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# Masculinity and the acceptance of violence: a study of social construction

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MASCULINITY AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF VIOLENCE: A STUDY OF SOCIAL  
CONSTRUCTION

by  
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Master of  
Arts degree in Sociology  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Karen Heimer

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee  
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## ABSTRACT

Men commit the *majority* of violent crime, yet the majority of *men* do not commit violent crime. Why is this? Research connecting men and violence cannot fully explain this phenomenon, namely, the variation among men regarding violence. This research study seeks to empirically measure masculinity and to study its relationship to perceptions of violence. My primary hypothesis is that men who measure as more ‘masculine’ will be more accepting of violence. My secondary hypothesis is that situational contexts are also important for the acceptance of violence. These hypotheses are examined using the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory and randomized factorial vignettes. Results indicate that those who more strongly conform to masculine norms are more likely to be accepting of the violence represented in these vignettes.

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## INTRODUCTION

Men commit the *majority* of violent crime, yet the majority of *men* do not engage in criminal violence. Why is this? Research connecting men and violence cannot fully explain this phenomenon, namely, the variation among men regarding violence. Studies done focusing on only those who have already committed violent crimes do not explain why only some men ever engage in violence. Certainly part of the explanation can be found in the social construction of men and cultural meanings of masculinity.

This research study seeks to empirically measure masculinity and to study its relationship to perceptions of violence. The guiding principle is that variation of masculinity exists among men. My primary hypothesis is that men who see themselves as more 'masculine' will be more accepting of violence. My secondary hypothesis is that situational contexts are also important for the acceptance of violence. This thesis proceeds as follows: First, I discuss the meaning of gender and masculinity in our culture. Second, I discuss past research connecting aggression and masculinity, as well as research on measuring masculinity. I then detail my factorial vignette design, and finally present and discuss the results.

### Gender and Masculinity

Gender is everywhere and affects everyone. It is one of the easiest ways to categorize others. Gender lets individuals know what interactions are appropriate in a given context. Yet gender is a complicated social construct. It is simultaneously a way to act, a power structure, a set of social pressures, an identity, and more. Gender is created and recreated through interaction, but it also constrains behavior. The ways that



individuals interact with others, categorize themselves, work, parent, and find partners is all part of the social construction of gender (Lorber 1994).

Judith Butler (2004) sums up the difficulty of understanding the individual actor within the social construction of gender, writing “the ‘I’ that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them” (3). Individuals act in accordance with, and against, gender norms and understandings of behavior. We do this consciously and unconsciously, restricted by boundaries yet testing and stretching those boundaries.

One of the most notable gender and masculinity researchers is Raewyn Connell, who has written books and articles on masculinity in the western world since the early 1980’s. She sees gender as “the structure of social relations that centers on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes” (Connell 2009:11). Gender, though connected to ideas of the body, is yet very separate and so much more than understandings of maleness and femaleness. A biological male may enact femininity in his choice of clothes, friends, and occupation. A male may also enact masculinity and outwardly portray the gender identity of ‘man’ by engaging in the behaviors associated with manliness. This includes how he interacts with his boss, sports buddies, and potential partners; how he cuts his hair; how he walks; the car he drives; and the cadence of his speech and vocabulary. At the present time in the United States, there are behaviors that are understood to be ‘manly’ and thus expected behaviors of those displaying the masculine gender. These expectations are adhered to in varying degrees among individual men. But these expectations differ around the globe and across time.

For example, how a father is expected to act toward his children in the United States today is very different than the gendered expectations of fatherhood fifty or one hundred years ago (Lorber 1994). The construction of gender happens socially through interaction and within institutions. Gender is a context specific construct. Understandings of gender change over time and location. These changes are enacted by individuals, but also shape the larger structure of gender. These changes happen within the current context of gender. Consequently, gender needs to be located historically and culturally. Butler (2004:10) sums up this understanding well. “Terms such as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are notoriously changeable; there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending upon geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom and for what purpose.” It is important when studying gender that social and historical context be always in our thinking.

Structure and culture condition our understanding of gender and thus impact the construction of the gender order. Currently in the United States the major social structure molding gender is patriarchy (Hartman 1981). Feminist scholars maintain that the understanding of gender in this time and location is shaped by the constraints of patriarchy (Lorber 1994). Hartman (1981:41) defines patriarchy as the base from which our understanding of gender comes; the idea that men are more highly valued than women grows and shapes our current definitions of masculinity and femininity.

Patriarchy also reinforces the constructed dichotomy of masculine and feminine. Although infinitely more complicated in practice, gender is generally thought of in Western societies as comprised of these two polar opposites. What is masculine and feminine is both easily understood and very complicated. The average North American

could probably come up with a list of traits that exemplify feminine and masculine behavior. But North Americans' conceptions of gender, it must be remembered, are filtered through and constructed within the gender order of patriarchy, where value is placed on masculine traits over feminine traits.

Part of what patriarchy does to gender is inextricably link it to issues of power. It is important to understand, however, that ideas of masculinity include the domination of women, but also that of other men (Lorber 1994; Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985). In real life, this power translates into socialized differences between women and men, and between different types of men. These men may adhere to different understandings of masculinity or to similar masculinities but to varying degrees.

Masculine and feminine genders are assigned different roles and responsibilities in society and are treated differently at all stages of life. The rituals engaged in for birth, marriage, and death differ by gender of the individual (Lorber 1994). Given the choice between a doll and a baseball bat, one could easily guess which gift is meant for the little girl. But the boundary between genders is not without flexibility.

This boundary is policed and enforced, but because individuals shape the social construction of gender, individuals can cross the boundary or live in a space in between the genders (Connell 2009, Lorber 1994). Living in this space, however, is never easy. Westerners prefer clear gender understandings to ambiguity. A strong understanding of what it means to be masculine, for example, shapes our understanding of how men are expected to act in given situations.

Connell (2005:68) points out that in the United States and other Western countries we see masculinity as defined as that which is not feminine. This is directly related to our

gender order of patriarchy, as women are seen as inferior. Thus, the definition for the dominant group would not include any recognizable attribute of the subordinate group. Yet we cannot so easily define masculinity as ‘that which men do,’ or ‘how men interact’ because that implies that women cannot inhabit aspects of masculinity, or that masculinity and maleness are one and the same. Connell (2005) argues that a single definition of masculinity is not practicable. That masculinities are constructed in relation to others in interaction means that there is no single masculinity, but multiple masculinities engaged by individuals, which also shift depending on context. These multiple masculinities operate within a power differential, where certain traits and types of men are privileged and dominant over other men. This concept is best understood in light of patriarchy and the context-specific aspect of gender.

Multiple masculinities exist because aspects of social life affect how we engage in gender. Race, class, religion, and sexuality are just a few of the other social constructs that interact with gender to create multiple masculinities. The appropriate masculinity to display in one neighborhood, for instance, or one type of job may be very different in other circumstances. Connell (2005) researches multiple masculinities by engaging in detailed interviews with many different ‘types’ of men. The men who are engaged in social justice, for example, feel and exhibit masculinity quite differently than the group self-identified as gay or the group of corporate working men. Differences are apparent in how these men judge their fathers, talk about how they believe men should act, and live their daily lives. These interviews show multiple masculinities in practice.

These multiple masculinities are not only separate, but unequal. They are ordered with white, upper-middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian men seen as

possessing an ideal masculinity that includes power, strength, virility, courage, and other traits. And although this is understood as the pinnacle of masculinity, realistically very few men can inhabit these traits and produce them in all interactions and parts of life. There are variations in the degree to which these masculine traits are possessed by individuals. Yet the unrealistic belief in one, solid masculine type of behavior is still a large part of how manliness and masculinity are understood.

Hegemonic masculinity is the name for this ideal masculinity “which all boys acknowledge, but most do not fully inhabit” (Connell 2009: 100). Masculinity, like femininity, is part of the gender order that individuals learn throughout their lives. Children learn gender practices, and incorporate them in their actions. But not all aspects of masculinity are available to all male children to learn. Masculinity is seen to be differently understood and enacted by black men, working class men, homosexual men, etc. Connell (2005) stresses that only because *current* understandings of gender and domination support this hegemonic ideal, hegemonic masculinity is supported. If patriarchy changes or values of race, class, and heterosexuality change, then the hegemonic ideal of masculinity will also change. However gender and masculinity are not abstract concepts; they are a concrete part of everyday interaction.

To apply these definitions of gender and masculinity to real life, we can think of them as different behavior expectations. Individuals engage in gendered action. They ‘do gender’ as part of their everyday interactions (West and Zimmerman 1987). A person enacts their gender in the way they walk, talk, and gesture. These actions help categorize the individuals we meet as either man or woman. This implies that there are definite

understandings of how men and women are expected to act, though this varies across situations.

Certain behaviors are expected of gendered individuals. And these expectations differ depending on the gender engaging in them. For example, Hatty (2000) explores how independence was constructed as belonging to the masculine gender in the public sphere. For masculine bodies, violence and aggression is often an expected behavior (e.g. sports or war), especially as an outcome of certain interactions (e.g. threat).

### Masculinity, Aggression and Violence

Male violence as a gendered action is a well-studied phenomenon, even if the exact causes are not understood. For example, research has linked masculinity, violence and sport. Kreager (2007:706) finds that sport is a location of power and privilege, where aggression and domination are revered masculine traits and part of athletes' identities. Crosset (1999: 254) argues that it may be useful to think about male college athletes' violence as encouraged by its location within the structure and culture of the university, and that violence against women is understood as an appropriate display of masculinity in order to gain status. Within the structure of higher education and male athletics, a culture of violence and power is fostered where violence on the field is rewarded and then can spill over onto interactions with women and with other males.

In recent years, violence has been studied in the context of culture and socialization. The university system, in particular, has been a unique location of focus regarding cultures of violence, sexual assault, and rape. It is well accepted that the university, far from being a totally safe environment for new adults, is actually an

incubator, supporting and perpetuating acceptance of violence and assault (particularly male violence against females) (Fisher, Sloan, Cullen and Lu 1998). Carr and Van Deusen (2004) found that personality traits such as hostile masculinity, impulsivity, and power issues with women were present within men who had sexual aggression and who had committed rape on college campuses.

A variety of theories set up this connection between masculinity and violence. While some researchers feel that masculine violence is a reaction to how tenuous a hold patriarchy has on society (Carrigan et al. 1985), masculinity and violence are more often conceptualized as symptomatic of gender socialization. Carr and Van Deusen (2004) speak of hyper-masculinity as a result of being taught to be dominant and aggressive.

Regardless of whether violence is a result of masculine frustration or part of masculine socialization, we should not separate masculinity from violence against women (Crosset 1999: 245). Aggression and violence may even be a way of acting out, or 'doing' masculinity (Messerschmidt 1993). If violence is part of acting masculine, albeit only in certain situations such as sport and war, violent behavior could easily be translated into a way to enact masculinity in everyday life. It may be that this is only true for subordinated masculinities that may lack other avenues for expressing masculinity such as financial gain. But it is important to remember that if violence is part of masculinity, that connection only applies to the here and now as opposed to other times and places.

This fact regarding the current definitions of masculinity reinforces the idea of cultural transmission of these norms. Violence has varied over time and place; it is not a natural expression of masculinity, but as the definitions of manhood change,

masculinity's relationship to violence changes. Masculine ideals, such as man as soldier or man as breadwinner, are only current manifestations of societal expectations regarding individual behavior.

Whitehead (2002:38) sees the socialization of men to be violent as a severe problem in society today:

While politicians and policy makers may seek to reduce the levels of violence in society, they invariably fail to subject to critical scrutiny the masculinist culture that feeds and validates the violence practices of men ... If we are to have some understanding of otherwise inexplicable acts of violence by men, whether it be serial killing, sexual assault, rape, child abuse, mass violence, random violence or torture, then we must recognize that dominant forms and codes of masculinity serve to legitimize, to some degree, that which is, arguably, the major social problem of our time.

### Measuring Masculinity

Masculinity as a social construct needs to be measured, researched, and analyzed as the complex, ambiguous concept that it is. Gender definitions are now recognized by researchers as a construct beyond the simple dichotomy of masculine/feminine. Instead of quantifying them as diametrically opposed, a much more nuanced type of measurement is needed to fully capture gender (Deaux 1985: 59). Theory and research on gender have the difficult task of being both appropriately broad and yet understandable and usable.

Because masculinity is so hard to define and measure, there have been few, if any, quantitative sociological studies relating a measured masculinity to violence or aggression. Additionally, these studies do not focus on the variation of degree of masculinity, as the focus is here. Most quantitative measures of masculinity are developed by psychologists who, while recognizing the multi-faceted aspects of masculinity, most often measure masculinity as a single construct. Whorley and Addis



(2006) conducted analyses on the previous ten years of masculinity research in psychology in order to identify trends and holes. From 1995 to 2004, they found that commonly the studies about masculinity had been quantitative, but that the vast majority of these quantitative studies were using a single measure from a short list of seven popular measures.

Measuring masculinity and its link to violence is a complicated endeavor. Qualitative studies do a wonderful job of exploring relationships between masculinity and an outcome (like violence). These studies, however, do not have a systematic way of accounting for masculinity. Often, masculinity is assumed if the interviews are only done with males (see Graham and Wells 2003), or not defined prior to the analysis (see Mullins, Wright, and Jacobs 2004).

A problem arises when considering ‘multiple’ masculinities (Connell 2005, 2009). Mahalik, Locke, Ludlow, Diemer, Scott, Gottfried, and Freitas (2003) attempted to capture the many sides of masculinity with an eleven-dimension masculinity measure. The Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI) was created to measure how strongly an individual conforms or does not conform to several aspects of masculine norms, including thoughts, feelings, and actions that are believed to represent the masculine being (Mahalik et al. 2003:5). Using a series of focus groups, twelve masculine norms were agreed upon as distinctly different from feminine norms: winning, emotional control, risk-taking, violence, dominance, playboy, self-reliance, primacy of work, power over women, disdain of homosexuals, physical toughness, and the pursuit of status. Physical toughness was later removed, leaving the eleven dimensions that comprise the CMNI. This inventory, used in this study, attempts to measure multiple

facets of masculinity, and the many ways it can be adhered to by individuals, uncovering the gradation in masculinity among men.

These eleven norms were constructed out of a general understanding of what it currently means to be masculine in the United States. The problem then becomes, is this measure simply a reflection of hegemonic masculine ideals and not at all tapping into other masculinities? Smiler (2006) used the CMNI, the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, and ten masculine stereotypes to measure multiple masculinities. These stereotypes included: average Joe, businessman, family man, jock, nerd, player, rebel, sensitive new-age guy, Don Juan and tough guy. What he found was that different levels of separate norms within the CMNI correlate with distinct stereotypes. These stereotypes represent some of the multiple masculinities within the United States (Smiler 2006).

The present study will use three of the eleven norms created by the CMNI: violence, risk-taking and pursuit of status. It is not within the scope of this paper to identify certain types of masculinity from the myriad of multiple masculinities, but instead to address the propensity to accept violence across all types of masculinity. For example, one could see how (using Smiler's stereotypes from above) aggressive behavior could be beneficial to multiple stereotypes or types of masculinity. It is easy to imagine how the businessman, jock, rebel, and tough guy would all benefit from an acceptance of both physically and non-physically aggressive behavior.

### Studying Masculinity and Violence through Vignettes

Individuals are consciously and unconsciously judging and categorizing others the moment they are introduced; it is a customary part of social life (Rossi and Anderson 1982). The present study utilizes this aspect of social beings by asking them to judge not other individuals, but scenarios outside their own involvement. Specifically, I am interested in the respondent's judgment of a violent scenario as a way to gauge his or her level of acceptance of violence. Respondents are presented with a violent scenario, and then asked their opinion on the vignette they just read; this is then regressed on the individuals' CMNI score.

#### Vignette Dimensions

The present study employs randomized factorial vignettes as opposed to real scenarios. When using randomized factorial vignettes, the constructs of the vignette are chosen with care. Only aspects of a situation deemed relevant may be included to preserve parsimony. Each additional variable adds to the number included in the factorial universe of all possible vignettes, effectively shrinking the sample available for analysis. As discussed above, gender, as a defining characteristic, impacts how we perceive others and their actions; for this reason it is an important vignette dimension to include. The hostility of an interchange will give context to any further action, and the severity of an actor's violent response will greatly impact how we view that violent response. For this study, sex of the victim, level of hostility preceding the violent interchange, and severity

of the actor's violent response were all considered highly relevant to the issue of the acceptance of violence.

### Sex of Victim

Sex of the victim has been shown to greatly change the perception of a violent incident. Warr (2002) spoke of an experiment in his discussion of social pressures to be delinquent in which a confederate attempted to rile up a participant through verbal insults. The participant's reaction varied depending on a number of variables: if there were other people in the room, whether or not alcohol was involved, and characteristics of the confederate. Threats to masculinity made by females could be ignored without threat of status, but threats made by young males to other young males were seen as a greater affront and less often ignored (Warr 2002:56). It is therefore reasonable to assume that these same principles would apply when witnessing other people's acts of violence. An act of violence against a same-age male, especially where alcohol is involved, will be more understandable and accepted than violence against a female. Thus it seems that situations with female victims will be less accepted than those with male victims.

### Hostility of Interchange

The level of hostility in an interchange preceding violence is also very important for the acceptance of violence. This precipitating event gives the violent action context. Aggressive actions do not often happen without precipitating events. Intuitively, arguments and other provocation might, in some instances, justify aggressive behavior. Few would argue that violence and aggression are never justified. Our court system

reflects the general understanding that, for instance, people are allowed to defend themselves.

Empirically, Graham and Wells (2003) found that provocation was an important precursor to violent reactions in bars. Additionally, they conclude that some settings and values can combine to create a space “in which male-to-male aggression is normal and accepted” (Graham and Wells 2003: 561). The variable ‘hostility of interchange’ seeks to measure how hostile an interchange would have to be in order to justify a violent response in the perception of the respondents. It would seem, then, that as the hostility of the interchange increases, the acceptance of violence will increase.

#### Severity of Actor’s Response

Hostile interchanges will not elicit the same responses across time, situations, or people. Though much qualitative work on violence focuses on violence in different locations, the use of violence is often deemed more appropriate in some locations than others, in some situations over others, with some people rather than others (Mullins et al. 2004). The violent response of the actor would be expected to have a very large impact on whether or not that response is deemed appropriate. While the other situational variables give context to the judgment, this variable is the focus of judgment.

#### Conditional Effects of Scenario Dimensions

Sex of victim, hostility of interchange, and severity of actor’s response may not act independently of one another. For example, in her factorial vignette study of child abuse, Garret (1982) found a significant interaction between child and adult

characteristics. The impact of a positive description of a child varied depending on the description of the offending adult. Reading about this vignette study that included interactions sparked an interest for this project to understand the fluctuating effects of certain variables depending on other variables. For example, it was hypothesized that there would be less acceptance of violence that was perpetrated against a female, but does that vary depending on the context? Does the leniency applied to female victims depend upon the actions of that female? Research in street violence indicates that it becomes more complicated when violence is perpetrated as a show of masculinity while female victims are involved. Mullins et al. (2004) interviewed street offenders about instances of violent retaliation. While most of the men quickly stated that they did not engage in any violence towards women, probing provided instances of such violence, along with extensive justifications for those violent acts. When a woman was an intimate partner, was said to be 'acting like a man,' or posed a serious physical threat, then violence was seen as justified action despite her status as a protected female (Mullins et al. 2004). Research such as this indicates that the relationship between gender of victim and violence may not be straightforward.

Similarly, it is expected that if a hostile interchange preceded the violent event, that violence would be seen as more justifiable. However, the impact of the hostile interchange could vary depending on the violent reaction, and vice versa. For example, if an increase in the hostility of the interchange increases the acceptance of violence (meaning the more hostile the original interchange, the more acceptable the violent response), there could still be a limit to how violent the response could be. If the interchange was very hostile, but the actor's violent reaction is still seen as too

aggressive, then the impact of the hostility of the interchange on the acceptance of violence varies depending on the severity of the actor's violent response. One could imagine that only a certain level of hostility would appear to justify severe violent reactions. As the discussion suggests, it is likely that the effects of the scenario dimensions may be conditional on each other. Possibilities such as these are assessed in my analysis of the data.

## DATA AND METHODS

### Sample

A convenience sample of undergraduates was chosen for the study. Two large undergraduate classes were offered the option of taking the survey at the end of class time near the start of the spring 2010 semester. The survey was given to both men and women for practical reasons of classroom administration, but only the men were used in the final analysis because I am interested in the effects of variation in masculinity among men. The sample thus includes 80 undergraduate men who completed the survey containing 4 factorial vignettes. The response to the factorial vignettes was the dependent variable, and each response was treated as a separate case. Because of this, the final sample size was 320 factorial vignette scores. As discussed below, my analyses control for clustering among individual respondents.

The sample is all male, majority white (88%), and between the ages of eighteen and twenty (76%). Additionally, the students come from well-educated backgrounds. Over half of all students had a mother and father who graduated from college or beyond. Eighty males had no missing data in all variables and are included in the final analysis.

### Randomized Factorial Vignettes

The survey included three dimensions of the CMNI and four factorial vignettes. The factorial vignettes utilized in this study provide a unique way to present realistic situations to respondents. Real life is full of associations. When asking a respondent to judge a real life scenario, then, it becomes impossible to tease out which dimensions of a



situation drives the judgment. For example, race and class are often highly associated. When asking a respondent to judge a scenario that includes both race and class, it can become difficult to identify which aspect of a person has a larger impact on the judgment. Randomized factorial vignettes, as described by Rossi and Anderson (1982), address this issue by randomly selecting and combining different aspects of scenarios. Combining the results of multiple randomly assigned scenarios across a sample allows us to measure the impact of independent variables like race and class.

The factorial vignette was specifically designed to capture the judgments of its respondents. Rossi and Anderson (1982:19) emphasize the importance for social scientists to understand what underlies social judgments. The judgment in this study is the acceptance of violence. When presented with a violent vignette, the respondent is asked to judge the scenario on a scale of 1 (definitely not okay) to 9 (definitely okay).

Rossi and Anderson (1982:15-16) emphasize the ability of a factorial survey to recreate the complexities of real life judgments while being able to separate the social and individual influences:

Factorial surveys are so named because they combine ideas from balanced multivariate experimental designs with sample survey procedures... In short, from the experimental tradition, the factorial survey borrows and adapts the concept of factor orthogonality and from the survey tradition it borrows the greater richness of detail and complexity that characterizes real-life circumstances.

Factorial surveys are vignette studies in which a respondent is given a fictitious scenario to judge. Each vignette contains variables, or dimensions, of the researcher's choosing that have a set number of levels. In each vignette, these levels can be changed so that the respondent may judge multiple scenarios. These factorial vignettes are then used to capture social judgments of various types of events. Garret (1982:180) used the

factorial vignette method to uncover how certain aspects of a scenario combine to influence how serious an event is perceived. In her research the event was child abuse. That study was influential in structuring the factorial vignette used in this survey.

In order for a respondent to feasibly judge *all* possible scenarios, the number of dimensions and levels must be kept small. For example, within a vignette study with four dimensions that each have four levels, the possible combinations would equal  $(4)(4)(4)(4) = 256$  possible vignettes, too many for one respondent. “For very large factorial object universes, random sampling of the objects can be used, with each respondent-judge being given an independently drawn random sample of the factorial objects” (Rossi and Anderson 1982). The factorial survey approach allows the researcher to assess multiple dimensions with multiple levels by using random assignment when creating a set of vignettes for a respondent to evaluate.

All possible combinations of dimensions and levels is called the factorial universe. The random sample given to a particular respondent is the respondent subsample. Because each respondent subsample has “the same properties (asymptotically) as the populations from which they were drawn, analyses of such samples will result in estimates that asymptotically converge on populations parameters” (Rossi and Anderson 1982:30), meaning that because we are essentially taking a specific number (number of respondents times number of vignettes evaluated by each respondent) of small random samples from the factorial universe, we can combine them to create one

large random sample. The unit of analysis is the vignette, or object. An example of a possible vignette judged by a respondent is below (See Table 1)<sup>1</sup>.

Table 1. Sample of Factorial Vignette.

---

*Kevin is a recent college graduate. Recently he went to a friend's house with a group of friends.*

*He had nothing to drink.*

*During the course of the evening, a younger woman that Kevin did not know approached him expressing annoyance that Kevin had stepped on her coat.*

*Kevin responded by yelling at her.*

How okay was his response?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

Definitely Not Okay

Definitely Okay

---

#### Dimensions of Violent Scenarios Assessed

##### Hostility of Interchange

The levels of this dimension were an attempt to capture a wide variety of scenarios with distinct levels of hostility of the interchange between the actor and victim. This variable was pretested and received helpful feedback from a separate freshman honors seminar class in gender and violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Italics are added for the ease of the reader, but were not included in the survey given to

### Sex of Victim

This variable was a dummy, coded 0 for male, and 1 for female. Sex of the victim, or receiver of the violent response, is an important dimension when understanding aggressive behavior. Masculine norms for violence may vary depending on characteristics of the victim.

### Severity of Actor's Response

This is the focal dimension used to judge the violent scenario. A range of levels were used to capture the severity of violent responses these varied from verbal (0) to physical violence (3). The response levels were modeled after the items assessing self-reported violent behavior in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Harris 2009).

## Variables

The variables included in this study are discussed below. Appendix C includes the full vignette, and Appendix D contains the included dimensions of the CMNI.

### Dependent variable

The dependent variable is the vignette score which ranges from 1 (definitely not okay) to 9 (definitely okay). For this study, an increase in the final vignette score corresponds to an increase in the acceptance of the violent scenario. When dimensions do not significantly affect judgments, they have been largely ignored by the respondents

when making their judgments (Rossi and Anderson 1982). When dimensions affect judgments positively, reflected by an increase in vignette score, these dimensions are said to have increased the acceptance of violence.

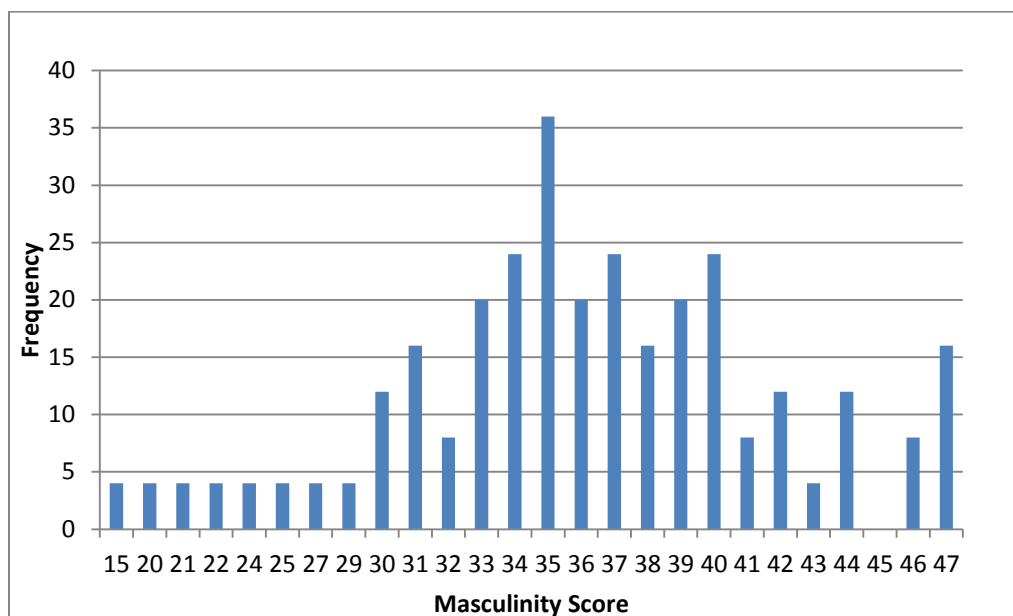
### Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory

Three dimensions from the CMNI were chosen to measure violent aspects of masculinity: violence, risk taking, and pursuit of status.<sup>2</sup> Through personal correspondence with Mahalik (September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010), it was determined that the combination of these dimensions would be an adequate tool to uncover the respondents' adherence to masculinity norms. The alpha scores for each subscale are as follows: violence .83, risk taking .74, and pursuit of status .73. Mahalik et al. (2003:12) report violence, risk taking, and pursuit of status coefficients as .84, .82, and .72 respectively. The coefficient alpha for the combination of the three subscales is .85, only slightly lower than the coefficient alpha of .94 reported by Mahalik et al. The distribution of this variable can be seen in Figure 1.

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<sup>2</sup> Only three dimensions were chosen due to time constraints, as only a small amount of class time was given to fill out the survey.

Figure 1. Distribution of masculinity score.



### Controls

Information on age, race, and parent's education was gathered for use as individual-level controls. Most control variables were ordered categories, with five categories for age (18-20, 21-25, 26-29, 30-35, 35+). Race was calculated with a binary (white, nonwhite)<sup>3</sup>. Parent's education was a combination of categorical education level questions asked for each parent separately. (See Appendix A for a full explanation of the variables.)

<sup>3</sup> This was recoded from a five category variable after very little variability in race was found in my sample.

### Data Analysis

As discussed above, the present study is in essence an experimental design, and each vignette is the unit of analysis. Regression techniques were used to analyze the main effects and interactions of vignette dimensions, and respondents' characteristics can be examined vis-à-vis their reactions to the scenarios. (See Ludwick and Zeller (2001) and Rossi and Anderson (1982) for extensive discussion of the appropriateness of regression analysis.) Because respondents give their judgments of the appropriateness of an actor's behavior in four scenarios, the design is within-subject and the non-independence of the data within respondent must be addressed. I addressed this correlated response using OLS regression and the robust cluster option in STATA. This procedure corrects the standard errors and the variance-covariance matrix, but does not affect the estimated coefficients themselves, which should be unaffected by clustering.

## RESULTS

Multivariate analysis indicates that the three main vignette characteristics are important to the judgment of the violent scenario. Additionally, those who more strongly conform to masculine norms are more likely to be accepting of the violence represented in these vignettes. The final model includes only significant vignette characteristics and interactions. All two-way interactions and three-way interactions were checked and not included if not statistically significant.<sup>4</sup>

Table 2 presents the coefficients from my regression analysis. I discuss the results regarding the effects of masculinity (CMNI). Next, the effects of the vignette characteristics are examined. Tables 3-4 present the interactions from the vignettes. Situational variables, respondent characteristics, and the masculinity score together account for 31% of the variation in vignette score.

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<sup>4</sup> Data were recoded. The 'response' variable was recoded from a 5 point scale to a 4 point scale. This was found to be acceptable based on the respondents' equal disregard for both top categories.



Table 2. Coefficients of OLS Regression Predicting Acceptance of Violence.

|                          | Model 1            | Model 2              |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Masculinity              | .0326**<br>(.0132) | .0387**<br>(.0140)   |
| Age                      | -.1173<br>(.1733)  | -.1729<br>(.1654)    |
| Race                     | -.5535<br>(.3294)  | -.3956<br>(.3530)    |
| Parents' Education       | -.0886<br>(.0902)  | -.0402<br>(.0912)    |
| Hostility of Interchange |                    | .9033***<br>(.1557)  |
| Female                   |                    | -.4505<br>(.2348)    |
| Severity of Response     |                    | -.2812***<br>(.0705) |
| Severity*Hostility       |                    | -.1360*<br>(.0553)   |
| Interchange*Female       |                    | -.2740*<br>(.1264)   |
| <b>R<sup>2</sup></b>     | <b>.0244</b>       | <b>.3110</b>         |

Note: \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001 Sample size 320

### Masculinity

As expected, the respondent's masculinity score was a statistically significant predictor of acceptance of violence across both Models 1 and 2. Increased acceptance of masculine norms, as measured by the CMNI, is a significant predictor of the acceptance of violence when controlling for age, race, and parents' education. Moreover, this effect remains significant even *after* controlling for significant situational vignette characteristics. Because this is an all-male sample, this study shows that differences in masculinity norm acceptance is key—apart from the fact of being biologically male. This goes beyond research that confounds masculinity and biological sex, and shows the

importance of gender among males. It is evident, however, when looking at the change in  $R^2$  that context is a much stronger predictor of acceptance of violence.

In both models, the effect of masculinity is significant at  $p < .05$ . This shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between conforming to masculinity and the acceptance of violence. The CMNI used in this study captures a more complicated definition of masculinity, as called for by gender scholars.

### Vignette Characteristics

My analysis revealed two significant statistical interactions between scenario dimensions: 1) the severity of actor's response with the hostility of the interchange, 2) and the hostility of the interchange by sex (female=1) of victim. In order to best understand these statistical interactions, the impact on vignette score (which is interpreted as the respondent's acceptance of violence) of the interactions was examined at different levels of severity, hostility, and sex of victim.

The interaction between hostility of interchange (the provocation that takes place before the violent response) and severity of response (the male actor's response to provocation) will be examined first. In short, more violent responses are judged as less acceptable. Though the intensity of the provocation is positively associated with an increased acceptance of violence, this positive impact of the hostility of the interchange becomes *weaker* as the severity of the response by the actor becomes more violent. As the preceding incident (how the victim approaches the actor) becomes more hostile, the acceptance of violence increases. Responding in any manner (from yelling to punching) is seen as more acceptable. As the responses become *more* violent, however, the impact

of the preceding incident weakens. As the victim's approach increases from annoyed to angry to violent, yelling is seen as acceptable. Threatening is still seen as acceptable, but less so. This trend continues for pushing and punching as well.

We can view this statistical interaction from the perspective of increasing the hostility of the interchange by 1 unit at different levels of actor's response (See Table 3). When the hostility of the interaction is set to increase by one and the severity of the response is set to 0 (yelling) the impact on acceptance of violence by the respondent is significantly positive (.95). As the severity of actor's response increases, the impact of hostility of the interchange on respondent's acceptance of violence becomes less positive. For instance, when hostility of the interchange increases by one unit, and response is set to level 3 (punching, threatening with a weapon) the respondent's acceptance of violence increases by less than half a point (.45).

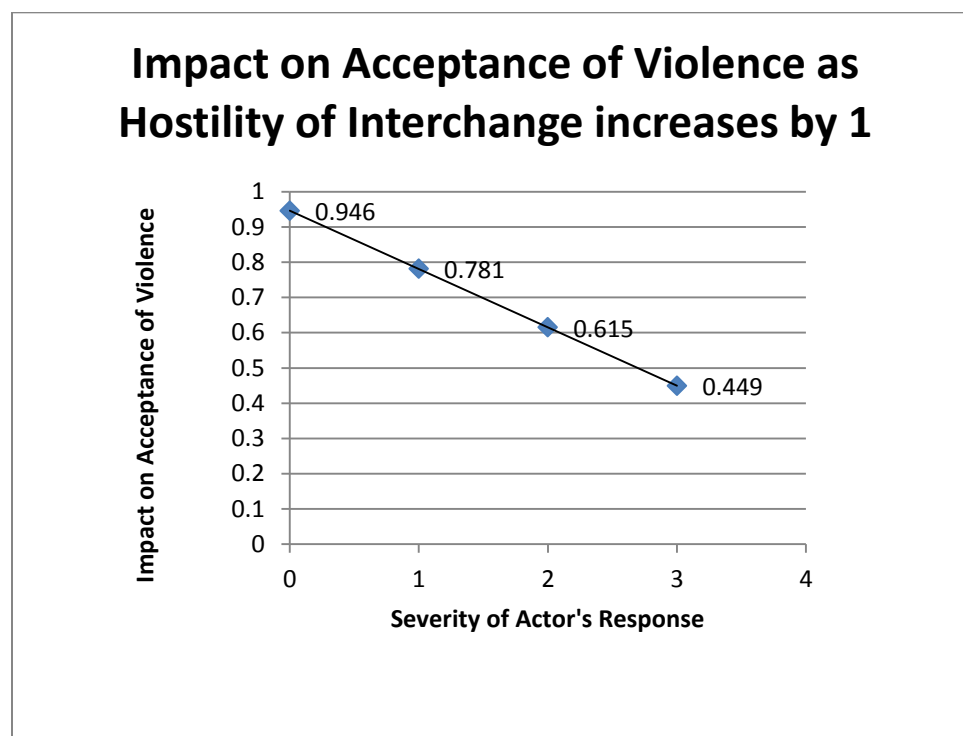
It seems that as the actor's response becomes more severe, the impact of the hostility of the interchange decreases, although it remains statistically significant and positive in sign. Said another way, hostility has a positive impact on acceptance of violence, but this impact is *more* positive at less severe levels of actor's response (and *less* positive at more severe levels of actor's response). As the violent response becomes more severe, the hostility matters less to the respondent when judging the violent scenario.

Table 3. Impact on acceptance as hostility increases by one, at all levels of severity.

| 0=yelling | 1=threatening | 2=pushing | 3=punching,<br>threatening with a<br>weapon |
|-----------|---------------|-----------|---|
| 0.946***  | 0.781***      | 0.615***  | 0.449***                                    |
| (0.148)   | (0.115)       | (0.099)   | (0.107)                                     |

Note: \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001 Sample size 320

Figure 2. Impact on acceptance as hostility increases by one, at all levels of severity.



This means that the hostility of the interchange is positively related to acceptance of violence; however, this relationship has its limits. Violence is acceptable to the respondents under certain contexts. There are levels of violence that are less accepted.

There are many possible explanations for this surprising trend. One is that there may be a ceiling effect of the violent responses. It could be that, no matter what the preceding hostile interchange, an extreme violence response by the actor is not acceptable. So, while the hostility of the interaction certainly gives context to the violence that excuses it to an extent, it cannot justify severe violence. This could be due to the act of violence itself, or it could be due to the respondent's real world aversion to escalating an already charged situation by condoning a violent response to a hostile interaction. In other words, this sample of college students could simply have an aversion to all acts of severe physical violence, or the context of a hostile interchange could trigger an aversion to exacerbating an already tense situation.

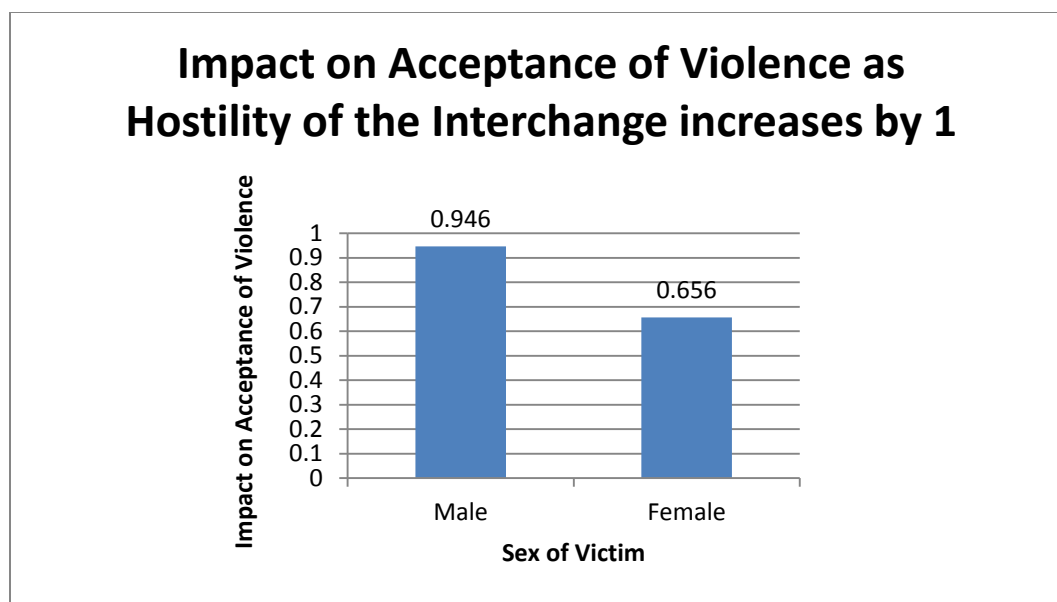
The interaction of 'hostility of interchange' with 'sex of victim' (1= female) was examined as well (See Table 4). Substantively, it appears that an actor behaving violently toward a female is less acceptable than an actor behaving violently toward a male. When the hostility of the interchange increases by one and the victim is male, there is a significantly positive impact on final vignette score (.95). When the victim is female, however, there is a less positive impact on vignette score (.66), although this affect is still highly significant. This means that even though increasing the hostility of the interchange more easily justifies the actor's violent response, the impact of hostility on acceptance of violence is weaker when the victim is female.

Table 4. Impact on acceptance as hostility increases by one for both sexes of victim.

| 0=Male   | 1=Female |
|----------|----------|
| 0.946*** | 0.656*** |
| (0.148)  | (.125)   |

Note: \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$  Sample size 320

Figure 3. Impact on acceptance as hostility increases by one for both sexes of victim.



While the interaction between the hostility of the interaction and the severity of response is surprising, this sample of male college students seems to find it less acceptable to respond violently to a woman, regardless of the level of hostility in the preceding interchange. The complicated relationship between violence and gender of the victim shown by Mullins et al. (2004) (in a sample of violent criminals) is supported by these findings.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although research has repeatedly shown the relationship between biological males and violence, this paper shows a significant relationship between variability within masculinity and violence. This all-male sample varies in its conformity to masculine norms, and this difference significantly impacts the acceptance of violence. By utilizing a measure of gender that attempts to capture multiple facets of masculinity, this study augments both gender and violence literature. This is of substantive interest to gender theorists as well as criminologists. This study is a theory driven, quantitative association between degrees of masculinity, not maleness, and the acceptance of violence.

The results discussed above are general in the directions hypothesized. Conforming to masculine norms of violence, risk-taking, and pursuit of status is directly and positively associated with acceptance of violence. Similarly, sex of the victim, hostility of the interchange, and the level of actor's violence all have a significant impact on how a violent scenario is perceived.

The next step would be to uncover *why*, for example, female victims, despite being hostile, are still perceived as less appropriate victims. Or, *why* those with higher masculinity scores would be more accepting of violence. Gender socialization is a popular route in discussing the relationship between masculinity and violent behavior. There is no time-order element to this particular study, so it cannot be determined if conforming to masculine norms existed prior to acceptance of violence, but it may not matter. If acceptance of violence is part of the masculinity socialization, then one would not come before the other.

What *does* matter, though, is that these two things are related. Masculinity, a valued set of behaviors, interaction style, etc., is empirically linked to the acceptance of violence. This means that individuals that society values because of their leadership or business prowess, for example, would also be valued for their violence. When violence is valued by society as an individual trait, expectedly it will be used against others.

Through this project I learned a lot about collecting my own data, and how to improve this study for the future. This project would have greatly benefited from an increase of sample size and a streamlining of the survey. In the beginning, I was very interested in individual traits and behaviors that may be associated with an increase in masculinity score. These questions made the survey much longer, and ultimately did not add anything to the present study. Looking back, I would remove these questions and replace them with an additional measure of gender or masculinity. I would also do my best to increase the sample size by increasing respondents as well as the number of vignettes judged by each respondent. Finally, I would also increase the variation in the vignettes, specifically expanding the types of non-violent responses given by the actor of the vignette.

An important next step would be to examine the relationship between masculinity and acceptance of violence for women respondents. One may guess, for instance, that masculinity and the impact of hostile female victims may be weighted differently by women in judging violent scenarios. During the initial analysis of women respondents, masculinity was not found to be significant in predicting vignette score. The masculinity measure used in this study was developed specifically to measure men, and may not be appropriate for measuring masculinity in women. A deeper theoretical understanding of



women and masculinity is needed to inform the creation of a masculinity measure for women. I can, however, look at the relationships between gender of respondent and the more significant contextual variables.

An additional way to study the relationship between gender and violence would be to change the gender of the perpetrator. I hypothesize that any violence perpetrated by a woman would be seen as less acceptable than violence done by a man, as violence is accepted as part of masculine behavior, but is seen as inappropriate for women. I am also particularly interested in how female victims are perceived by females and less masculine respondents.

Using an undergraduate sample provides some limitations. When looking at college students, it is important to pay attention to how the cultural expectations regarding violence can shape the aggressive tendencies of those present. It could be that the very fact that this data about violence was collected in a location with obvious anti-aggression expectations lowered the respondents' acceptance of violence. A classroom, like those where this data was collected, is not a place that fosters aggressive behavior. This context may have lowered the acceptance of violence across the respondents. Collecting data in a different, more aggressive, context may impact the overall vignette scores.

In addition to tone of the classroom, social desirability may also play a role. Anticipating the proper response (given the mostly non-violent nature of a college campus) may have compelled the respondents to be less accepting of violence. Social desirability bias is a strong force and may have affected the responses.

As always, it is important to remember the situational dimension of gender. Male college students at a Midwestern university will judge these violent scenarios very differently from any other age group from elsewhere around the world. Masculinity and contextual variables may play a more or less prominent role for men of other cultures. An initial examination of this relationship could begin on a large campus with many international students.

While this data cannot be generalized beyond college students, there are still benefits to focusing on this population, especially when concentrating on violence that occurs within the college setting. “The college years are a period of transition and examination of ones’ identity. Masculinity may be one facet of personality that emerges for examination during this time and it may emerge as problematic” (Whorley and Addis 2006:656). Masculinity and violence may be differently related within this population, which may give clues as to how to address violent behavior in this particular location.

Future research, especially within the college student population, should focus on the variation within lower levels of violent responses. These students did not respond positively, at all, to higher levels of violence. Using a vignette with more categories of non-severe responses would give the researcher a better idea of how masculinity works at lower levels of violence. I suspect that a survey that disaggregates possible violent scenarios into realistic levels within a party setting could better tap into the lived experience of violence for undergraduates.

Research has shown that gender in the context of the university, especially athletics, is a unique space for rewarding and encouraging violent masculinities (Kreager 2007, Graham and Wells 2003, Crosset 1999, Carr and VanDeuson 2004). Masculinity

and violence researchers should attempt to expand upon the findings of this study by investigating the larger college student population. I speculate that the aspects of masculinity that are most tied to violence will be heightened when describing vignettes on locations where violence is more likely to be experienced. Research in this area would benefit from further vignette studies focused on locations specific to college life, such as athletic events or bars and clubs. These vignette studies, coupled with multifaceted examinations of masculinity, would help decouple sex and gender and uncover a connection between the socialization of masculinity and violence.

This study begins to examine that relationship and shows that a relationship between masculinity and the acceptance of violence *does* exist. Gender and context complicate our understanding of violent scenarios, but the socialized concept of masculinity remains an important predictor of acceptance violence.

## APPENDIX A. VARIABLE LIST

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Vignette Score           | Coded as 1= Definitely not okay to 9= Definitely okay   |
| Masculinity              | A composite of 21 questions (see Appendix D).   |
| Age                      | Coded as 1=18-20, 2= 21-25, 3=26-29, 4=30-35, 5=36+   |
| Race                     | Dummy coded as 0=white, 1=non-white   |
| Parent's Education       | A composite of Father and Mother's education.<br>Coded as 0= Went to school, but I don't know what level, 1= never went to school, 2=eighth grade or less, 3= more than eighth grade, but did not finish high school, 4= completed GED, 5=high school graduate, 6= went to business, trade, or vocational school after high school, 7= went to college but did not graduate, 8=graduated from college or a university, 9= professional training beyond a four-year college. |
| Hostility of Interchange | Coded as 0= asked for help locating an address, 1=expressing annoyance that [Kevin] had stepped on [his] coat, 2= angrily, accusing him of spilling a drink on [her], 3= violently, accusing him of totaling [his] car.   |
| Female                   | Dummy coded as 0=male, 1=female   |
| Severity of Response     | Coded as 0=yelling, 1=threatening, 2= pushing, 3=punching/threatening with a weapon   |

## APPENDIX B. MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

|                          | Mean  | S.D.  |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| Vignette Score           | 2.278 | 1.782 |
| Masculinity              | 36.48 | 6.996 |
| Age                      | 1.314 | .6813 |
| Race                     | .1124 | .3162 |
| Parents' Education       | 6.301 | 1.379 |
| Hostility of Interchange | 1.531 | 1.147 |
| Female                   | .5000 | .5007 |
| Severity of Response     | 1.753 | 1.144 |

## APPENDIX C. FULL VIGNETTE

Kevin [ Adam, John, Eric, David],  
 [ is a student, is a recent college graduate, has graduated and has a family, is a recent retiree].

Recently he went to [the bar, an organized university function, a friend's house]  
 [by himself, with a friend, with a group of friends].

He had [nothing to drink, a little to drink, a lot to drink, not included].

During the course of the evening, a(n) [older, younger, the same age] [man, woman] that [Kevin] did not know approached him [and asked for help locating an address; expressing annoyance that [Kevin] had stepped on his coat; angrily, accusing him of spilling his drink on [her]; violently, accusing him of totaling [his] car].

Kevin [Adam, John, Eric, David] responded by [yelling at her/him, threatening her/him, pushing her/him, punching her/him, threatening her/him with a weapon].

How okay was his response?

|                     |   |   |   |   |   |                 |   |   |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------|---|---|
| 1                   | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7               | 8 | 9 |
| Definitely Not Okay |   |   |   |   |   | Definitely Okay |   |   |

## APPENDIX D. CONFORMITY TO MASCULINE NORMS INVENTORY

|   |    |   |   |     |
|---|----|---|---|-----|
| If there is going to be violence, I find a way to avoid it. | SA | A | D | SD* |
| Taking dangerous risks helps me to prove myself.            | SA | A | D | SD  |
| I never do things to be an important person.                | SA | A | D | SD  |
| I believe that violence is never justified.                 | SA | A | D | SD  |
| I take risks.   | SA | A | D | SD  |
| I would hate to be important.                               | SA | A | D | SD  |
| In general, I do not like risky situations.                 | SA | A | D | SD  |
| I prefer to be safe and careful.                            | SA | A | D | SD  |
| It feels good to be important.                              | SA | A | D | SD  |
| Trying to be important is the greatest waste of time.       | SA | A | D | SD  |
| Having status is not very important to me.                  | SA | A | D | SD  |
| I like fighting.  | SA | A | D | SD  |
| I hate any kind of risk.                                    | SA | A | D | SD  |
| Sometimes violent action is necessary.                      | SA | A | D | SD  |
| I am willing to get into a physical fight if necessary.     | SA | A | D | SD  |
| Violence is almost never justified.                         | SA | A | D | SD  |
| I feel uncomfortable when others see me as important.       | SA | A | D | SD  |
| No matter what the situation I would never act violently.   | SA | A | D | SD  |
| I never take chances.                                       | SA | A | D | SD  |
| It is foolish to take risks.                                | SA | A | D | SD  |
| I am disgusted by any kind of violence.                     | SA | A | D | SD  |

\* SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, D=Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree

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