psychologically dysfunctional and that violating gender roles can lead to negative psychological consequences for both women and men.

In order to empirically assess how rigidly defined gender roles have negative consequences, O'Neil and colleagues (1986) developed the Gender Role Conflict Scale. From a young age, boys and men are socialized into a fear of femininity, which is at the center of gender conflict. Surrounding the center are six other socialized patterns related to gender role conflict and strain: homophobia, restrictive emotionality, health care problems, obsession with achievement and success, restricted sexual and affectionate behavior, and socialized control, power, and competition issues. Each of these patterns emanates from men's socialization as gendered beings.

Thompson and Pleck (1995) later distinguished two approaches to men and masculinities: *trait* perspective (masculinity as biological) and *normative* perspective (masculinity as socially constructed). Most men and masculinities literature since the late 1980's has utilized the latter approach, using the plural form, "masculinities," in recognition of the multiple and often competing conceptions of masculinities (Brod, 1987; Connell, 1987). From a sociological (*normative*) perspective, "men are not born; they are made" (Kimmel & Aronson, 2004, p. xxiii). Manhood is constantly demonstrated as a means of gaining approval from other men, as men are the primary audience and evaluators of this "homosocial enactment" (Kimmel, 1994, p. 34).

Masculinity is likened to an ongoing performance, where men often prove their worthiness through hegemonic behaviors and actions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). From this discursive act, themes of hypermasculinity (Courtenay, 2000; Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005), homophobia (Harper & Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 1994; Kimmel & Messner, 2012), and fear of femininity and subordination of women (Harper, 2004) are enacted and performed.

Masculinity is paradoxical, as college men are both powerful and powerless (Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Capraro, 2000). “Men’s social power is the source of individual power and privilege...it is also the source of the individual experience of pain and alienation” (Brod & Kaufman, 1994, pp. 142–143). Men as a group are advantaged due to their gender privilege; however, men as individuals often feel powerless to the hierarchical nature of masculinity (i.e., hegemonic masculinity). Therefore, college men often conform to gendered norms (e.g., engaging in risky behaviors, violent acts, and/or binge drinking) in order to compensate for their feelings of powerlessness (Capraro, 2000).

Davis (2002) was the first to explore men’s gender identity from a student development perspective. He conducted a phenomenological study of ten undergraduate college men and their understanding of socially prescribed gender roles. Five themes emerged from his study: the importance of self-expression, code of communication caveats, fear of femininity, confusion about and distancing from masculinity, and a sense of challenge without support. Given the lack of literature on men’s gender identity development, Davis utilized Josselson’s (1996) theory of women’s identity development as a conceptual framework for his study. In his concluding remarks, Davis advocated for more empirical studies to consider the development of college men through a gendered lens.

### **Grounded Theory Studies on College Men’s Gender Identity**

Edwards and Harris (2010) addressed calls for literature on men’s gender identity development by conducting two grounded theory studies (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Harris & Edwards, 2010). Edwards and Jones (2009) studied ten



undergraduate men describing the constant interaction between the individuals and society's expectations of what it means to be a man. Edwards and Jones likened performing masculinity to wearing a mask in order to repress aspects of themselves that did not live up to masculine expectations. This confirmed previous theoretical speculation that society pressures men to bury their true feelings and maintain an unemotional and stoic front, a *mask of masculinity* (Pollack, 1998).

While Edwards and Jones focused more on the individual, Harris (2010) addressed the contextual influences of what it means to be a man. In a study of sixty-eight undergraduate college men, he discovered that college men conceptualize their masculinity through pre-college gender socialization, academic interests, male peer group interactions, male gendered norms, and campus involvement. These contextual influences are dependent on and heavily influenced by campus culture, as masculinities are expressed differently depending on the institution. This empirical work confirmed previous theoretical models (Harper et al., 2005; Harris & Harper, 2008) which described influences on masculine norms and common behaviors associated with these norms.

These two grounded theory studies have several common findings: external pressures and expectations to perform hegemonic masculinity, consequences of hegemonic masculinity, and efforts to transcend traditional hegemonic masculinity (Harris & Edwards, 2010). The studies make a noteworthy contribution to college men and masculinities literature, confirming previous theoretical models concerning aspects of hegemonic masculinity, gender role conflict, and other patterns/behaviors of college men.

### **Complex Individuality**

Over the past decade, men and masculinities scholars have called for further research on how gender identity intersects and is influenced by other identity dimensions (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper et al., 2011; Harris, 2008, 2010; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Harper and colleagues (2011) argue that most of the literature in the field of higher education often limits studies of individuals to discrete identity dimensions, often negating the nuanced aspects of individual identities. They coin *complex individuality* to describe the intricate nature of multiple identity dimensions, a phenomenon punctuated by their case study participant. Harper and colleagues are astute in citing the roots of *intersectionality* and connecting the concept to college environment such as classrooms and residence halls, where college students may encounter harmful stereotypes due the multiplicity of one's identities. However, by summarizing this phenomenon as *complex individuality*, Harper and colleagues dismiss a contextual and discursive understanding of *intersectionality* rooted in systemic oppression.

### **Masculinity and Other Identity Dimensions**

The relationship of masculinity and other identity dimensions has largely focused on masculinity and race (Dancy, 2012; Harper, 2004, 2006; Harris III, Palmer, & Struve, 2011). Minimal scholarship considers the relationship between masculinity and disability (Gerschick, 2011), masculinity and class (Reed, 2011), masculinity and national culture (Davis, Sewalish, & Thomas, 2006), and queer masculinities (Berila, 2011; Dilley, 2002). Masculinity and sexuality are rarely studied in isolation (Rhoads, 1997), as sexuality is often associated with race (Harper et al., 2011; Malebranche, Fields, Bryant, & Harper, 2007; Perez-Jimenez, Cunningham, Serrano-Garcia, & Ortiz-Torres, 2007).

Harper and colleagues (2011) are quick to critique this singular, “two-at-a-time” approach and instead, suggest a more intersectional understanding of men’s gender identities. Originally suggested by Jones (1997), the “braiding of gender” (p. 379) with other identity dimensions not only recognizes the salience of gender as an identity dimension but also how gender is understood as a reflection of core identities, social identities, and/or contextual influences. More complex studies tend to showcase gender, race/ethnicity, class, spirituality, and sexuality simultaneously (Harper et al., 2011; Means, 2014; Perez-Jimenez et al., 2007; Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, & Messner, 2011).

Mainstream literature on masculinity and race does not directly consider gender and race as identity dimensions; rather, there is an inherent assumption that interrelatedness and overlapping exists. The same is true for other “two-at-a-time” models. Outside of literature on masculinity and race (e.g., Harper, 2004) and recent studies on intersecting masculinities (e.g., Harper et al., 2011; Means, 2014; Perez-Jimenez et al., 2007), much of the scholarship is merely theoretical speculation. The Harper study (2011) is the only study to date that utilizes the MMDI (Jones & McEwen, 2000) as a conceptual and analytical framework, while Means (2014) researches multiple identities from the perspective of queer theory, using Abes’ (2009) theoretical borderlands. This study of college men at the intersection of masculinity and faith is the first study to use *intersectionality* as a central theoretical framework for investigating college men.

## **Intersectionality & Faith**

In order to connect intersectionality and faith, this section examines “macro” theological arguments regarding oppressive power structures, followed by a “micro” analysis focused on intersecting identities and student development theory.

### **Christian Faith Development Theories**

Connecting intersectionality to student development literature, the faith development theories of Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) are most commonly referenced in the field of religion and spirituality in higher education. These stage theories are both progressive and hierarchical, as an individual builds complexity over time through the successful resolution of a series of crises (Erikson, 1950, 1968).

Fowler (1981) offers a six-stage theory of cognitive faith development. Traditional-aged (18 to 24 year old) college students would likely fall in stage three (synthetic-conventional faith) or stage four (individuated-reflective faith). During the *synthetic-conventional* stage, an individual’s faith is unreflective and uncritical, assuming the belief systems of authority figures such as religious institutions and/or parents. Conflict and dissonance are minimal, as conformity is of utmost importance. During the *individuated-reflective* stage, an individual begins to critically reflect on one’s own faith. Faith understanding is no longer simply assumed from authority figures, as this stage is marked by conflicting understandings and inconsistencies. By taking responsibility for one’s faith in light of this incongruence, an individual seeks to build a new complexity of faith understanding.

Fowler’s theory of faith development is limited in that it looks at faith from merely a cognitive perspective, where *faith* is about developing an understanding of how

one relates to the world. The model does not account for psychosocial or ecological understandings of human development. Fowler's model is also constructed based on observation of a homogenous population of mostly Caucasian Christian men. Therefore, it is not clear whether his model is generalizable to other religious traditions, agnostic/atheists, women, transgender students, or non-Caucasian populations.

Drawing upon the work of Kegan (1998), Parks (2000) moves beyond Fowler's cognitive model, towards a more integrative model of cognitive, affective, and social aspects of faith development (Love & Guthrie, 1999). Parks argues that cognitive transformation, by itself, is insufficient in forming a mature adult faith. She divides faith development into *forms of knowing*, *forms of dependence*, and *forms of community*. Parks also builds on Fowler's model by adding an additional stage for young/emerging adults, in hopes of teasing out the nuance of early adulthood. During the young/emerging adult stage of development, she describes *forms of knowing* as "probing commitment": the need to consistently reflect upon personal values and convictions to create a personal faith. *Forms of dependence* for this stage is known as "fragile inner-dependence": vulnerable, but independent and autonomous. *Forms of community* for young/emerging adults are described as "mentoring communities": intergenerational group environments that maintain a healthy balance of challenge and support.

For Parks (2000), mentoring environments are essential to faith development. The features of a mentoring community include: a network of belonging, big enough questions, encounters with otherness, habits of mind, worthy dreams, access to images, and communities of practice. In particular, communities of practice include humanizing activities that Parks describes as *table* (breaking bread together in a mentoring

community), *hearth* (intimate one-on-one mentoring conversations), and *commons* (contexts where critical engagement is encouraged and supported – a public square where issues can be deliberated and debated). Parks' is limited in her analysis of these communities of practice, as she does not acknowledge the inherently gendered qualities of *table*, *hearth*, and *commons*. These contexts embody masculine norms, and therefore, call for a gendered analysis of faith development. Deconstructing these heavily gendered environments may provide a more complex understanding of the faith development of college men.

While developing an inclusive definition of *faith*, the faith development theories of Fowler and Parks have a large Western and Christian bias. Therefore, their work should not be assumed without evidence to fit non-Western cultures or other religious traditions. Despite this possible limitation, these faith development theories provide a language and framework to explain and predict the experiences of non-Christians as well as agnostic and atheist emerging adults, or “nones” (Funk & Smith, 2012) who do not identify themselves with a particular religion.

Parks improves upon Fowler's model by incorporating an affective and relational understanding of faith. This model draws upon the work of Gilligan (1982), recognizing the feminine voice in faith development theory. While expanding the accessibility of faith to both genders, Parks does not account for gender differences or differential treatment by each gender in faith development. In fact, she fails to account for multiple social identities, including race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. Therefore, Parks' model might not adequately capture or account for individual identities, social identities, and unjust power structures in her model.

Stage theories have long been critiqued for their homogeneity (Flavell, 1982) and limited focus on mental processes rather than environmental and social factors (Fischer, 1980). More recently, Abes and Kasch (2007) argued that these linear models were inadequate in describing the degree in which students impact their environments by reshaping their contexts. They argue that critical perspectives such as queer theory might more adequately reflect the mutually constitutive nature of identity construction.

To better understand the relationship between faith, personal/social identities and power structures, it is necessary to examine scholarly literature on the faith development of college students.

### **Faith and Other Identity Dimensions**

The relationship of faith identity and other identity dimensions has largely focused on faith and race (Constantine et al., 2002; Dancy, 2010; Park, 2012a, 2012b; Patton & McClure, 2009; Stewart, 2002; Stewart & Lozano, 2009) and faith and sexuality (Abes, 2011; Birch, 2011; Gold, 2010; Love et al., 2005). These studies are mostly qualitative and exploratory, as they often understand faith as an independent and isolated identity dimension. Relatively few studies have observed faith identity from an intersectionality framework.

Stewart (2002) investigated the role of faith in the development of an integrated racial identity for five Black college students at a predominantly White institution (PWI). She found that in order for an individual to appreciate and integrate multiple identity facets, a certain spiritual maturity might be required. Stewart also found discovered that PWIs were ill-equipped to serve the spiritual development of Black college students, a sentiment that was later echoed by Patton and McClure (2009) in their study of the

spiritual development of African American college women. Both studies spoke to the lack of space, both physical and emotional, that hindered the students' abilities to connect multiple aspects of their identities. Missing from both studies is an analysis of the participants' mentoring communities (Parks, 2000), which could provide the challenge and support necessary for participants to weave their individual identities.

From a theoretical perspective, both studies used the work of Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000). Stewart came out of an Afrocentric philosophy to employ the concept of identity integration as a conceptual framework, while Patton and McClure utilized Black feminist thought (Collins, 1990) and an "endarkened feminist epistemology" (Dillard, 2000, p. 662) as conceptual and analytical lenses. Collectively, Afrocentric philosophy, Black feminist thought, and an "endarkened feminist epistemology" highlight multiple and interacting oppressions and the unique role that spirituality plays as a coping mechanism in racist environments. While these lenses are useful for research on Black women, they should not be applied to other populations.

Love, Bock, Jannarone, and Richardson (2005) examined the interaction between spirituality and gay and lesbian identities of twelve college students. They defined spirituality as "our drive for meaning, authenticity, purpose, wholeness, and self-transcendence" (p. 197). Love and colleagues found that five out of the twelve participants had reconciled their spirituality and sexuality, while the other seven participants had not. Among those reconciled, participants benefitted from a strong religious upbringing, a strong loving environment, and a direct experience or conflict regarding their religion and their sexuality. Experiencing challenge from a religious community within the context of a supportive environment often was stimulus for



reconciliation and a deepening of spiritual and sexual identities. Those non-reconciled participants seemed to compartmentalize their spirituality and sexuality either consciously or subconsciously. They experienced little to no conflict that would cause them to reflect upon these two identity dimensions simultaneously.

As a theoretical lens, Love and colleagues utilize the concept of identity integration (Levine & Evans, 1991), which involves an acceptance of one's sexuality. This concept is specific to the gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities and communities, and therefore, should not be utilized with other identities and other populations. While citing the MMDI (Jones & McEwen, 2000), Love and colleagues do not utilize the model, nor the concept of intersectionality in their study.

Abes (2011) explored the intersection of faith and sexuality in her longitudinal study of ten Jewish lesbian college students. Utilizing a narrative inquiry methodology, she limited her analysis to two students, in order to examine more richly how identities intersect over time. She affirmed the importance of context, similar to other studies of multiple identities (Abes et al., 2007; Harris, 2010; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2002), as each participant experienced a shift in identity as their surroundings changed. Abes also discovered that when participants were able to internally define their identities, they were better able to filter out negative religious messages, understand that multiple religious perspectives exist, and ultimately accept their lesbian identity in the context of a religious community.

To date, Abes' (2011) is the only study to consider both intersectionality and faith identity along with other identity dimensions. Specifically, one narrative in her study connects Jewish identity to social identities (race and social class) and systems of

oppression (anti-Semitism and racism). This demonstrates the power of intersectionality as an analytical framework, as complex associations are understood across multiple internal and external influences.

Collectively, these studies highlight that in order to integrate faith identity with other identity dimensions, it is important for individuals to have a strong religious background, a spiritual maturity, an internally defined sense of self, and have a challenging yet supportive environment which can help make sense of negative contextual influences. Abes' (2011) study provides a template for examining the intricate relationship between faith identity and other identity dimensions that is not only true to the concept of *intersectionality* but also integrates a conceptual and analytical framework that is inclusive of all identities and social groups.

### **Intersection of Masculinity and Faith**

In order to connect faith identity with men's gender identity (masculinity), this section examines "macro" theological arguments from Christian men's spirituality literature, which highlights problematic assumptions about men of faith from an essentialist understanding of gender. This is followed by a "micro" analysis focused on intersecting identities and student development theory.

#### **Christian Men's Spirituality Literature**

Much popular literature on masculinity and spirituality has been written from a Christian Evangelical perspective. The literature has largely utilized an essentialist notion of gender, often blaming the feminist movement for feminizing men and calling all men to reclaim their *true* masculinity (Eldredge, 2011; Fox, 2008; Rohr, 2004). Eldredge (2011) argues that due to the feminization of our culture, men have become

emasculated and far too passive. In response, he argues that men need to find their inner heroic side to grow closer to God. Eldridge maintains that churches have been part of the problem, as Jesus Christ has been portrayed as soft and passive rather than heroic and hyper-masculine.

Rohr (2004) writes from a Catholic perspective, grounded in the mythopoetic men's movement of the 1990's. Through a series of initiation rituals, Catholic men can reclaim their inner masculinity and become mature adult men. Similar to many feminist theologians, Rohr argues for a more feminine understanding of God as "mother" while also using Gospel interpretations to advocate for homosexuals in the Catholic Church.

Fox (2008) calls for men to awaken "the sacred masculine" in order to rectify the distortions of the external world. He provides ten archetypes of authentic male spirituality modeled after previous masculine archetypes (Jung, 1969; Moore, 1991). Fox posits that men have a higher calling to become "real men" and to reinvent the world.

Overall, Christian men's spirituality literature often clings tightly to gender essentialism, claiming that there is something essential to masculine identity that has somehow been lost. The feminist movement has socialized men into more feminized beings, and therefore, men need to relearn what it means to be a man. This reliance on gender essentialism is ironic, given the fact that most empirical literature in the fields on psychology and sociology has focused on men from a social constructionist perspective. However, Christian men's spirituality scholars would argue that gender essentialism is rooted in biblical teachings, exemplified by Jesus Christ in the Gospels as well as the story of Adam & Eve in the Book of Genesis.

Viewing men from an essentialist perspective is problematic, as it reduces the experiential realities of men from different backgrounds and cultures and forces a corrective monolithic understanding on all men. Social constructionism accounts for a fluidity of masculinities – a contextual understanding of men as individual spiritual beings and men of Church communities and other institutions. The next section examines literature on the masculinity and faith of college men from a social constructionist perspective.

### **Masculinity & Faith**

Study of the relationship between masculinity and faith is a relatively recent phenomenon in empirical literature. Most literature has focused more heavily on faith than masculinity (Herndon, 2003; Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008; Ward & Cook, 2011), or has focused on a clash of multiple conflicting identities (particularly race, gender, and sexuality) in favor of an exclusive analysis of faith and masculinity (Means, 2014; Means & Jaeger, 2013). A more balanced account has been provided over the past few years with two grounded theory studies on the interrelatedness of masculinity and spirituality (Longwood et al., 2011; Wilcox Elliott, 2012).

Ward and Cook (2011) conducted a quantitative study on the associations between masculinity and religiousness of college men. Utilizing six instruments related to religious identity and masculinity, they found that both positive and negative associations exist between masculinity and religiousness of college men. They found that “winning,” “power over women,” and “disdain for homosexuals” were positively correlated with various aspects of religiousness, while “emotional control,” “violence,” and “playboy” were negative correlated with various aspects of religiousness. Moreover,

they discovered that religious fundamentalism contributes to traditional, patriarchal views of gender roles, while non-fundamentalist religious commitment does not. “A commitment to the values and beliefs of one’s religion is associated with more emotional expressiveness and fewer tendencies towards violence, whereas believing in the fundamental truths of one’s religion is not” (p. 52). This study provides evidence that, depending on the forms of religiousness, men relate differently to various gender role conceptions, beliefs, and behaviors. However, the findings of this study may be disputable, given the homogenous sample of 154 college men who unanimously self-report their sexual orientation as heterosexual or straight men.

Riggins and colleagues (2008) argue that Black college men are socialized into a strong religious orientation, which, if cultivated in a sincere manner, can provide positive academic and personal outcomes. A strong religious orientation, when coupled with ongoing spiritual support, is shown to bolster resilience and provide a sense of purpose for Black college men. Riggins and colleagues conducted their study at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), confirming an earlier study suggesting the same to be true for Black men at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Herndon, 2003).

While these studies further the conversation on masculinity and faith in college men, they fail to provide a rich textured analysis of the phenomenon for at least one of these reasons: (a) limited focus from a quantitative perspective; (b) masculinity and faith are not the central focus on the study and are treated as additional findings; and (c) masculinity and faith are examined in a clash of multiple, intersecting identities, which inevitably provides a more superficial analysis. The next section discusses grounded

theory studies that are focused exclusively on masculinity and faith.

### **Grounded Theory Studies on College Men of Faith**

Over the past few years, two grounded theory studies have begun to wrestle with the relationship between masculinity and faith. Longwood and colleagues (2011) conducted a study of thirty-six college men, seeking to understand how masculinity is interrelated with spirituality, as interpreted by the lived experience of college men. Written from the perspective of two religious studies scholars and two higher education professionals, *Forging the Male Spirit* provides a robust application of practical and historical perspectives. Longwood and colleagues (2011) include a detailed description of men's spirituality groups at St. John's University (MN) along with an outlined history of religious movements in America and their perceived impact on American Men.

Problematically, Longwood and colleagues spend much of their time describing men's spirituality groups, yet their research design contains no group interviews or focus group interactions. Instead, they opt to conduct a series of individual interviews with college men. Also problematically, they summarize most of their findings into two separate sections: a masculinity section and a spirituality section. They compartmentalize masculinity into types and roles, and spirituality into different interpretations of what it means to be spiritual and/or religious.

Longwood and colleagues spend little time actually integrating these two identities and finding overlapping understanding of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a man of faith. They suggest three findings for the linking of masculinity and spirituality: no significant relationship exists, a healthy masculinity promotes a healthy spirituality, and a healthy spirituality promotes a healthy masculinity. While

these findings help to further the discussion on the interrelatedness of masculinity and spirituality, it seemed that these findings were an afterthought, rather than central to the study itself.

Wilcox Elliot (2012) was the first higher education scholar to explore college men's gendered and spiritual identities. He asked the question: "what does it mean for college men to be authentic?" Using dialogical narrative methodology, Wilcox Elliot coined the *Transcendence Model for Identity Construction*. This model portrays a developmental snapshot of college men, describing the multiple ways by which men negotiate their gender and spiritual identities. The model contains four dimensions: intrapersonal, interpersonal, extrapersonal, and ultimate. The intrapersonal describes one's "inner" sense of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. The interpersonal describes the social self, one's relationships and connectedness to others. Connecting the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions are *congruency channels*, which characterize the constant interaction between one's "inner" and social self. The extrapersonal outlines the engaged self, one's communities and commitments. Within the extrapersonal dimension are *identity archetypes*, which showcase models that portray what it means to be a man or what it means to be spiritual. Connecting the interpersonal and extrapersonal are *transcendence channels*, which describe the positive impact of commitments and communities that move college men away from self-centeredness towards a more relational self. Finally, the ultimate level describes something transcendent that orients college men's lives.

Wilcox Elliot's work is limited in that it provides a developmental snapshot, rather than the process of college men's faith development. This model could be

enriched by coupling models with Baxter Magolda's (2004b) model of self-authorship or Edwards and Jones' (2009) model of "masked" masculinity. Both of these models demonstrate a developmental process of becoming aware of external expectations, moving through a crossroads, and ultimately transcending external expectations (removing the mask) and authoring one's own life.

Wilcox Elliot effectively describes what it means it mean to be a man and what it means to be spiritual, however, he does not adequately highlight what it means to be a "spiritual man," in an intersectional sense. While the study purports to examine the interrelatedness of masculinity and spirituality, these identities are evaluated as independent and discrete dimensions. The interview protocol separates masculinity and spirituality into different sections, failing to ask overlapping questions that address the interrelatedness of masculinity and spirituality, or how other identities (e.g., race and sexuality) impact the spiritual development of college men.

Wilcox Elliot also does not account for differences among men, as all men do not benefit equally from their gender privilege (Harper & Harris, 2010). Men with dominant identities (e.g., White, heterosexual, Christian) experience more positive contextual influences in Wilcox Elliot's model due to their privileged status in society. Conversely, men with more subordinate identities (e.g., non-White, non-Christian) experience fewer advantages and limited resources for spiritual development. A consideration of systemic oppressions would have enriched his analysis, especially since the study examined men from seven different religious backgrounds. Finally, this study is limited due to its small sample size of only seven participants from one medium-sized public university.

The two grounded theory studies on masculinity and spirituality are limited for



five reasons. First, and rather problematically, these studies fail to reference one another in their literature reviews. Second, these studies treat masculinity and spirituality as discrete identity dimensions, rather than looking at them with a complexity of individual and social identities as suggested in intersectionality research. Third, despite citing hegemonic masculinity in both reviews of literature, these studies do not account for this oppression in either model. Fourth, these studies ignore religious oppression and marginalized faith identities in their models. Finally, these studies do not account for the interaction between multiple identities and interlocking systems of power and oppression as suggested in intersectionality research.

### **Summary and Synthesis of Reviewed Literature**

Student development literature is still coming to terms with intersectionality as critical paradigm for conducting qualitative research, as much of the theory and research still comes out of a positivist paradigm (Evans et al., 2010). Given this historical precedence, student development scholars have often reduced intersectionality to intersecting identities (Dancy, 2010; Davis et al., 2006; Drechsler Sharp et al., 2012; Gold & Stewart, 2011; Harper et al., 2011), focusing more on identity rather than intersectionality. While literature has evolved from an analysis of multiple social identities to more complex, contextual understandings of identity development (Abes, 2009; Jones, 2009), often missing from the contemporary discourse is an analysis of systemic oppression. As a critical theory, intersectionality aims to deconstruct institutions, organizations, laws, policies, and practices that contribute to inequitable power structures. True to the historical roots of intersectionality as a Black feminist and womanist framework, this systemic oppression filters down to the individual,

experiencing multiple privileged and subordinate identities simultaneously, depending on social context.

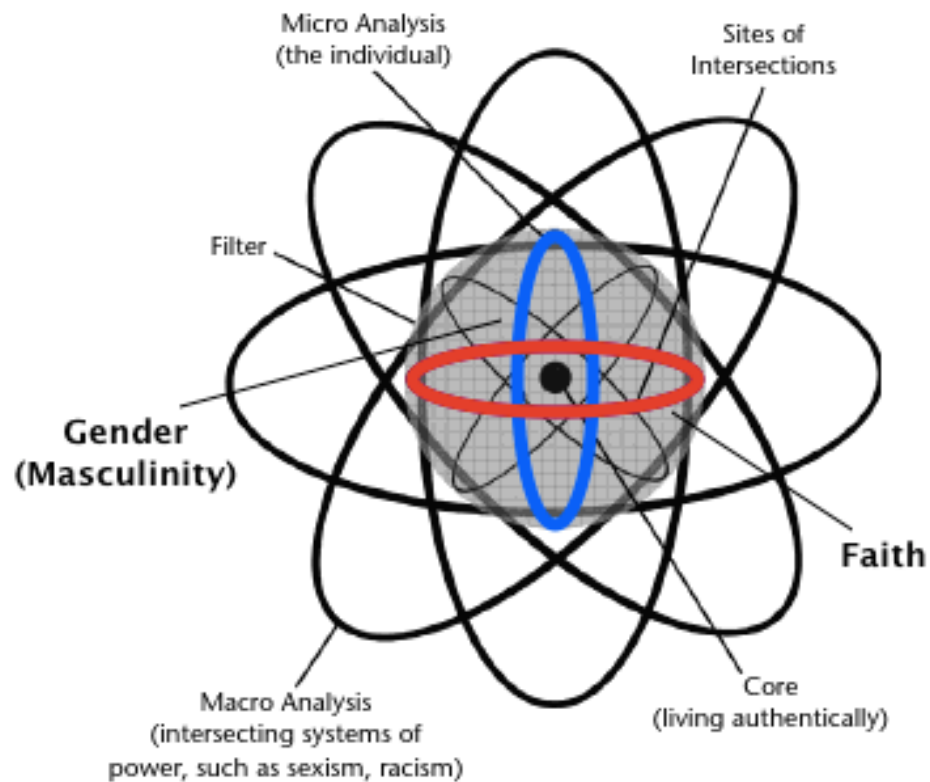
Similarly, the fields of college men and masculinities and religion and spirituality in higher education have been historically examined from a positivist paradigm. Men and masculinities literature has focused largely on deconstructing gender as a discrete identity dimension (Davis, 2002; Kimmel, 2008). In recent years, the field has evolved towards an analysis of multiple identities (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper et al., 2011; Harris, 2008). While this shift has helped to build awareness of college men as complex and multifaceted beings, minimal scholarship examines college men, multiple identities, and systemic oppression. These studies have incorporated an analysis of power and privilege focusing on subgroups of fraternity men (Sweeney, 2014) and Black gay men (Means, 2014), expanding consciousness of the differing experiences of gender privilege in college men (Harper & Harris, 2010).

Literature on the religion and spirituality of college students has shared a similar tone with men and masculinities research, as researchers have moved from a singular understanding of faith development (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000) towards an analysis of multiple social identities (Gold & Stewart, 2011; Love et al., 2005; Patton & McClure, 2009; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Stewart, 2009). Abes' (2011) study of two Jewish lesbian women is the only study in the field to utilize intersectionality, connecting multiple social identities to systems of oppression. By raising consciousness and addressing misconceptions regarding marginalized subpopulations, Abes provides a blueprint for productive social change.

The primary challenge for future researchers is to lay a stronger foundation for intersectionality, which is often getting collapsed into multiple identities instead of tied expressly to power and social location.

This study sought to address knowledge gaps in the fields of intersectionality and multiple identities, men and masculinities, and religion and spirituality in higher education. While studies of masculinity and spirituality have been conducted (Longwood et al., 2011; Wilcox Elliott, 2011, 2012), these studies have approached the topic from an additive perspective (Bowleg, 2008), rather than an intersectional paradigm (i.e., intersecting identities, power, and social location).

This study of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity was the first study of masculinity and faith to employ intersectionality as its theoretical framework. In order to situate the study in student development literature and the field of higher education, I used the Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (IMMDI) (Jones & Abes, 2013) with masculinity and faith represented as intersecting rings on the model (see Figure 3 below).

**Figure 3**

**Modified Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (IMMDI)**

(Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 161)

This study sought to answer the following questions: (a) how do masculinity and faith identities intersect in college men who actively participate in faith-based communities, and (b) how does this intersection inform college men's development?

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity. The research questions addressing this purpose were: (a) how do masculinity and faith identities intersect in college men who actively participate in faith-based communities, and (b) how does this intersection inform college men's development? In order to examine the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity, I selected a constructivist epistemological paradigm and used grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014), which enabled me to discover a theory of this process grounded in the experience of the participants. In this section, I outline the core characteristics and provide rationale for the selection of qualitative inquiry and grounded theory methodology, as well as the constructivist epistemological paradigm and theoretical perspectives framing this study. I also outline specific methodological procedures, including sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures. I address issues of trustworthiness, ethical concerns, and limitations of this study. Finally, I provide a statement of researcher positionality in order to acknowledge my own subjectivity as a researcher and to be transparent about how I came to and conducted this study.

### **Research Design**

#### **Constructivist Epistemological Paradigm**

A paradigm is a belief system or worldview that guides the researcher ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructivism served as the paradigm for this study of college men, which guided the

selection of research methods, data collection, and data analysis.

Constructivist theory is a worldview in which persons socially construct knowledge in order to make meaning of their experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2004a). Ontologically, constructivists assume the nature of reality to be relativistic, as there are various interpretations of truth rather than a singular universal truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 2002). People interpret and evaluate their experiences through “current assumptions about themselves and the world, conflicting assumptions they encounter, and the context in which the experience occurs” (Baxter Magolda, 2004a, p. 31). People operating from a constructivist paradigm build meaning and knowledge through a process of naturalistic inquiry, where experiences in their environment serve as meaningful guideposts to the construction of their realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, I interviewed men of faith in their natural environment, a college setting (i.e., residence halls, classrooms, libraries), where multiple realities are constructed through human interaction and contextual influences (e.g., institutional culture). As Baxter Magolda (2004a) asserts, this developmental process entails a combination of internal assumptions and external experiences. As experiences and assumptions inform one another, constructions may become more sophisticated over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For example, the participants’ salient faith identities were heavily shaped prior to college and became more complex and multifaceted during college, as participants interacted with others (e.g., faith communities, non-Christian peers) who affirmed, challenged, and/or complicated their previously held worldviews.

Epistemologically, the constructivist researcher maintains the transactional/subjectivist assumption, that knowledge is created through the interaction

between the investigator and participants of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Since reality is multiple and socially constructed, constructivist researchers are open and flexible to the emerging realities of the participants, while also transparent about their own assumptions and biases. Methodologically, the constructivist researcher aims to reconstruct previously held constructions into more informed and advanced constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As the researcher introduces competing constructions, participants become more aware of, and perhaps revisit and reshape, the content of their own constructions. For example, I came into the study sensitive to how men of faith experienced tensions with sex and sexuality, especially around sex, hook-ups, and virginity; however, the way participants struggled with masturbation and pornography broadened my understanding of tensions around faith and sexuality.

Operating from a constructivist paradigm in this study of college men, I expected the participant experiences of masculinity and faith to be divergent, given their unique naturalistic environments and the dynamic nature of meaning-making. Therefore, my research approach provided an open space for participants to make meaning of their experiences and to challenge my interpretations of their realities, in order to discover a more sophisticated theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith.

### **Intersectionality Social Justice Theoretical Perspective**

Theoretical perspectives provide a lens that helps to identify important research problems and guide research questions (Creswell, 2014; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Theoretical perspectives frame and orient the study not only in its research design but also the data collection procedures and interpretation of the findings (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This study examined the intersection of masculinity and faith using

intersectionality social justice as a theoretical lens. This perspective framed: (a) the research questions from an intersectional approach; (b) the literature review, in providing a lens to interpret and organize literature in fields of men and masculinities and faith, spirituality, and religion; (c) the sampling procedures, particularly the maximum variation sampling strategy that identified participants from a variety of Christian faith backgrounds, social group identities, and college experiences; (d) the interview protocol, which considered masculinity and faith independently and then from an intersectional approach, with questions that attempted to account for identity intersections, power, privilege, and oppression; (e) the interviews and focus groups, where I was constantly aware of a power dynamic both as a researcher and as a person who has multiple privileged identities; and (f) the coding and analysis, as I was sensitive to issues around context, power, and non-majority identities and perspectives.

Social justice inquiry recognizes inequality, socioeconomic disparities (income, education, and occupation), and social oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, classism) operate in society on an individual and collective level (Feagin, 2001). Social justice fosters a fair and just society by working to eradicate inequality and oppression, ensuring that people have equal access to liberties (i.e., working to benefit those least advantaged in society) (Rawls, 1999). A central tenet of social justice is the promotion of human dignity; for example, women should be treated with respect rather than instruments of the ends of others (Nussbaum, 2000). In this study, I was sensitive to several factors related to social justice including, but not limited to: (a) a social justice emphasis embedded in faith and Christian principles; (b) how society privileges Christian men both as Christians and as men; and (c) how non-majority Christian men (e.g., gay, non-White) may have



differential experiences.

Charmaz (2005) advocates for the usage of social justice theoretical perspectives from a constructivist paradigm, as a focus on multiple and socially constructed realities enables the researchers to deconstruct issues of power and privilege, dominance and subordination, and oppression and exclusion through participants' assumptions and experiences. Tensions operate at both macro (systemic) and micro (individual) levels. Systems privilege and oppress individuals and groups, opening doors for some and creating barriers for others. Remaining indifferent to inequitable power structures represents complicity to this problem, and therefore, permits further social inequality. Individuals must work to ensure equal access to opportunities, particularly for historically disadvantaged populations. For example, in this study, I was attentive to how America was founded on Christian principles and sensitive to how gay men and men of color have been historically marginalized in America.

Feminist social justice inquiry has been utilized in two foundational grounded theory studies of college men's gender identity development (Edwards, 2007; Harris III, 2006). These studies sought to identify hegemonic conceptions of masculinities of undergraduate men, specifically within the college setting, where these notions are fostered and reinforced.

This study employs intersectionality social justice as a theoretical lens, which follows the Black feminist and womanist critiques of the feminist movement, moving beyond a single axes of oppression (sex/gender) to analysis of multiple axes of oppression (race, gender, class, and other identities) (Collins, 1990). Intersectionality champions a fluidity over fragmentation of identities, and synergy over symbiosis

(Bowleg, 2008; Stewart, 2010), as one identity cannot be separated from another. It is inadequate for researchers to examine identities as independent and discrete, since intersectionality assumes that these identities constantly interact, inform, construct, and come into conflict with one another. Intersectionality researchers not only account for intersecting identities but also incorporate an analysis of larger structures of inequality and systemic oppression that simultaneously privilege and oppress individuals, depending on their social location. In this study, an intersectionality social justice theoretical perspective shaped the interview protocol in asking questions related to not only masculinity and faith but also other intersecting identities (e.g., race, class, sexual orientation) and oppressions (e.g., sexism, racism, heterosexism).

In recent years, interest in intersectionality as a theoretical perspective has increased exponentially in the field of higher education (Museus & Griffin, 2011; Torres et al., 2009). This has been bolstered by the emergence of the model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI), which highlights the varied salience of multiple intersecting identities, depending on how an individual interprets and makes meaning of contextual influences and structures of inequality (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & McEwen, 2000).

This trend of inquiry towards intersectionality has not been met without forewarning and critique. Intersectionality is often misused when the focus is solely on the individual and multiple identities (Jones, 2014), as it not only discounts contextual influences but also moves away from its historical focus on multiple oppressions (Collins, 1990). In addition, Bowleg (2008) points out the often difficult interpretative task for researchers “to make explicit the often implicit experiences of intersectionality,

even when participants do not express the connections” (p. 322). Researchers of intersectionality are charged with making connections through their own interpretations, when most participants are unable to decipher and present these connections among multiple identities and oppressions. Intersectionality researchers are subject to enhanced discretion and responsibility to make meaning of the participant experiences, and therefore, they must be intentional in their analysis and interpretation of data (Jones, 2014).

On an operative level, intersectionality social justice seeks to eradicate oppression and systemic injustice through an analysis of multiple and competing oppressions. The researcher works to advance a more fair and just society building awareness of how systems privilege and oppress certain identities, individuals, and groups. The researcher empowers participants by helping them come to understand more sophisticated and competing constructions of reality.

The intersectionality social justice theoretical lens influenced the way I perceived and interpreted the empirical data in this study. I was attentive to how masculinity and faith operate with men of multiple dominant and subordinate identities. In particular, I acknowledged patriarchal assumptions that have guided White male Christians (historically men of Protestant denominations) to create and maintain systems that simultaneous privilege and oppress certain individual and group identities. To this end, I acknowledged that hegemonic conceptions of masculinity are not simply sexist, but are also often racist, classist, homophobic, anti-Semitic, etc. This theoretical perspective oriented my study to not only look at issues of gender but also to examine how individuals may experience multiple oppressions simultaneously (Collins, 1990).

## **Qualitative Inquiry**

Qualitative inquiry has many unique characteristics. Creswell (2014) summarizes three major introductory texts on qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) into eight core characteristics: (a) natural setting, (b) researcher as key instrument, (c) multiple sources of data, (d) inductive and deductive data analysis, (e) participants' meanings, (f) emergent design, (g) reflexivity, and (h) holistic account (Creswell, 2014).

I chose qualitative inquiry to conduct this study for many reasons. As Creswell (2013) notes, qualitative inquiry is most appropriate for answering the “how” and “what” questions. In this study, my research questions were concerned with “how” masculinity and faith intersect and “how” this informs the development of college men. In addition, a qualitative approach allowed the participants space to reflect on the meanings they ascribe to their masculinity and faith, while also reflecting on how their actions influence their thoughts and feelings (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A qualitative approach also provided space as a researcher (e.g., multiple realities, reflexivity) to extract, synthesize, and interpret issues of power, privilege, and oppression, which aligned with an intersectionality social justice theoretical perspective.

## **Grounded Theory Methodology**

Grounded theory was initially developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a means of generating theory inductively through a systemic qualitative analysis. At the time, grounded theory challenged epistemological assumptions that qualitative research could not generate theory and that it lacked the robustness of quantitative research, which was considered to be far more systematic with its positivistic orientation. Grounded theory is

unique from other qualitative methods, as it does not begin with a theory to prove or disprove; rather, it begins with an area of study and allows relevant data to emerge into a theory.

Grounded theory has since been refined to reflect a constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2014). While Glaser and Strauss assumed a strict objectivity on the part of the researchers, Charmaz's revision allows researchers to be transparent and reflexive about the bias and assumptions they bring to the inquiry. In this study, I was transparent about my own bias and assumptions both in my researcher positionality statement (in the next section) and in providing a summary of theoretical suppositions, including the intersectionality social justice theoretical perspective that framed the study. Journal entries helped me remain reflexive at every stage of the research process. Some examples include: (a) detailing the possibility that masculinity and faith may not intersect or come into conflict at all, which I was sensitive to both in the interview protocol and in the interviews; (b) reflecting on my own experience as a Catholic and as a former student-athlete and being careful not to project my experience onto the participants in the interview process; and (c) identifying themes and subthemes that resonated with my personal experience, such as "privatization of faith," and revisiting coding and analysis to discern whether this was my own perception or participants' perceptions of their experiences.

According to Charmaz (2008), the systematic approach of grounded theory has four key characteristics of data collection and analysis: (a) inductive-abductive, (b) comparative, (c) interactive, and (d) iterative. Grounded theory begins with an inductive logic but moves to an abductive reasoning, seeking to generate hypotheses that emerge

from empirical findings. In this abductive process, data collection and analysis happen simultaneously, which is unique to other qualitative methods. Grounded theory uses the constant comparison method (Dey, 1993), as data is organized and separated into distinctive groups, looking to find points of commonality and points of departure in the data. Grounded theory is an interactive method that prompts the researcher to keep interacting with the data, following hunches and analytic ideas, while engaging with participants multiple times and introducing new participants to confirm and add nuance to these ideas (Charmaz, 2014). Finally, grounded theory is an iterative process with several rounds of going back and forth between data and analysis before arriving at a concluding theory (Charmaz, 2014).

In this study, I followed the systematic approach of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008) through the following examples: (a) engaging in data collection and analysis simultaneously as I coded initial themes such as a quest for meaning and purpose and vulnerability/consolation that later formed the basis of themes around family and relationships and accountability and affirmation; (b) comparing newly collected data with previously connected data, as it became evident later in the interview process and in the two focus groups that sex and sexuality was a major theme rather than a subtheme of the study; (c) following leads related to tensions faith and masturbation/pornography, as the topic was brought up in the fifth interview, which caused me to ask questions about the topic to all of the participants; and (d) revisiting data and analysis multiple times before arriving at a theory. For example, themes of family and relationships and careers, callings, and vocations were initially subthemes that became major themes in the study after revisiting data and analysis multiple times.

Grounded theory provides the researcher space to interpret and synthesize theoretical concepts that emerge from the participant experiences, as well as an ability to examine the process of how meaning-making is constructed through a series of experiences (Charmaz, 2005). In social justice studies of grounded theory, this focus on processes may be used to analyze relationships between human agency and social structures (Charmaz, 2005). Social justice inquiry, when combined with intersectionality, provides a theoretical framework to examine how privilege and oppression operate across a spectrum of experiences on systemic and individual levels. In the case of this study, I explored the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity in the context of other identities (e.g., race, class, sexual orientation) and intersecting systems of power, privilege, and oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, heterosexism). The process of accountability and affirmation aided participants in their constant negotiation of masculinity and faith identities, which was more complicated with participants who had one or more oppressed identities.

Grounded theory is appropriate when knowledge about a topic is fairly advanced and/or when current theories about the phenomenon are inadequate or non-existent (Creswell, 2014). In the case of this study, the argument can be made both ways. Previous research has been conducted on faith development (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000) and men's gender identity development (Edwards, 2007; Harris III, 2006); however, little to no research has examined these two variables together, specifically how masculinity and faith identities intersect in college men.

### **Intensive, Semi-Structured Interviewing**

In order to discover of a theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in

college men's identity, I conducted intensive, semi-structured interviews of participants across two institutions. Intensive interviews are best suited for grounded theory studies, given the fact that both the methodology and style of interviewing are "open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 85). Intensive, semi-structured interviewing allows the interviewer flexibility to discover discourses and pursue ideas and issues immediately as they emerge in the participant interviews (Charmaz, 2014). The interviewer enters with a set of questions designed to elicit a range of responses and discourses, and during the interview, has the freedom to add additional probing questions or follows leads based on participant responses.

Given the nature of the research, I will operationalize *masculinity* and *faith* in the following sections.

### **Faith**

Faith is a meaning-making process over the lifespan, in the development of meaning, purpose and fulfillment in one's life (Parks, 2000). Parks acknowledges that faith, for many, is largely associated or equivalent with religion and religious belief. However, she describes faith as much broader than religious belief as "the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience" (p. 7). Therefore, faith is an inclusive term that includes both the religiously affiliated and, in some cases, the religiously unaffiliated. For example, a person of faith may have a strong spiritual identity, but may not be affiliated with a particular religion.

Consequently, in this study, *faith* is understood in terms of one's faith identity from a developmental perspective, as the degree to which one comes to understand, identify with, and/or ascribe to aspects of spirituality and religion (e.g., spiritual identity,



religious affiliation, practices, beliefs). For example, Harper and colleagues (Harper et al., 2011) tell the story of Tyson, who has a salient spiritual identity, is affiliated with Christianity, yet does not attend local churches and practices his faith in a deeply private and personal manner (prayer and personal devotions), partly due to conflicting beliefs with local church teachings and viewpoints on homosexuality. This study operationalizes faith in a manner that is inclusive of Tyson's faith and spirituality, recognizing that Tyson's religion and religious identity is shaping the way he conceptualizes and practices his faith, as Christianity and its teachings may enhance, conflict, and/or detract from his experience. I was sensitive to how religious identity shapes faith identity both positively and negatively in this study, particularly with gay men and men of color.

### **Masculinity**

Masculinity is a socially constructed concept that informs the ways that men should act, think, and feel. As gendered beings, boys and men are socialized into dominant masculine behaviors and norms through complex social interactions with culture, such as experiences, events, and actions (Kimmel & Messner, 2012; Weber, 1998). As a result, men learn and adopt the gender scripts for society's definition of what it means to be a man (Kimmel & Aronson, 2004). *Masculinity* is overlapping yet distinct from men's gender identity, which is the sense of oneself as a male. An individual is *cisgender* when their gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth, and an individual is *transgender* when their gender identity does not match their sex assigned at birth. While gender identity was not the focus of this study, it was one of several social group identities considered in the maximum variation sampling strategy.

Consequently, in this study, *masculinity* will be understood as the degree to which men come to understand, identify with, and/or ascribe to traditional notions of masculinity (i.e., actions, thoughts, feelings). This study is concerned with gender socialization, gender role conflict, and gender norms.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Researcher reflexivity is a critical component of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002). The researcher functions as a key instrument in qualitative inquiry, where personal experiences and insights contribute to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). The role of the researcher becomes important in shaping and deriving meaning from the data. In terms of reflexivity, the researcher must remain mindful of particular assumptions and biases they bring into the field, particularly when these may conflict or contradict the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Patton (2002) urges qualitative researchers to be “self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness” (p. 41). The researcher must be honest and transparent in reflecting on how they came to and conducted a study.

As a student affairs administrator for over nine years, a resident minister in a sophomore residence hall for over five years, an instructor or teaching assistant in six graduate and five undergraduate-level courses, a devout Catholic since college, and a former student-athlete (football) at Boston College, my interest in the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity development has been heavily influenced by these experiences. The research questions asked in this study emerged from personal experiences as a Catholic man, my professional experiences as an educator and minister, and academic experiences as a teacher and scholar.

From as early as I can remember, my identity as an athlete was synonymous with my understanding of masculinity. Growing up in a hyper-masculine football environment, the way I came to understand what it means to be man was heavily influenced by coaches and teammates, who espoused values such as hard work, independence, stoicism, toughness, competition, winning, and dominance over others – all values associated with traditional, hegemonic notions of masculinity. I adopted these values without question, as my experiences off the field at an all-boys Catholic high school reinforced these notions of masculinity. Given my physical attributes (six-foot three inches tall – same height since the seventh grade), coaches, teammates, and peers expected me to perform exceptionally on the playing field. While I experienced success in other arenas of my life (e.g., the classroom), my peers idolized my athletic ability, and therefore, growing up, football success served as a primary means of validation and support.

I did not question my identity as an athlete or my understanding of what it means to be a man until I experienced a football injury during my sophomore year at Boston College. In a period of darkness and despair, I was moved to renew my then-dormant faith by becoming confirmed into the Catholic Church. I began to explore my faith, spirituality, and religion for the first time since grade school, through various worship, retreat, and service experiences. It was through these experiences that I first identified tensions between being a man and having faith. I felt the pressure to privatize my faith in hyper-masculine contexts, such as on the football field and in the social scene, where restrictive emotionality and independence were considered normative. I felt the pressure to choose between being a man and having faith, as the dominant masculine and secular

culture did not allow for this level of complexity, even at a Catholic university.

After college, through my professional experiences as an educator and a minister, I began to see many of my own experiences reflected in the experiences of college men, who were also wrestling with integrating faith into their notions of masculinity. This was apparent through my experiences as a retreat director and as a leader of an all-male faith-sharing group, where college men would explore aspects of their identity in a manufactured space (i.e., away/secluded from campus, confidential, shame-free environment), but would often have difficulty sharing these experiences with their male peer groups outside of these settings. As a result, many men felt disheartened and confused, as emerging identities remained fragmented and disparate during their college experience.

My experiences as a scholar have served to question, inform, and add nuance to my personal and professional experiences. During my master's program in pastoral ministry, I became familiar with the concepts of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and *guy code* (Kimmel, 2008), and began to reflect upon the negative and harmful effects of masculinity, specifically how it may conflict with or become an obstacle to the faith development of college men. During my doctoral work in higher education, I began to view masculinity and faith through the lens of intersectionality theory, examining multiple and intersecting oppressions and identities. The works of Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and Collins (1990) and their unwavering commitment to social justice and equality, inspired me to think critically about my experiences as a Catholic man and how I have been a beneficiary of many systems of power and oppression, as a result of having many privileged identities. Given this

reflection, I discovered a need in the literature and passion within myself to discover the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity through a critical lens of intersectionality. I now understand this work as central to what it means to be Catholic, which is, at its core, rooted in a commitment to human dignity, social justice, equality, and the eradication of all forms of oppression.

This positionality statement helped me reflect on personal biases to be aware of throughout the study. For example, I became more aware of my own tensions between being a man and having faith during my college experience. In response, I engaged in journal writing during the data collection and analysis stages. This ensured that I was not projecting my experiences onto the participants in the interviews and not biasing coding and analysis.

My experiences with masculinity and faith, how I have come to and constructed my own gender and faith identities, and the scholarly perspectives I bring to this study are not limitations as long as I am conscious and transparent and my experiences were not assumed and/or projected onto the participants. Instead, these perspectives provided a unique expertise and serve as tools to aid my understanding of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity development.

## **Sample**

### **Purposeful Sampling**

Consistent with the appropriate methods for constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling reflects a general axiom of qualitative research, that the goal of research is not to make generalizations about an experience or populations, but to understand the

particularities of the phenomenon in question based on select cases (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). In purposeful sampling, the researcher select cases they believe they can glean the most insights from, with particular attention towards unusual cases where people are experiencing extreme struggle or unwavering success (Patton, 2002). For example, from the information indicated on the participant profile forms, I selected participants that I perceived were experiencing extreme struggles (e.g., gay men, men of color, transfer students) and unwavering success (e.g., White men, affluent men, student-athletes).

### **Identifying Participants**

In order to purposefully select participants for this study, I employed a combination of intensity, maximum variation, and theoretical sampling strategies. Intensity sampling identifies information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but are not unusual or extreme cases (Patton, 2002). I sought Christian men from Catholic and Protestant traditions who participated in nationally recognized faith-based organizations with college chapters in the Northeast, including Catholic student centers (e.g., Newman Connection) and interdenominational Christian fellowships (e.g., InterVarsity and Cru). College men from these faith-based organizations richly identified with the phenomenon of interest, the intersection of masculinity and faith, given their self-selection into the groups as well as their gender socialization as boys and men. The inclusion of men from various Christian denominations sought to ensure the inclusion of privileged masculinities (e.g., White, affluent, athletic, heterosexual, and cisgender) and marginalized masculinities (e.g., non-White, working class, physically disabled, gay, feminine, and transgender).

I selected two institutions in the Northeast with similar institutional profiles and levels of support for religious belief and faith development. Oxbridge (a private, secular university) and San Ignacio (a Catholic, Jesuit university) are similar contexts as two large, four-year, highly residential, and high research activity universities that champion the liberal arts. Careerism and pre-professionalism is largely the focus at Oxbridge, while vocationalism is largely the focus at San Ignacio, although its undergraduate business school is a notable exception. While most faith-based initiatives are campus-based at San Ignacio, they are generally off-campus at Oxbridge. The rationale for choosing two universities (as opposed to one) was based on the potential to generate a more robust theory with a more diverse sample at both a faith-based and a secular university.

In order to solicit participants, I visited faith-based organizations at Oxbridge and San Ignacio. Organizational leaders (chaplains, campus representatives, and executive board) notified members of the study by electronic mail. Interested participants were asked to complete a participant profile form with demographic information related to their faith backgrounds, social group identities, and college experiences. Of the potential participants, 38 expressed interest in the study by submitting a participant profile form. Of the 38 interested participants, I purposefully selected an initial group of twelve participants (six participants from each institution). With intensity sampling, participants were selected based on ranking faith, spirituality, and religion as “very important” on a five-point Likert scale. With maximum variation sampling, participants were selected based upon four criteria: (a) religious affiliation/denomination; (b) social group identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and age); (c) college

experience (e.g., academic interests, college involvement, leadership experience, and plans after graduation); and (d) high school profile. I selected participants that I perceived were experiencing struggles (e.g., gay men, men of color, transfer students) and unwavering success (e.g., White men, affluent men, student-athletes) (Patton, 2002). Maximum variation sampling was also consistent with an intersectionality social justice theoretical perspective, as I made effort to include participants with one or more marginalized identities (e.g., race, class, sexual orientation), who were likely to be experiencing some form of systemic oppression.

Theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014) was achieved after eight participants, when participants repeated themes and subthemes related to family and relationships; careers, callings, and vocations; and sex and sexuality. Themes were consistent with participants at both universities, although Oxbridge had a more salient culture of careerism and pre-professionalism, which is detailed in the findings section. In addition to redundancy, no new themes were emerging from the participants' experience; however, I continued to ask participants to reflect on alternative themes in the remaining interviews and focus groups. The remaining four participants were utilized to add contradiction, variation, breadth, and depth to the categories and themes emerging from the data. For example, the four participants helped me unpack and clarify subthemes of careerism and pre-professionalism and regretted sexual acts (e.g., sex, hook-ups, masturbation, pornography), which were complex and complicated for most participants.



## **Sample Size**

Given the fact that there are no firm guidelines for sample size in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002), the rationale for the initial group of twelve participants was appropriate given the research questions, methodology, and number of institutions in the study. Since there were two institutions in the study, I selected six participants at Oxbridge and San Ignacio to gather a more varied sample of Christian men from a variety of faith backgrounds, social group identities, and college experiences. Grounded theory is an emergent method, as it employs a theoretical sampling strategy (Charmaz, 2008). This allowed me to select a small initial sample (Patton, 2002) and then, if necessary, add participants beyond the initial group until the data emerging from the participants reaches a level of saturation (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014) or redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since my sampling procedures outlined a specific set of criteria (self-identified men who are members of a practicing faith-based organization), additional participants were not necessary. Since saturation and redundancy were achieved after eight participants, the final four participants added depth, breadth, contradiction, and variation to the concepts, categories, and themes that emerged from the data.

## **Pilot Study**

I conducted a pilot study in January 2015 with five undergraduate men at a large, four-year, highly residential, and high research activity university in the Northeast. The pilot study served as a platform for testing questions and approach. The pilot study enabled me to fine-tune my interview protocol. For example, when asked about role models, participants mentioned religious figures from scripture and Catholic saints, which prompted me to add a question that explicitly asked about influences from

scripture, religious figures, and saints. I refined my language and terminology to be more familiar to the college student experience. For example, the participants talked about several recent movies, music, and books that depicted the college experience, which I was more attentive to during the interviews for this study. I solicited feedback on the questions asked in both interviews, as well as the structure of the participant profile form. Participants believed that the length of the form and the interviews were of the appropriate content and length. I became more familiar with the semi-structured nature of the interviews, practicing follow-up questions based on participant responses. The pilot study helped me identify possible themes (e.g., family, mentors) that caused me to modify my interview protocol, in an effort to be more responsive to these themes. The pilot study also helped me fine-tune coding and analysis.

### **Data Collection: Interview Procedure**

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, which allowed participants time to reflect on the intersection of masculinity and faith between interviews. The first interview was broken up into two halves: the first half focused on faith, while the second half focused on masculinity. This interview lasted approximately an hour a half, broken down into two forty-five minutes sections. Following the first interview, each participant was instructed to reflect on how masculinity and faith come together, if at all. This reflection prepared them for the second interview, which focused on the intersection of masculinity and faith. The second interview lasted approximately an hour.

The first half of the first interview focused on faith and asked questions about how participants have come to understand their faith and what it means to have faith. I

asked participants to describe and provide examples of what it means to be a person of faith and to what degree they internalize and/or ascribe to society's definitions. I also asked participants to describe contextual influences (i.e., people and situations) that have helped to shape their faith identity. This interview protocol was guided by faith development theory (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000) and literature in the field of spirituality and religion in higher education. Specifically, the interview protocol integrated literature related to: (a) a cognitive understanding of faith (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000), asking participants questions about what it means to have faith; (b) forms of community and dependence (Parks, 2000), asking participants questions about contextual influences and mentoring communities; and (c) faith and other identities (Dancy, 2010; Love et al., 2005; Stewart, 2002), asking participants questions about how faith intersects with other identities, such as race, class, and sexuality.

The second half of the first interview focused on masculinity and asked questions about how participants have come to understand their masculinity and what it means to be a man. I asked participants to define and provide examples of what it means to be a man and to what degree they internalize and/or ascribe to society's definitions. I also asked participants to describe contextual influences (i.e., people and situations) that have helped to shape their masculinity. This interview protocol was guided by men's gender identity development theory (Harris & Edwards, 2010) and literature in the field of college men and masculinities. Specifically, the interview protocol integrated literature related to: (a) how men internalize and ascribe to society's definitions of masculinity (Harris & Edwards, 2010), asking participants questions about what it means to be a man and how their definition fits or does not fit society's definition; (b) contextual influences

on masculinity (Harris, 2010), asking participants questions about how their masculinity has been shaped over time; and (c) masculinity and other identities (Harper et al., 2011), asking participants about how masculinity intersects with other identities, such as race, class, and sexuality.

The second interview examined the intersection of masculinity and faith, building on themes that emerged from the first interview. I asked questions that prompted reflections on the intersection of masculinity and faith; specifically, participants' perceptions of how these two identity facets interact, inform, construct, and come into conflict with one another, if at all. This interview protocol was guided by literature related to intersectionality and student development theory, specifically the Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & Abes, 2013). The interview protocol integrated literature related to identity intersections and contextual influences (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000) as well as intersecting systems of power, privilege, and oppression (Abes, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2013), asking questions about identity interactions and possible conflicts on individual and systemic levels.

In order to member check and triangulate the initial themes that formed the basis for the emerging theory, accountability and affirmation, I conducted focus group feedback sessions at each institution. All twelve participants attended the optional focus group, which demonstrated their strong interest and engagement in the topic itself, the experiences of other eleven participants, and the overall outcomes of the study. The focus groups served as an opportunity to gather feedback from the participants on whether the initial themes of the study (family, careers, and sex and sexuality) were true to their experience. Participants at both institutions expressed struggles with tensions at

the intersection of masculinity and faith with their possible careers and sex and sexuality. They connected with one another about feeling less masculine and inadequate as men given cultural expectations of masculinity that expected them to be very individualistic and hypersexualized. While they aligned more closely with their faith and religious principles in both careers and sex and sexuality, they talked about feeling frustrated when comparing themselves to other men on campus. The participants spoke about how their faith communities helped them feel more comfortable with themselves and make meaning of their experiences. The focus groups were critical to theory formation, as some of the early conceptualizations of the emerging theory of accountability and affirmation came directly from the focus groups.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to effectively analyze the data that emerged from the interviews in a manner consistent with grounded theory, I utilized constructivist grounded theory methods proposed by Charmaz (2014). A transcriptionist was contracted to transcribe the sound files for twenty-four individual interviews and two focus groups. Following transcription, interviews and focus groups were coded using Dedoose software.

Data were analyzed using initial, focused, axial, and theoretical/selective coding (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In initial coding, the researcher identifies fragments of data (e.g., words, lines, segments, incidents) and determines their analytic import to the study (Charmaz, 2014). I engaged in line-by-line coding using Dedoose software, writing memos that provided additional explanation and context for the initial codes, so I could revisit them for their analytic import at the focus coding stage. I separated data into categories and processes, by deconstructing and

analyzing events, actions, and experiences, specifically how and why they came to be and what constituted them (Charmaz, 2014). Line-by-line coding prompts the researcher to examine data in new and unique ways, as coding may conflict with or call into question initial assumptions that emerged from the interviews (Charmaz, 2014). At this stage, grounded theorists utilize *in vivo* codes, which aim to preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions by using participants' terms as codes (Charmaz, 2014). In more detail, each interview was coded line-by-line resulting in over 1600 individual codes, such as "caring for others," "moderation," "pressure to lose virginity," and "proving masculinity through sexual conquests."

In focused coding, the researcher studies and assesses the analytic value of initial codes by comparing codes with other codes, in order to determine their adequacy and conceptual strength (Charmaz, 2014). Given this analysis, the researcher identifies initial codes that make the most analytic sense moving forward. Consistent with grounded theory, initial and focused coding are both emergent processes, as the researcher may uncover new and sometimes unexpected insights or ideas during data collection and analysis, which are occurring simultaneously. In the focus coding stage, codes were grouped into 43 major categories, such as "humility and modesty," "mentor, model, and example for others," "sex and hook-ups," and "sin, temptations, and vices."

At the axial coding stage, I linked these categories to *causal conditions*, *intervening conditions*, and *consequences* of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). From these connections, I formed initial *theoretical propositions* (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998), which are hypotheses that suggest relationships between conditions, phenomena, and

corresponding influences (Creswell, 2013). For example, family and relationships and careers, callings, and vocations were initially subthemes under a larger theme related to meaning and purpose. As I recognized the salience of these experiences, the two subthemes became themes of their own.

At the theoretical/selective stage, I identified the central phenomenon that emerged from the data that describes the intersection of masculinity and faith. As discussed in the previous section, the focus groups were critical in conceptualizing the emerging theory of accountability and affirmation, as the discussions prompted me to revisit coding and analysis in conceptualizing a central theme for this study.

Throughout data collection and analysis, I engaged in journaling, memo-writing, and diagramming (Charmaz, 2014), which helped me be more reflexive about the research process and track the process of data analysis and interpretation. For example, journaling about the two gay participants in the study helped me make meaning of their experiences of heterosexism, including how they strongly differed in their interactions with and perspectives on Christianity and campus-based LGBTQ communities.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify four criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is one of the most important factors in ensuring trustworthiness, as it ensures that the data collected is representative of the phenomenon studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure credibility in this study, I employed a number of strategies. First, as outlined in previous sections, I carefully executed the techniques and procedures for grounded theory research, including initial, focused, axial, and selective coding, memo-writing and

diagramming, theoretical sampling, and theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014). Second, consistent with grounded theory, I engaged in member checking by providing participants with bullet-pointed summaries of previous interviews (Charmaz, 2014). This ensured that my interpretations were true to their experiences, as the participants were asked to clarify my interpretations of their interview responses. In general, participants were satisfied and thankful for the summaries, as they provided additional opportunities to reflect on their own experiences. A few participants sent back minor comments and clarifications that gave context and nuance to statements made in the interview. For example, in his first interview, Jean talked how it was “complete B.S.” when his college peers were not forthright about their motivations to pursue money and wealth. In reading his interview summary, Jean credited his faith for helping him internalize less lucrative career pursuits that aligned more closely with Christianity and religious principles. He added “unfortunately (or fortunately), I believe it because of my faith.” Through his feedback, I became more attentive to his strong reliance, yet ambivalence, about his faith and career pursuits both in the second interview and in coding and analysis. At the conclusion of the study, I conducted voluntary focus groups at both institutions (all twelve participants attended), which served as an opportunity to solicit feedback from the participants on whether the initial themes were true to their experience. As outlined in previous sections, the focus groups were critical for theory building, as the discussions formed early conceptualizations of the emerging theory of accountability and affirmation.

Transferability ensures that the findings of the study have applicability in other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Other researchers wishing to transfer the results to different contexts will ultimately judge the transferability of this study. It is the



responsibility of the researcher to provide a detailed account of all aspects of this study, or a thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), including the research context and assumptions that are central to this study. The final dissertation provides a thick description that serves as a means of addressing transferability. In the event that researchers have additional questions beyond the final dissertation, I will revisit the research materials. Therefore, I have preserved digital recordings, transcripts, interview summaries, research notes (e.g., journals, memos, diagrams), descriptions of participants, and all other research materials until they need to be destroyed to maintain participant confidentiality, consistent with the guidelines of the Boston College Institutional Review Board.

Dependability ensures that the findings of the study are consistent and could be repeated in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability also requires the researcher to account for the changing contexts in which the research occurs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to acknowledge my own research subjectivity, I provided a statement of researcher positionality earlier in this chapter, which is a reflection on my personal experiences of the intersection of masculinity and faith. I engaged in reflexive practices by journaling regularly throughout the data collection process. As outlined in previous sections, journaling provided a means of capturing my thought processes during the study.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed by other researchers, when presented with the same information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure confirmability, I preserved digital recordings, transcripts, interview summaries, research notes (e.g., journals, memos, diagrams), descriptions of participants, and all

other researcher materials. For the purposes of inter-rater reliability, I shared two interviews with another doctoral student in order to compare coding and meaning-making from the interviews. The doctoral student was familiar with emergent coding schemes for his own dissertation research. After coding and analyzing the two interviews, we debriefed our findings to examine our degree of concordance. The coding agreed substantially with my own and questions were posed that helped me critically reflect on my own coding, such that the degree of bias in the codes was diminished. For example, a question was posed about the possibility of double coding “vulnerability” and “honesty and authenticity,” which caused me to collapse the two categories into one. To this end, a question was also posed about the subjective nature of coding “vulnerability” and “honesty and authenticity,” which made me aware of how I may have positively biased the coding, in perceiving the participants’ behaviors as laudable. In response, I revisited the coding and discerned whether “vulnerability” and “honesty and authenticity” was my own perception or participants’ perceptions of themselves.

### **Limitations**

There are several key limitations that need to be acknowledged in this study. First, given the constructivist paradigm of this study, the findings are context-specific, as participants were portrayed in their unique social contexts. This study was conducted across two campuses with a small number of participants. Despite the fact that these campuses have different approaches to faith-based initiatives, the sample is by no means representative of all college campuses and environments. In addition, this study sought to examine the small number of participants in depth, not to develop a theory that is generalizable to all college men.

Second, selection bias is also a limitation of this study, as the participants in this study self-selected into this study and self-selected into their respective faith-based communities and organizations outlined in the sampling procedures. Given the fact that organizational leaders notified potential participants of the study by personal electronic mail, the 38 interested participants were likely to be men who frequented their offices, programs, and/or classrooms. Consequently, there may have been other men with differing perspectives on the intersection of masculinity and faith that may not have been invited to participate. This exclusion may have potentially impacted the findings of this study.

Finally, a limitation of any qualitative research is the interpretation of participant experiences. As a key instrument in qualitative research and grounded theory methodology (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002), my subjective role as a researcher undoubtedly impacted the way I conducted and interpreted the research, specifically the data collection, analysis, and outcomes of this study. Another researcher's interpretations and conclusions of the same study would likely differ in some respects. There would also likely be differing outcomes with another theoretical perspective.

### **Ethics**

Over the course of this study, I made every effort to assuage ethical concerns by: (a) ensuring participant confidentiality, (b) informing participants of the potential risk/discomforts and benefits of the study, and (c) protecting the dignity of the participants. In order to encourage participant honesty and transparency throughout the study, participant confidentiality was maintained using a pseudonym in all published

research materials. The actual identities of participants were maintained in a password-protected file, in order to facilitate potential participation in a future research project.

Although there are no anticipated risks/discomforts to the study, the nature of the study asked participants to reflect upon how they have come to understand what it means to be a man and what it means to have faith, which may have elicited visceral reactions to past memories and experiences. Guided by my experiences as a resident minister, I made every effort to ensure participants were comfortable and cared for, particularly if a participant revealed sensitive or distressing experiences. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, as participants had the right to withdraw from the study without penalty. All interview questions were optional, as participants could decline to answer questions if they felt uncomfortable with the content. While there were no direct benefits to the study, I hope that each participant gained a new awareness of how masculinity and faith intersect in their lives.

Of utmost concern is the dignity of the participants in this study. Throughout the study, I made every effort to communicate my sincerest concern for their well-being. If they desired, I provided additional information and resources (e.g., places of worship, faith-based sharing communities, men's groups, counseling services), in order to demonstrate my care and to help continue their development as college men.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Using purposeful sampling and constructivist grounded theory methodology, I sought to posit a theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men. Through intensive semi-structured interviewing, I gathered and analyzed data using an intersectionality (Museus & Griffin, 2011) social justice (Charmaz, 2005) theoretical

perspective. The theory that emerged from this study sought to inform developmental theories of college men and to provide a useful framework to help faculty, staff, and administrators develop programming, outreach, and curricula to engage college men.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

This study explored the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity. I conducted two interviews each with twelve undergraduate men. Consistent with grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014), each interview was coded line-by-line resulting in over 1600 individual codes (initial coding), such as "caring for others," "moderation," "pressure to lose virginity," and "proving masculinity through sexual conquests." Then, the codes were grouped into 43 major categories (focused coding), such as "humility and modesty," "mentor, model, and example for others," "sex and hook-ups," and "sin, temptations, and vices." From these categories and subcategories, I explored processual relationships between categories, specifically how they interacted, informed, constructed, and contradicted one another (axial coding). Three themes emerged which formed the basis for the emerging theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity (theoretical coding), grounded in the experience of the participants of this study.

In this chapter, I give an overview of the final sample, introduce the participants in the study, provide an overview of the emerging theory, and discuss in detail the three themes that emerged using the participants' examples and explanations (i.e., thick descriptions) of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity. The emerging theory reflects the process of how college men interacted with cultural expectations of them as men of faith. This study suggests an emerging theory of accountability and affirmation, where men of faith negotiated masculinity and faith identities and were more likely to receive accountability and affirmation from their faith

communities than a hypersexualized and very individualistic masculine culture, which resulted in a greater conformance to faith and religious principles. The theory of accountability and affirmation is present in three major themes of this study: (a) family and relationships; (b) career, calling, and vocation; and (c) sex and sexuality. The major themes are outlined in this chapter.

### **Overview of Sample**

Twelve Christian college men from Catholic and Protestant traditions participated in this study. The criterion for inclusion of sample was based on full-time undergraduate enrollment and active participation in Christian faith-based communities and organizations. With intensity sampling, participants were selected based on ranking faith, spirituality, and religion as “very important” on a five-point Likert scale. With maximum variation sampling, participants were selected based upon four criteria: (a) religious affiliation/denomination; (b) social group identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and age); (c) college experience (e.g., academic interests, college involvement, leadership experience, and plans after graduation); and (d) high school profile.

The sample consisted of six participants from Oxbridge (a private, secular university) and six participants from San Ignacio (a Catholic, Jesuit university), seven Protestant and five Catholic men, two gay men, seven men of color (three mixed race), three low-income or working class men, three student-athletes, three pre-medicine concentrations, one transfer, one international student, and twelve cisgender men.

**Table 1**  
**Participants' Social Group Identities**

Participants	Religious	Race (Ethnicity)	Sexual Orientation	SES/Class	Age	Institution	College Experience
Anthony	Roman Catholic	Hispanic/Latino (Columbian)	Heterosexual	Working class	21	San Ignacio	Theology, retreats, service
Blake	Roman Catholic	White (European)	Gay	Middle class	21	San Ignacio	Accounting, economics, GLBTQ retreat leader, spiritual reflection/prayer leader
Francis	Episcopalian	Hispanic/Black/ Asian (Latino/African- American/Afro- Caribbean/Asian)	Heterosexual	Low income	18	San Ignacio	English, Black student group, school newspaper (writer)
Gilbert	Roman Catholic (converted from Evangelical Protestant)	White (European)	Heterosexual	Middle class	23	Oxbridge	Classical civilizations, rugby (captain), transfer from military academy
Jean	Protestant	Asian (Chinese)	Heterosexual	Middle class	18	Oxbridge	Physics, fellowship group for Asian students, interfaith initiatives
Joseph	Roman Catholic	White (European)	Heterosexual	Working class	21	Oxbridge	Human evolutionary biology, pre-med, drama, Catholic student group
Josh	Non-denom. Christian	Black (African)	Heterosexual	Middle class	20	San Ignacio	Applied psychology/human



							development, former football player (injury), fellowship group, personal trainer
Jude	Non-denom. Christian (Evangelical)	Black (African/ Nigerian)	Heterosexual	Affluent	20	Oxbridge	History, pre-med, fellowship group, African Diaspora singing group
Luke	American Baptist	White (European)	Heterosexual	Middle class	18	Oxbridge	English, classics, band, fellowship group, Christian journal (writer/editor)
Mark	Roman Catholic	White (European)	Heterosexual	Middle class	22	San Ignacio	Biology, pre-med, orientation leader, service
TJ	Baptist	Black/White (mixed)	Heterosexual	Middle class	21	San Ignacio	Communications, football, fellowship group for athletes
Tom	Anglican	White/Asian (mixed/New Zealand)	Gay	Middle class	22	Oxbridge	Math, philosophy, teaching assistant, volunteer at homeless shelter, Christian journal (writer)

### Participant Descriptions

#### Anthony (San Ignacio)

Anthony is a 21-year old Latino (Hispanic) heterosexual man from a working class background who is Roman Catholic. He is a first-generation college student of Columbian immigrant parents. Anthony attends mass four to five times per week and receives spiritual direction from a Catholic priest. Anthony has been a participant and

leader both on a religious retreat and a service trip to the Dominican Republic. Anthony is a theology major who has applied to a local Catholic seminary with hopes of entering into a six-year academic program in route to becoming an ordained priest after graduation. He attended a public high school in the Northeast region of the United States.

### **Blake (San Ignacio)**

Blake is a 21-year old White (Irish/Italian/French Canadian) gay man from a middle class background who is Roman Catholic. He is a member of a Catholic (Jesuit) student group and leads a weekly prayer/reflection open to all undergraduate students at the university. He has served as a leader for both a spiritual retreat and GLBTQ student retreat and has participated in an international immersion program. Blake is a leader of a men's conversation group and a trainer for bystander education. He is an accounting and economics major who plans to work at a large accounting firm and become licensed as a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) after graduation. He attended a private, all-boys Catholic (Xaverian) high school in the Northeast region of the United States.

### **Francis (San Ignacio)**

Francis is an 18-year old Hispanic/Black/Asian (Latino/African-American/Afro-Caribbean/Asian) heterosexual man from a low-income background who is Episcopalian. He is involved in a management program for students from diverse racial backgrounds and is a member of a Black student group. He is a writer for a student newspaper and is on the residence hall council. Francis also had an on-campus job with athletics. He is an English major who plans to work in the private sector in order to pay off his student loans, and until he can financially support himself as a writer. He would like to write a

novel that guides and inspires African-American students to attend college and make positive changes in their home communities. He attended a private, coeducational Catholic (Jesuit) high school in the Northeast region of the United States.

### **Gilbert (Oxbridge)**

Gilbert is a 23-year old White (European) heterosexual man from a middle class background who is Roman Catholic (converted from Evangelical Protestant in college). He is a member of a Catholic student group that has expectations of chastity and sobriety. He attends mass daily and serves as a leader of a weekly Bible study. Gilbert transferred from a military academy and is the captain of the rugby team. He is a classical civilization major who plans to teach and coach rugby at a private, coeducational Catholic (Jesuit) boarding school in Europe after graduation. He attended a public high school in the western region of the United States.

### **Jean (Oxbridge)**

Jean is an 18-year old Asian (Chinese) heterosexual man from a middle class background who is Christian (Protestant). He is a first-generation college student of Chinese immigrant parents. Jean attends church weekly, is a Sunday school teacher, and took two classes at Oxbridge pertaining to Christianity. He is a member of an interdenominational Christian group for Asian-American students and was the event chair for an interfaith forum. Jean is involved in the women and men's prison empowerment program, the math student association, and the physics student group. He also is involved with an organization that empowers teens to make healthy decisions. Jean is a physics major who is uncertain of his path after graduation, but is interested in pursuing a

Ph.D. in Physics. He attended a public high school in the southern region of the United States.

**Joseph (Oxbridge)**

Joseph is a 21-year old White (European) heterosexual man from a working class background who is Roman Catholic. He is a member of a Catholic student group that has expectations of chastity and sobriety. He attends mass daily and leads a weekly Bible study. Joseph serves on the leadership team of the largest Catholic student organization on campus. He is a member of the drama club, a tour guide on campus, and a member of an acapella group. Joseph is a human evolutionary biology major who plans to take two years to work (in acting or mission work) after graduation, and then attend medical school. He attended a public high school in the southwest region of the United States.

**Josh (San Ignacio)**

Josh is a 20-year old Black (African-American) heterosexual man from a middle class background who is a non-denominational Christian. He is a scholarship football player who stopped playing due to a head injury. He is an active participant in an interdenominational Christian group and regularly attends Bible study. He is in a marketing group on campus and served as a committee member for a charity basketball tournament that benefited cancer research. He also works as a certified personal trainer at the University recreation complex. He is an applied psychology and human development major who plans to attend graduate school after graduation. He attended a public high school in the Northeast region of the United States.

### **Jude (Oxbridge)**

Jude is a 20-year old Black (African) heterosexual man from an affluent background who is an Evangelical/non-denominational Christian. He is a member of an interdenominational Christian group, where he co-leads a weekly Bible study. He is also a member of an African Diaspora singing group that celebrates creativity and spirituality, and a member of a student group against malaria. He is a history and science (global health and health policy) major who plans to take a gap year after graduation to pursue health policy and health systems strengthening, and then attend medical school. He attended a public high school in the southern region of the United States.

### **Luke (Oxbridge)**

Luke is an 18-year old White (European) heterosexual man from a middle class background who is American Baptist. He comes from a family with three-generations of pastors at his home church. Luke is a member of an interdenominational Christian group and regularly attends Bible study. He is a writer and editor for a Christian journal on campus. He is a member of the marching band and works as a janitor on campus. Luke is a double major in English and Classics who plans to attend graduate school after graduation. He attended a public high school in the Northeast region of the United States.

### **Mark (San Ignacio)**

Mark is a 22-year old White (German/Irish/Slovenian) heterosexual man from a middle class background who is Roman Catholic. He volunteers for four hours a week and is a Eucharistic minister and reader at weekly masses. For two summers, he has served as an orientation leader for the University. Mark led an alternative spring break

program with a focus on servant leadership and is in a leadership program focused on ethics and servant leadership. He co-chaired a national conference on Jesuit spirituality and for two years and held a leadership position in the residence hall council. Mark is a biology major who plans on doing biology research, service, and/or attending medical school after graduation. He attended a private, all-boys Catholic (Jesuit) high school in the Midwest region of the United States.

### **TJ (San Ignacio)**

TJ is a 21-year old mixed race (Black and White) heterosexual man from a middle class background who is Baptist. He is a scholarship football player who is actively involved in an interdenominational Christian group for athletes. TJ leads a weekly Bible study for student-athletes. He is a communications major who plans to pursue a career in professional football or sports media. He attended a public high school in the southern region of the United States.

### **Tom (Oxbridge)**

Tom is a 22-year old White/Asian (New Zealand) gay man from a middle class background who is Anglican. He is a member of an interdenominational Christian group, where he met some of his closest friends in college. He is a writer and editor for a Christian journal on campus. Tom also serves as a teaching assistant for the mathematics department, regularly volunteers at a local homeless shelter, and leads an interfaith discussion series on campus. Tom is a mathematics and philosophy major who plans on going into academia and becoming a philosophy professor after graduation. He attended a private, coeducational Anglican high school in New Zealand.

## **Overview of Emerging Theory**

The focus of this study was the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity, describing the process by which the participants came to understand themselves as men of faith. Participants in this study developed their identity at the intersection of masculinity and faith through constant interaction with cultural expectations of them as men of faith. As participants learned these expectations, they negotiated masculinity and faith identities and were more likely to receive accountability and affirmation from their faith communities than a hypersexualized and very individualistic masculine culture, which resulted in a greater conformance to faith and religious principles. The theory of accountability and affirmation is present in three major themes of this study: (a) family and relationships; (b) career, calling, and vocation; and (c) sex and sexuality.

### **Family & Relationships**

#### **Expectations & Experiences in Family & Relationships**

**Fatherhood, leadership, and modeling for children.** Participants anticipated roles as husbands and fathers and shared the desire to be present and emotionally involved in their family. As Gilbert remarked, "As a husband and a father your primary vocation is to your family." Jude described a man of faith as "in the context of a family...in the context of a flock," the "spiritual head," the provider of "stable financial support" and the caretaker of the "emotional needs" of the family. He continued, "The nature of just simply being present as a man, as a father, as a husband is so, so important." Jude looked up to his father as an ideal man of faith.

Other participants shared deep connections with their fathers, whom they admired and hoped to emulate in the future. TJ talked about the importance of providing financially and emotionally for a family and gave an example of his father's unwavering love and support growing up.

Making sure that if you have a family providing for your family, making sure you're loving them. It's not something that's just going to be easy. I'm not a dad, but I know my dad every day worked to make sure that he was in our lives and really worked at our relationship with each other. It wasn't easy at every second of every day but it was definitely worth it.

Mark described the deep connection he had with his father as being pivotal to him opting out of the party scene on occasion, in order to spend quality time with friends and be well rested for the next day.

That justification to stay in tonight so I can have a better day tomorrow, I didn't just decide that because "oh my gosh, I drank way too much last Thursday and this Thursday I'm going to stay in, I'm not drinking cold turkey." No, that decision's developed for 21 years. That's seeing my dad say no, I'm not going to have a beer at the picnic, I'll throw a ball with you, Mark. That's anecdotal but my dad's done things like that. Like my dad staying in watching basketball with us instead of going to a bar. Seeing that and then doing that in high school and saying I need to study and praying about it, having my faith led to that small decision to say no because I've seen the result. I've seen where my father is, I've seen where my grandfather is and they made decisions like this. Small decisions add up and small consequences of faith add up into that decision-making.



Anthony focused on caring and providing for his two elderly parents with the minimal salary he would receive as a seminarian and diocesan priest. His identity as “the man of the house” was deeply rooted in Columbian culture and the importance of family. “I’m always looking out for the best interests of my family and the mentality is that if you’re the man of the house in a Spanish household you need to look out not just spiritually but also economically for your family.”

Joseph, who was also considering a vocation to the priesthood, found overlapping qualities of fathers and priests. “And what it means to be a dad is just having this desire to protect and care for. I feel like that’s very similar to being a priest but in a different sense. When you’re a dad you care about the person’s mind, their body, their soul – everything.” Joseph shared how often he prayed to St. Joseph of the Holy Family (father of Jesus), “because I feel like he’s a really good model of what a man should be. He’s the person God trusted to take care of Jesus and teach Jesus how to pray.”

Joseph also talked about the possibility of having children, and the desire to be fulfilled in his career, which he believed would be more important to his children than being wealthy. “If I am called to the married life, if I am called to have children, then what’s going to benefit them more than having a trust fund is seeing their mom and dad just being extremely fulfilled in the way they live and what they do.” Tom shared a similar position to Joseph, as his parents, rather than focusing on “money, power, and success...(My parents) gave up better job options for the ones they felt God was calling them to.”

While Joseph and Tom talked about being a model of fulfillment for their children, Gilbert wanted to be a model of sacrifice for the good of the family, as he

expressed openness to more financially lucrative jobs that would provide better but were less fulfilling. Gilbert considered this to be a great and noble sacrifice to prioritize his family over himself. He attributed his recent shift in thinking to a budding romantic relationship in his life.

I recently started seeing someone at the beginning of January and the more time I spent discerning that relationship the more this question of being a provider and providing for a family has come back because now I'm not just thinking about myself. I'm thinking about my wife and my kids as well. And so suddenly those jobs in finance look a lot more attractive now. And as far as balancing that tension I think that as a husband and a father your primary vocation is to your family. And so, there is something noble and even working a terribly dry and boring 9-5 job or something that makes good money because you're providing for your family. That's what you're called to do first and foremost if you are a father and a husband.

Undoubtedly, the men of faith in this study had high expectations of fatherhood. The next section addresses the importance of faith in the family.

**Faith as central to family life.** Many participants shared the desire for God and faith to be a foundation for their family. Blake explained, "When I find my partner for life (faith) will be more present, very present then. So, it's like it will always be there and I think once I have a family of my own I think it will grow dramatically then." Jude described how he prays about his future family, marriage, and fatherhood, including the hope to pass on faith to his children, which he connected to his masculinity.

I think one of the things I definitely pray about is being a good provider and a good father because especially now even being in a relationship and thinking long term about the future I'm definitely considering what it means to me. I am imagining myself getting married sometime after medical school because in that sense I would feel prepared as a provider. But also, my masculinity would be important to my ideal of what it means to be a father and I think it's important for me to be asking God about how to be, how to pass on good values and how to be present and just have all the things that I think men are supposed to have and pass on to their children.

Passing on Christian teachings was also important to Joseph, who described a man of faith as a "spiritual father" who is there to "help teach friends, your loved ones, and your children about your faith and hopefully their faith."

Mark spoke at length about the gratitude he felt for his parents for providing him a strong Catholic upbringing and foundation. "I just can't believe how much my parents influenced and how much they sacrificed for me." Mark described how his parents saved money in order to afford Catholic education since early childhood, which instilled strong ethics and values. "(My parents) could have put that money in their retirement fund and probably would have retired five or ten years earlier...I'm forever indebted and I hope to do the same with my children."

Jude described the importance of his parents as models for Christian ethics and "spiritual truths," as they lived out their faith through their God-centered marriage.

I think I've been really fortunate to have my parents as probably a model for Christian ethics. I think even foundationally looking at their marriage, they've

definitely had ups and downs and squabbles and definitely serious times but I always felt like whether either of them felt like they were in the wrong they always come back being centered on God and whether that meant being committed to being married and working out whatever conflicts they had or if it meant being what they felt like God has told them to be as father and mother and sort of taking care of us in that capacity. I see them not only living it out in action but also just foundationally teaching me a lot of spiritual truths whether it's praying together before we go to bed or my dad praying over me.

Mark also shared the importance of having "a bedrock of similar beliefs" about faith in marriage, where parents are "on the same page." TJ talked about the significance of keeping love alive in a marriage with "God as a rock."

I know that puppy love will not always be there when you're married, I know that. It's going to take more than that and that's where I think God comes in and that's why I think that it's so important to have God as your rock in your relationship because everyone's going to have that love where they say I get butterflies and I lose my breath when I talk to her and whatever. And when that comes, if you both are aspired for the same things in life and you just want to continue to grow. In my specific example in the Lord and just honor each other in that I feel there's endless amount of love towards that so that's kind of the thing.

Francis talked about marriage as a sacrament in the Catholic Church. He explained, "Just giving part of yourself to someone else and actually being one with another person is pretty much the closest thing to being with God and actually learning to

love God, if you can love another person in a spiritually, emotionally, and a physical way.”

While Mark and Jude were satisfied with the way their parents raised them, Blake and Tom wanted to raise their future children in a more faithful environment than their parents had provided. Blake explained, “My parents didn’t get an opportunity to take classes like this and this right here...I came here because of liberal arts...to be better educated.” Blake was adamant about following a different model for his children, centered on faith. Tom described his parents as “very committed Christians,” but also very “hands off,” as they did not “force Christianity on me and my siblings.”

They took us to church every Sunday, but they wanted us to meet God for ourselves and when I did first meet God here at college, I was actually a bit upset with them for not having been more directly involved in our faith. I started telling them off, like, “Why didn’t you read the Bible with us more, or pray with us more?”

For some participants, the centrality of faith in the family and marriage extended to sexual identities as virgins. This is highlighted in the next section.

**Sex, virginity, and marriage.** The importance of marriage and faith was reflected in the participants’ identities as virgins. TJ, Jude, Jean, Gilbert, and Joseph shared their feelings on marriage and the importance of remaining virgins for future spouses. TJ spoke about an imminent engagement with his current partner and “saving himself for marriage.” Jude, who was also in a committed relationship, thought about “sex being in the context of marriage.” Jean talked about “looking for a wife,” which he considered to be a “long, drawn out process and it involves a lot more self-control”

around issues of sex. When forced to explain his virginity to peers, Jean pointed to his Christian values and “slightly more conservative Chinese American culture,” which both advocated for his stance. Gilbert also held an equally strong position on virginity, rooted in Christian teachings on sexual ethics.

Christ commands us to be pure and sex is only appropriate inside marriage.

That’s not an arbitrary command either. That is there because it’s for our own good and that we will flourish as men – as women too because they’re called to the same – that we will flourish as people if we are living the way that Christ tells us to.

Joseph talked about the value of “taking it slow” with his partner and saving himself for marriage.

I really enjoy taking it slow with this girl. And it feels right. Almost like if this is supposed to be my future spouse then I can wait and we would have our whole lives.

In contrast, Blake described an enlightened view of church teachings on sex and virginity, brought about by a course he took on spirituality and sexuality. He strongly believed in “sex for love and not procreation” and that “good sex doesn’t require marriage.” Blake later shared the story of losing his virginity at the age of 21, outside of a loving and committed relationship. It “just kind of happened” and was “slightly reckless...sure.” It is important to note that other participants may have felt strongly about saving themselves for marriage or may have shared Blake’s views, but they did not comment on the matter.

**Care and sacrifice in relationships.** The participants desired to love others by caring and sacrificing for them, which they connected to their identities as men of faith. Mark and Josh talked about loving, caring, and sacrificing without expecting anything in return. Mark shared, “Maybe you aren’t going to make me happy today but you’re in my life and I’m going to love you.” Josh explained, “It doesn’t take someone to give me love to give love. I feel like I give love no matter what and if I happen to receive love that’s great too. I feel like giving goes before getting.”

Gilbert, Mark, and Francis spoke about the need for consistency in the way they treated others. Gilbert connected loving, caring, and sacrificing to being intentional and glorifying God.

There’s being intentional about approaching every event, action, thing throughout the day and asking oneself, “How can I glorify God in this?” And the way that would look is often like it would be loving, caring, and sacrificing for others and putting others above oneself and going out of one’s way. Doing little practical things to make, to care for someone else, to love them, to make them feel loved and cared for.

Mark talked about a consistency of dignity and respect for others regardless of their social standing, focusing on good will rather than monetary or personal gain.

I think it’s how you treat people 24/7, it’s not just how you treat the people you serve with. It’s how you treat the workers that are clearing you trays; it’s all those things. It’s in the relationships. I do sacrifice for my friends. I do sacrifice. I do care. I do spend a little extra time if someone’s struggling because of faith,

motivated by faith not just motivated by good will or this will come back to me or I'm getting paid to do this.

Tom echoed Mark in his desire to be treat people consistently, no matter their rank or position. "Christianity helps us to see this, it teaches us that people are good, though we're very different from one another...I look at the bus driver and I see the same thing as when I look at my professor."

Francis demonstrated his care and sacrifice for others through his solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. He expressed frustration and struggle with "recent news about people who are being killed and abused," which was an unresolved tension with this faith. "I do believe in Catholic teachings and I believe in love and everything, but it's hard to just love someone when they're murdering your friends, families, and literally destroying your own culture." As a freshman, Francis became involved in the Black student organization and started writing for the student newspaper about race-related issues. His involvement was inspired by several figures of the past and present, particularly the life and teachings of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who protested against poverty, injustice, and violence. Francis was also enthusiastic about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Pope Francis, and St. Francis Xavier. He described the ways that he emulated the religious figures through his college involvement.

Just their sacrifice of actually giving their lives to Christ, giving their lives for others, and trying to help others. That's something that I always try and live by and that's why I joined the Black Student Association. I started to protest, I wrote articles about issues that had to do with Ferguson and race.



Other participants took pride in their ability to be available and present to their peers, which was grounded deeply in their faith. Anthony shared his availability to friends “any time of the day to talk, regardless of time, regardless of location.” He considered his presence as a “very concrete way of me living out my faith life...Jesus was there for me, so I want to be there for others.” Luke talked about his predisposition towards “humility” and loving others, connecting it to faith and scripture. “The scriptures say how important being humble is and the whole idea of putting others before yourself, loving your neighbor before yourself, blessing the meek, and all that and how you show that you really are humble, that you are thinking of others.” Blake also credited his love and good morals to scripture, specifically the “greater idea of unconditional love and that you need to love yourself and also love others and love God.” Blake expressed this idea through being a “rock” for others and shared a story about a friend coming to him to talk about her sister being sexually assaulted.

I’m that one that has the communication skills but I’m also the person that I’ve seen that my friends will go to as a rock. One of my really close friends, when her sister was sexually assaulted, I was the person she went to...People have no idea what’s going on beneath and I feel like I’m somebody who seeks to know.

Like Blake, Josh talked about one of his male roommates coming to talk with him about a failed romantic relationships, which surprised him, since his roommates were usually very stoic and did not like to share their feelings openly with others.

I notice for the most part no one talks about their emotions...One night (my roommate and his girlfriend) broke up and he came to me...he cried about how hurt he was, he’d been with the girl for years, she’d broke his heart...out of all of

my seven roommates, he is the only one in my room to actually vent and talk to me about his problems and actually show his emotions and not try to cover them or hide them. He didn't try to put on a mask.

The "mask" that other men wore grew tiresome at times for Josh, as he wished that more of his male friends could have the courage to talk about their insecurities and struggles. In describing his motivations for loving others, Josh asked the simple question, "How could I possibly be God's servant if I'm only caring about myself?" Josh answered his own question:

You have to share the wealth. You can't just think about yourself, but how about the person to the right of you? You never know. I feel like if somebody next to me, one of my friends, if they're not doing well, if they're down for whatever reason it makes me feel down because I feel like I'm not doing my job to help them because I feel like the point is to help others. The key emphasis is help. Don't just focus on oneself. Focus on others around you, community.

**Treating women with dignity rather than utility.** The participants in this study extended their love, care, and sacrifice to the way they treated women, as they had strong reactions to a very individualistic and hypersexualized masculine culture that encouraged hooking-up with women and treating them as sexual currency. Anthony described being a man as treating women with equality and respect, which he passed down to his nephew.

For me a man is also, try to be living proof, a living example that we don't have to be, try to think of ourselves as better than or stronger than women. I wouldn't consider myself a feminist per say but there's something there to be said that there is equality there, there is a middle ground that you need to respect your peers and

usually I tell my nephew that you've got to respect the women. I think that needs to be very important. That's very important to what a man is, is respecting others especially women and your mother and your parents. That's a big one for me.

Jean felt that misogyny was perpetuated by a very individualistic and hypersexualized masculinity, and therefore, used his faith to rethink gender norms and narrow ontological categories for men and women.

I think there's also a very strong reaction against misogyny because of my faith. You know, we're all equal in Christ, equal in the eyes of God and I feel like Christianity is extraordinarily egalitarian...outside of a faith framework I feel like you can make whatever kinds of statements you want about human nature, the nature of men and women, gender norms, and things like that but I think that Christianity, it shaped my views a lot in terms of this understanding of men and women and this fundamentally equal before God.

Like Jean, Jude brought up Christianity in the context of privilege and power, as a religion that required individuals to sacrifice for the good of others. "Christianity is fundamentally, in so many different parts...a religion of sacrifice and I think that what it means to be a Christian involves a deep sort of sacrifice and involves a lot of giving up your privilege and giving up your power for other people." Blake considered privilege in the context of masculinity. "There's an acceptance of privilege and (men) don't recognize their privilege and I think that's something a man would do. A man would try to know who he is and what he stands for and why he does."

The way that Jean, Jude, and Blake conceptualized faith and/or masculinity as a force for egalitarianism and social justice is reflected in the phrase "intentional

benevolence.” Jude described “intentional benevolence” as a way that he reconceptualized traditional gender norms for men of faith. “A lot of the traditional ideas about gender come from a place of intentional benevolence rather than a place of dominance. And understanding that what it means to be a man is fundamentally caught up in an idea about responsibility and sacrifice.” As a model of “intentional benevolence,” Jude used the life and teaching of Jesus.

I think (intentional benevolence) is a predisposition to prioritize other people over yourself because in a lot of ways Jesus serves as the model for that in that he works tirelessly to heal or administer and he talks about how he doesn’t necessarily have a place to rest but he still has such a heart for the people that he wants to serve that he goes out of his way to do that. I think having that sort of orientation towards people is one thing I see as important to being a man of faith. I also think it sort of again, related to that sacrifice and that you’re willing to put other people’s interests before yours in some important ways. I think it sort of comes with a certain amount of intentionality in that you’re very aware of your obligations or aware of how you’re interacting with other people so that shapes maybe what you do.

Gilbert was also critical of a very individualistic and hypersexualized masculinity that was obsessed with pride, power, and dominance over women; however, he did not share the egalitarianism of other participants. Instead, Gilbert believed that women were insufficient on their own and that it was his duty as a man of faith to protect and care for them.

I don't see faith being a part of our culture's view of masculinity...that revolves more around pride and desire for power. You get tied in the desire to dominate other people or put oneself above other people and that especially comes out in men's relationship with women and seeing women as objects to be dominated or in control of. Those things are part of our culture's understanding of masculinity. Those things are not part of my understanding of masculinity in that for me faith is very much wrapped up in that in that it would be about, for me, not dominating women, but protecting and taking care of them. Providing for one's family, striving after greater virtue and holiness and all of those things are tied to faith especially those last few because Christ commands us to grow in virtue and holiness.

**Desiring validation and acceptance in a stoic masculine culture.** Participants desired validation and acceptance as men of faith in a stoic masculine culture that they perceived as not open to vulnerability and challenge. Participants often described tensions with their roommates who were more deeply rooted in a hyper-masculine culture and were generally less open to faith and public expressions of faith.

Blake talked about his desire for validation and acceptance from his roommates and peers and shared stories of their inability to connect on a deeper level. For example, he spoke about challenging his roommates to stop talking about "blacking out" and using women for sex and hook-ups, to which they responded, "Why are you being such a stiff? It's not really a big deal...we're just joking." Blake became animated in his interview in describing the interaction, "I just want to scream at them joking about these things...it

creates that culture (of blacking out).” He was frustrated the lack of caring that was evident in a series of negative interactions with his roommates.

At that point I was really frustrated with all of the people I lived with and blocked with. It’s lonely to think the way I think sometimes and (my counselor) was like, “Go find people who are going to validate you.” And I have those people. I have some peers that absolutely validate me. But the people that you live with, you feel lonely because you’re like, “Why don’t these people care?” It’s not even that they’re putting you down but they’re not responding to you.

Blake added that, in the past, he made multiple futile attempts to share his faith with his roommates, but “it would never be reciprocated.” He used the example, “if I were to say ‘I feel pretty blessed,’ they’d be like, ‘Oh, cool.’” Talking about faith required a vulnerability that was atypical and marginalized in a stoic masculine environment. Instead, conversations on faith were largely intellectual and abstract. “It’s more of this discussion of ‘Do you actually believe in God?’ But we don’t talk about where our faith is at.” Blake provided a broader description of the campus culture around faith at San Ignacio.

If I’m going to talk about faith, say it’s a Friday night and it’s just after dinner. Maybe people are starting to get ready and if I was to talk about God they’d be like, “Why are you talking about this now?” Like, “What do you mean?” “Let’s talk about sports,” “Let’s talk about other things,” or “Let’s talk about the week.” And when I do talk about faith on campus it usually is this enclosed setting which is that was the topic we chose for this week’s men’s conversation group meeting.

Or at a faith conversation group meeting. Or I'm going to a "Finding God at San Ignacio" event that's scheduled. I know when I'm talking about faith.

While Blake described the limited conversations about faith on the campus of San Ignacio (a Catholic, Jesuit university) outside of an "enclosed setting," such as conversations groups and on-campus programming, Jude described his experience of faith on the campus of Oxbridge (a private, secular university) being heavily marginalized from most on-campus programming.

Like Blake, Anthony struggled with others' perceptions of his masculinity and faith, which Anthony related closely to his experience in Machismo culture. He considered having faith at San Ignacio to be "much more of a women's thing to be in touch with their faith than it is a man thing." He experience similar pressures from Machismo culture, as it changed the "dynamics of who you're supposed to be and what you're supposed to do in church and outside of church, in your faith life, how you're supposed to be as a man, how you're supposed to act as a man. That also affects the way you can act or the way you can be around others."

In relating to others, Anthony shared a tense interaction with his roommate who looked unfavorably upon Anthony for practicing daily prayer at his bedside. Anthony stridently responded that he would continue daily prayer in the room, despite the objections of his roommate.

By me doing my religious practices I don't see how I'm harming you. You may not like it but you have your right just as much to leave the room and let me finish praying. It's not like I'm going to be praying 24/7 to make you feel uncomfortable but it is my room too.

Mark experienced similar difficulties with his roommates, but differed from Blake and Anthony in having primarily privileged identities as White, male, middle-class, straight, and Catholic at a predominantly White and Catholic university. He struggled to be vulnerable and share his faith with his roommates. “That’s not something like, Johnny, how’s your faith life going? I would never ask him, that’s coming out of left field.” Despite the fact that his faith was largely privatized in the room, Mark felt that if any point he felt a strong need to explain his faith, his peers would respect him, partly due to his privilege. “Deep down, I think that if I explain to anyone why I do things in the name of my faith I would be respected...maybe that’s because I’m in the majority.”

**Heteronormativity, homophobia, and intimacy.** Heteronormativity and homophobia in cultural expectations of masculinity and faith limited emotional and physical intimacy for the participants. Anthony, Blake, Gilbert, and TJ each described a desire to hug other men, but were often met with handshakes by their male peers. Anthony explained his evolution from someone who gives handshakes to someone who desires a hug, and the discomfort associated with such an exchange.

I would say years ago when I was in high school I probably would not have given a hug to a guy...it felt wrong. It felt like guys are not supposed to give hugs, they’re supposed to give handshakes. You give hugs to women only...(now) I’d rather give a hug than a handshake...I’m much more comfortable giving a hug to a man.

In a similar way, TJ described the fear of physical intimacy he experienced both on the football field and in the locker room, where intimacy was expressed “quickly” in certain situations.



The only real intimacy you really have with your teammates, not that I think about it, is if they make a quick play, a quick pat on the back or pat on the butt or quick high five. There's really not a great play like run up a quick hug or even afterwards, after the game. When I said bye to a few seniors there really wasn't too much hugging. It was just a quick handshake and then "Good luck, I'll see you around" kind of thing.

Notably, TJ felt the need to qualify our conversation through the phrase "not that I think about," which was reflective of his homophobic locker room culture. Blake shared a similar sentiment, suggesting that his male peers struggled to be vulnerable due to a fear of intimacy. "It's a fear to be that connected to somebody. When you're more connected to somebody I think you'll experience more of a spiritual or this love and I think there's a fear of that. Whereas a man, this man who's supposed to fit a hegemonic masculinity, not caring and lack of interest...is afraid of not objectifying a woman or another man."

Several participants desired to say "I love you" to other men, but were fearful of being ostracized by their male peer groups. TJ told the story of going to a movie theater with his football teammates and being shunned by his peers.

I'm about to watch a movie with my really close friends that I've grown and developed for a year and a half...One of my close friends said something really funny and I was just like, "You guys crack me up. I love you guys." I had this weird aura around me from them. They never said anything after it, they never did anything – nothing happened. But I just felt like it was a really relaxing and funny environment then it kind of got brought down a bit. I'm still really close friends with all those guys in the group, it was just I remember feeling that

tension...back up kind of thing. It took me a while to warm back up to that eventually.

For TJ, saying “I love you” was deeply connected to his conceptualization of “brotherhood” and was a necessary vulnerability required of a man of faith. TJ explained, “Part of privatizing my faith was hiding that brotherly love.” This experience, where teammates did not reciprocate, caused him to remain quiet about not only his love for others but also his faith.

TJ remarked that sharing love and faith with his teammates has become easier with age and seniority, as he has solidified his community and involvement. He reflected on the difficulty of any incoming player to come in, be vulnerable, and share their faith. “It’s so hard. I tip my hat off to those that can go in an environment completely by themselves and shine a bright light as if they were in a big group of others with their faith.”

Blake described the difficulty for men to be close with one another physically and emotionally and the need for humor to diffuse uncomfortable situations. “(Men) definitely seek to be closer friends not in romantic ways but in a more emotional way which can lead to hugging where it’s not romantic interest. It’s this fear of homoeroticism for sure that they then have to joke about it immediately afterwards and I think that fear is why they’re afraid to care for one another.”

TJ suggested a need to redefine masculinity for men who have faith, to hug, touch, and provide a love deeper than any sexual act.

Faith's deal of masculinity it's a lot more loving. There's more hugging, there's more touch with each other. Not saying that sexuality has anything to do with it. It's a lot more like I said before, Agape type of love, real love for one another.

While participants were able to be more vulnerable in faith communities, these liminal spaces still retained aspects of heteronormativity and homophobia. The heterosexism of faith communities is described in the next section.

**Heterosexism and fragmented experiences of gay Christians.** Akin to a strictly heterosexual masculinity, participants perceived that their faith communities also advocated for a strictly heterosexual faith. As Jean described, "The Bible tends to advocate heterosexual male values often times in terms of family structures." Christian teachings deeply impacted the faith, acceptance, and self-worth of Tom and Blake, the gay Christians in this study.

Tom experienced tremendous struggle identifying as a man, as a Christian, and as a member of the gay community. He felt he did not fit neatly into any category or social group. When describing his sexuality, Tom described the need to remain closeted in fear of being misrepresented or overly associated with the queer student community at Oxbridge. "I've never completely come out. I would never call myself out and proud. I'm not proud to be gay. I slightly resent the Queer Student Association because of their 'pride'...that's just not my experience." A strong part of his inability to be proud of his gay identity was his "fragmented" experience of Christian love and sexuality.

I think desire, whether that be romantic or sexual or erotic...is complicated. I think that it's fragmented. I experience it as very fragmented...Gay marriage or that particular view of gay is just like straight Christian sexuality but then

substitute the woman out for a guy, that particular vision of sexuality. I talk about it, but I don't see it anywhere in anybody else and I don't find it in myself, this kind of happy marriage where you're sexual and you're romantic...it doesn't feel clean and tidy that way.

Tom provided an image of a "happy marriage where you're sexual and romantic" typical of a heterosexual Christian couple, where desires "come together." His inability to feel "complete" was reflective of the intellectual frustration he experienced as a gay Christian male. Tom told the story of "coming out" and being accepted by a religious chaplain before coming to college. "My first reaction when the chaplain at home told me he thought same-sex relationships were 'fine' was to think, 'You're not a real Christian.' That was my first gut reaction. I guess I must have had a pretty deeply conservative view about the whole thing in some sense. It wasn't an intelligently conservative view. I never really got beyond that." Tom still feels incomplete due to painful memories of "coming out," despite the fact that he has evolved intellectually and understands his "fragmented" place in the church as a gay Christian.

Catholic teachings on homosexuality and lack of acceptance within the Church caused Blake to constantly question his identity as a Catholic.

As a gay male I think that's why I've started to drift towards "loosely Catholic" and I kind of like that I've done that because although I know that the church doesn't accept homosexuals...it's kind of helped me recognize where I want to spend my time...the church at this time really stands for a lot of values that really disappoint me.

Blake also expressed struggles with acceptance, intimacy, “closeness,” and “commitment,” connected to being sexually assaulted in high school, “coming out” in college, and “family issues.” He recalled doing a reading recently where the author described himself as “afraid of rejection,” but at the same time, “just afraid of acceptance.” Blake remarked, “I’ve always felt that way. I think most people are like that. So I’m ready to try out relationships but I know it will take awhile before I’m ready for maybe even a loving one.”

Tom described his involvement in a Christian fellowship group becoming “tortured” and “complicated” when his spiritual mentor and close friend in the group suggested that gay Christians remain celibate, in accordance with Christian teachings. “It was kind of painful to hear that because by the time I came here...I’d been shaped to see and appreciate that gay love was love and that gay relationships were no worse off than straight ones.” As a result, conversations about celibacy with Tom and his mentor were kept to a minimum. In addition to feeling disconnected with fellow Christians, Tom experienced ongoing feelings of loneliness and isolation from God. He shared one of his deepest and darkest prayers before God.

In my most raw and kind of painful prayers before God the thing that I find myself praying is, “God, do you love me? Do you actually love me? Do you love me as much as this boy who loves me? Do you miss me, God? I haven’t seen you for a while, so I guess I kind of assume it, do you miss me? Do you even notice up there in heaven that I’m not around anymore?” I feel anxious for that kind of affirmation.

## **Accountability & Affirmation in Family & Relationships**

**Faith communities.** Faith communities were critical to the participants' accountability and affirmation, as they made meaning cultural expectations as men of faith. For example, Tom associated his deepest pain and frustration with his identity as a gay Christian man; however, his experience in a Christian fellowship group was overwhelmingly positive and affirming. Tom described the paradoxical experience of "coming out" for the first time at Oxbridge through a "testimony" to participants of the decidedly conservative group.

It's sort of an interesting paradox thing. They're much more conservative on this question than any Christian group that I've been a part of before and so all my friends think I'm weird because it was the first place where I came out to a group, not just individuals. I actually gave a testimony in front of the whole group where I very publicly came out...The reaction I got from the students in the group was overwhelmingly warm and supportive. The fellowship group has been all my best friends and they have seen me through thick and thin. Even when they disagree with me I've never, ever felt anything from them but love, warmth, and acceptance.

Tom felt a strong sense of gratitude for the acceptance and affirmation he received from the group. This consistent community enabled him to feel more confident and self-assured in his friendships, deepened his faith, and helped him gain a deeper understanding of Jesus and his teachings.

The greatest joy, the greatest consolation, the greatest warmth of love and friendship that I've experienced in this life has been very connected to faith and

the community of faith that I've been in. I have to say, I have to confess that it is because of Jesus and it is because of people who love Jesus who consciously have given their lives to be shaped around loving and following Jesus that I don't hate myself so much and that I have more and deeper friendships than many people ever have the pleasure to have in their life.

TJ and Josh received similar affirmation and validation from their faith communities during their transitions into college. TJ shared his early experiences with a Christian fellowship group for athletes, where he was able to say "I love you" "automatically," as opposed to his football teammates, where he changed his tone to "I love you guys." TJ compared his instant connection to his fellowship group to his ease in saying, "I love you" to his high school football teammates. His inability to say "I love you" to his college teammates was rooted in a fear of being excluded, marginalized, or considered "weak" by his teammates in what he perceived as a hyper-masculine and often homophobic locker room culture. TJ felt scared to share his true feelings with teammates until he "heard it first from someone else."

I was really close friends with a lot of guys at home on the football team. They were like my brothers and I treated them like that and I'd always tell them "I love you" and "I'm here for you" knowing that I had nothing sexual behind that, just a brotherly love kind of thing. That's what it was when I got here. I met a close couple of friends and we really bonded. I remember it being so tedious to say "I respect them" and "I love them like my brothers at home." I remember I never told anyone on the team that until I heard it first from someone else. That's kind of how scared I was. Whereas the Christian fellowship group for athletes was just

kind of automatic. I guess there's that common ground where you're with other believers that it's just, "I love you." You're a fellow believer. We're in this together, that's awesome. Not saying the first time you meet someone it's like "I love you, we're brothers." It takes awhile. With the football team there's some guys that I'm close to that I still haven't shown that side of love whereas the guys that I do show that love to like, "all right guys, be safe, have fun at home" – that took me until this year honestly to actually warm up to that idea just because of the fact I didn't want to be looked at or set any bad example of my faith or God in any way and be looked at as weak.

TJ described "brotherly love" as connected to accountability and affirmation with God, family, and friends. He expressed a fear of "living a lie" that would "lead to a whole bunch of chaos." Therefore, TJ prioritized accountability and being "open" in all of his relationships.

That's kind of like what it is, brotherly love. Being open with one another in order to just keep growing your relationship with the Lord and being honest and up front about that. I say that because personally there's so many things that I can hide from my friends and family that obviously I could never hide from God...(I strive to be) up front with my friends as I am with how God sees me and I really ground myself in that love.

Josh received affirmation from his Christian fellowship group after encountering a radically different social scene in college. While he remained sober and focused on athletics in high school, his early college experience was centered around alcohol and drinking. He credited his Christian fellowship group for making him "think about college



in a different way.” Josh talked the pressure he felt to drink as a freshman in order to make new friends and the accountability and affirmation he received from his fellowship group.

You don’t want to seem like a lame guy who says “no.” You want to say “yes” and make friends...I feel like when I joined the Christian fellowship group as a sophomore it put things into perspective. Like why am I doing this? I could be a lot more productive with my Friday and my Saturday rather than get drunk or something. I’m not saying I’m perfect, but I’m saying I’m making progress trying to make changes in my lifestyle as far as what I want to do and stuff, trying to do what other people want me to do.

While Josh found his Christian fellowship group to be an alternative to the party scene, Blake found “reflective outlets” through participation in a Catholic, faith-sharing group and a men’s retreat. He credited the experiences for growing his previously stagnant faith and starting to ask, “Where’s God in my life?” through more frequent prayer.

**Spiritual mentors.** Participants also received accountability and affirmation from spiritual mentors and guides, who were usually senior members of campus ministries/chaplaincies and interdenominational Christian and Catholic student organizations. Blake and Anthony benefited from conversations with mentors (as opposed to peers) who affirmed their feelings of frustrations and inadequacy in relationships, while keeping them accountable to their faith. Blake shared about how Father John connected humor with faith to make conversations about faith “less serious,” since faith is often considered to be a “serious topic.” Blake admired his ability to make

faith “extremely casual,” for which he provided an example of how humor kept him open to a daily relationship with God.

I’ll kind of be walking through the house and he’ll just stop me and be like, “I see Jesus in you.” And you’ll be like, “What?” It’s amusing, but at the same time he’s serious about it. “Wow, that was just like St. Ignatius” and he does it in a way that’s amusing but a way that makes it far more realistic to have this sense of faith on a day-to-day in every thought God.

Gilbert talked about how he frequently met with a priest for confession in an effort to be “conscious of how I can love people better,” as he became self-aware of the ways he was “judging other people or being very critical of things that they’re doing and in that thought I’m somehow making myself out to be better than them.” In order to reframe his “pride,” Gilbert described how confession helped him to “reorient not just glory and honor for myself but to bring glory and honor to God and to sacrifice whatever it takes in order to do that.”

Anthony shared about his relationship with a member of the campus ministry staff, which has enabled him to become “much more critical about my life, my actions, and my goals...where I want to go, what I want to do.” As a result of conversations with his spiritual mentor, he claimed to have become a “much more religious person...much more compassionate, much more merciful, much more loving, caring, and non-judgmental.” He described how the mentoring relationships increased his capacity to be vulnerable, cry in front of others, and embrace his faith.

I’m okay with crying. I’m okay with praying at mass and showing a different side of the masculine side of things that I feel like men aren’t supposed to cry at mass

or outside of mass or prayer groups. Or that religion is not just for women that it is also for men and praying is also for men not just for women...I'm very comfortable because of my faith to be open with another man or another woman, cry in front of them if needs be.

TJ shared the critical influence of an older member of the football team, Matthew, who was also a Bible study leader in the Christian fellowship group for athletes. Before joining the fellowship group his freshman year, TJ recalled his difficulties juggling responsibilities related to academic coursework and football. Meanwhile, he was deemphasizing his faith and neglecting important relationships such as his long-distance girlfriend back home.

I'm doing all this and I'm scrambling with all this as a freshman running around campus with my head cut off and I think and there's times where I didn't even open my Bible. There were some nights in a row where I would skip prayer. I'd be lying in bed and I'd fall asleep and I'd skip prayer. Throughout my day, I would forget to pray over my food and just be thankful for the things I was so thankful for before. It was just really a tough time.

TJ was in desperate need of accountability and affirmation in his faith and relationships. He described how he was sought out by Matthew to join the Bible study after weeks of struggling with the dominant party scene on campus.

A lot of the freshman guys got here and they're like, "Hey, we're going out to party, you want to come?"...(Matthew) could tell that I was slowly starting to be molded into a little bit of a different person...he pulled me aside and that's where

he gave me a little bit of his testimony and said, “I think it’d be cool if you met (for Bible study).” That’s where I got back on track.

The “testimony” of Matthew, including details of his faith journey, provided a model of honesty and vulnerability for TJ to follow when joined the Bible study, which turned out to be a “real turning point” in his college experience and his relationships.

Jean received affirmation through his friend Kathy, who he considered his “biggest role model” and someone he could be “more open with about sharing my feelings and what I think and crying.” Kathy provided affirmation during his deepest struggles, especially when he felt alone in his faith.

Whenever I get really depressed about the state of the world and like there’s no one who really deeply cares about Christ anymore I say, “Oh, no, Kathy is here.” I can see God working in her and she’s just a close friend that I’ve been able to confide in a lot who I can see God’s love in and I’m very intimately close with.

**Counselors.** Josh and Blake talked about seeing a counselor due to feeling less masculine than other men. Josh shared his struggles with depression and anxiety following a series of concussions from football, which forced him to quit playing football. He recalled feeling “feminine” for both his difficulties following the concussions and his desire to seek counseling.

In other people’s minds I may have been feminine. That was natural. Yeah, psychologically I was messed up but it was a natural response for me to cry, for me to feel down, for me to feel like I needed help. I feel like the definition (of masculinity is) that you should do everything yourself, you don’t need help to do everything. You should be the one that helps others...Initially you’re going into it

like, “Why am I doing this? I don’t need her. I can figure this out by myself on my own. I don’t need anybody to talk to me.” But as I went through, I saw that it helped me out and got me through that tough place in my life. That actually helped me realize that I can cry, I can be down, I can seek help but it doesn’t mean I’m not a man. It just means I actually care about my livelihood, care about my future, care about being mentally stable.

Receiving affirmation helped Josh become more comfortable crying, showing emotion, and seeking help as a man. Counseling also helped Blake feel more comfortable with his masculinity. He shared the story of being frustrated with the lack of caring in a series of negative interactions with his roommates. The conversation with his counselor “really hit home” when she told him, “It’s pretty lonely being a leader.” This subtle reframing helped Blake feel more affirmed when he challenged reckless drinking and sexual behaviors. It also reaffirmed the importance of his role as a Bystander Education trainer on campus. Blake also credited counseling for validating his masculinity and sexuality, since being gay was perceived as less masculine by his peers.

A lot of work with my sexuality has been, you know, because then it’s like, “Are you a man?” Because people say, “You’re not as much of a man if you’re gay.” Those undertones, not so much people saying that outright, but undertones. A lot of that, I think yes, faith, I’ve felt valued but more of that has been through conversation and I’ve gotten validating conversations from (spiritual mentors)...but the real impact was definitely counseling. Having that one on one. Being able to say this is my issue.

**Daily prayer and reflection.** Mark, Anthony, and Blake shared the importance of St. Ignatius, including the Ignatian Examen, which they used as a daily tool for accountability and affirmation. Mark described the daily prayer and reflection: “Last week that’s where my mind went, laying my head down on my pillow and running through my day, seeing where God was or seeing where opening my heart to the gratitude, seeing where I can be better and seeing where I struggled.” Anthony explained how the Examen helped him create habits of thinking and being. “I basically do that every night. It doesn’t leave my mind. I’m always thinking of my life and what I could have done better, what I did right, where I saw God, where I could have used God’s help a little bit more here and there.”

Blake shared his experiences as the leader of weekly Examen reflections for his Catholic, faith-sharing group. The role required him to write a new prayer every week and provided him an opportunity to make meaning of his course on spirituality and sexuality. Given the popularity of his weekly reflection, Blake talked about how he was invited to lead an Examen with other groups on campus, in curricular (an accounting course and an ethics and professionalism course) and co-curricular settings (a men’s group and an LGBTQ retreat). Presenting to multiple audiences forced him to continually reflect on his message and his personal relationship with God. Blake described the repetition of the Examen prayer as “helpful in keeping me attentive to my faith.” He shared the example of annotating his daily calendar, “Every day I go through my desk calendar and I need to cross that day off and I need to check mark my day and see what I thought of it...and that’s a routine I’ll probably do the rest of my life.” Blake

admitted, “I’ve almost used the Examen to substitute (Catholic) mass in a way, to be honest...It makes me feel like I don’t feel bad to not be going to mass.”

Blake considered the responsibility of writing the Examen each week as “giving” to others, describing his revisionist and dialogical approach as attractive to students who asked big questions about life and God.

What I do with (writing the Examen) that I don’t see a lot of people do is I really take the time to write my reflections, but to make it a conversation with God.

Here, I am really trying to give in and say, “What’s He saying to me this week?”

I know people that lead reflections on campus that use the same reflection every week and I don’t do that. I’ve never used the same reflection again and that’s because I’ve always tried to see, “Where is this conversation going? What am I going to learn next?” And I think connecting that sense of my faith connects who I am as a person as someone who is “let’s keep moving,” “we’re going to keep growing.”

Mark also received affirmation from the “The Prayer for Generosity” by St. Ignatius, as it strengthened his faith and willingness to sacrifice for others when he felt tired, hurt, or discouraged.

I have it up on the front of my desk. I see it everyday. That’s one of those central tenants when it’s hard to love someone next to me or hard to sacrifice. Father (John) will ask me to do a bunch of extra things today and it’s like “I’m busy, I don’t want to do this. I need to get this paper done”...Don’t count wins and losses and ticks and tacks. Just do it, just love...I can sacrifice, it’s not about me being hurt, but I can do this for others.

**Scripture.** Jude talked about feeling less than a man for desiring romantic relationships and for being in touch with his emotions and feelings. He described how he received affirmation through John 11, which describes the death of Lazarus and Jesus openly weeping. This act of “humanity” gave Jude reassurance about his masculinity and helped him redefine society’s definition of masculinity in accordance with faith and Christian principles.

I feel like Jesus is supposed to be the model of what a Christian man is supposed to look like, at least in some capacity. Jesus was celibate and he is an archetypal model for all Christians but I think because he was born as a man he fulfills certain categories I think are important that I think that run pretty counter cultural to the stereotypical masculine categories, you know? For example, there’s a story about Lazarus, you know, Mary and Martha’s brother who dies and they both go up to him and when Mary talks to him Jesus weeps and I think that pretty stereotypically men are pretty adverse to showing grief or emotion or things in that kind of capacity and so the fact that he is doing that shows a humanity and a masculinity that I hope to espouse.

The next section considers the theme of career, calling, and vocation.

### **Career, Calling, & Vocation**

The participants in this study were accountable to others and God, held accountable by their peer groups, and needed affirmation regarding their careers, callings, and vocations. They struggled with very individualistic and breadwinning expectations of masculine culture and in a negotiation of masculinity and faith identities were more likely to receive accountability and affirmation from their faith communities, where they



had more fluidity in career decisions and received affirmation for desiring to provide for a family and contribute to the common good.

### **Expectations & Experiences in Careers, Callings, & Vocations**

**“To whom much is given, much is expected.”** Several participants connected their conceptualizations of God to their career decisions. Francis, Jean, and Luke talked about how they were expected to actualize their God-given gifts, talents, and abilities. In selecting a major and choosing a career, Francis claimed that he was “trying to do something with the talents I was given by God.” Jean described the fact that being a person of faith did not automatically assume a career in public service or volunteer work, as it was important to maximize his God-given gifts and “be a success.”

“To whom much is given, much is expected.” If you’re not working hard to develop the gifts God gave you and the opportunities God’s given that’s also bad, right? So it’s trying to just, it’s not as if there’s a clear cut you should always do the volunteering thing. You need to balance between making yourself successful and using what you’ve been given too – because you should be a success, right?

Luke echoed the “to whom much is given, much is expected” sentiment, and shared similar difficulties in balancing a Christian and/or service-based career with a more financially lucrative and opportunistic career.

Yeah, but at the same time that’s also been drilled into me, “to whom much is given much is expected,” right? And that’s a problem you do see in the Christian community here where it’s like how do I balance just wanting to go for a career versus do I just want to do everything for God but at the same time I have the opportunity to do all these things. There is some sort of a Protestant work ethic.

**Other-directed careers.** Jean, Mark, Francis, Jude, and Josh connected their careers to an expectation and a desire to help and serve others. Jean talked about working a summer job that served the community “because I feel an obligation because of my faith to help other people.” Instead of going for the most high-paying job, Mark was in favor of sacrificing for others, “You have that job but look how you didn’t sacrifice. I want to count the costs and say yeah, but look at all the people that I’ve served...sure, you have the better job.”

As a freshman, Francis was still just deciding a major, let alone a career. While Francis had an uncertain future, he talked about “finding a job that’s able to help you and your family and also help others.” He remained hopeful that he would find a career that satisfied all of these desires. He shared, “There is something out there, I just don’t know what yet.” Blake, an outgoing senior, felt that his future position as a fraud investigation tied into his ethics as a man of faith. “It is like, be that person that sticks to your values and beliefs...A man of faith would not be a hypocrite. And if he does change his beliefs or values, he’d own them.”

Josh connected a career in clinical psychiatry to his faith, suggesting that it was his “duty” and “job” to help others.

The reason why I want to be a clinical psychiatrist...that’s with people, communication. Also, personal training is the same thing. You’re helping someone with communication. People-oriented fields...helping others being selfless, putting others in front of yourself. Because I mean clearly it’s better to give than to always be the one to receive. It’s easy to just take, give me, give me, give me. But giving is hard. Because I mean, you have to have passion and love

in your heart in order to do that. So I feel definitely faith has influenced what I've decided to be for sure because I know that I feel like it's my duty, it's my job to help others.

Similarly, Jude expressed his desire to become a doctor that was wrapped up in his identity as a healer and as a person of faith.

I see being a healer as connected to (faith) because when people are sick that's when a lot of the deeper questions come out, you know? On an explicit level, I might be in a profession where people are potentially about to die or are inches away from losing their life. But on an implicit level, I think taking care of a person's body or taking care of a person lends itself to really deep relationships and unique relationships and things that maybe they tell you that they wouldn't tell anyone else. And so I see that as an extension of being the best human I can be, like how Jesus was a healer and didn't necessarily heal people physically but was able to console them emotionally and even spiritually and I guess sometimes especially spiritually.

Jude felt that his calling was connected to forging deeper relationships and caring for others, which was profoundly connected to scripture and the life and teachings of Jesus. At the same time, coming from an affluent background, Jude was reassured by the financial security of being a doctor. He described it as a "very comfortable" and a "very stable" profession, which he weaved into his desire to heal and support others.

You go to school for a long time but you end up making a lot of money and you're almost guaranteed to have a job wherever you go. For me, I saw it as maybe a deeper calling fundamentally to me. I felt like I was somebody who

wanted to heal and I was really intrigued at the possibility of supporting people in their most vulnerable sort of way. But I had always been very comfortable with the idea that doctors were able to make a lot of money, which I felt comfortable with, just because I think that there's a lot of profound work being done and there's a lot of highly intensive skills that come into that. But I guess the short answer is that being a doctor was a very comfortable choice for me as someone who planned to be a husband and a provider eventually in the future.

**Family provider.** While several participants had a strong desire to “help others” in their professional roles, nearly every participant was motivated by a desire to provide for a family, which required some form of financial gain. Jean talked about the need to “maintain yourself and be self-sufficient.” Francis, a low-income student who was raised by a single father, also spoke about “working hard for your kids to have a better life for them” and the practical need for a good salary. He added, “Money’s important, and I do have to pay these student loans back eventually, but it’s not like I have to be Donald Trump rich.” Joseph was not interested in pursuing a financially lucrative career, if it was not his calling. “My kids don’t need to be upper middle class if their parents vocations are not, you know, six figure jobs.” Jude, who was pre-med and planned on becoming a doctor, talked about the value of being a provider as a man and as a person of faith.

Yeah, I think being a man, one of the first things that comes to mind is that it has some pretty significant bearings on sort of a career opportunities for the future in that I think of myself as a man in having to fulfill that idea of being a provider as far as Christian context goes. And I think that can play out very differently. I think that a man who is married or in a relationship, maybe they don’t necessarily

have to be making more in some of the market economy contexts we have right now but I do think that they should be stable as far as allowing their wife or significant other to be more flexible and in that sense be a provider of stability whether their financial provision is more variable. Being a man I feel more drawn to careers where I feel I could be a somewhat comfortable provider for my eventual wife and family. So that's one significant decision that my faith and my masculinity have influenced me.

Mark, who was also pre-med, shared a responsibility to be a provider, but was unwilling to pursue a career solely for a comfortable salary. Mark believed that "a solid income provides stability for a family," but considered limitations of a singular pursuit of wealth. "I mean I have never wanted to make as much money as I possibly could." While Mark desired to be a doctor someday, he saw more important things in life. "I think you weigh that out and say in the long term this is not economic stability or choice, but it's more...there's more important things than just getting the best job." For Mark, those "important things" were relationships. "I would take a job that is slightly lesser or slightly less paid to be with the very genuine friends that I have in the Northeast, to be with my girlfriend." Mark continued, "I think that my decisions maybe didn't help me monetarily. I'm not going to be working at Goldman Sachs next year, but I think I'm going to be happy."

Anthony, who desired to become a priest, also felt the need to be a provider financially for his elderly parents and extended family, as these values were deeply rooted in a Columbian and Spanish household. He detailed his decision to become a diocesan priest (as opposed to a religious order), partly due to the fact that he would not

be required to take a vow of poverty and therefore, could receive a personal income.

Anthony felt tensions between “joy” and “money” in pursuing a vocation to the priesthood, as he was expected to provide financially and be “the man of the house.”

The path I’m choosing brings me money...but there is a huge conflict there because, like I’ve told you, I have two elderly parents. I think of them. My two brothers are in Columbia. They can’t support my parents. My brother here is an alcoholic, so he can’t support my parents. My parents don’t have any savings...I think about if they get sick, how will I provide for them? If I’m in the seminary, how am I supposed to look out for them economically? I’m always looking out for the best interests of my family and the mentality is that if you’re the man of the house in a Spanish household you need to look out not just spiritually but also economically for your family.

Anthony was one of five Catholic men who participated in the study. Of the five, four men (Anthony, Gilbert, Joseph, and Mark) were openly considering or had previously considered a vocation to the priesthood. As a working-class man, Joseph shared similar questions to Anthony (who self-identified as low-income) about being a provider for family. Joseph found it difficult to wholeheartedly pursue a religious vocation with cultural expectations to be successful and financially secure in order to provide for one’s family.

I’m trying to separate this careerism and stability from vocational discernment and it’s really difficult because stability is attractive and making money and being able to provide for your family is very attractive but if it’s not what God wants me

to do then it's not going to be the thing I'm most joyful in and not going to be the thing which gives God the most glory which is my end goal.

Both Gilbert and Mark had considered religious vocations in the past but recently entered into meaningful romantic relationships that caused them to reconsider their purposes in life. Gilbert explained the shift from a religious vocation to a family vocation, where he was forced to imagine himself differently as a provider, husband, and father.

I recently started seeing someone at the beginning of January and the more time I spent discerning that relationship the more this question of being a provider and providing for a family has come back because now I'm not just thinking about myself. I'm thinking about my wife and my kids as well. And so suddenly those jobs in finance look a lot more attractive now. And as far as balancing that tension I think that as a husband and a father your primary vocation is to your family. And so, there is something noble about working a terribly dry and boring nine-to-five job or something that makes good money because you're providing for your family. That's what you're called to do first and foremost if you are a father and a husband.

While Gilbert talked about sacrifice in terms of family, Mark shared about sacrificing beyond family. Mark pointed to the positive influence of Father John, who took a vow of poverty and therefore, could focus his energies on being a spiritual and emotional provider. "People like Father John can (sacrifice) because he doesn't have a wife and children to go home to and so that's appealing like how much good can be done when you self-sacrifice and you give up money and possessions." While Mark had deep

admiration for Father John and his ability to sacrifice for the good of others, Mark maintained that he did not feel called to the priesthood at this time but left open the possibility of a vocation in the future. “I don’t feel a call right now, but let me experience college.”

**Careerism and pre-professionalism at Oxbridge.** Joseph put it simply when he joked, “I’m an Oxbridge student, so I don’t fail.” The six participants from Oxbridge struggled to sync their faith with the campus culture of success, achievement, and individualism. Joseph spoke at length about the culture of Oxbridge around “careerism” and “pre-professionalism,” which complicated his decisions about majors and careers.

I think careerism and pre-professionalism are actually really dangerous in that people can get trapped into doing jobs that they feel like they’re supposed to do – to be a breadwinner, to be stable – but it may not be what they’re called to do...I think one of the struggles is putting aside this idea of careerism because a lot of my life I’ve thought I wanted to be a doctor and at some point the money aspect entered into it...(but) one of my main ideas for being a doctor is I want to help people who need me. I would love to do something along the lines of Doctors Without Borders or something like that but right now I’m trying to separate this careerism and stability from vocation discernment...careerism actually harms discernment a lot in a place like Oxbridge.

In the midst of a very individualistic and competitive environment at Oxbridge, Jean shared his struggles with “pride,” “pre-eminence,” and “accomplishment,” including how to be “humble” and “happy” for others when they are successful. He felt that his conceptions of faith, God, and humanity called him to live differently than his peers.



I think in terms of big life decisions (faith has) contributed to why I decided not to be pre-med or go into finance. I think a lot of that comes out of pride and want for my own pre-eminence. At my 20-year reunion, a part of me wants to be able to say, “Hey, I’m rolling...I’m doing well.”...(But) you need to forget more about yourself and your own accomplishments and think more about people, humanity as a whole...pride (is) not lying to yourself and telling yourself that you’re not as good at things as you actually are which is how most people view humility but more as a self-forgetfulness...being equally happy if you had done it or someone else had done it and the idea being that you don’t spend time thinking about where you fit in the man’s hall of fame.

While Jean talked about the temptation to be in “the man’s hall of fame,” showcasing his wealth at an Oxbridge 20-year reunion, Tom talked about the temptation “to build a little empire of oneself...the Kingdom of Tom instead of the Kingdom of God.” Tom, who was considering a Ph.D. in Philosophy and a career in academia, described the intensely competitive and very individualistic culture of academia at Oxbridge, which came into conflict with his faith.

The desire to succeed academically and intellectually is something that I sometimes have trouble squaring away with faith. It can feel very much like a solitary selfish sort of pursuit of glory, wanting to think better thoughts than anyone else ever thought. And that’s something that I’ve still been kind of puzzling about.

Luke countered the intensely competitive culture of success at Oxbridge by taking a job as a campus janitor, which he believed demonstrated his faith and humility.

I think it comes down to it's a demonstration of humility and the scriptures say how important being humble is and the whole idea of putting others before yourself, loving your neighbor before yourself, blessing the meek and all that and how you show that you really are humble, that you are thinking of others when you're doing work that some people would say "Oh, that's beneath you," "That's disgusting," or "That's for people who don't go to Oxbridge." (The janitor position) is sort of a way of showing myself I'm not different from the people who do this type of work. This type of work isn't worse. All work is good and all work can be done to the glory of God.

Luke also talked about the pre-professional tensions he experienced at Oxbridge. "I feel the tension of 'Should I work in a homeless shelter or do something to pad my resume?'" Resembling the experience of Luke, Jean countered the Oxbridge culture through volunteering at a homeless shelter rather than building his resume in preparation for medical school or a future job.

And I feel like if it were not for my faith I would be much more concerned with making a stable living and making a good income too; maybe not for income's sake but for social standing and starting up a family and having the kind of material wealth income...that helps for relationships and things like that and romance. So I'd be much more concerned with ambition and how things will further my career...As it is right now, I still do want to do good things and great things, hopefully, but it's much more informed that I'm doing this for God's work and I'm doing it not for myself but for the intention of serving God because I know that volunteering at the homeless shelter is not nearly as good for my

resume as doing research in a lab. I don't know, maybe I do need to do more research in the lab.

Jean shared his unwavering faith and service to God through volunteer work but at the same time, expressed doubt and uncertainty about this commitment in the midst of a competitive culture of careerism and pre-professionalism. This tension was also connected to the “comfort” of his middle-class lifestyle that brought about materialistic tendencies, which were in conflict with faith and scripture.

God says it, it always comes back to me – “it’s harder for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven than a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.” I often times wonder whether it would be, because I struggle a lot with what I want to do in my life. Do I want to go into a career that I know would give me this middle class income or do I want to just do whatever God calls me to, even if that means giving up my comfortable lifestyle? I think it’s harder for me to give up my comfortable lifestyle coming from a middle class family.

**Fear of careerism over faith after college.** Careerism was also a concern for participants in demanding professional cultures after college. Blake (San Ignacio) and Jude (Oxbridge) felt that careers in business and medicine might “minimize” or be in conflict with faith. Blake, who was preparing for a position at an accounting firm, was worried that his faith would become less and less important as his career moves forward and becomes attracted to more high-paying jobs. “When I think about my career how I’m deathly afraid that once I enter the working world my faith will decline and, you know, I obviously am pretty concerned about money.” Jude, a pre-med student, was

concerned that during the arduous process of becoming of doctor, his faith and his relationships with God may become fragmented.

Being on the path to medical school there's a lot of different steps, getting to college and then you're in college and trying to get into med school and then you get into med school and trying to get into residency... There are just a lot of boxes to check and I'm worried. I worry that when I am not sure about checking them or I don't feel like I'm on a path to checking them that my relationship with God is kind of splintered.

### **Accountability & Affirmation in Careers, Callings, & Vocations**

**Vocation groups and retreats.** Mark and Jude received accountability and affirmation about their future careers from faith- and vocation-based conversation groups. While both were applying to medical school in hopes of becoming doctors, Mark was also considering a vocation to the priesthood. He mentioned that he was always “open to a call” but did not currently feel drawn to the seminary. In order to make meaning of this call, Mark attended a vocation group for Catholic men considering the priesthood. The San Ignacio sponsored group was facilitated by some of his most influential college mentors, who also happened to be priests. Through the conversation group, he felt reassured in his decision to pursue a career in medicine and learned that “if you're being called, you're going to know.”

Jude attended a vocation-based Bible study sponsored by his Christian fellowship group that focused on integrating faith into secular careers. The vocation group enabled him to reflect on how to “tie your daily faith to vocation” and provided reassurance that “almost any job you can do can fit the cultural mandate...(of) living out God's mission

and maybe transforming the world.” Through these conversations, Jude was able to make meaning of his passion for medicine and desire to become a doctor, which he linked to his identity as a healer. The affirmation he received from the group helped him feel more comfortable and affirmed in his decision to pursue medical school. Notably, when Jude talked about the vocation group in the Oxbridge focus group, his peers shared his enthusiasm for such a group and wished to duplicate it within their own faith communities.

Blake, who had committed to a position at an accounting firm, reflected on the benefits of attending a vocation-based spiritual retreat during his sophomore year at San Ignacio. He described how it helped him “intertwine faith and joy and still have a vocation that God would want you to do.” While affirming his decision to enter the accounting field, the retreat also helped Blake become more critical of corporate work cultures. With perspective, Blake chose to work for an accounting firm that was more in sync with his faith – a mission-oriented firm with strong ethics and values, including equality and advocacy for women and LGBTQ communities.

**God, prayer, and scripture.** Joseph and TJ expressed the importance of trusting in God and God’s plan, which provided affirmation and consolation for their feelings of uncertainty in careers, callings, and vocations. Joseph, who was choosing between a career as a doctor, actor, or priest, expressed his difficulty in trusting in God’s will and God’s plan in the midst of overwhelming uncertainty. In order to calm anxiety and fears about career pursuits, Joseph often reflected on Psalm 119:105, “Thy word is the lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path,” which referred to his trust of God in all matters.

Joseph shared how his mentor, Father Michael, cited the passage during the El Camino de Santiago pilgrimage.

(Father Michael) said, “Okay, if God’s word is a lamp into your feet and a light onto your path, how far can you see? You can only see two or three steps; you can only see the next step.” So being a provider and all that is part of faith...God has a plan, God has a will, and if God wants me to be an actor He probably doesn’t want me to be a starving, unsuccessful actor who cannot give my family what they need. If that’s what He wants from me then I’m going to be at least successful enough to not go into crazy debt and I will be able to provide for at least myself and for my family. I may not be incredibly wealthy, I may be a character actor getting by, but that’s fine. I need to have the faith that whatever field God wants me in He’ll find a way for me to be successful and I need to find a way to have that trust and that’s something where I’m struggling right now because my career is such a huge thing.

TJ also talked about trusting in God’s plan to assuage concerns about his career. As a communications major and college football player, TJ wanted to pursue a sports-related career. He described God as “painter” and “artist” who had given him many gifts, talents, and abilities and instead of feeling doubt and uncertainty, he trusted that everything would work out as long as he lived out God’s plan.

God's like a painter or an artist and his signature is that we're made in his image... You never make any artwork the same, so we're all different... You can pursue anything that you want as long as your heart is longing for Him... As long as I'm living for Him and doing things in accordance to Him and I'm trying to live my

life to the best of my abilities for Him then everything else will follow suit.

Everything else will be taken care of. Obviously I'm not going to go out and be a male stripper or do anything crazy, but I feel like when it comes to what you want to do, what you're passionate about, and what you're good at, I feel like all that stuff He embedded in you, so why not use it to the best of your abilities?

Jude, who was waiting to hear back on job applications, shared the critical influence of his pastor in helping him develop a mental orientation towards God, a trust in God, and the ability to gain perspective when he is feeling “down” and “low.” Jude put it simply: “When you’re failing or at your lowest, sometimes God’s voice can be the loudest.” Using a thumb exercise as a means of perspective taking, Jude described an orientation towards prayer and seeking God in everything as providing affirmation in the midst of uncertainty, doubt, and failure.

It’s a matter of gaining perspective... You need to shift and understand how important, profoundly important some things are... I think one of the lessons I’ve learned from a variety of journeys and failures in life is probably the simple truth that when you’re failing or at your lowest sometimes God’s voice can be the loudest.

While all participants remarked about receiving affirmation from life and teachings of Jesus, some participants found it helpful to reflect on specific chapters and passages from the Gospels (e.g., John 11) and other books such as Psalms and Colossians. Tom shared the affirmation he received from Colossians 3:3-4, which served as a reminder that God was guiding him even when he was uncertain who he was becoming.

“For your life is hidden with Christ and God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also shall appear with him in glory. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also shall appear with him.” Now the way that I’ve always interpreted this passage, I don’t know if it’s at all faithful, but is: Your life is hidden even from yourself. You don’t know who you are. Your life is hidden with Christ and God and so by looking to Christ I can learn what my life is, what my life means. I can receive from him the name of my life. It’s hidden from me, I don’t understand it now. It’s perplexing to me. My life doesn’t make sense, but when Christ who is my life appears then I will appear, my identity will appear. That’s why I like that verse. It meant that I didn’t need to figure out things. It meant that I could wait for things to make sense.

## **Sex & Sexuality**

### **Expectations & Experiences in Sex & Sexuality**

**Sexuality and hypersexuality.** Participants in the study found sexuality and hypersexuality, including sex, hook-ups, masturbation, and pornography, to be deeply ingrained in cultural expectations of men. Anthony provided an overview, “I mean in today’s day and age it’s seen as if it’s normal for guys to see pornography. It’s seen as normal to want to lose your virginity sooner rather than later and be a player and be a womanizer type of guy.”

Participants described the hook-up culture as a “chess game” (Mark), where “manly guys are getting the girls” (Blake) and men go out and get “the right amount of drunk but not too drunk and find the right person” (Mark). Josh suggested a difficulty in



being simply friends with women, as he felt pressured by his male peers to have an “end game” that entailed sex.

The point of you hanging around a girl is to have sex with her. Kind of like, “You’re wasting time if you’re hanging around a female. You can’t be friends with a female. You have to have an end game.”

Joseph felt that as a man, he was expected to be “active and a pursuer” of women. Josh shared that in order to gain the respect of his male peers, he needed both “quality and quantity” of women. In a similar way, Anthony shared, “You can have multiple girls. Don’t get attached to one girlfriend.”

Blake felt pressured in the gay male culture to have sex early and often. He expressed reservations about the culture, describing it as “difficult” and “very hypersexualized.” He noted, “A lot of gays act out and their way of acting out is by hooking up a lot and I see a lot that also use it as a way to be liberated. So in a way it’s good and damaging. They feel like finally they’re themselves but they’re also not doing it in healthy ways.”

The pressure to have sex and hook-up also extended to the participants who were in romantic relationships. Joseph shared how his roommates teased him for not having sex with his partner, as sex was equivalent to “success” in relationships. “And I think (sex), it’s the very definition of success in a relationship and my roommate – both of them actually – make fun of me for it because both of them have been in very different relationships that are much more physical.”

Jude shared a story about his roommate being teased and pressured to have sex with his partner. He felt tensions with this exchange and as a result, became more private

and reserved about his own romantic relationship. “They were basically egging him on wondering, because it was his birthday weekend...if he was going to get a birthday present. That’s probably a good example of me feeling a tension with the other guys.”

TJ experienced similar reactions when he told his teammates that he was “saving himself for marriage.” While disappointed he could not relate to his teammates, TJ described his frequent temptations to hook-up with other women on campus, despite the fact that he was in a serious, long-distance relationship.

Even being in a relationship, it's still tough...I'm even getting ready to propose soon so I would never in a million years break my relationship at all and even in that moment it's just tempting, you know what I mean? That's how strong it is, so I definitely don't think anyone can say they're never tempted.

Jean also wanted to save himself for marriage, which requires him to exercise “self-control” when he went to parties and felt strong urges. This was complicated by the fact that he considered sex to be a full expression of masculinity.

When I go to parties, talk to girls, things like that, there’s much more of a focus on fostering emotional intimacy or just being connected and much less of an emphasis in my mind on sex. And I have a number of friends, that’s why they go to parties; the ultimate goal is to know new girls. For me it’s very almost restrictive in that I feel like I’m almost looking for a wife and so it’s much more of a long, drawn out process and it involves a lot more self-control. Because of that, I often get the sense that I’m not allowing my masculinity to fully express itself and the full expression of my emotional sexual desire.

Many participants yielded to expectations of hypersexuality, rationalizing behaviors as being “young” and “reckless” and/or viewing college as a liminal space where sexual behaviors were acceptable. Two participants shared stories of losing their virginities at an early age. Blake considered losing his virginity at the age of 21 as “me having fun being young.” Francis talked about how he was pressured by his male peers to “just have sex and just lose it” in high school. Participants also considered masturbation and pornography a regular and expected practice among college men. Francis called it “normative,” while TJ contextualized the pervasiveness, “I would love to meet the guy that says he, one-hundred percent, has conquered lust as a sin.”

The participants clearly associated masculinity with hypersexuality, as sex was a full expression of masculinity often equated with “success” and winning a “game.” The next section describes how participants positioned their faith in contrast to a hypersexualized masculinity.

**Faith and hypersexuality.** Masculinity and faith were often dichotomized and perceived in opposition to one another in matters of sex and sexuality. While participants associated masculinity with hypersexuality, faith meant to abstain from sexual activity, “restrict” or be “more conservative” (Josh), draw a “line” (Gilbert and Joseph), view sex in moderation, and/or integrate sex and spirituality (Blake). Participants often perceived this dichotomy positively, as it contributed to healthier, committed relationships as opposed to utilitarian sexual acts. Joseph credited his faith in “putting aside this idea of pursuing sexual gratification and picking up the idea of loving for and caring for someone.” Francis claimed that his faith inspired him to seek deeper and more

meaningful relationships with “more spiritual” peers. Josh suggested that his faith made him think about his relationships with women differently.

I feel like faith as far as my relations with females has definitely made me a lot more conservative. I don’t try to look for an end game with a female who I happen to be friends with or just met or am close with. I’m more focused on getting to know them as a person first. Because how could you possibly be intimate with someone who you don’t know? Especially now that I started looking at stuff with more perspective, just growing up, kind of just realizing how special it is to actually be intimate with an individual and just having that connection.

Joseph felt that having casual sexual activity was “not really something I can do as a man of faith. I can’t just be going out and hooking up with as many women as I want.” Similarly, Luke felt that objectifying women ran counter to Christian teachings.

If an attractive woman walks past you, you shouldn’t go and take a second look whether it’s objectification or lust, it’s the same issue...yet another motivation to treat women properly and with respect...being active and a pursuer – that’s not really something I can do as a man of faith. I can’t just be going out and hooking up with as many women as I want.

In reference to the hook-up culture, Anthony made a distinction between masculinity and faith. “My masculinity side sometimes says yes, that’s what you should be doing. But my faith says no, that’s not what you should be doing.” Jean also positioned faith in contrast to a hypersexualized masculinity that advocated for “sex before marriage,” masturbation, and pornography. “I see those as very masculine male

things and being sexually aggressive and those are places where my Christianity, where my faith pretty directly contradicts.”

While advocating strongly for faith and committed, healthy relationships, participants also demonized toxic mental aspects of a hypersexualized masculine culture. Josh explained the long-term effects of casual sex, “What could you possibly gain from having sex with a girl and then throwing her off that at some point? That affects you mentally when you actually do try to commit to a relationship.” Anthony shared similar sentiments about masturbation and pornography, “pornography distorts your mind, and if it distorts your mind, it distorts your faith.”

Other participants also felt that a hypersexualized masculinity was disconnected from love, intimacy, and ultimately their faith. As Joseph put it, “Masculinity doesn’t often reflect love. It reflects sex and I don’t like that.” Francis questioned the hook-up culture because it was “empty” and lacked “feeling” and “caring.” “It bothered me because I wanted something real. I wanted to have something special.” Francis continued, “Love isn’t about sex. It’s about a deeper feeling. It’s about connecting with someone on a personal level.” Tom, a gay Christian, had strongly internalized church teachings on celibacy that asked him to abstain from sex, which fragmented his understanding of sex, love, and marriage.

And it’s this very, very sexless vision of love moving in kind of celibate, gay Christian circles, this very idealized vision of spiritual love and relationship that is supposed to be what marriage is really about and what sexual intimacy is really about...I don’t know if I can say that sexual intimacy is really about the kind of

marital love and emotional love since those things seem to have come apart for me.

Blake, another gay Christian in the study, made no mention of celibacy in his interviews. In response to his feelings of fragmentation, Blake actively sought to integrate masculinity, sex, love, and spirituality.

With masculinity I feel like in college guys are definitely not thinking about spirituality at all with sex. They're definitely separating sex and spirituality...they're recognizing love and it's so annoying because why can't they connect? If God is love why aren't they pulling those together?

Later in his interview, Blake redefined sex and sexuality as a spiritual energy connected to love and desire. "And then ultimately what's the best sex is...I desire their desire for my desire – that end all version."

**Feeling less masculine due to restrictive sexuality.** Several participants felt less masculine and inadequate as men for not participating in the hook-up culture, which caused much anxiety and uncertainty as they adopted faith and religious principles that focused on intimacy, exclusive and committed relationships, virginity/abstinence, and moderation. Participants often considered church teachings limiting and restrictive to the college experience and a full expression of masculinity and therefore, caused spiritual struggles related to sexuality. TJ remarked, "I would love to meet the guy that says he one-hundred percent has conquered lust as a sin." Jean shared, "I feel like Christianity set the bar too high almost and it feels too out of touch with what it means to be male and sexual."

Many participants shared stories of male peer interactions that left them feeling less masculine, as a hypersexualized masculinity conflicted with their faith. Before college, Jude interacted with many peers who had trouble understanding his faith and personal beliefs. In high school, he was “getting competing ideas of what it means to be masculine,” as his male peers shared a “preoccupation with physical aspects of relationships.” In contrast, Jude did not see himself as a “serial dater or a hook-up person.” Jude commended his faith for providing a healthy alternative to a hypersexualized masculinity espoused by his peers.

I wanted an emotional support. I wanted someone who I could be myself with. I wanted someone who I felt understood me on a deeper level and who I could take care of on a deeper level and that’s what troubled me because I felt like it was not the masculinity that I was supposed to – I felt like I wasn’t being masculine and desiring the emotional things rather than the physical things. So that kind of carried some of that anxiety with me into my Christian walk and I’ve been very aware of how that plays out. But I’m thankful that having some solid grounding in Christian faith has allowed me to rework that.

Josh felt a similar pressure to explain himself to his male peers when he contemplated abstinence. “Because obviously if you’re a man you’re looked at as like, ‘Why are you even trying? How could you possibly last?’ You’re kind of looked at as, ‘What’s possibly going on with you?’ to the point where you feel like you just have to neglect sex.” Jude described his inability to have conversations with his male peers about struggles with masturbation and pornography because they would be considered “awkward” and met with a “blank stare.”

Jude shared the example of Sex Week at Oxbridge, where he felt his views on sexuality and ethics were not represented in the general population. He told the story of going to a talk on sex education where abstinence was absent from the content of the session. “I remember it being distinct because there weren’t any concessions about abstinence. There were talks about safe sex and using condoms and everything but the scenario coming up was that a guy hooking-up with a girl he met at a bar, which was profoundly different than I think a lot of people on campus think about sex which is in a relationship with someone you love, you know?” He continued, “The example used was a hook-up, which I thought was pretty strange...it was my experience realizing ‘this isn’t Kansas anymore’ – different concessions are made here than in other places.”

**Feeling less faithful due to regretted sexual acts.** Many participants engaged in sexual acts (i.e., sex, hook-ups, masturbation, pornography) that were otherwise normative for college men and the college experience in general, in an effort to moderate and control their sexual urges and to prove a hypersexualized version of masculinity. Since they perceived these acts as antithetical to being a person of faith (e.g., virginity, abstinence, and moderation), some participants experienced frustration, inadequacy, and guilt when they engaged in the hook-up culture, had sex, contemplated sex, masturbated, or watched pornography.

Mark spoke about a “guilty feeling” he felt after a hook-up and the “self-control” he practices because of his faith.

When I hook up I have a guilty feeling...this isn’t healthy for me...I don’t think this is what my faith would agree with...And I think that’s where self-control



comes in. I can pray about it, I can work on it, and I can stop things that I don't want to do...I practice self-control for my faith.

Tom described a stark disconnect between strictly sexual relationships and hookups, which he has come to "regret," and intimate relationships, which yearns for. "I've had sexual hookups that I've since regretted and it feels totally disconnected at the experiential level from the kind of intimate relationships, even the intimate friendships that I've enjoyed here."

Gilbert shared the experience of diving into the party scene in college with his rugby friends, where he made repeated mistakes and experienced shame and regret connected to hooking-up and "lust." This was in sharp contrast to his high school experience where he limited physical activity to romantic partners.

The end of that semester a couple things happened. I got really drunk one night...I went to the hospital...then the following weekend when I was home for thanksgiving break I saw an ex-girlfriend, met up with her and hooked up with her that weekend...I could just see the contrast because this was someone I used to care about. For the first time my sole goal or purpose in seeing her was to gratify my own lust, you know? And I could see the contrast there. Anyway, those two things in particular happened and gave me reason to stop and reflect on where I was and think about where I wanted to be.

Masturbation and pornography was also a source of frustration and guilt for many participants, as they failed to live up to the expectations of their faith. Gilbert shared his futile efforts to fully control his masturbation, "It's frustrating because it's one of those things that I feel like I should be done with this but I continue to struggle with it." Joseph

also described his inability to change his “selfish desires” of masturbation and pornography, as the ebb and flow of his behaviors irked him.

It’s actually kind of gone up and down over time, it’s changed over time, but for a long time I was battling – am battling, of course it’s ongoing – habitual sin and for a while I just would beat myself up and think, “Why am I never getting better? I’ve confessed this at least 40 times. Why is nothing changing?”

The frustration, inadequacy, and guilt associated with masturbation and pornography was compounded by the fact that it was often difficult to be vulnerable and admit wrongdoing in an abstemious faith culture. Therefore, participants’ feelings of frustration and guilt were sometimes privatized. Jude described masturbation and pornography struggles as “insular,” where people are “boxed into shameful categories.” Mark expressed his inability to talk to a random priest about his struggles, “I don’t think I would go to a religious community and pick at random and say, ‘I’ve been jerking off a lot can I talk to you about it?’” Francis also talked about his inability to share masturbation and pornography struggles with his faith community. “Any time I do something like watch porn, I don’t like to tell people that. It’s not something that I advertise because...it’s something that you don’t do.” Gilbert contrasted a conversation with peers about sinful drinking behaviors with a conversation about sexual sin and masturbation. He considered the latter to be a much more “private” and “difficult” sin to share.

Yeah, maybe because it’s something that is so private that makes it more difficult to bring it out into the open where as if I was going to tell someone that I had drank too much that’s not such a private thing because you wouldn’t have any

problem going out and drinking with your buddies. But compare that to you're not going to go out and masturbate in front of your buddy. So there's an amount of privacy with sexual sin that makes it different from other kinds of sin and so other kinds of sin are easier to be open about.

**Ambivalence towards faith and sexuality.** Some participants had more fluidity and, in general, were more ambivalent about faith and sexuality and in their interpretations of sex and sexuality in light of faith and church teachings. Blake previously associated masturbation and pornography with church teaching, but no longer feels the level of guilt he once did. He has learned to reframe these acts apart from religion, classifying them as “spiritual energies” and “getting to know my body.”

Yeah, like I don't feel bad. I used to feel guilty about masturbating. I don't any more at all. That was probably more in high school and maybe my first year here I would feel bad about masturbating and that was because of what I had learned from faith, from the Catholic Church, things like that. I don't feel that way anymore. Sometimes I see it as an outlet, I don't know. That's how it would connect to faith. Now, I don't know. It's still not really connected to faith. It's not really there because for me when there's faith and love, there's God, it's two people, it's not masturbation. I mean, so sometimes it feels like it's selfish but at the same time I do try to sometimes think of it as me getting to know my body.

Josh and Mark shared the experience of feeling ambivalent about sex, hook-ups, and church teaching during college transitions, but becoming more aligned with faith and church teaching as they became older. Josh described his perceptions of the college experience influencing his interpretation of faith and church teaching.

It's like, "How do I go about it at this stage in my life? I'm in college. In college I'm supposed to have fun." So I feel like if I let my faith restrict me I'm not enjoying this small part of life. I feel like some times I can have my whole life to live up to those expectations.

Mark also considered college to be a liminal experience where he could make compromises with his faith and sexuality. "I'm not going to lose my faith. I'm not going to abandon it but I'm going to let myself experience college. I'm going to let myself hook up." He rationalized these behaviors by saying, "Ignatius went to brothels" and "I think that people who masturbate can still go to heaven." Mark described a faith-related "nag" later in college that made him rethink his views on hooking-up.

I definitely think there's a social animal part of me that wanted to hook up and I feel like there's some justification, like "It's just a hook-up. It's not a big deal. Everybody does it." But I think in the back of my mind there was this nag that's like, "You know better. You know that's not what you're supposed to be doing." I think it was my faith and my spirituality. I think that's kind of what steered me away from hooking-up, trying to hook-up with someone every time you go out in freshman year...I think relationships should start with friendship and then move into more intimate relationships.

Paralleling his experience in the hook-up culture, Mark also became less ambivalent about masturbation and pornography over time. He maintained that when his faith increased and relationships were stronger, instances of masturbation and pornography decreased. "I would say if you did a survey, a mass poll, probably times

that I've prayed better, that I've reflected more, that I've had the best relationships, the instances of pornography and masturbation have gone down."

Compared to Mark, Blake and Francis were more ambivalent, as they were validated by the fact that they masturbated and watched pornography less than other men. Blake was able to rationalize some his behaviors by comparing himself to others and focusing more on masturbation than pornography.

I'll look at porn once every two to three weeks. I definitely stayed away from the whole addiction, being addicted to porn. I can tell from other people where they start to watch it more and more and there's also the evolution of starting to watch more intense porn which has always been freaky to me because people, they'll watch the same thing over and over and then they're like now I want to go to something else, you know? That progression is scary to me so I don't really, I don't know. I use porn, I would say infrequently for a male. But that means in a way I'll masturbate without porn.

Francis shared his early exposure to pornography in connection to faith and guilt, and his continued struggles with sexual urges and masturbation.

So I've grown up seeing pornography since I was a little kid and I kind of feel guilty every time I look at it and then I have to feel like I have to go to church and have to absolve myself of that. It's something that I'm still trying to deal with even at this time because I don't try and have sex with everyone on campus. Any time I have those urges it's like I don't want to do anything sinful or bad, but it's just sometimes you just, it just happens.

Jean and Tom were far beyond ambivalent as they considered faith and church teachings on sexuality to be nonsensical. Jean expressed his frustration in his first interview, “I feel like Christianity set the bar too high almost and it feels too out of touch with what it means to be male and sexual.” He continued his argument by describing how men are biologically wired for sex and sociologically expected to be sexual and hypersexual.

I suppose the biggest points of conflict for me would be both biological and sociological and just the idea that my biggest source of conflict tends to be reconciling my male sexuality and pornography, masturbation, and things like that with faith and – maybe I’m being melodramatic – but I feel like an unbearable burden or absurdly high expectations of male morality that don’t line up with the realities of what it means to be male.

In his second interview, Jean described his annoyance with and reluctant acceptance of faith. “Most things in this world come into conflict with faith. That sucks but I think that’s the world we’re called to live in.” Tom, whose faith was heavily influenced by Evangelical teachings, shared a similar frustration with faith and sexuality.

Frankly, Evangelicalism is just extremely awkward about sex and make it awkward for everyone and they can’t shut up about it and they can’t shut up about guarding your heart and all this crap and it’s just horrible and frustrating and the general sense I get from young, Evangelical males is that sex is mostly a curse to be sort of sworn off until – I’m sure you’ve heard – sex is nasty, dirty, and disgusting and save it for the one you love...you have to put up some front about

being totally asexual and happy and celibate and content and all this kind of nonsense.

### **Accountability & Affirmation in Sex & Sexuality**

**Faith-based accountability partners/groups.** Several participants received affirmation through what they called “accountability groups,” which served as a place to process and making meaning of shame, isolation, and “loneliness” typically surrounding issues of sexuality, lustful desires and temptations, and sexual sin.

Gilbert described a Wednesday night accountability group at his previous university (a military academy), where men would talk openly and honestly about struggles with “sexual sin,” drinking, relationships, and “other things that (we) needed prayer for.” He shared his desire to join such a group beginning in December of his sophomore year, as recent episodes of drinking and hooking-up left him feeling that “my life needs to change, things need to get turned around.”

Gilbert shared the story of going to the accountability group for the first time and being taken aback by the honesty and vulnerability of the men in the group, which caused him not to conceal his previous “failures” around hooking-up, drinking, masturbation, and pornography with the group. Instead, he created a “new start” in the group, where he would share ongoing temptations rather than past experiences.

And so yeah, I kind of didn’t know what to expect when I walked into it so I was a little surprised to see these men being so honest and so open about these things that I wasn’t quick to talk about with anyone...so I just decided not to talk about any of the stuff that had been happening in recent weeks and months and treated it like a new start.

Gilbert spoke about rationalizing and calculating his vulnerability about sexual sin as time went on in the group, which he perceived as a tool for helping others reflect upon their own experience and their relationship with God.

(My level of sharing) is different based on where the other person is and their reaction. I don't think I'm less willing to share except for the sake of prudence. Because I think that if my being open and honest with them can help them to see things in a different way and figure things out for themselves then I would be willing to humble myself to make that possible. I would be willing to share those parts of my life that aren't so savory if it means that they will start thinking about their relationship with God more.

While Gilbert was selectively vulnerable with his accountability group, Jude was much more open and honest, partly due to the fact that he and peers were responsible for the creation and vision of the group. Jude shared about his transition into college and his early "spiritual struggles" with sexual desires and temptations. After sharing his concerns with members of his Christian fellowship group, he and a few other members decided to create their own group called "B.O.S.S.," which was served as an acronym for "Brothers Overcoming Spiritual Struggle."

Jude talked about sharing his struggles with pornography with the group, as he used to feel "a profound sense of shame and aloneness" and "didn't really have anyone I felt necessarily comfortable voicing those to," which left him feeling like he "failed" and "was not living up to the standards I had set for myself or what I was supposed to adhere to it." He continued, "It was extremely helpful to have a group of brothers around me



who I could be candid with, but also to know that they might have some perspective on how to pursue things in the future and how to move forward.”

Jude described the group as “trimming the fat from my life,” not in the sense that there was a right or wrong (“being able to enjoy different actions but having to abstain from others”), but “trimming the fat” in the sense of “reorienting myself towards God in some pretty challenging ways.” He maintained that the group was not strictly about sexual desire and temptation, but that “sexual ethics comes up in that being Christians we understand sex to be a spiritually union, it’s supposed to be in the context of marriage. So my fellowship and the guys, we all sort of discuss what it means to abstain from sex until we’re married.”

Jude shared the significance of his faith community in helping him “bring to light” spiritual struggles “as opposed to keeping them insular and keeping people boxed into shameful categories.” He credited the group with helping him become more honest and vulnerable about his college experience as a Christian man, in particular, his ability to share his “doubt” with others and to make meaning of his “frustrations with God.”

I think it’s been really beneficial to have them helping me sort of be genuine and transparent in different areas of struggle. Not only archetypical male struggles but just things like what it means to be a student and living out the faith, what it means to have doubt, what it means to just have frustrations with God. But also just to ask questions and I think all of them are very prone to asking questions, that I really enjoy.

As opposed to an accountability group, Joseph had an accountability partner to help him with his “habitual sin” of masturbation. He also was an accountability partner

for another person. His rationale for these partnerships was rooted in his desire to achieve “holiness” and “sainthood” and “the best way to do that is to stop sinning.” Joseph described how partners signed up for a service called “Covenant Eyes,” which collects web-browsing histories and shares them with a designated partner. Joseph shared the benefits of such an arrangement.

So if I mess up David knows and since getting that I haven’t and I’ve had it for like six months now so I haven’t looked at pornography in at least six months and it started off originally as “Okay, I’m not going to mess up because David’s going to see this.” But now it’s just I don’t want to and the temptations are less. And so in terms of dealing with lust and sexual sin and things like that, I find that leaning on my brothers in Christ has helped me immensely which I guess kind of goes back to vulnerability and openness...it’s just being willing to admit when I mess up to these guys.

The men who found value in accountability groups/partners (Gilbert, Jude, and Joseph) were all Oxbridge students. The other participants from Oxbridge and San Ignacio were more likely to share with a spiritual mentor about issues unrelated to sexual desires and temptations. A notable exception was TJ, who shared in the focus group that he had an accountability group in high school but did not participate in such a group at San Ignacio.

**Spiritual mentors.** Participants also received accountability and affirmation for sexual behaviors from spiritual mentors and guides, who were usually senior members of campus ministries/chaplaincies and interdenominational Christian and Catholic student organizations. Many Catholic participants went to confession to receive spiritual

mentorship, accountability, and affirmation in matters of sex and sexuality. Mark had an informal arrangement with his spiritual mentor, Father John, where he could contact him at any time of the day to speak about his sexuality and struggles with masturbation and pornography.

A lot of people see confession as a cloister, it's more like talking with someone, I'm confessing my sins to God, Father John is with me, it's kind of an offshoot, but my relationships with mentors has been huge in my life...Even just, there'd be an emergency. There was one day during finals I was torn apart about something. I went down and said, "Father, can you hear my confession?" It was 11:30. He said, "Sure. Sit down, close the door." That's really nice, that's huge to have a faith partner, a trusted relationship like that.

Gilbert had a similar ability to reach out to a priest on campus, Father Michael, by sending a short email. He talked about the "joy" of "forgiveness" and "love" he experienced after confessing his sins, including sexual sin. Confession was a novel experience for him, given his recent conversion to Catholicism.

Confession is great especially for someone who grew up Protestant and didn't have that for so long. When I walk out of the confessional – not every time, but probably ninety percent of the time – there's this bounding peace and joy that comes from understanding that I was just actually forgiven of my sins via the sacrament. Because it is a sacrament that's the most concrete way that I experience that forgiveness and that love.

Joseph described how he started to go to confession as a high school senior, in order to deal with his "habitual sin" of masturbation after learning that it was considered

sinful. He explained how he then gained a deeper understanding of sin once he arrived at college.

First off, in high school I didn't – no one every explained to me or led me through the steps of why masturbation and pornography are wrong, why there's a problem with it. But it was at some point later on in high school when the conversation came up and the priest said, "Oh, that's a sin" and he didn't really explain it but he just said, "Yeah, that's a sin. It's sexual sin. It's a twisting of sexual desire and that actually falls under adultery." And I'm like, "Oh shoot, let me go to confession." And then it was really explained better when I got into college.

Joseph described his inability to control his masturbation, which said he confessed "at least 40 times," but shared an experience of accountability and affirmation from a priest, who helped him make meaning of his frustrations.

I told the priest about this and he said, "Well, you're falling into despair. You're relying too much on yourself." And I said, "Okay, how do I fix it?" And he said, "Well, you're going to mess up until you say, 'God, I need help.'" And so maybe I don't beat myself up quite as much.

**Curricular offerings.** Blake had the unique experience of feeling affirmed in his sexuality through coursework, as his passion for integrating sexuality with spirituality was met with a course offering at San Ignacio. He described the course as "life-changing...to understand God in a way, as a way to relate to others and seeing God between two people." The course was taught by a gay professor at San Ignacio and was especially powerful because it incorporated books and articles written by gay Christian theologians and heterosexual theologians who supported homosexuality in the church.

This provided additional affirmation for Blake as a gay Christian and consequently, inspired a renewed faith in God.

(The course) was a great way to see Christian theologians that supported homosexuality and get all those readings and also just understand God in a way, as a way to relate to others and seeing God between two people. It was a lot of sexual theology, which isn't covered too often at all at this university and many others. So that really brought back my faith and made me think about God a lot.

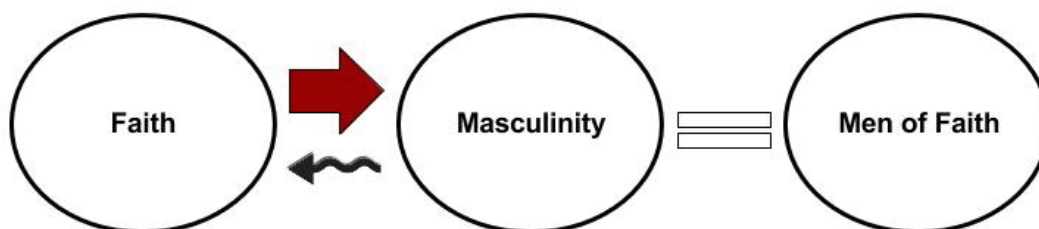
### **Negotiating Masculinity & Faith Identities**

When participants thought about themselves as men of faith, they negotiated their identities as “men of faith.” They started with a belief in religious principles that informed the construction of faith, which in turn, challenged conceptualizations of masculinity in secular culture that were in opposition to faith and religious principles. Their faith and their interpretation of faith was developed and shaped by this constant state of negotiation. Faith is what drove this particular group of men to construct masculinity, but this negotiation was not without struggle and conflict, as it was an ongoing source of frustration, inadequacy, and guilt. The negotiation of masculinity and faith identities is depicted in Figure 4 below.

Participants' masculinity and faith identities were often “intertwined” (Blake), as participants often referred to themselves as “men of faith” and “Christian men.” Faith often influenced and sometimes mediated participants' masculinity. For example, participants spoke about how their faith “informs” (Luke), “shapes” (Josh), “changes” (TJ) “balances” (Mark), “deemphasizes” and “tames” (Jean) their masculinity (depicted

as larger arrow). In contrast, masculinity was a much weaker influence on faith (depicted as a non-linear arrow).

**Figure 4**



### **Identity Negotiation as Men of Faith: Masculinity & Faith**

#### **Summary and Conclusion**

The twelve participants in the study each explored their experiences as men and as persons of faith over two interviews. Through the interviews, they described a process of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity development. The participants had associated masculinity and faith with specific actions, thoughts, and feelings. Their identity development at the intersection of masculinity and faith reflect the process of how college men interacted with cultural expectations of them as men of faith. This study suggests an emerging theory of accountability and affirmation, where men of faith negotiated masculinity and faith identities and were more likely to receive accountability and affirmation from their faith communities than a hypersexualized and very individualistic masculine culture, which resulted in a greater conformance to faith and religious principles. The theory of accountability and affirmation is present in three

major themes of this study: (a) family and relationships; (b) career, calling, and vocations; and (c) sex and sexuality. The emerging theory will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss the emerging theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity, accountability and affirmation. I consider the theory in relation to research questions that framed this study and in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter two. I discuss implications for theory development, student affairs and campus ministry practice, and future research. I conclude with a reflection on strengths and weaknesses of the study.

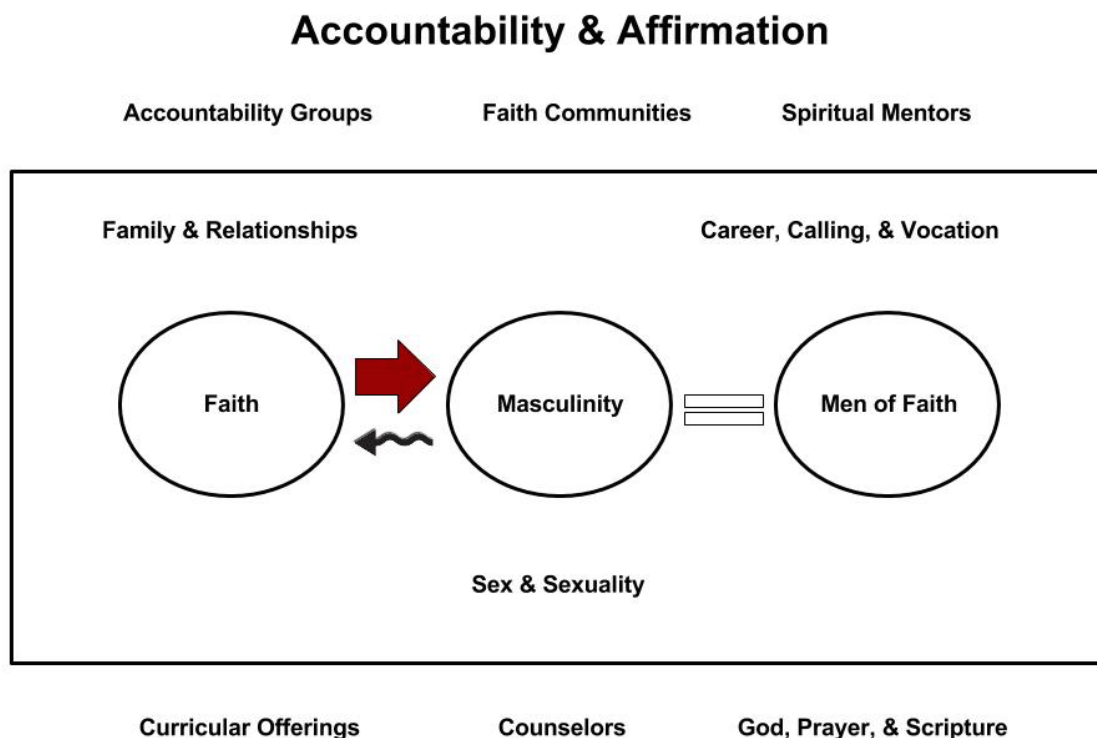
### **Theory of the Intersection of Masculinity & Faith in College Men's Identity:**

#### **Accountability & Affirmation**

This study suggests that the emerging theory of accountability and affirmation (see Figure 5 below) was a process of interacting with cultural expectations of them as men of faith. As participants learned these expectations, they negotiated masculinity and faith identities and were more likely to receive accountability and affirmation from their faith communities than a hypersexualized and very individualistic masculine culture, which resulted in a greater conformance to faith and religious principles. The theory of accountability and affirmation is present in three major themes of this study: (a) family and relationships; (b) career, calling, and vocations; and (c) sex and sexuality.



Figure 5



**Theory of the Intersection of Masculinity & Faith in College Men's Identity:**

**Accountability & Affirmation**

Accountability and affirmation was a process of interacting with cultural expectations of them as men of faith. The participants experienced conflicting and, at times, overlapping cultural expectations of masculinity and faith. Cultural expectations of masculinity were very individualistic, hypersexual, and heteronormative, while expectations of faith were often centered on benevolence, sacrifice, virginity/abstinence, and heteronormativity. As a result, participants were in a constant state of identity negotiation. Some participants experienced a more complicated identity negotiation due to additional expectations unique to their multiple, intersecting and marginalized

identities, such as gay Christian men, Black and/or Hispanic Christian men, and low-income and working class Christian men. Participants at Oxbridge also experienced unique tensions due to their campus culture of careerism and pre-professionalism. Participants received accountability and affirmation from faith communities, spiritual mentors, accountability groups, curricular offerings, counseling, and God, prayer, and scripture. Notably, there was no dominant form of accountability and affirmation present in all three themes; rather, each theme created a unique negotiation of masculinity and faith identities and therefore, warranted unique forms of accountability and affirmation.

In family and relationships, participants were expected to become fathers, leaders, providers, and models for their children. Faith was considered central to family life, which some participants connected to virginity and saving themselves for marriage. Participants also strived to care and sacrifice in relationships and treat women with dignity rather than utility. They were in constant need of validation and affirmation for being vulnerable in stoic, heteronormative, and homophobic masculine culture. Heterosexism also created a fragmented experience of family and relationships for gay men of faith. In family and relationships, participants received accountability and affirmation from faith communities, spiritual mentors, counselors, daily prayer and reflection, and scripture.

In careers, callings, and vocations, participants believed in the phrase “to much is given, much is expected” as many pursued other-directed careers and needed income to provide for their families. Participants at Oxbridge had a unique culture of careerism and pre-professionalism that influenced their career decisions. Some participants were concerned that once they moved into their profession, their faith would decrease and

become less salient. In careers, callings, and vocations, participants received accountability and affirmation from vocation groups and retreats and God, prayer, and scripture.

In sex and sexuality, participants were influenced by a hypersexualized masculinity that was in direct conflict with their faith that advocated for virginity, abstinence, and moderation. As a result, participants felt less masculine due to restrictive sexuality and felt less faithful due to regretted sexual acts, although some participants were ambivalent about church teachings on sexuality. In sex and sexuality, participants received accountability and affirmation from faith-based accountability partners/groups, spiritual mentors, and curricular offerings.

In all three themes, men of faith negotiated masculinity and faith identities and were more likely to receive accountability and affirmation from their faith communities than a hypersexualized and very individualistic masculine culture, which resulted in a greater conformance to faith and religious principles. Through this process, participants were able to create a more harmonious identity at the intersection of masculinity and faith.

### **Relationship of Theory of Accountability & Affirmation to Research Questions**

The purpose of this study of college men of faith was to posit a theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity. The following research questions initially guided this study: (a) how do masculinity and faith identities intersect in college men who actively participate in faith-based communities, and (b) how does this intersection inform college men's development? The intended outcome of this study was a theoretical perspective on the intersection of masculinity and faith grounded in the

experience of the participants. The research questions are discussed in relation to the emerging theory below.

The process of the intersection of masculinity and faith identities is central to this study on college men's development. The college men who participated in this study experienced the intersection as a process of constant interaction with cultural expectations of them as men of faith. In order to meet these expectations at the intersection of masculinity and faith, participants described a meaning-making process of accountability and affirmation, where men of faith negotiated masculinity and faith identities and were more likely to receive accountability and affirmation from their faith communities than a hypersexualized and very individualistic masculine culture, which resulted in a greater conformance to faith and religious principles. The theory of accountability and affirmation is present in three major themes of this study: (a) family and relationships; (b) career, calling, and vocation; and (c) sex and sexuality.

The participants were socialized according to cultural definitions of masculinity and faith. Cultural expectations of masculinity centered on hyper-individualism, hypersexuality, and heteronormativity, while expectations of faith centered on "love," "benevolence," virginity/abstinence, and heteronormativity. The participants were influenced by personal experiences such as parents, priests/pastors, teachers, and coaches as well as by social institutions such as media, education, sport, church, church teaching, religious figures and practices. Men who had one or more marginalized identities experienced additional expectations unique to their marginalized social group (i.e., heterosexism, racism, and classism). The complexity of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity increased as participants became more independent

and autonomous in college, when they began to think themselves in the context of a family and relationships and careers, callings, and vocations. Since the external expectations of what it means to be a man (i.e., very individualistic and hypersexual) were often antithetical to what it means to be a man of faith (i.e., “love,” “benevolence,” and virginity/abstinence), the participants experienced deep frustration, as a fully harmonious identity at the intersection of masculinity and faith was unattainable.

All of the participants in the study described their frustrations with expectations as men of faith, as they felt inadequate in satisfying unattainable expectations. Participants felt they did not fit a traditional definition of masculinity. They described times when they conformed to masculine norms intentionally and unintentionally, often surrounding issues of love, intimacy, and sexuality. The consequences of adopting hyper-masculine thoughts, feelings, and behaviors included using others for personal gain (e.g., hook-ups), losing one’s virginity, sin, inability to be vulnerable with others, and inauthenticity. When the participants became more aware of these consequences, they felt a deeper sense of frustration and inadequacy, causing some to eventually seek accountability and affirmation. Two participants received affirmation for being considered “feminine” or “gay” through counseling. Other participants did not seek affirmation for (and/or became apathetic to) being considered less masculine or they received affirmation through faith communities, faith-based accountability partners/groups, spiritual mentors, faith practices such as prayer and reflection, and scripture where some were able to develop personal definitions, redefining masculinity in accordance with faith and Christian principles such as accountability and responsibility. However, the men who were able to create an alternative definition of masculinity still felt the need to prove themselves as men by

adopting hyper-masculine norms, particularly during times of when they felt insecure, ashamed, and/or had not yet received accountability and affirmation.

Given their constant gender socialization, hyper-masculine environments in college, and the salience of their faith identities, participants felt they would never fully live up to cultural expectations of masculinity. Participants were only able to feel secure as men of faith, when they were able to adopt cultural expectations of masculinity that were in sync and intersected in positive ways with their faith, such as being a father and providing and sacrificing for others, which are reflected in the themes and subthemes of the process of accountability and affirmation. Even with these positive conceptualizations, participants would often succumb to hyper-masculine norms during times of frustration and guilt, when they felt insecure, inauthentic, and distant from their faith. When participants were able to adopt positive masculine intersections of masculinity and faith, they were not only more vulnerable and open to seeking accountability and affirmation but also had healthier expressions of love, intimacy, and sexuality that benefited women, other men, themselves, and their faith communities, as they were better able to give and receive love.

In terms of faith expectations, participants felt that they were “imperfect” and “broken,” which most of them accepted as their “callings” as Christians. Participants described times when they rejected principles of faith and Christianity, often surrounding issues of love, intimacy, and sexuality. The consequences of rejecting thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with faith and Christianity included using others for utility or personal gain (e.g., hook-ups), loneliness (e.g., masturbation and pornography), losing one’s virginity, sin, distance from God, Jesus and their church community, inability to be

vulnerable with others, pride, vanity, inauthenticity, and a privatization of faith. When men became more aware of these consequences, they felt a deeper sense of frustration and guilt, causing them all to eventually seek accountability and affirmation. In order to “reconcile,” be “remade” and “made whole again,” participants often received accountability and affirmation through Christian faith communities, faith-based accountability partners/groups, spiritual mentors, counselors, and curricular offerings. Through the process of accountability and affirmation, participants were able to: forgive themselves and others; feel loved, supported, and accepted by others, God, and Jesus; become more vulnerable with women and other men, including saying “I love you”; become better able give love, especially to those more difficult to love, who had hurt or wronged them; feel closer to God, Jesus, and their church community; become a better imitation or “follower” of Jesus; gain a deeper understanding of the Christianity and its teachings; and evangelize, share, and be more public with their faith.

Given their constant faith and religious socialization and expectations of them as faithful Christians, participants felt they would never fully live up to the expectations of faith and Christianity. They would never be “perfect” men of faith like Jesus. They would always be “sinners,” but with “God’s grace” might achieve “holiness” and/or “sainthood.” To this end, participants were never able to feel fully secure in their faith, but when they received affirmation, felt loved, and became more secure in their faith identity, they were able to deepen their faith and understanding of Christianity and develop new habits of thinking, feeling, and being men of faith.

When more secure in their faith, participants only adopted conceptualizations of masculinity that were in sync and intersected in positive ways with their faith, such as

being a father and a provider and caring and sacrificing for others, which are all reflected in the process of accountability and affirmation. However, most participants did not feel the need to adopt positive conceptualizations of masculinity, since they were already present and visible in their churches and faith communities. Instead, participants felt the need to unlearn certain thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with a traditional definition of masculinity, such as hyper-individualism, hypersexuality, and, in some cases, heteronormativity, in an effort to reorient themselves towards their faith. Even with these positive conceptualizations, participants would often succumb to hyper-masculine norms when they felt frustrated, guilty, and inadequate, which consequently, made them feel insecure, inauthentic, and distant from their faith. When participants were able to adopt positive masculine intersections of masculinity and faith, they were not only more vulnerable and open to seeking accountability and affirmation, but also had healthier expressions of love, intimacy, and sexuality that benefited women, other men, themselves, and their faith communities, as they were better able to give and receive love.

In contrast, when participants felt less secure or insecure, “despair,” and “darkness” about their faith or an aspect of faith, they experienced deeper frustration and guilt, which created a vicious cycle of identity negotiation, where participants would reject principles of faith and Christianity and habitually adopt a distorted sense of sex and sexuality in their thoughts and behaviors, which led to deeper and deeper frustration and guilt. Consequences of this cycle included: using others for personal gain; distance from God, Jesus, and their church communities; inability to be give and receive love; inability to be vulnerable with others; pride; vanity; inauthenticity; and a privatization of faith. This vicious cycle was evident in aspects of all of the participants’ experiences,



especially regarding masturbation and pornography, but was present in other sexual acts, such as sex and hook-ups. When this cycle of thoughts and feelings manifested itself externally in the behaviors of the participants, it may have, on a superficial level, been misperceived and misdiagnosed by others as adopting hyper-masculine norms and/or rejecting principles of faith and Christianity; however, on a deeper level, this study suggests that intense frustration and guilt may be creating a vicious cycle of identity negotiation, resulting in a distorted sense of sex and sexuality. This cycle impeded the process of accountability and affirmation.

To a slightly lesser degree, participants experienced a similar vicious cycle in their careers, callings, and vocations. Participants believed that cultural expectations of faith encouraged them to pursue potentially less lucrative careers that were in line with their vocational callings (e.g., other-directed careers) and God-given gifts, talents, and abilities, while cultural expectations of masculinity encouraged them to pursue more lucrative and often more individualistic careers focused on breadwinning. Many participants experienced frustration, inadequacy, and guilt for pursuing less lucrative careers than many of their male peers. They expressed temptations to pursue careers that garner more money, power, and respect from their peers, yet would often rely on their faith as a primary guidepost. Participants worked to reconcile tensions at the intersection of masculinity and faith by framing themselves as “providers” instead of “breadwinners,” with a long-term focus on providing financially for one’s family. However, the more participants aligned with their faith and worked to distance themselves from very individualistic pursuits, the more they perceived themselves as inferior and inadequate in comparison to more “successful” male peers.

### **Relationship of Theory of Accountability & Affirmation to Literature**

In chapter two, I provided a review of literature at the intersection of masculinity that framed this study and informed my data collection, analysis, and theory development. In this section, I discuss the results of the study in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter two as well as other literature that has emerged since the writing of chapter two. I outline connections, contradictions, and contributions between this study and literature in the field.

### **Identity Development**

By describing the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity as a process of accountability and affirmation, where men of faith negotiated masculinity and faith identities and were more likely to receive accountability and affirmation from their faith communities than a hypersexualized and very individualistic masculine culture, which resulted in a greater conformance to faith and religious principles, this study has several connections, contradictions, and contributions to literature in the field.

This study utilized the Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (IMMDI) (Jones & Abes, 2013) as a theoretical lens, examining participants' gender (masculinity) and faith identities, which represent two intersecting rings of the model, but was attentive to intersecting systems of power, privilege, and oppression (e.g., heterosexism, racism, and classism) and other intersecting identities (e.g., race and class) to the extent that they influenced the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity. The theory that emerged from this study, accountability and affirmation, is more fluid and non-linear than traditional faith development theories that are stage based (Fowler, 1981) or partly stage based (Parks, 2000). The emerging theory is more

similar to theories of multiple identities (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & McEwen, 2000) and theories of college men's gender identity (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2008; Harris & Edwards, 2010) as it portrays a discursive, developmental process of multiple identities towards a more complex and internally defined sense of self in light of social context and location.

The emerging theory builds knowledge of intersectionality and multiple identities by examining two intersecting rings of the IMMDI (Jones & Abes, 2013), gender (masculinity) and faith – two identities that had not been exclusively examined. The theory also builds knowledge on college men's gender identity and faith development, answering calls in the field to generate theories that incorporates multiple, intersecting identities of college men (Harper et al., 2011) and persons of faith (Abes, 2011).

The way faith influenced and sometimes mediated constructions of masculinity (as opposed to masculinity mediating other identities) closely resembles the concept of a “spiritual core” (Stewart, 2009) and spirituality as a “anchor” for other identities (Dancy, 2010) in studies of identity intersections of Black college students. The primacy of faith for the participants in this study also adds nuance to the reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity (RMMDI) (Abes et al., 2007). In this study, faith was not simply an identity but was often the locus of the participants' meaning-making filter depicted in the RMMDI. Faith became a primary means of self-authorship, as men sought to move faith to the center of their lives and filter out negative influences, which often included hyper-masculine norms that were very individualistic and hypersexual. At times, participants in this study used a meaning-making filter to block out negative religious influences such as heteronormativity, heterosexism, and church teachings on

homosexuality. This was especially true for gay Christians. In general, as men this study developed through the process of accountability and affirmation, the complexity of their meaning and faith increased, and as a result, they were better able to filter negative contextual influences. To this end, the salience of faith made participants acutely aware of their *masks* of masculinity (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Pollack, 1998).

The way participants strived for self-sufficiency and engaged in identity exploration is reflected in the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Participants accepted responsibility for their behaviors, made independent decisions, and desired to become financially independent and stable in family and relationships; careers, callings, and vocations; and sex and sexuality. Participants also explored identities connected to love, work, and worldviews, paralleling traits of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Participants desired to attain adulthood through love and relationships that became more intimate, sexual, and serious over time as participants conceptualized families and possible identities as fathers. They became more intentional about their jobs and careers as they considered adult and family life such as being a financial provider. Participants previously held worldviews were challenged and negotiated at the intersection of masculinity and faith identities.

The way participants tenuously held their masculinity and felt the need to constantly demonstrate their masculinity through social proof and validation is consistent with theories of gender role strain/stress/conflict (Eisler, Skidmore, & Ward, 1988; O'Neil, 2008; Pleck, 1981) and precarious manhood (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). In response to these social conditions, participants often considered their masculinity in light of their faith and religious principles. Participants received validation and affirmation for

their masculinity from their faith communities, but often felt the pressure to prove themselves outside of these communities.

The way participants experienced and talked about their faith is reflected in theories of faith development (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). Participants' experiences aligned closely with Fowler's (1981) *individuated-reflective* stage, as they critically reflected on their faith outside of family and authority figures and experienced conflicted understandings and consistencies. For example, participants struggled with whether to fully adopt faith and religious principles, especially around careers, callings, and vocations and sex and sexuality. They were challenged by very individualistic and hypersexual tendencies of their college peers, which often created a conflicted understanding of faith as restrictive and limiting to the college experience.

Participants' experiences also aligned closely with Parks' (2000) *probing commitment, fragile inner-dependence, and mentoring communities*. In *probing commitment*, participants felt the need to always reflect upon personal values and convictions to create a personal faith, as they worked to integrate their faith into their college experience, which was often in conflict with dominant masculine and secular culture. Participants had a *fragile inner-dependence*, as they were vulnerable, yet made independent and autonomous decisions and took responsibility for their behaviors. Participants had faith communities and spiritual mentors that served as *mentoring communities* that were typically intergenerational and had a balance of challenge and support.

The way participants quested for meaning and purpose in their family and relationships, careers, callings, and vocations, and sex and sexuality is reflected in studies

of faith and spirituality that describe a meaning-making process requiring “big questions” in the development of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment (Parks, 2000) and a spiritual quest (Astin et al., 2011). This study has several more connections to Parks (2000) that are highlighted throughout the sections below.

### **Family & Relationships**

Participants shared a common appreciation for their families, parents, and other people responsible for raising them. This connects to a previous study of college men’s gender identity that depicts pre-college gender socialization, which includes parental influence, as contextual influences on the meanings college men makes of masculinities (Harris, 2010). Another grounded theory study of men’s gender identity development cited participants relationships with their fathers as influencing their self-understanding and their conceptualizations of themselves as men (Edwards & Jones, 2009). Edwards and Jones also described that there was elusiveness to gaining their father’s approval; however, that was not a theme that emerged in this study of college men. Participants in this study spoke about their many positive relationships with their fathers as well as their mothers, including gratitude for the way they were raised with Christian values and the many sacrifices parents made for them (e.g., working multiple jobs, delaying retirement, and paying tuition). Some participants described their parents’ marriage, as they were able observe and make meaning of the relationship for their purposes of preparing for their own relationships, future marriages, and possibly children. Another notable difference in their study is faith being a foundation for their family and a family of their own someday.

Participants in this study demonstrated a tremendous ability to love, care, and treat others with dignity and respect. Relationships were critical for their identities as both men and persons of faith, which complicated two quantitative studies that described college men, when compared to women, as less spiritual and relational (Buchko, 2004) and are less likely to emphasize the importance of peer groups in their spiritual development (Bryant, 2007). However, the participants in this study are consistent with Astin and colleagues (2011), who suggest that men are more likely than women to become more loving in college.

Participants also talked about treating women with love, care, and respect, stressing the importance of egalitarianism between women and men. They desired to be providers emotionally, spiritually, and financially for women, and, in some cases, protectors of women. Participants spoke about a “flock” and “taking the lead” in their family, but also shared expectations of their future partners as providers as well, including financially. While the language participants used of “provider,” “protector,” and “leader” had aspects of patriarchy, participants were not knowingly or intentionally sexist, misogynistic, oppressive, and/or demeaning towards women. One participant also about shared his leadership role in Bystander Education training, where he acted as an ally, especially around issues of sexual assault.

Participants never used words such as “groupie,” “slut,” or “commodity” to describe women, as participants did in another study of college men’s identity development (Harris, 2008). They expressed the full dignity of women around them and some talked about the critical influences of women on their development, including but not limited to: mothers, female friends, girlfriends, and a devotion to Mary in the Holy

Family. They did, however, participate in the objectification of women (and men) through their struggles with pornography, which reflected their deeper, internal thoughts and struggles with sex and sexuality, and some participants spoke about their participation in the hook-up culture, but often in a deeper desire for an exclusive romantic relationship since a dating culture was not always present on campus. These findings complicate foundational research on hegemonic masculinity in the field of men and masculinities hegemonic masculinity, which depicts a unilateral power structure that focuses on winning, domination, and subordination of women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993). Subordination of women is also echoed in the field of college men and masculinities subordination of women (Harper, 2004). In short, the participants in this study could be considered patriarchal in their families and faith communities (e.g., church hierarchy), but complicated the assumption of sexism and subordination of women present in all men and particularly college men.

Participants also experienced heteronormativity and homophobia, which has been a finding in several studies on men and college men (Harper & Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 1994; Kimmel & Messner, 2012; McGuire, 2014). To this end, participants' inability to be vulnerable in a hyper-masculine culture echoed aspects of fear of femininity and emotional restrictiveness found in studies on men and college men (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper, 2004; Ludeman, 2004; O'Neil et al., 1986).

The two gay participants in this study struggled most deeply with heteronormativity and heterosexism in masculinity and faith. Tom felt ashamed and confused intellectually and spiritually, especially around expectations of faith, and did not identify with the experiences of the queer student community. In contrast, Blake



strongly identified with the LGBTQ community, sought counseling for being less masculine, and called himself “loosely Catholic,” avoiding traditional aspects of the church, including going to mass regularly, in preference for prayer, reflection, and spiritual development. Blake’s experience is consistent with multiple aspects of Harper and colleagues (2011) in their case study of Tyson, who is affiliated with Christianity and has a salient spiritual identity, yet does not attend local churches partly due to conflicting beliefs with local church teachings and viewpoints on homosexuality. While Tyson practiced his faith in a deeply private and personal manner (prayer and personal devotions), both participants in this study had a very public faith that manifested itself more often in their faith communities and conversation groups rather than formal religious practices.

The gay Christians in this study were both in the process of reconciling their spiritual and sexual identities in the context of a faith community, where they received much affirmation and validation. This has many parallels and connections, yet also complicates the Love and colleagues (2005) study on spirituality and gay/lesbian identities. Love and colleagues talked about how the five reconciled participants in their study benefited from a strong religious upbringing, and strong loving environment and a direct experience or conflict regarding their religion and their sexuality. Experiencing challenge from a religious community within the context of a supportive environment often was stimulus for reconciliation and a deepening of spiritual and sexual identities for the participants in their study. The two participants in this study experienced a similar stimulus from their participation in faith communities while experiencing conflict with

the church and its teachings, which led to some sense of reconciliation; but they felt that a full reconciliation of spirituality and sexuality might never be possible.

Similarly, the experience of reconciliation for two gay men in the study closely have points of commonality and departure with the Abes (2011) study that explored the intersection of faith and sexuality in her longitudinal study of Jewish lesbian college students. The two gay participants in this study and the two lesbian participants in the Abes study both experienced a shift in identity as their surroundings changed and participants took steps to internally define their identities in different ways. The Abes study posits that participants were better able to filter out negative religious messages, understand that multiple religious perspectives exist, and ultimately accept their lesbian identity in the context of a religious community. While participants in this study took steps towards accepting themselves in the context of a religious community, they had not fully accepted themselves in the context of a religious community. They made significant progress during their college experience, but were still working towards full acceptance. Blake was better able than Tom to filter out negative religious messages and understand that multiple religious perspectives exist. Tom had a very difficult time filtering out negative messages and had the conflicting experience of believing in aspects of church teaching on celibacy, yet choosing to be sexually active.

All participants demonstrated a love and care for women and gay peers, but in terms of ally development (Edwards, 2006), were more willing to advocate for women's rights than gay rights. Dignity and respect for women was often tied to the participants' faith and their understandings of family, marriage, and relationships. In contrast, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer advocacy and a discomfort for and/or desire to

change church teachings on homosexuality were expressed only by the two gay men in this study. Most heterosexual participants who spoke about homosexuality as sin accepted church teaching, but within the group, had mixed emotions; some heterosexual participants felt powerless to church teaching even if they disagreed, while others staunchly accepted church teaching as truth. In short, heterosexual participants were allies in the sense that they were sympathetic, sensitive, and supportive to gay Christians privately and individually, but when it came to advocating for gay and LGBTQ communities in a general sense, were unwilling to advocate openly for their cause in the their communities and their churches.

### **Career, Calling, & Vocation**

Participants were able to focus on both present behaviors that prepared them for life after college (e.g., resume building and selecting a major), and, at the same time, consider themselves in future careers using the language of calling and vocation. Edwards and Jones (2009) also talked about the men in his study balancing external pressures to party and socialize, but also their ability to prepare for life after college by committing themselves to their coursework and internships. However, participants in the Edwards and Jones study did not mention thinking of themselves “larger,” in the context of a career, profession, or family, as this study does.

The participants’ consideration of themselves in the context of career and families and their ability to trust in God’s plan, using their God-given gifts, talents, and abilities resembles Parks (2000), in her assessment of faith as seeking a deeper meaning and purpose, with “big questions,” “probing commitment,” and “imagination.” However, this study also considered contextual influences on the participants’ development, including

the desire to provide for themselves and their families. In particular, this study found participants asking “big questions,” yet struggling with cultures of careerism, during and after college, and pre-professionalism during college.

Another study of intersections of spirituality with other identities for African-American college men had similar findings to this study, including pre-professional pursuits, acceptable careers for Black men, and being Christian and pursuing a career in the legal profession (Dancy, 2010). This study complicates the Dancy study in the participants’ ability to resist the temptation to oversimplify more prosperous careers as somehow less Christian, as they described deeper callings such as fighting against “hypocrisy,” guided by a strong sense of ethics, values, and beliefs (Blake), and being a “healer” (Jude), “provider” (all). It also adds other-directed careers, focused on helping others, to an understanding of college men and careers.

### **Sex & Sexuality**

Participants in this study experienced a strong pressure to engage in multiple sexual conquests with women as a means of proving their masculinity, or hypersexuality, which is also highlighted in several studies of college men and masculinities (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper & Harris, 2010; Harris, 2008; Laker & Davis, 2011; O’Neil et al., 1986). The tensions participants felt with faith and sexuality were echoed in studies of the spiritual development of Black college students (McGuire, 2014) and Black gay men (Means, 2014) as well as a study of male sexuality and gender roles in Puerto Rican heterosexual college studies (Perez-Jimenez et al., 2007). This study adds nuance to an understanding of sexuality and hypersexuality in college men by suggesting tensions with

virginity/abstinence and masturbation and pornography, which are notably absent in higher education and student affairs literature.

Participants experienced frustration as a result of interactions with cultural expectations of masculinity and faith. In their male peer groups, participants experienced disconnect and exclusion in the form of teasing, name-calling, and shaming as a result of their faith or involvement with faith practices and communities. From these experiences, participants conceptualized who they as men in relation to and in the context of a campus culture, which is similar to the Harris (2010) study that highlighted male peer group interactions and campus involvement as contextual influences on the meanings college men make of masculinities. This study suggests that influences of male peer groups and campus involvement may be intersecting influences for men of faith, rather an individual and bilateral relationship described in the Harris study.

The participants' experiences of frustration and guilt has some connections but largely contradicts literature on shame and masculinity in men (Kimmel, 1994) in college men (Capraro, 2000). These authors argue that when men feel powerless or shamed by other men, they typically conform to masculine norms as a defense mechanism and as way to compensate feelings of inadequacy. The participants in this study, indeed, felt frustration, guilt, inadequacy, and powerlessness as a result of expectations of masculinity and faith. However, their responses contradict these studies, as participants typically sought out accountability and affirmation from spiritual mentors and faith communities, and as a result, conformed to faith and church teaching rather than hyper-masculine norms. For most participants, their deepest feelings of frustration were associated with sinful thoughts and behaviors. These behaviors were sometimes

manifestations of sexuality and hypersexuality, but had less to do with compensatory behavior and more to do with sexual desires, temptations, and “lust,” which were considered sin. They were not impervious to shame from other men, as two men sought counseling for being considered “gay” or “feminine.” To this end, when participants felt frustration, inadequacy, and guilt, they had patterned behaviors of seeking accountability and affirmation from faith communities, faith-based accountability partners/groups, spiritual mentors, faith practices, counseling, and course offerings. In the literature on shame and masculinity (Capraro, 2000; Kimmel, 1994), help-seeking behaviors are considered positive reactions to shame.

Participants’ experiences of frustration, inadequacy, and guilt more closely resemble Parks’ (2000) metaphor of a *shipwreck* moment, as they experienced anticipated and unanticipated feelings of disappointment and were forced to engage big questions that challenged their beliefs. For example, participants asked questions of meaning and purpose surrounding faith, love, trust, and commitment such as: *Who am I? Am I lovable? Do I matter? What or who can I trust? What is the meaning of sin? Why am I suffering? Why are so many others suffering? What will the future hold for me?* Big questions challenged the participants to be vulnerable with others in an effort to find answers, and ultimately seek out accountability and affirmation, in the process of developing new meaning, purpose, and faith.

While other studies have discussed external tensions with faith, religious teaching, and sexuality (Harper et al., 2011; McGuire, 2014; Perez-Jimenez et al., 2007), participants in this study experienced internal feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and guilt as a result of tensions with masculinity, faith, and sexuality. The participants

connected frustration, inadequacy, and guilt to sexuality and hypersexuality, including sexual desires and temptations surrounding sex, hook-ups, masturbation, and pornography. These desires and temptations were intimately linked with faith and church teaching, specifically “sexual sin,” which was experienced as a result of spiritual “failures” associated with sex, hook-ups, masturbation, pornography, and feelings of lust. Frustration, inadequacy, guilt, and “sin” were also connected to heteronormativity, heterosexism, and teachings on homosexuality and celibacy for gay Christians in this study.

### **Accountability & Affirmation**

Participants shared the experience of receiving affirmation for the feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and guilt from faith communities, faith-based accountability partners/groups; spiritual mentors, faith practices, counselors, and course offerings. In receiving affirmation, participants not only experienced love, support, and belonging, but also developed a deeper sense of accountability and responsibility as men of faith. Critical to the faith development of young adults, Parks (2000) describes their “yearning for belonging, connection, inclusion, relationship, and intimacy” (p. 104). For men in this study, belonging, connection, inclusion, relationships and intimacy were reflected in their experiences of affirmation, often in faith communities and with spiritual mentors. These communities of accountability and affirmation bared close resemblance to Parks’ conception of *mentoring communities*, as they were places of love and hospitality that were rooted in a potential for a new and renewed sense of self.

This study suggests that accountability and affirmation are also functions of a mentoring community, but is not limited as such. Participants were able to receive

accountability and affirmation outside the context of community, in more ethereal forms of spiritual and religious imagination such as religious figures, faith practices, and scripture. Through their deep emotional, spiritual, and intellectual abilities, the men in this study received affirmation and imagined new ways of thinking, feelings, and being, often challenging themselves to be better and do better. For example, some participants imagined and critically analyzed themselves in a scene from scripture (i.e., the Gospels) in order to gain perspective on their lives. The participants' critical analyses allowed them to receive affirmation from ethereal experiences, which sometimes acted as a substitute, but were often in addition to mentoring communities.

Accountability and affirmation also aligned with Parks' (2000) metaphors of *gladness* and *amazement*, when participants were able to, with perspective, transcend their previously held worldviews, come to a deeper understanding of themselves, and develop a deeper sense of accountability and responsibility, which led to the creation of new habits of thinking, feeling, and being for the purposes of continual affirmation with God, Jesus, and faith communities.

In the field of higher education and student affairs, the participants' experience of affirmation and validation has some overlap with literature related to belonging and inclusion. Strayhorn (2012) has provided substantial literature around college students' sense of belonging; however, a chapter on faith, spirituality, religion, belonging, and inclusion is notably missing from his book and other published works on the topic. Means (2014) explores experiences of belonging and inclusion in his study of Black gay men's spirituality, where he describes "spiritual counter spaces" (p. 196) such as music, practice rooms, nature, and predominantly African-American groups that are inclusive



and affirming of the participants' marginalized identities. The study overlaps with the Means study, in the sense that participants needed spaces of accountability and affirmation that were inclusive and validating of their feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and guilt. As a result of their interactions with expectations of masculinity and faith, participants in this study sought accountability and affirmation for their inability to satisfy unattainable expectations as men of faith. The participants in this study were eager and often desperate for accountability and affirmation as men of faith. Participants with marginalized identities experienced a more complicated sense of frustration, inadequacy, and guilt due to their race, class, and/or sexual orientation. This was particularly evident in gay Christians, who at times, felt a deeper and more intense frustration than other men in the study due to church teachings on homosexuality.

Accountability in the literature typically focuses on academic achievement, success, and persistence (e.g., Harper, 2012; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010), which may incorporate aspects of spirituality (e.g., Harper, 2012), but does not seek to understand the development of accountability as a means of deepening one's faith.

### **Summary of Relationship to Literature**

The theory that emerged from this study describes a developmental process of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity, where men came to a deeper understanding of themselves as men of faith. The way participants negotiated masculinity and faith contributes knowledge to theories of intersectionality and multiple identities, men's gender identity development, and faith development as the intersection of masculinity and faith identities had not been exclusively explored. The way faith influenced and sometimes mediated masculinity is reflected in studies of faith and other

identities, where faith acts as an “anchor” or “core” to other identities. Faith was as a primary means of self-authorship for the participants, as it made participants acutely aware of their masks of masculinity. Participants’ experiences closely paralleled theories of emerging adulthood, precarious manhood, and faith development, but had some contradictions with studies of college men and masculinities, especially around sex, sexuality, shame, accountability, and affirmation. The way participants shared about careers, callings, and vocations had broad connections to theories of emerging adulthood and faith development, but overall, had few connections to the literature. The way participants shared about frustration, inadequacy, and guilt and the process of accountability and affirmation had many connections to the work of Parks (2000), but overall, had mostly indirect connections in the literature. The theory adds depth and nuance to literature focused on shame, belonging, spiritual spaces, and self-authorship and multiple identities. The way participants shared about virginity/abstinence, masturbation, pornography, sin, accountability, and affirmation were unfounded in the literature and suggest new insights into how student affairs and campus ministry educators may engage men in deeper questions of themselves and their negotiation of masculinity and faith identities.

### **Implications**

The results of this study have several implications for theory development, student affairs and campus ministry practice, and future research. These implications are based not solely on the theory that emerged from the study but also the process of coming to this theory, including identifying a theoretical lens and framing this study, the

interviews and focus group feedback sessions, and the process of making meaning of the participants' experience.

### **Implications for Theory**

The emerging theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity offers three insights for future theory development, particularly identity development theory. The emerging theory in this study demonstrates the critical need for further theoretical exploration into intersectionality and multiple identities examining privileged identities of individuals from two or more dominant groups, where there are presumptions of privilege in more ways than one. While theorists have rightly focused most of their energies on individuals from underrepresented and oppressed populations and marginalized identities and, more recently, multiple marginalized identities, this study suggests that membership in multiple dominant social groups does not necessarily equate to the absence of frustration, inadequacy, and guilt. This study suggests that men of faith are in the process of negotiating masculinity and faith identities and in desperate need of accountability and affirmation.

The men of faith in this study experienced deep frustration due to unattainable expectations of masculinity and faith, as they felt they did not live up to either standard well. The intensity and persistence of their frustration, inadequacy, and guilt, particularly around sin, sexual sin, masturbation, and pornography, was largely concealed and privatized in their interactions with their faith communities, as they often received accountability and affirmation in one-on-one conversations (e.g., spiritual mentors) and narrowly defined groups (e.g., accountability groups). The omnipresence of sex and sexuality in masculinity and dominant male culture and the taboo and sinful nature of sex

and sexuality in faith and church communities, proved paralyzing and counter-developmental at times, as participants were caught up in vicious cycle of identity negotiation, which led to feelings of frustration, inadequacy, guilt, and ultimately a distorted sense of sex and sexuality. Meanwhile, externally, the presumptions of privilege combined with a superficial analysis of this cycle rendered their experiences as men of faith invisible.

Further theoretical explorations of privileged identities of individuals from two or more dominant groups can provide insights for individuals and those called to nurture and care for those individuals, which spans a variety of fields and professions that are interested in theoretical understandings of identity and matters of social justice. Further theoretical explorations of multiple privileged identities would also indicate whether the findings of this study are more of a function of multiple privileged identities or more of a function of separating out masculinity and faith; masculinity; faith; or a combination of these conclusions.

Another implication for theory development is the connection made in this study between identity development/negotiation and accountability/affirmation warrants further exploration, particularly as it relates to persons of faith and religious subgroups. The participants in this study had salient Christian faith identities (ranked “very important”) and a strong faith and religious socialization and orientation, and therefore, had a deep understanding of church teachings on sin as well as faith/religious practices (e.g., prayer, reflection, spiritual guidance, confession, mass). This combination of factors undoubtedly impacted the process of identity negotiation and the need for accountability and affirmation to attend to feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and guilt (e.g., sexual sin)

in quantity, complexity, and depth. Paradoxically, participants' interactions with their faith communities were connected to their deepest feelings of both frustration and affirmation. Further theoretical explorations of faith identity negotiation, accountability, and affirmation can provide insights for individuals as well as religious leaders, ministers, psychologists, educators and other professions charged with for inculcating a culture of faith and/or working with different persons of faith and their religious communities.

Finally, while this study underscores elements of faith development theories (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000) such as *fragile inner-dependence* and *mentoring communities*, it challenges these theories in three ways. First, the way participants negotiated masculinity and faith identities and felt their faith was in conflict with a very individualistic and hypersexualized masculine culture challenges faith development theories to consider faith and identity intersections and differential experiences of various subpopulations and social group identities. Second, the way faith influenced and sometimes mediated masculinity challenges faith development theories to consider the primacy of faith as not only an identity but also a “core,” “anchor,” and primary means of self-authorship. Third, given the fact that gay Christian men and Christian men of color in this study had a more complicated negotiation of masculinity and faith identities challenges faith development theories to consider faith and other identities in context, accounting for power, privilege, and oppression. To this end, while faith development theories have considered the relationship of faith and meaning-making, theories have given little to no consideration to how individuals make meaning of marginalized identities and experiences of oppression through their faith. In this study, faith was a source of affirmation and consolation, but also contributed to feelings of frustration,

inadequacy, and guilt. The paradoxical experience of faith in this study is a critical implication for faith development theorists.

### **Implications for Student Affairs & Campus Ministry Practice**

This study sought to debunk assumptions that men and persons of faith are both monolithic groups, by examining Christian college men from Catholic and Protestant traditions. Christian men of faith are often reduced to Christian and religious stereotypes and stereotypes of power and success in the academy, rendering programmatic initiatives unnecessary and superfluous. The emerging theory offers three insights into the lives and experiences of men of faith as they negotiate the intersection of masculinity and faith and can help inform student affairs and campus ministry practice.

The emerging theory provides a clear understanding of hopes, desires, and struggles for men of faith at the intersection of masculinity and faith identities, which can be helpful for understanding and addressing issues and creating spaces for student development for men of faith as well as college men, Christians, and persons of faith in general. Since the external expectations of what it means to be a man (i.e., very individualistic and hypersexual) were often antithetical to what it means to be a person of faith (i.e., benevolence, sacrifice, and virginity/abstinence), the participants experienced deep frustration for not living up to either standard well, as a fully harmonious identity at the intersection of masculinity and faith was impossible. As a result of continual identity negotiation and feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and guilt, participants would, at times, habitually adopt a distorted sense of sex and sexuality and careers, callings, and vocations in their thoughts and feelings and reject principles of faith and Christianity. When this cycle manifested itself externally in their relationships (e.g., sexual acts) and career

pursuits, on a superficial level, may have been misperceived and misdiagnosed by student affairs and campus ministry educators as adopting hyper-masculine norms (e.g., sex, hook-ups, binge drinking, individualistic and utilitarian career pursuits) and/or rejecting principles of faith and Christianity (e.g., very individualistic and hypersexual). However, this study suggests that a vicious cycle of identity negotiation accompanied by feelings of frustration, inadequacy, guilt and a distorted sense of sex and sexuality and careers, callings, and vocations may be occurring on a deeper level, which impeded the process of accountability and affirmation.

Educators have observed men of faith who have participated in binge drinking and the hook-up culture, where men have engaged in sex and sexual activity and sometimes lost their virginity. They have observed men of faith reject principles of faith and Christianity, pursue careers for individualistic and utilitarian ends, neglect people on the margins, use others for personal gain, and stop taking care of themselves and their emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being. The emerging theory in this study helps educators resist the temptation to oversimplify these behaviors as “deviant,” “hypocritical,” “inauthentic,” and merely “sinful,” and rather, reframe these behaviors as signifiers of a vicious cycle of frustration and a distorted sense of sex and sexuality and careers, callings, and vocations occurring on a deeper level. By no means does this excuse the behaviors of these men, but this emerging theory offers a novel perspective on the roots of these behaviors as deep frustration, as a result of their interaction with cultural expectations of masculinity and faith. Instead of “boxing” these men into “shameful categories,” as one participant put it, and writing them off as inauthentic, hypocritical, and “just like any other men” on campus, this study suggests that men of

faith desperately need accountability and affirmation, but are caught up in a vicious cycle.

Rather than responding to and demonizing superficial behaviors, this study suggests that educators may find more success helping men of faith grow by resisting the temptation to oversimplify and by providing developmentally appropriate interventions based on the theory of accountability and affirmation. Educators may have more influence in the lives of men of faith by seeking to understand their experience of frustration, by creating spaces where they can be vulnerable and share their thoughts and feelings, and by loving and accepting them unconditionally in their imperfection, faults, and limitations. In providing affirmation, educators can help these men develop a deeper sense of accountability, aiding in their creation of new habits of thinking, feeling, and being as men of faith.

Living and learning communities, bystander intervention trainings, sexual assault prevention organizations, orientation, retreat, and service leader trainings, career/resume workshops, athletic teams, fraternities, men's groups, faith conversation groups, accountability groups, vocation groups, Bible studies, catechesis, homilies/sermons, and reflection/prayer activities could all be designed with an attentiveness to frustration and a distorted sense of sex and sexuality and careers, callings, and vocations, and a readiness to provide accountability and affirmation. For example, orientation programs that are focused on welcoming incoming students and their families should train orientation leaders to be more attentive to the intersection of masculinity and faith and provide resources (e.g., first-year men's groups) for ongoing accountability and affirmation during the first-year transition. Theology and religious studies departments should



incorporate affirmation through seminar style curricular offerings focused on how faith intersects with masculinity (e.g., Christian manhood) and other social identities (e.g., spirituality and sexuality) in the context of power, privilege, and oppression. Academic advising and career services should also implement vocation groups that facilitate conversations on the intersection of masculinity and faith, as it relates to majors and careers.

Once educators have attended to the frustration, provided affirmation, and fostered a deeper sense of accountability in men of faith, they are better able to engage men in their conceptualizations family and relationships, careers, callings, and vocations, and sex and sexuality. Over time, in the context of a loving, accepting, and supportive mentoring relationship, educators may have greater success engaging men about their deepest desires of love, intimacy, and sexuality (e.g., fatherhood, romantic relationships, sexual desires and temptations) and their deepest feelings of frustration (e.g., sexual sin, masturbation and pornography, alternative careers).

Another implication for educators is related to an understanding of Christian college men as having multiple, intersecting identities and oppressions, depending on social context and location. Recognizing the distinct and overlapping cultural expectations of masculinity and faith placed on men of faith, intersecting with other identities such as sexual orientation, race, and class can help educators understand how different subpopulations and men of multiple subpopulations experience college. Despite a perceived privilege in Christian men, this study suggests that membership in multiple dominant social groups does not necessary equate to the absence of frustration, inadequacy, and guilt. This study suggests that men of faith desperately need

accountability and affirmation. The participants in this study experienced frustration when peers negatively responded to their alternative decisions and behaviors based on their faith and religious principles (e.g., opting out of aspects of the social scene). They experienced deep frustration and feelings of inadequacy that were associated with sinful thoughts and behaviors. However, gay, Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, mixed, low-income, and/or working class Christian men in this study experienced a greater complexity of frustration and feelings of inadequacy due to their paradoxical experience of perceived privilege as Christian men, while also having membership in one or more marginalized social groups. It is critical that educators understand the complexity of identity intersections in Christian college men, in order to attend to identity interactions (e.g., in sync, in conflict, or unrelated) and intersecting systems of power and oppression such as sexism, heterosexism, racism, and classism.

A final implication of this study is the undeniably pro-social behavior reflected in the participants' redefinitions of masculinity in accordance with faith and religious principles. Educators need to recognize and be reminded of the capacity of all men, not just men of faith, to lead accountable lives of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. Affirming, validating, and encouraging men of faith to not only ask big questions of themselves but also to think larger than themselves in their thoughts and behaviors can help come to deeper and fuller expression of themselves and their faith. The participants in this study already had an inherent desire and inclination towards the common good. They were already in the process of becoming more faithful Christians, and in turn, better men. Simply affirming, validating, and accepting the participants where they were at in their journeys and seeking to understand the pressures they experienced as men of faith

proved beneficial to the participants' abilities to be vulnerable and share their true feelings.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Through the process of developing and conducted this study, several implications for future research emerged related to the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity and the intersection of shame, masculinity, and faith.

Future research related to the intersection the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity is encouraged. This study was limited in its sample of twelve Christian college men from two high research activity universities (a Catholic, Jesuit university and a private, secular university) in the Northeast. Despite the fact that the participants were selected using maximum variation sampling to represent a variety of Christian faith backgrounds, social group identities, and college experiences, full diversity was impossible with twelve participants. For example, non-Christian men, Christian Lutheran/Methodist/Mormon men, atheist and agnostic men, disabled men, Native American men, and bisexual, transgender, and queer men were not represented in the sample. In particular, given the fragmented experiences of two gay Christian men in this study, it is critical that scholars explore future research with gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer men of faith who are closeted, "out," or in the process of "coming out" who may be experiencing a more complicated identity negotiation at the intersection of masculinity and faith with gender and sexual identities.

The way faith is conceptualized and practiced also has a strong variation in different institutional, religious, geographic, or cultural contexts. Another question to consider is whether men who identify less or not at all with their faith engage in the same

level of identity negotiation as the participants in this study. Future exploration of the intersection of masculinity and faith in a different region, with different institutional profiles (e.g., public universities, HBCUs, Christian colleges), and with men of additional diverse social group identities, faith backgrounds, and college experiences not represented by the participants in this study would be an area rich for future research.

This study had several compelling subtopics that emerged in the interviews but were not explored in more depth, given the purpose and research questions of the study. Further research on the intersection of masculinity and faith is highly encouraged with topics and populations such as: (a) homophobia and male student-athletes; (b) multiracial men and situational identity; (c) men actively engaged in social justice movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street); (d) men considering religious ordination in the context of careerism and pre-professionalism; and (e) men who attended single-sex and/or Catholic/Christian high schools.

Given the fact that adolescent and college-aged men tend to enact gender more traditionally and are more likely to experience gender role conflict, when compared to men across different points of the lifespan (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; O'Neil, 2008; O'Neil et al., 1986; Thompson & Pleck, 1995), it may be useful to examine the intersection of masculinity and faith with boys and men across different points of the lifespan. While this study was limited to interviewing college men, it may be profitable to examine the intersection of masculinity and faith longitudinally, exploring boys' pre-college socialization and conceptualizations of masculinity and faith through their transition into college life. This type of work could be beneficial for faith-based high schools that send a majority of their graduates to secular colleges and universities.

Research could also examine men after college when their aspirations of family and relationships and careers, callings, and vocations have come to fruition.

Future research related to the intersection of masculinity and faith with the theory of accountability and affirmation is encouraged. The men in this study had decidedly pro-social and help-seeking behaviors, largely contradicting literature on shame and masculinity in men (Kimmel, 1994) and college men (Capraro, 2000). It may be useful to study the intersection of masculinity and faith with accountability and affirmation with different faith traditions in other regions of the country. Further exploration could be a rich of research and could contribute to an understanding of intersectionality and multiple identities, men and masculinities, and faith, while also generating new insights for fields of higher education and student affairs, counseling, psychology, and theology.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are several key limitations that need to be acknowledged in this study, which are important considerations to keep in mind before using the emerging theory to guide theory, practice, or research. First, given the constructivist paradigm of this study, the findings are context-specific, as participants were portrayed in their unique social contexts. This study was conducted across two campuses with a small number of participants. Despite the fact that these campuses varied in religious affiliation (one Catholic, Jesuit university and one private, secular university) and therefore, had different approaches to faith-based initiatives, the sample is by no means representative of all college campuses and environments. In addition, this study sought to examine the small number of participants in depth, not to develop a theory that is generalizable to all college men. These limitations about the researcher paradigm and the context-specific nature of

the participants' experience should be considered along with the results of this study. By being transparent about the underlying assumptions, premises, and approaches used, the purpose is not to detract from the value of this study; rather, acknowledging these limitations enhances the work by leaving it open to critique in order to make a more significant contribution to the field.

The participants in this study were a very unique group of Christian college men who considered faith “very important” to their lives. Their experiences were by no means average or typical. Despite the fact that the participants were selected using maximum variation sampling to represent a variety of Christian faith backgrounds, social group identities, and college experiences, full diversity was impossible with twelve participants. Because this study explored the intersection of masculinity and faith identities of Christian college men, there were also innumerable other identity intersections that could have been explored, but were not the focus of this study.

Selection bias is also a limitation of this study, as the college men identified in this study self-selected into their respective Christian faith-based communities and organizations outlined in the sampling procedures. Given the fact that organizational leaders notified potential participants of the study by personal electronic mail, the 38 interested participants were likely to be men who frequented their offices, programs, and/or classrooms. Consequently, there may have been less involved men of faith with differing perspectives on the intersection of masculinity and faith that may not have been invited to participate. This exclusion may have potentially impacted the findings of this study.

Context is also an important limitation to consider. This study was conducted at two large, four-year, highly residential, and high research activity universities (a Catholic, Jesuit university and a private, secular university) in the Northeast with parallel offerings for faith-based communities. Participants were selected from two different institution types intentionally, to diversify the sample and to explore aspects of institutional context for men of faith at secular and faith-based universities. Despite this diversification of faith and religious contexts, the two institutions were similar as high research activity universities. Academic rigor was reflected in the participants' intellectual precociousness, which undoubtedly influenced their ability to understand and make meaning of their faith and church teaching, and therefore, influenced the findings of this study. Given the socially constructed nature of college men's gender identity combined with the strong variation of the ways faith is conceptualized and practiced in different institutional, religious, geographic, or cultural contexts, another study may discover different insights and conclusions of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity.

Finally, a limitation of any qualitative research is the interpretation of participant experiences. As a key instrument in qualitative research and grounded theory methodology (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002), my subjective role as a researcher undoubtedly impacted the way I conducted and interpreted the research, specifically the data collection, analysis, and outcomes of this study. Despite strong adherence to trustworthiness criteria, another researcher's interpretations and conclusions of the same study would likely differ in some respects. There would also likely be differing

outcomes with a theoretical perspective other than the Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & Abes, 2013)

### **Strengths of the Study**

The strengths of this study are connected to the procedures of this study that were consistent with grounded theory methodology and the honesty and vulnerability of the participants in this study. This study employed a constructivist grounded theory methodological approach (Charmaz, 2014), which allows researchers to be transparent and reflexive about the bias and assumptions they bring to the inquiry, as opposed to strict objectivity (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I followed the procedures of constructivist grounded theory methodology in the framing of this study, data collection, data analysis, and theory development. In following procedures to the best of my abilities as a researcher, the findings of this study suggest the process of accountability and affirmation as a theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity. For the purposes of member checking and triangulation, I provided bullet-pointed summaries to the participants at the conclusion of each interview and conducted voluntary focus group feedback sessions at each institution, which all opted to attend. For the purposes of inter-rater reliability, I shared two interviews with another doctoral student and we debriefed our findings to examine our degree of concordance. These efforts were made to ensure that appropriate procedures of constructivist grounded theory methodology were employed as outlined in the proposal of this study.

It was also very humbling and truly a gift to work with a group of incredibly honest and vulnerable men. They shared an enthusiasm and genuine interest in the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity, both spiritually and



intellectually, which was reflected in their willingness to share richly about their own experience as well as their desire to meet other men in the study and contribute to theory building in the focus group feedback sessions. In addition to anonymity, they put their faith and trust in me as a researcher and a minister. In return, I loved and accepted them and did my best to provide accountability and affirmation for their feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and guilt. In sharing about their deepest desires, hopes, dreams, fears, and struggles, they brought up several novel topics and issues unfounded in higher education and student affairs literature. Their generosity of time and spirit provides much hope for the development of college men and hope for the church.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the findings and emerging theory in this study, discuss the theory of accountability and affirmation in relation to the research questions that framed the study and literature in the field, and provide implications for theory development, student affairs and campus ministry practice, and future research. The limitations and strengths of this study were also discussed.

The emerging theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men's identity, accountability and affirmation, depicts a process of Christian college men interacting with cultural expectations of them as men of faith. As participants learned these expectations, they negotiated masculinity and faith identities and were more likely to receive accountability and affirmation from their faith communities than a hypersexualized and very individualistic masculine culture, which resulted in a greater conformance to faith and religious principles. Through this process, participants were able to create a more harmonious identity at the intersection of masculinity and faith.

The theory of accountability and affirmation is present in three major themes of this study: (a) family and relationships; (b) career, calling, and vocation; and (c) sex and sexuality.

When I began this study, I was hopeful that I would learn about these men and learn about myself. I was confident that the twelve college men would bring their whole selves to this study, which they did, in a tremendous act of generosity. However, I did not expect to be so inspired, educated, renewed, and transformed by their infinite wisdom. While their honesty and vulnerability provided the basis of the theory of accountability and affirmation and should be commended, it would reduce them to claim the emerging theory as their only contribution. The participants also learned how they could become better Christians and better men. In a real sense, they became beacons of hope for the church and their faith communities. I am left with humility and gratitude for the gifts they have given.

## APPENDICES

### **Appendix A: Electronic Letter to Faith-Based Group Advisors and Student Leaders**

Dear (Advisor/Student Leader Name),

My name is Daniel Zepp and I am a doctoral student at Boston College in the Lynch School of Education. I am writing to solicit men from (faith-based group) at (research setting) to participate in my dissertation study of college men. The purpose of this study is to posit a theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men and how this intersection informs college men's identity development.

In order to solicit participants, I would like to attend an upcoming meeting of (faith-based group) at (research setting). I would like to speak to the group at the beginning (or end) of the meeting for no longer than ten minutes, where I will share my dissertation topic, answers any questions or concerns related to the study, and ask those interested to complete the participant profile form (see attached). I will select participants based on the forms that are completed and then be in touch with selected participants about scheduling an individual interview.

If you wish to contact me with any questions or concerns, here is my information:

Campus Address: Campion Hall #205

Cell Phone: 502-387-7182

E-mail: [zepp@bc.edu](mailto:zepp@bc.edu)

Thanks in advance for your generosity of time and spirit. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Daniel A. Zepp  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Lynch School of Education  
Boston College

Dr. Ana M. Martínez-Alemán  
Full Professor & Chair  
Lynch School of Education  
Boston College

## **Appendix B: Recruitment Letter Handout to Participants at Faith-Based Group Meeting**

Dear (Student's Name),

Hello! My name is Daniel Zepp and I am a doctoral student at Boston College in the Lynch School of Education. I am conducting a research study on the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men. It is my hope that you will consider being a part of this study, as you have the potential to make an important contribution.

The study will consist of two individual interviews: the first interview will last approximately one and a half hours, while the second interview will last approximately an hour in length. Both interviews will be conducted in the spring of 2015. During these interviews, we will have the opportunity to discuss your experiences of and your perspectives on your faith, spirituality, and religion as well as your understanding of your masculinity and how you have come to understand what it means to be a man.

You will also be invited to participate in a feedback session with the other participants near the conclusion of the study in the spring of 2015. During this session, I will share some initial themes and ask you to comment and provide feedback on whether these themes are an accurate representation of your experience.

In gratitude, participants will receive a \$15 gift certificate at the conclusion of each interview, totaling \$30 at the completion of the second interview.

All information that is obtained in connection with the study and that can identify you will remain strictly confidential. Data gathered from the interviews will be used only for authorized research. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to participate at any point in time. If you are interested in participating, please complete the attached participant profile form. I will select participants based on the forms that are completed and then be in touch with selected participants about scheduling an interview.

If you wish to contact me with any questions or concerns, here is my information:

Campus Address: Campion Hall #205

Cell Phone: 502-387-7182

E-mail: [zepp@bc.edu](mailto:zepp@bc.edu)

Sincerely,

Daniel A. Zepp  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Lynch School of Education  
Boston College

Dr. Ana M. Martínez-Alemán  
Full Professor & Chair  
Lynch School of Education  
Boston College

### **Appendix C: Electronic Letter to Participants Unable To Attend Meeting**

Dear (Student's Name),

Hello! My name is Daniel Zepp and I am a doctoral student at Boston College in the Lynch School of Education. I am conducting a research study on the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men. It is my hope that you will consider being a part of this study, as you have the potential to make an important contribution.

The study will consist of two individual interviews: the first interview will last approximately one and a half hours, while the second interview will last approximately an hour in length. Both interviews will be conducted in the spring of 2015. During these interviews, we will have the opportunity to discuss your experiences of and your perspectives on your faith, spirituality, and religion as well as your understanding of your masculinity and how you have come to understand what it means to be a man.

You will also be invited to participate in a feedback session with the other participants near the conclusion of the study in the spring of 2015. During this session, I will share some initial themes and ask you to comment and provide feedback on whether these themes are an accurate representation of your experience.

In gratitude, participants will receive a \$15 gift certificate at the conclusion of each interview, totaling \$30 at the completion of the second interview.

All information that is obtained in connection with the study and that can identify you will remain strictly confidential. Data gathered from the interviews will be used only for authorized research. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to participate at any point in time. If you are interested in participating, please complete the attached participant profile form. I will select participants based on the forms that are completed and then be in touch with selected participants about scheduling an interview.

If you wish to contact me with any questions or concerns, here is my information:

Campus Address: Campion Hall #205

Cell Phone: 502-387-7182

E-mail: [zepp@bc.edu](mailto:zepp@bc.edu)

Sincerely,

Daniel A. Zepp  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Lynch School of Education  
Boston College

Dr. Ana M. Martínez-Alemán  
Full Professor & Chair  
Lynch School of Education  
Boston College

**Appendix D: Participant Profile Form**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address (Local or Campus):**

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**Email Address:**

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**Phone Number:**

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**Will you be available for two in-person interviews in the spring of 2015?**

**(Y/N):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Will you be available for one in-person feedback session in the spring of 2015?**

**(Y/N):** \_\_\_\_\_

Participants in this study will also be selected to represent a wide range of spiritual and/or religious identities, as well as a wide range of social group identities and college experiences. Any information you can provide with regard to the areas below will be helpful in identifying participants for this study.

**Do you self-identify as a man?**

**(Y/N):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Religious Affiliation/Denomination/Church Affiliation:**

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**How would you describe your faith, spirituality, and/or religion?**

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**Rank the importance of faith, spirituality, and/or religion in your life (circle one):**

*Very Important   Somewhat Important   Neutral   Not Very Important   Not at All Important*

**College Involvement in Faith-Based Initiatives (personal and/or small group conversations, academic coursework, co-curricular programming, worship, etc.):**

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**College Involvement Overall (e.g. fraternity men, resident assistants, student-athletes, clubs/organizations):**

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**Leadership Experience in College:**

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**Major/Minor:**

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**What are your plans after graduation?**

**High School Profile (check one):**

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private/secular (coeducational)
- ☐ Private/secular (single-sex)
- ☐ Private/faith-based (coeducational), specify religious affiliation/denomination: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Private/faith-based (single-sex), specify religious affiliation/denomination: \_\_\_\_\_

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_**Disability:** \_\_\_\_\_**Race:** \_\_\_\_\_**Ethnicity:** \_\_\_\_\_**Sexual Orientation:** \_\_\_\_\_**Socioeconomic Status (check one):**

- ☐ Low income
- ☐ Middle/Working class (circle one)
- ☐ Affluent



## **Appendix E: Interview Protocol**

### **First Interview: Faith & Masculinity (1 hour 30 minutes)**

#### *Purpose*

The purpose of the first interview is to introduce participants to the topic, gather their initial thoughts, and have them reflecting upon their masculinity and faith. The interview will consist of two parts: the first part will focus on faith, while the second part will focus on masculinity. Through a semi-structured approach, I will ask participants to: 1) talk about how they have come to understand what it means to be a man and what it means to have faith; 2) describe and provide examples of these definitions and how they internalize and/or ascribe to society's definitions; 3) describe how faith/masculinity has informed who they are as a man and how faith/masculinity relate to other identities; 4) identify and describe contextual influences (i.e. people and situations) that have helped to shape these aspects of their identity; and 5) describe how their college experience and campus environment uniquely informed, formed, and/or transformed their faith and masculinity. The following questions reflect the topics to be discussed in the first interview.

### **First Interview: Part I – Faith (45 minutes)**

#### *Potential Questions/Topics*

- Opening
  - Tell me about yourself. I'm really interested in hearing about your thoughts on your masculinity and faith.
- Faith
  - How would you describe what it means for you to have faith?
  - How would you describe society's definition of what it means to have faith? How does that fit or not fit you?
  - How has your understanding of what it means to have faith changed over your life?
    - What have been the most significant turning points, relationships, places, and/or events (good or bad) that have helped to change your understanding of what it means to have faith?
- Faith on Campus
  - How do you feel your faith has been shaped by your college experience (e.g. personal and/or small group conversations, academic coursework, co-curricular programming, worship)?
    - Can you give me some examples?
  - How do you feel your faith has been shaped by your participation in a practicing religious community (e.g. institutional church, scripture, sermons, religious leaders, religious iconography, worship, retreats, service opportunities)?
    - Can you give me some examples?
  - Could you give me an example of something you did or something that you do (an action) that reflects your faith?
    - What are some of the things you believe you have to do to be seen as a person of faith by others?
  - How does your faith compare with your peers?

- What is an example of something you did or something that you do (an action) that reflects your faith, that perhaps you don't see others doing?
- Faith & Other Identities
  - How has your faith shaped who you are as a man?
    - Can you give me some examples?
  - Let's talk a little bit about other aspects of who you are...
    - For example...
      - *Race* – how is it like to be a *White* person with faith?
      - *Sexuality* – how is it like to be *gay* person with faith?
      - *Class* – how is it like to be a *working class* person with faith?
      - *Religious affiliation/denomination* – how is it like to be a *Baptist* as opposed to a person from another affiliation/denomination of faith?
        - Can you give me some examples?

### **First Interview: Part I to Part II – Transition**

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts on your faith with me. Let's move to masculinity and how you understand what it means to be a man.

### **First Interview: Part II – Masculinity (45 minutes)**

#### *Potential Questions/Topics*

- Masculinity
  - How would you describe what it means for you to be a man?
  - How would you describe society's definition of what it means to be a man? How does that fit or not fit you?
  - How has your understanding of what it means to be a man changed over your life?
    - What have been the most significant turning points, relationships, places, or events (good or bad) that have helped to change your understanding of what it means to be a man?
      - Can you give me some examples?
- Masculinity on Campus
  - How do you feel your masculinity has been shaped by your college experience (e.g. personal and/or small group conversations, academic coursework, co-curricular programming, worship)?
    - Can you give me some examples?
  - How do you feel your masculinity has been shaped by your participation in a practicing religious community (e.g. institutional church, scripture, sermons, religious leaders, religious iconography, worship, retreats, service opportunities)?
    - Can you give me some examples?
  - Could you give me an example of something you did or something that you do (an action) that reflects your masculinity?
    - What are some of the things you believe you have to do to be seen

- as a man by others?
  - How does your masculinity compare with your peers?
    - What is an example of something you did or something that you do (an action) that reflects your masculinity, that perhaps you don't see others doing?
- Masculinity & Other Identities
  - How do you feel your masculinity has been by shaped your faith?
    - Can you give me some examples?
  - Let's talk a little bit about other aspects of who you are...
    - For example...
      - *Race* – how is it like to be a *White* man?
      - *Sexuality* – how is it like to be *gay* man?
      - *Class* – how is it like to be a *working class* man?
      - *Religious affiliation/denomination* – how is it like to be a *Baptist* man as opposed to a man from another religious affiliation/denomination?

### **First Interview: Conclusion**

This concludes the second part of the first interview. Thank you for your reflections on your faith and masculinity. Our next interview will focus more specifically on how you feel faith and masculinity come together.

### **Between First & Second Interview**

#### *Objective*

After the first interview, I will engage in initial, line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2014), looking for prompts to guide the second interview protocol. Given this initial analysis, I will put together an executive summary (bulleted) of how each participant suggested that they understood and experienced faith and masculinity. This summary will be emailed to the each participant before the second interview.

### **Second Interview: The Intersection of Masculinity & Faith (1 hour)**

#### *Purpose*

The purpose of the second and final interview is to revisit reflections on faith and masculinity from the first interview, while asking questions related to how faith and masculinity interact, inform, construct, and come into conflict with one another. Through a semi-structured approach, I will ask participants to: 1) talk about their perceptions of the intersection of masculinity and faith; 2) describe and provide examples of points in time where these aspects of their life have felt in sync, in conflict, and/or ambivalence/uncertainty; 3) describe how this intersection has informed who they are as a man of faith and how this intersection relates to other identities; 4) identify and describe contextual influences (i.e. people and situations) that have helped to shape the intersection of masculinity and faith; and 5) describe how their college experience and campus environment uniquely informed, formed, and/or transformed their perceptions of the intersection of masculinity and faith. The following questions reflect the topics to be discussed in the first interview.

### *Potential Questions/Topics*

- Masculinity and Faith
  - How does being a man and having faith come together? Are these in sync or closely tied together? Are you ambivalent about it or unsure? Do they not mix at all, in conflict, or opposed to one another? Does it depend on the situation?
    - Can you give me some examples?
  - How do you understand yourself as a “man of faith”?
    - What have been the most significant relationships and/or events that have informed your self-understanding as a “man of faith”?
  - Has being a man influenced any of the choices you have made about your faith?
    - Can you give me some examples?
  - Has having faith influenced any of the choices you have made about your masculinity?
    - Can you give me some examples?
- Man of Faith
  - How do you feel your understanding of what it means to be a man of faith has changed during your life?
    - What have been the most significant turning points, relationships, places, and/or events (good or bad) that have helped to change your understanding of what it means to be a man of faith?
  - Can you think of any man in your life that serves as a role model for what it means to be a man of faith?
    - If so, what have they taught you and how?
      - How have these integrated these aspects of their lives?
    - If not, why not and would you like to have a role model? If so, what might this role model offer you?
- Man of Faith on Campus
  - How do you feel being a man of faith has been shaped by your college experience (e.g. personal and/or small group conversations, academic coursework, co-curricular programming, worship)?
    - Can you give me some examples?
  - Could you give me an example of something you did or something that you do (an action) that demonstrates who you are as a man of faith?
    - What are some of the things you believe you have to do to be seen as a man of faith by others?
  - How does this compare with your peers?
    - What is an example of something you did or something that you do (an action) that demonstrates who you are as a man of faith, that perhaps you don’t see others doing?
- Masculinity, Faith, & Other Identities
  - Let’s talk a little bit about other aspects of who you are...
  - For example...
    - *Race* – how is it like to be a *White* man of faith?
    - *Sexuality* – how is it like to be *gay* man of faith?

- *Class* – how is it like to be a *working class* man of faith?
- *Religious affiliation/denomination* – how is it like to be a *Baptist* man of faith as opposed to a man of faith from another religious affiliation/denomination?

**Second Interview: Conclusion**

This concludes the second interview. Thank you for your reflections on being a man of faith. What questions do you have for me?

**Feedback Sessions (Member Checking)**

In order to member check and triangulate, I will hold feedback sessions at the conclusion of the study at each faith-based organization. During these sessions, which will take place at a regularly scheduled group meeting, I will share initial themes that emerged from the data, based on field notes and initial coding, and ask participants to comment and provide feedback on whether my conclusions are an accurate representation of their experiences.

## Appendix F: Informed Consent Form



### Boston College Consent Form

**Boston College, Lynch School of Education,  
Department of Educational Leadership & Higher Education**  
**Informed Consent to be in study:** Intersection of Masculinity and Faith in College  
 Men's Identity: A Grounded Theory of Spiritual Crossroads  
**Researcher:** Daniel A. Zepp  
**Adult Consent Form**

#### Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study of college men that examines the intersection of masculinity and faith. You were selected as an interview participant because of your involvement in a faith-based college student organization and because you represent a variation of social group identities and college experiences in the overall sample of participants. I ask that you read this form thoroughly and ask any questions you have before agreeing to this study.

#### Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to posit a theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men.

Participants in this study will be Christian college men from Catholic and Protestant traditions at two Boston area universities. I expect to interview up to ten participants at your institution, and you may know some of the other participants. I will ask all participants to refrain from speaking with others about the study before completing the second and final interview, should you and should they choose to participate.

#### Description of study procedures

If you agree to participate in the study, I will ask you to participate in two individual interviews from 2/23/15-5/30/15. The first interview will be approximately an hour and a half in length, while the second interview will be approximately an hour in length. During these interviews, you will be asked questions about your experiences of and perspectives on faith, spirituality, and religion as well as your understanding of masculinity and how you have come to understand what it means to be a man. Following the collection of interview data, I will transcribe the data for purposes of coding (organizing themes and ideas in the data according to a validated research methodology, grounded theory). You will also be invited to participate in a feedback session with the other participants near the conclusion of the study in May 2015. During this session, I

will share initial themes that emerged from the data and ask you to comment and provide feedback on whether my conclusions are an accurate representation of your experience.

#### Risks/discomforts in being in the study

The study has minimal risks. Some questions may elicit personal reactions of feelings regarding aspects of your masculinity and faith. All questions will be optional, and you as the study participant may decline to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. There may be unknown risks.

#### Benefits of being in the study

The purpose of this study is to posit a theory of the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men. I hope each participant comes to better understanding of their masculinity and faith; however, there is a not direct benefit. Potential benefits include a new awareness of how masculinity and faith intersect in the lives of students. Publications of this study could be beneficial for college educators as it could inform their practices in regards to the support of college men.

#### Payments

You will receive the following payment/reimbursement: \$15 gift certificates at the conclusion of each interview, totaling \$30 at the conclusion of the second interview.

#### Costs

There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

#### Confidentiality

The records created in this study will be kept private. Transcriptions will not include your name or any other identifying information. Research records will be kept in a locked file in my home office. No persons at your institution will be given access to your responses, now or in the future.

All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file. The researcher is the only person who will have access to the recorded files, and when he is finished transcribing and analyzing them, they will be destroyed. Access to the records will be limited to the researcher; however, please note that the Institutional Review Boards at study institutions, Boston College, and internal Boston College auditors may review the records.

#### Voluntary participation/withdrawal

Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with your current institution in any way. You are free to

withdraw at any time, for whatever reason. There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for stopping your participation. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

#### Dismissal from the study

If during the course of the interview you indicate that you are not currently enrolled as a student at your institution, you will be dismissed from the study.

#### Contacts and questions

The researcher conducting this study is Daniel Zepp, a doctoral candidate at the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. For questions or for more information concerning this research, you may contact him at 502-387-7182 or by emailing [zepp@bc.edu](mailto:zepp@bc.edu).

If you have any questions about this research, you may also contact Daniel Zepp's faculty advisor, Dr. Ana M. Martínez-Alemán at [alemanan@bc.edu](mailto:alemanan@bc.edu).

If you have any questions about the research, about your rights as a research participant, or if you experience any research-related harm or injury, you may contact Daniel Zepp, M.A., at [zepp@bc.edu](mailto:zepp@bc.edu), and/or the Office for Research Protections at Boston College by calling 617-552-4778 or emailing [irb@bc.edu](mailto:irb@bc.edu).

#### Copy of consent form

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and for future reference.

#### Statement of consent

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form, and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Study participant name:

---

Participant or legal representative signature:

---

Date:

---



### **Appendix G: Executive Summary Cover Letter**

Dear (Student's Name),

Thank you again for your generosity in taking part in this study. As I mentioned previously, I am attaching an executive summary of our previous interview based on the transcripts. Please carefully review the summary, providing comments, feedback, and clarification on anything you feel that I may have missed or misrepresented. If through the process of reviewing the summary any additional insights or ideas are triggered, please include these in your response. Please feel free to comment directly in the margins or on additional sheets.

Once you have finished reviewing the essay, please let me know via email ([zepp@bc.edu](mailto:zepp@bc.edu)) or phone (502-387-7182) so that we can arrange the best way for me to receive your comments. In our next interview, we will take time to discuss some of the issues raised in our previous interview as well as any corrections and/or additions you might have.

I am truly grateful for your time and energy as a participant of this study. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Daniel A. Zepp  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Lynch School of Education  
Boston College

**Appendix H: Electronic Letter To Participants Not Selected For Interviews**

Dear (Student's Name),

Thank you for your interest in participating in a research study on the intersection of masculinity and faith in college men. This study is nearing completion and we were fortunate to have more participants than we needed, so your direct participation is no longer necessary.

If you wish to contact me with any questions or concerns, here is my information:

Campus Address: Campion Hall #205

Cell Phone: 502-387-7182

E-mail: [zepp@bc.edu](mailto:zepp@bc.edu)

Sincerely,

Daniel A. Zepp  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Lynch School of Education  
Boston College

Dr. Ana M. Martínez-Alemán  
Full Professor & Chair  
Lynch School of Education  
Boston College

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