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Author
Molina, Carolina

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What Would Jesus Do? Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity
in Religious Organizations

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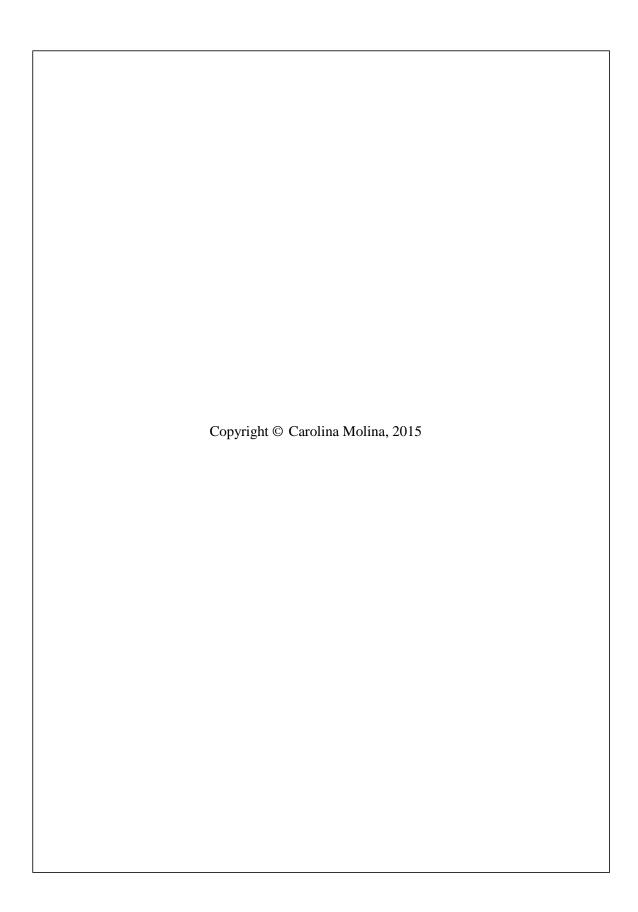for the degree of Master of Arts

in

Sociology

by

Carolina Molina

Committee in charge:

Professor Zulema Valdez, Chair
Professor Irenee Beattie
Professor Edward Orozco Flores

2015

The Thesis of Carolina Molina is approved, and it is acceptable in

quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Irenee Beattie

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Edward Orozco Flores

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Zulema Valdez   Chair

University of California, Merced

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

What would Jesus do? Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity in Religious Organizations.

By

Carolina Molina

Master of Arts in Sociology

University of California, Merced

Professor Zulema Valdez, Chair

        This study investigates how men's only church programs rearticulate notions of hegemonic masculinity. Specifically, this study examines two male-only programs, one English-speaking and one Spanish-speaking, within a non-denominational Christian organization in California's Central Valley. Using qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this study shows that masculinities are constructed by aligning notions of hegemonic masculinity with religious beliefs to produce *religious masculinity*. *Religious masculinity* emerges as a form of masculinity that rejects traditional expectations of manhood that contradict religious doctrine. Yet, findings show that male-only programs tend to reinforce hegemonic masculinity in the process of constructing *religious masculinity*; for example, by exhibiting masculine displays through the use of physical strength, competition and familial leadership. These masculine displays allow for members to negotiate their masculinity even as they maintain their dominant place in the gendered hierarchy. Though *religious masculinity* may emphasize masculine behaviors that are supported by religious doctrine, ultimately the behaviors and practices that comprise *religious masculinity* are not markedly different from those typified by hegemonic masculinity. *Religious masculinity* is also embedded within the larger organizational structure of the church that has institutionalized male dominance by naturalizing male leadership in both the public and private spheres. Though there are explicit attempts to challenge hegemonic masculinity in this setting, *religious masculinity* serves to maintain hegemonic masculinity by reproducing and cultivating male dominance.

Introduction

Though masculinities, or the varying qualities associated with boy and men, are dynamic and change according to history and context, what they have in common is the persistence of naturalized male dominance. Masculinities are relational. The parameters of what comprises masculinity are determined by its opposition: the beliefs and behaviors associated with girls and women (Connell [1995] 2005). Feminine qualities include selflessness, sensitivity, tenderness and deference. The relationship between masculinity and femininity is consistent with patriarchy, which demands the dominance of males over females at work and in the home, and is reproduced through gendered social institutions that organize life along a male-dominated and female-subordinated hierarchy (Lorber 1994). The gendered hierarchy is maintained by an ideology and practice of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity calls for the embodiment of an ideal masculinity to maintain dominance (Connell [1995] 2005; Connell and Messerschmitt 2005). Although organizations designed to serve men may seek to reproduce or resist traditional notions of masculinity, their methods do not typically threaten the gender hierarchy of the larger social structure, the dominance of men over women. Changing social landscapes also create a shift in relations between masculinities and femininities and the gender hierarchy. Such social changes include increased civil rights for women or failing economies that threaten a man's ability to produce economic capital. Such circumstances within Christianity has posed a threat towards male dominance as increased attendance and privileged of women has been regarded as the feminization of religion, that is believed to be a detriment not only towards religious organizations, but to society as a whole (Woodhead 2001).

Institutions such as the military, organized sports and religion are examples of androcentric structures that direct power and privilege towards men and sustain the subordination of women in their own unique way, thereby reproducing masculinity as the dominant position in a gendered institutional setting and the larger social structure. These institutions also have their own unique practices and ideologies that influence how mean articulate their masculinity. For example, some forms of Christianity employ the practice of asceticism where men are admonished to not indulge in "worldly" notions of masculinity such as drinking, smoking and relationships with women outside of their marriage (Brusco 1995; Flores and Hondagnue-Sotelo 2013). One of the latent effects of this practice is an improved husband and family man that directs his resources towards his family instead of himself (Brusco 1995). Though particular Christian behaviors may emphasize or rearticulate some aspects of traditional masculinity, men that choose to engage in asceticism are motivated by religious convictions.

This study examines how masculinities are constructed within the context of a large, non-denominational Christian church that offers male-only programs designed to empower and provide religious guidance to its male members. These male-only programs become spaces where men can respond to changing gender dynamics and also give them an opportunity to rearticulate masculinity according to their context. The Christian church where this study takes place, that I will refer to as "Valley Church", is one the largest and most established its area. Valley Church is focused on developing its relatability with the community in order to reach and attract more members. Their efforts to reach and

diversify their membership includes flexible worship times, services in Spanish, social events, announcements on popular Valley radio stations, and developing small groups that cater to a variety of interests including gender, age and marital status. This study explores how men who participate in male-only programs express agency in challenging, reproducing or shaping the masculinities that exist within the context of the male-only program and the larger context of the religious organization. In the analysis of the two programs, the English speaking "Push" group and the Spanish speaking "Redeemed Men" group, I show that the emergence of a *religious masculinity*, which prioritizes religious ideals, emerges within the program and church which challenges traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity while simultaneously sustaining the subordination of women. Moreover, the construction of *religious masculinity* retains most aspects of hegemonic masculinity in its discourse and practice. Specifically, members of male-only programs engage in practices that require a hegemonic masculinity framework to construct *religious masculinity,* which ultimately legitimizes hegemonic masculinity.

The practice of *religious masculinity* requires men to engage in aspects of hegemonic masculinity (i.e., working out at the gym together) in order to legitimize religious masculinity as an acceptable alternative form of masculinity, albeit one that is in line with their religious ideology. In addition, this *religious masculinity* is articulated differently within the two male-only programs. The English-speaking group constructs a notion of religious masculinity that challenges hegemonic masculinity by encouraging intimate and emotional vulnerability through homosocial relationships, which are cultivated by engaging in displays of physical strength. Conversely, the Spanish-speaking group did not equate being vulnerable with *religious masculinity*, choosing instead to focus on competition through biblical intellectual acumen. The Spanish-speaking group also made an effort to promote egalitarian ideals between men and women as an aspect of *religious masculinity*, although hegemonic masculinity prevailed. Although the male-only programs construct *religious masculinity*, and seek to challenge hegemonic masculinity, the discourse and practices they use maintain hegemonic masculinity.

Literature Review

Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant approach to the study of men and male positions in our social order and has made its mark on a considerable amount of empirical investigations (Connell and Messerschmitt 2005). The concept has been used as a tool for analyzing gender disparities in education, criminology and media representations (such as war and sports imagery) men's health, and organizational studies (Connell and Messerschmitt 2005). Developed by R.W. Connell, the concept identifies the patterns of practice that ensure male domination over females. Hegemonic masculinity is a cultural ideal that is not biological but socially constructed (Connell [1995] 2005). It encapsulates the most "honored way of being a man" and is set apart as the most highly regarded form of masculinity. The ideal man is generally aggressive, unemotional, virile, heterosexual and able-bodied. Hegemonic masculinity is accessible by an elite subgroup of men, typically ideologies and practices that are consistent with white, heterosexual middle class men (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Gerber 2015). The exclusivity of

hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchal privileges afforded it vary according to race, class and sexual orientation. For example, homosexual men find themselves oppressed by hegemonic masculinity as homosexuality is viewed as failed masculinity (Connell [1995] 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Pascoe 2014). Minority and working class men experience marginalized masculinity: power granted by their gender is limited by class and race (Connell [1995] 2005). Men who are subject to marginalized masculinity experience structural barriers and racism that limit their access to privilege, and are more likely to experience poverty, unemployment and an increased likelihood of incarceration (Flores and Hondagnue-Sotelo 2013). Because of structural inequality along the lines of race and class, marginalized forms of masculinity may sometimes manifest in more extreme forms of masculinity, such as increased aggression, in an effort to reassert marginalized men's position of dominance in the gendered hierarchy (Baca Zinn 1982; Flores and Hondagnue-Sotelo 2013). It is important to note, however, that engaging in extreme forms of masculinity is not exclusive to marginalized groups.

All forms of masculinity share the positioning of male and female genders in opposition to each other; that which is deemed masculine has no association or similarity to that which is deemed feminine. In addition, effective masculinity demands that which is considered feminine to be completely discredited and subordinate (Connell and Messerschmitt 2005). For example, if a man is rational, then a woman is emotional, and her points of view are subject to scrutiny because she is not considered a rational being. Men are also perceived as strong, inherently capable and deserving of attention (Morris 2008, 2012). This demands a structure of inequality that serves men, thereby establishing dominance in society, at work and in the home, and over women's bodies (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985; Shrock and Schwalbe 2009; Pascoe 2014).

Gender and Religion

According to Woodhead (2001) the sociology of religion and its process of secularization has been viewed through the lens of Weber (1905) and Durkheim ([1915] 1965), an approach that is largely gender-blind. Feminist scholars contend that there is a need to include gender in the study of religion and point out that religions are predominantly androcentric and provide a platform to perpetuate male dominance over women (Daly 1985; Driver 1976; Lummis 2006; Woodhead 2001). For example, in Christianity, despite the heterogeneity of the variations in doctrine, leaders and clergymen are mostly if not exclusively men; the clergy often selectively interprets texts to reinforce female subordination; and in most religions, and women are not allowed to serve in leadership roles as priests or pastors (Chafetz 1989; Holm 1994; Lummis 2006). Furthermore, the messages derived from religious leaders, texts and practices tend to be largely restrictive, heteronormative and rationalize gender inequalities between men and women, rooted in doctrine that are deemed sacred. (Krondorfer and Hunt 2012). The sacralization of beliefs and doctrine thus delegitimizes doubt and thwarts opportunities to contest.

This is especially obvious with the story of "Adam and Eve" as its origin myth, which contends that men maintaining dominance over women is part of a divine plan (Sanday 1981). In this context, sex roles are conceived of as biological and spiritually

innate – men enjoy power and leadership while highlighting the importance of women in the private sphere as mothers and caretakers (Lummis 2006). Although sex-roles are within Christian structures are framed in terms of "separate but equal," religious institutions ignore their androcentric nature and the privilege that comes with positions of leadership. In addition, the "separate but equal" ideology presented by Christian structures serves as an avenue towards the rationalization and legitimization of patriarchal practices (Chaves 1997; Lindley 1996; Lummis 2006; Wessinger 1996). Religion, then, is a site for gendered socialization that is conducive to religious ideologies that reproduce gender hierarchies (Sullins 2006; Woodhead 2001). For example, men are socialized to lead and be assertive, while the focus for women is about caring, nurturing and community (Beal 1997; Ozorak 1996; Woodhead 2001). Performing gender while participating in religion is not just a social demand; it is an expectation of religious practice and a moral obligation from a divine higher power. It is this divinity that precludes the contestation of gendered teachings and practices, reinforcing religiopatriarchal oppressions (Daly 1985; Krondofer and Hunt 2012; Woodhead 2001).

Despite the fact that religiopatriarchal systems work for the benefit of men, the androcentric nature of religion accepts the male experience as a normative one, negating men as gendered beings and thus obscuring religiopatriarchal oppressions that are unique to men (Krondofer and Hunt 2012). This obscurity continues to remain unacknowledged in the dynamics of masculinity formations within religious contexts. The restrictive nature of religion, that is, the insistence of heteronormativity and expected subordination to the clergy in power limits the agentic process of men in their masculine identities leaving them with a narrow selection of legitimate masculine behaviors in which to engage. Religion and hegemonic masculinity thus have a complicated relationship as it contradicts hegemonic masculinity by expecting men to be subordinate to clergy and reject free thought (Kirkley 1996; Krondofer and Hunt 2012) while perpetuating the domination of men in the gender order as "godly" trait (Daly 1985; Krondofer and Hunt 2012; Woodhead 2001).

Furthermore, men that choose to engage in organized religion attend local congregations, based on where they reside (Flores 2013). Subsequently, messages about masculinity will also vary according to demographic profile of their community setting, where their place of worship is situated and what type of religion they engage in, as religions are not homogenous in doctrine. In other words, some religious settings may reproduce a gender hierarchy that is embedded in a marginalized masculinity discourse and practice. At the same time, men have a variety of motives for engaging in religion, for example, a man experiencing marginalized masculinity may seek out religion to compensate for losses resulting from their marginalization in the larger social structure (Flores 2013).

Masculinity and Religious Organizations for Men

The emergence of male-only religious organizations within existing Christian congregations is due, in part, to a perceived feminization of religion (Beal 1997; Gerber 2015; Kirkley 1996; Woodhead 2001). Woodhead (2001) suggests that increased female participation in religious organizations can be explained by gendered socialization,

gendered structures, and as a compensatory response to material and social inequalities. As women have increased their participation and representation in Christianity, male-only empowerment groups have developed in response, to reclaim leadership and representation (Beal 1997; Messner 1997). Since feminization is perceived as a threat to male dominance and the social order, male-only groups serve to create safe spaces to reclaim masculinity as "naturally" intended (Beal 1997; Messner 1997). One example of this is a group called "The Promise Keepers." In 1990 a former college football coach in Colorado started this group to address the decline of male leadership and reassert male dominance. The Promise Keepers also believe that male leadership is necessary to redress contemporary societal ailments such as failing marriages and estranged and problematic children. With the intention of evangelizing men, the group began with 70 members and within half a decade had spread nationally with hundreds of thousands of men in attendance at their "revival" meetings (Beal 1997; Donovan 1998; Messner 1997).

The Promise Keepers were addressing a perceived crisis in masculinity: not enough men were willing to lead and the organization cited this masculine crisis as an egregious social problem (Beal 1997). The group also sought to fight against the cultural pressures that were relinquishing leadership roles to women, calling it the "feminization of the American male," and arguing that this development had allowed men to neglect masculine responsibilities, leaving women to fill this role (Beal 1997). The Promise Keepers sought to conflate leadership and masculinity by negatively framing femininity as incompetent (Beal 1997; Donovan 1998). Devaluing femininity is justified through gender essentialism, which suggests that men and women have innate differences that determine their distinct roles and a gendered division of labor. In addition to the notion of biological differences, religious groups cited biblical scripture to reify conventional gender norms as God-given (Beal 1997). The Promise Keepers thus reproduced hegemonic masculinity by demanding the subordination of women and exalting male domination and privilege. They were able to spread these messages through their large-scale meetings at sports stadiums nationwide and through the promotion of sports (Beal 1997, Donovan 1998). Sports are an ideal institution to legitimize conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity, as sports naturalizes male supremacy (Beal 1997; Messner 1997).

The Promise Keepers framed their practice of masculinity as what is described by some scholars as "godly masculinity," or an archetype of Christian manhood (Gallagher and Wood 2005; Gerber 2015). Godly masculine archetypes may diverge from hegemonic masculinity by highlighting loyalty to family values over hypersexualized and selfish values (Gerber 2015). That said, a godly masculinity tends to value heteronormative behaviors that encourage marriage, fatherhood and homosocial relationships with other "godly" men (Beal 1997). The pursuit of godly manhood is facilitated by the use of these godly archetypes and is also a way for a man to develop his own personal masculine identity. Personal relationships and spaces for male-only camaraderie are essential for the development of godly masculinity. Events sponsored by male-only programs provide a vehicle for religious men to connect with other men to achieve and maintain a form of godly manliness. In addition, male-only programs and relationships help foster accountability, which is necessary for the maintenance of the

collective effervescence acquired at the stadium rallies. Coined by Durkheim, collective effervescence occurs when large groups of people come together and are aligned in their motives to participate, thus sharing excitement. This excitement then reifies their reasons for engaging, connected them to something larger than themselves. For groups like the Promise Keepers, collective effervescence is necessary to legitimize the subordination of its members. Collective effervescence also facilitates the correlation of the church leadership with the supernatural, making fostering trust in the leadership and thus encouraging obedience.

The Promise Keepers is a fundamentalist reaction to the feminization of religion, a reflection of right wing conservative American ideals. Such right wing and reactionary responses are not typical; they are contingent on the particular social location of church members and their demographic profile, in terms of race, class and gender. In the case of the Promise Keepers, members were predominately white and middle class. Their social location influenced their reactionary response of "remasculizing" the church (Kimmel 1995; Messner 1997). In contrast, a study of Colombian Christian evangelism by Elizabeth Brusco (1995) demonstrated that a similar increase in the presence of females became an opportunity for collective action that translated into women attaining leadership positions within the church and a rearticulation of masculinity within familial structures (Brusco 1995). By engaging in asceticism, men redirected their priorities away from "vices" such as drinking, smoking and extramarital affairs and into their wives and children (1995). Though male leadership was still naturalized, asceticism coupled with familial commitments allowed for a rearticulation of masculinity that allowed men to share aspirations with women in their lives instead of standing in opposition towards them.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist scholars have exposed religion as a platform that facilitates female subordination. By addressing religion as an institution that is gender-blind, they show religion as a taken for granted male experience, despite women outnumbering men in participation. As a response to the feminization of religion, male-only programs have developed to "fix" the masculinity problem and attract more male members. However, since gendered experiences of men are conflated as the normative experience, men are overlooked as gendered beings. Although men maintain a position at the top of the gender hierarchy, men-only groups are designed to uphold the status quo rather than address gendered disadvantages that may exist for men: the only problem worth addressing is the loss of male supremacy. This is important for the study of men and religion, where hegemonic masculinity is negotiated and reproduced to sustain male supremacy as a norm while ignoring how these constructions of masculinity might not always be advantageous for men. As hegemonic masculinity is normalized, it limits male agency as they are expected to perform masculinity in this narrow sense, regardless of their own personal preference. For example, The Promise Keepers explicitly address the loss of male supremacy as a societal problem and thus politicizes their articulation of godly masculinity, forcing men to engage in masculinity according to their political

agenda (i.e. denouncing homosexuality and/or the imposition of the breadwinner burden) when it is not necessarily his first personal choice.

I focus on men that participate in male-only programs within a large Christian congregation. These two programs vary by racial composition and socioeconomic status; however, both programs draw members from the same congregation. The differences in the demographic profile of the members within the two programs are likely to produce different forms of masculinity, which may include hegemonic or marginalized aspects. The variations in masculinities become more complicated as the two are part of the same Christian congregation that is overall androcentric and dominated by men in both discourse and leadership. In the larger context, the Christian congregation seeks to challenge hegemonic masculinity in order to develop a unique religious masculinity, which is Jesus-like and superior, and set apart from the rest of the world. The interactions of the men in two male-only programs coupled with their attendance within the larger congregation will have an effect on the discourse and practice of religious masculinity that emerges within the male-only programs. The larger context may influence how hegemonic masculinity is challenged and/or maintained between members within each male-only program, and the two male-only programs may also develop their own understandings of religious masculinity that is largely influenced by the influence of the homosocial relationships that are cultivated within the group. I contend that the obligation of abiding by hegemonic masculinity coupled with a religious obligation to maintain male dominance may ultimately rearticulate hegemonic masculinity by imbuing it with religion. Despite the goals or intentions of male-only programs that seek to empower men by allowing them to challenge hegemonic masculinity, transcending hegemonic masculinity in a significant manner is unlikely to occur. By focusing on two male-only empowerment programs within a Christian organization, my study reveals how men express agency in challenging hegemonic masculinity through the emergence of *religious masculinity*, and whether the religious masculinity that emerges ultimately challenges or reproduces hegemonic masculinity.

Data and Method

Site

The site for the study is the Valley Church, a large non-denominational Christian church in California's Central Valley, and the two male-only groups, one English-speaking and one Spanish-speaking, within it. The male-only groups are a part of a larger program called "Sprouting" that designs both mixed gender and gender specific small groups that tailor to the needs and interests of the parishioners. Established in 1975, they describe themselves as "a loving community of growing disciples mentoring the next generation to live the mission of Jesus through the power of the gospel". Led by Pastor Ray for the past 15 years, Valley Church is committed to growth and outreach. Pastor Ray is an amicable and charismatic Pastor that is well respected by the community. He runs the church with the help of about 20 council members and staff. The Valley Church culture is welcoming and inviting, their mission statement is, "Meeting people where they are and loving them to where Christ wants them to be." As a result, the atmosphere was noticeably relaxed, with no formal dress code or pressures of mandatory attendance.

Traditional hymns were replaced by contemporary worship songs and had contemporary Christian resources available including marital and financial literature and self-help that you would typically find at other Christian churches. The relaxed environment, in addition to monthly welcome luncheons facilitates the increase of new membership. Established members made efforts to initiate friendships and invite members into their homes.

The congregation of Valley Church has over 1000 members, with about 600 total people in attendance in weekly Sunday services, 80 of which belong to the Latino ministry. This congregation enjoys a variety of resources, including a live band, a high-quality sound system, and large screens around the main stage that feature bible verses and song lyrics in real-time. In addition, members have pamphlets available with the printed sermon for the day that allows for an interactive learning experience (such as "filling in the blanks" aligned with the sermon). The demographics of the English-speaking segment of the congregation include both working and middle class members. The demographic profile of the members is comprised of 60 percent white, 30 percent Latino and 10 percent black or other members, including Asian. The congregation also includes a Latino ministry that hosts Sunday services and other church-related activities in Spanish. The Latino ministry is significantly smaller, And has considerably fewer resources compared to the English-speaking ministry such as a smaller live band, less detailed interactive pamphlets, and less technology overall.

Over a period of five months, I attended 24 co-ed public events including Sunday services, 16 in English and 8 in Spanish, with the purpose of establishing a relationship with the organization and familiarizing myself with the dynamics of the congregation. I rotated my attendance at the English and Spanish services on a bi-weekly basis. These events are public and designed to attract members of the community and no special permission is required to attend (although all aspects of the study protocol were approved, IRB # UCM14-0051). I also used my attendance at Sunday services to understand members' meanings related to how the organization frames gender dynamics when both women and men are present. While participating in public events I was able to take field notes on my observations related to the roles men and women were engaged in (such as volunteering and leadership) in an attempt to capture the meanings of their actions (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011).

Interview Sample

I conducted 11 total interviews with male members of the church who also participated in the men-only groups. Men for the interviews were recruited from the Spanish speaking group, "Redeemed Men" and the English Speaking group, "Push" (names of groups in this manuscript are pseudonyms). The racial composition of "Redeemed Men" is 100 percent Latino and the racial composition of "Push" is about 70 percent white, 20 percent Latino and 10 percent Asian. All participants were currently employed, with the exception of one that was retired. Most men (91 percent) in the male-only groups were married and the majority (82 percent) had children.

The Spanish-speaking group, "Redeemed Men"

"Redeemed Men" had an average of 15 members. Five members were interviewed for this study, or a third of the group members. Though this group did meet in Spanish, most of the participants spoke English fluently. Of the five interviews, only two were conducted in Spanish. The racial composition of the five interviewees was 100% Latino. Two of the interviewees had recently immigrated from Central America. The average age of this group was 34 years, 80 percent were married, and 69 percent of them had children, with a modal individual income of $40,000 - $60,000 per year.

English-speaking male group, "Push"

"Push" has an average of 30 members and 6 members were interviewed for this study. Half of the members interviewed were white, a third were Latino, and the rest were Asian (just under 20 percent) (see Table 1 for complete demographic information). The average age of this group was 45 years, and 100 percent of these men were married with children, with a modal individual income above $80,000 per year.

Table 1: Sample Demographic Information, N=11

	Name	Age	Race (self-identified)	Marital status	Parent	# of Children	Employment	Income
Redeemed Men: Spanish Speaking Group								
1	Daniel	34	Mexican-American	Married	Yes	2	Yes	40k-60k
2	Luis	33	Hispanic	Single	Yes	2	Yes	60k-80k
3	Miguel	38	Hispanic	Married	Yes	1	Yes	40k-60k
4	Fernando	32	Latino	Married	No	---	Yes	0-20k
5	Carlos	34	Latino	Married	No	---	Yes	20k-40k
Push: English Speaking Group								
1	Cristopher	55	Hispanic	Married	Yes	2	Yes	80k+
2	Victor	43	Asian	Married	Yes	2	Yes	80k+
3	Bob	62	White	Married	Yes	2	Retired	60k-80k
4	Joshua	39	White	Married	Yes	3	Yes	60k-80k
5	James	29	Mexican-American	Married	Yes	2	Yes	40-60k
6	Michael	43	White	Married	Yes	3	Yes	80k+

The primary goals of both groups include empowerment and self- improvement via a spiritual base. The Spanish-speaking group "Redeemed Men" meets on a weekly basis to discuss biblical passages and lessons aligned with the prior Sunday service and how they may be applied to their own lives. The English-speaking group, "Push" is an intensive seasonal program. Though there are weekly workout sessions throughout the year, "Push" mainly meets over six Saturdays in the summer with a weekend long hiking trip as its culmination. It is viewed as an intense boot camp designed to push participants spiritually, mentally and physically.

My position as a female researcher created a hesitancy among the church leadership to allow my presence at the male-only small groups due to what was described to me as the intimate nature of the topics discussed in the group. Since the goals of the small groups included increased vulnerability and the confrontation of personal issues, they felt an outsider listening in would hinder the men's ability to feel secure enough to carry out these goals. In addition, in the event that the men would want to discuss issues that are typically gender segregated, such as sexual purity, my presence would have been deemed inappropriate and an infringement on the privacy of the men in the group. This limited by access to ethnographic observations of the male-only weekly meetings and was able to attend only one meeting conducted by the Spanish-speaking ministry. Nonetheless, at the meeting I observed, I did not notice a significant hindrance in the opportunities for men to share openly about what they were learning and/or feeling. I did not participate at all in these meetings, my role was observer-only, and I took extensive notes on the content of their conversations, their body language, and the depths of their interactions with each other (Emerson et al. 2011). They discussed a range of topics including interpretations of scripture, desires to have children and methods to be supportive to their wives. The men in the group also displayed enthusiasm in the opportunity to help carry out my research and included the success of my project in their concluding prayer.

Method

The data for this mixed methods study was collected from participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. Since the church is enthusiastic about new members, I felt welcomed at Sunday Services, and could blend in with the rest of the congregation and was not identified by members as out of place or a "researcher."

I engaged in participant observation by attending Sunday services and other church related meetings to be able to familiarize myself with the culture and organizational dynamics of the church as a whole, in addition to observing the gendered behaviors of its members. I attended church services regularly on Sundays December 2014 through April 2015 both in English and in Spanish. Through participant observation I learned the organizational dynamics of the church and observed the gender dynamics through the interactions of the group members. Sunday services are conducted in a lecture (lesson giving) structure that allowed me to take extensive notes as I was sitting in the audience without calling any extra attention to myself. This data collection process helped me to better understand the organization and its members. My participation in these events also helped me to develop my interview guide. For example, frequently

during sermons the different Pastors would include examples of their interactions with fellow male congregates. Men often came to him for help, and they often shared about the emotional and vulnerable moments they experienced in the men-only groups, which they then framed as "breakthroughs". Thus, when formulating my interviews I included questions about their level of comfort in displaying emotion among their peers and church leadership. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it was through participant observation that I was able to build a relationship with the gatekeeper, Pastor Ray. I introduced myself to him after a Sunday service; he was willing to assist me in gaining access to the participants of the male-only groups- one of which he led.

My experience as a participant observer was different in the Spanish-speaking ministry. Because the total ministry membership was significantly smaller in size (about one tenth of the total English speaking ministry), my presence was more obvious though it possessed the same welcoming atmosphere towards visitors. Pastor Daniel, who was in charge of the Spanish speaking ministry, was especially welcoming. He introduced me and my project to the entire congregation during a Sunday service admonishing the men in attendance to give of their time and be interviewed, stressing the importance of building a strong community by helping a fellow Latina in pursuit of a PhD.

Interviews

In addition to participant observation at English-speaking and Spanish-speaking church services, I also conducted 11 interviews with male members of the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking men only groups. I elected to conduct interviews with male members of these two groups (the only male-only groups available to members) to understand how men's masculinity is shaped by the social location of members and how their personal narratives align with hegemonic and marginalized masculinities. The interview structure was one-on-one and completely confidential, giving participants the opportunity to express themselves freely. The average length of the interviews was 55 minutes and was mostly conducted face to face, with the exception of one phone interview.

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions regarding the respondent's personal definitions of masculinity, such as what it means to be a man, how men are different from women and their versions of good and/or bad masculinity (see Appendix 1 for the questionnaire/research guide). In addition, I asked the men-only members about their experiences as participants of "Push" and "Redeemed Men," respectively, focusing on whether or not the organization has helped them to be a "better man" and their comfort level with being vulnerable in the groups. The Church leadership provided the private space to conduct the interviews at the church campus. Transcribed interviews were coded according to common themes around challenging and maintaining actions and ideologies of hegemonic masculinity. First, themes were evaluated in aggregate form, and then separated between the two groups. Dominant themes included: heteronormativity, self-awareness, balance, relationships, gendered divisions of labor, and vulnerability.

Findings

Religious Masculinity

Religious Masculinity is a form of masculinity that emerges from the context of the church and serves as a guide towards the formation and adoption of masculinity by the men participating in the male-only programs. It serves as a dynamic template towards masculine identity through the use of traditional, masculine expectations of manhood with their religious beliefs as its base and is prominent in how the church organizes itself. It is different from the aforementioned "godly" masculinity in that it that male domination is not explicitly noted and there exists less judgment and explicit criticisms. The "godly" masculinity of The Promise Keepers explicitly address the loss of male supremacy as a societal problem and thus politicizes their articulation of godly masculinity, setting male supremacy as at the center of their agenda. *Religious Masculinity* is far from politicized, taking a less fundamentalist approach as the church desires to be relatable enough to diversify and increase their membership. For these men, there is a consensus that Jesus exemplified the most ideal form of masculinity: a selfless, courageous, righteous strong man. Thus, participants of male-only programs identified with *religious masculinity* that purposefully challenged conventional notions of masculinity that expect men to be selfish, irresponsible, aggressive, uncontrolled and oversexed.

Participants believe their faith called them to be better men, and thus was the most ideal form of masculinity that is complimentary to living a faithful and spiritual life. Masculine identity is interwoven in doctrine that guides how the men prioritize the ideals they interpret to be righteous or Jesus-like. When asked about their version of ideal masculinity participants replied that "Jesus Christ is my role model" and that real masculinity is a reflection of "men that [are] not afraid to challenge the traditional outlook of what people think men should be." There is an explicit desire for these men to set themselves apart from "the world" or non-religious masculinity, while simultaneously upholding their place of dominance over women.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Religious Masculinity within the greater church context

The ideology of a woman's natural subordination to a man is the most prominent way the church and religious masculinity mirrored hegemonic masculinity. The structure of obligatory male leadership was prominent in both the private (family) and the public (the church). Gender roles as of men as leaders were parallel within the church leadership positions were only available to men. The rest of the church functions were organized similarly, women predominantly served the church in kitchen and child care volunteering, while men were ushers and security officers (protectors). It is in these structural aspects of the church that female subordination was naturalized and maintained. As religious masculinity was embedded in the organization of the church, my experiences as a participant observer made this obvious. This was exemplified by the prominence of male leadership—male pastors always conducted sermons and women seldom spoke to the congregation as a whole about spiritual matters. In addition, sermons and cited biblical scriptures used male pronouns exclusively, despite the fact that well over half of those in attendance are woman. Again, this is exemplary of male dominance on the part of the male congregates but also in the collaboration of the female

congregates. Though sermons are not technically directed towards them, nor are their experiences recognized in relation to sermons, female congregates accept an androcentric standpoint as the general and normative experience that is also sacralized. The church indoctrinates its members into internalizing heteronormative gender roles as requirements of the divine. The ascribed sacred value of gendered roles subsequently leads to the maintenance of male dominance, as the sanctions for non-compliance of male dominance are believed to extend beyond the gendered hierarchy and sustaining male dominance is proof of Christian loyalty and commitment to a higher power. This structure of beliefs begets behaviors that also maintain hegemonic masculinity as it does not allow for questioning or reform. In fact, common themes in Sunday sermons cite the bible in the precautionary tales of the pursuit of knowledge: knowledge is dangerous therefore questioning the doctrine is a marker of failed faithfulness.

In addition, serving the congregation and volunteering is admonished as an integral part of church membership and the types of volunteer opportunities are gendered. Men are the most visible within the Sunday services, serving as ushers and collecting the monetary donations from the members. Women were most often found behind the scenes, working in the kitchen with tasks such as setting up coffee for the fellow congregates and handling the childcare (children's ministry).The heteronormative nature of religious masculinity facilitates service and commitment as it is a marker of religious masculinity; a godly man has a family that he is responsible for both economically and spiritually. This was demonstrated by the majority of men that were visibly volunteering were married. Maintaining a connection to the church community through service and church attendance serves as a mean to maintain and/or improve their religious masculinity. As was stated by Joshua, a successful membership was exemplified by men that, "Show up, be consistent, be engaging, have an open heart. Be willing and show up".

The norm of male dominance within the church also provided opportunities for men to safely display their religious masculinity. While explicit displays of emotion are not performed outside of the worship context, displays of vulnerability were common during the musical worship portion of the Sunday services. While worship is expressed through song, men have the opportunity to sing along and, in many cases, raise their hands in the air, prominently sway, shut their eyes in meditation and elevate their bodies (as in standing on their toes) as a display of reverence and worship. These behaviors were not mandatory but also not frowned upon and showed they were not afraid to show their just how important their faithful practices were. In this way, men were demonstrating something private: their relationship with god and connection to their charge community.

In addition, songs and prayers were also a legitimate space to show affection towards their wives and/or partners and small children or infants. During collective prayer times, men often put their arms around their partners or held their hands, demonstrating affection regardless of the people they were surrounded by. Almost every Sunday I observed men holding their children, at times holding multiple small children while standing. These behaviors are in line with the ideals of religious masculinity: a man that does not hesitate to demonstrate his reverence for his family and ability to be vulnerable in public. Though the Sunday services themselves may facilitate affectionate

displays, these behaviors are indicative of the safe space the Church is for men to rearticulate masculinity. These displays were less common in the Spanish-speaking services, though by no means completely absent.

In exploring the ways in which members of both male-only groups practiced or understood religious masculinity, I relied on the content of our one-on-one interviews. Men from each group shared a common understanding of masculinity that is centered on their perceptions of traditional gender expectations within the family. That is, being masculine is directly related to the execution of heterosexual familial gender norms. Themes of the breadwinning burden and household leadership were markers of masculinity yet within religious masculinity the execution of these gender norms were also contingent upon his ability to balance these roles well. Balance in religious masculinity is an intrinsic step in the attempt of challenging hegemonic masculinity: he needs to be able to demonstrate balance as a practice in his execution of masculinity, his character and other aspects of his life. Though religious masculinity acknowledges the strength and natural position of male leadership as a God-given role, a man is required to navigate these roles responsibly. As stated by Carlos,

> A good man is one that he does not abuse his power, abuse his mandate, I feel that is a good man. Always having the strength to get through tough situations but also having a heart to do things, not think that because we are men a man can't be caring towards other people or to your family, your children, your wife. I feel a real man is someone that can balance his corporal strength and his way of being-not abusing that.

Here, Carlos suggests that masculinity is realized through the restraint of his power, while simultaneously acknowledging that his power is necessary for successfully carrying out his role as a husband and father. Though he stresses the important of balance, he does so by maintaining the naturalization of male dominance. The idea of balance suggests a higher standard for these men to live up to that includes self-awareness about his flaws and natural tendencies. As a man is expected to lead, a higher standard is necessary to ensure he is responsible and effective in his leadership. Achieving balance is therefore very difficult and is associated with religious masculinity and the differentiation from the men in the "world". In this way, religious masculinity sustains male dominance by focusing on the positive traits and admonition of self-awareness and self-improvement. When asked about what makes a failed man, Joshua states that it is a man that is "in touch with his flaws and makes no effort to fix them." Joshua feels men have a responsibility to work hard at his flaws to be considered a real man. A real man who practices religious masculinity therefore keeps working to be deserving of his place at the top. His hard work in shaping his masculinity to fit Jesus'—the best example—is then celebrated, his place of dominance deserving and uncontested.

Religious masculinity does not deny that men have a tendency towards hegemonic masculinity, but instead of giving in to those tendencies, religious masculinity calls for men to resist and control them, highlighting the importance of balance. In this way, we see that hegemonic masculinity is taken for granted as natural, something that

should be controlled, not eradicated. For example, Michael associated masculine tendencies with watching violent sports, such as UFC:

> Men's flesh gravitate towards war, fighting. I like watching fighting, I like that aggression, but I temper it with also understanding and knowing myself… I like the skill, watching a good knock out feeds that to that flesh side of me as a man…it's still there. So understanding that, I'm more self-aware so I can slow down and not have a knee jerk reaction.

Michael's suggestion that fighting is tempered by his religious masculinity legitimizes conventional gender norms that dictate men should be attracted to violence. Through practicing self-awareness that is aligned with this religious masculinity he is able to balance these tendencies and remain outside the realm of conventional masculinity, while continuing to legitimize it. Masculinity therefore is not diminished by the denial of the masculinities of the "flesh" but enhanced by their ability to manage it. When asked to name and describe a man that best demonstrates masculinity, many of the participants used Pastor Ray as an example. One participant says he embodies masculinity because his "temper is under control, [has] patience, loves to be outdoors, not afraid of showing emotion, that's being confident and being a man." This response is indicative on the religious masculinity they aspire to cultivate.

The acquisition of balance in religious masculinity lends itself to further ideals and behaviors that rearticulate what is hegemonic. One of the most common behaviors supported by the participants is the approval of showing emotions besides anger and aggression. A man that is influenced by God is a man that is able to show when he is sad and vulnerable, however, the performance of such emotions are regulated by a consensus of legitimacy- such as death, conviction and love for his family. Legitimacy is contingent upon displaying discernment about what is worthy of allowing vulnerability and the right combination of such is worth celebrating. In addition, his discretion in the performance of emotion further sets him apart from women. Luis states:

> I think their [men] emotions, though they display the same traits, they have stronger character during emotional issues. They [men's] don't easily weep, even though they do weep. I believe that men have a stronger emotional character than women… because that is the way men are. I don't know if it has to do with their DNA or who they are inside, but that is the way men are built. That's what it is.

Luis is implying that men are biologically inclined to resist displays of emotion so that when emotion is displayed, it is more substantial than a woman's because men exhibit better discernment in choosing when and why to display emotion. Though men negotiate performance of emotion with legitimate counter-hegemonic ideals, they remain able to claim and maintain positions of dominance as female displays of vulnerability continue to be discredited.

Religious masculinity is also described unanimously in relation to heteronormative practices such as taking a wife, becoming a father, and being the leader of his household. Many participants cited domestic violence as a marker of failed masculinity as it is exemplifies lack of control but also is a strike against leading his

family spiritually, hindering his ability to realize the ideal masculinity necessary for becoming a good husband. A good husband still recognizes himself as the leader and provider for his family, maintaining his dominance, but his keeping of religious masculinity allows him to further challenge conventional notions of masculinity that dictate the divisions of household labor. Though participants continued to accept traditional gender roles, their obligation to their wives that stemmed from religious masculinity allowed them to recognize inequalities within the home. As was stated by Christopher:

> I can be sitting down and instead of just thinking --oh you [a woman] need to get up and make dinner-- I'll get up and make dinner. Because I feel that I'm obligated and at times if my sisters are there they'll say let me make it, I say no it can't be like that then let me help, let's do this together. I came out of a traditional family as well, my mom had an idea that was passed on to my sisters about the importance of them making sure they knew how to cook. But I got the same lesson and so they sometimes are reminded of that because they have husbands that may be aren't like me.

Christopher recognizes that his religious masculinity is what sets him apart from other men and helping the women in his life around the home is the right thing to do, even though his position as a man does not require him to. Being willing to cross gender roles is facilitated by their religious masculinity and thus facilitates the differentiation between them and those that do not practice religious masculinity.

The heteronormative gender roles, ambition towards balance and self-awareness were common goals for both groups. The acquisition of balance of their masculine tendencies was necessary to prove their masculinity and earn their place as head of households and in domination over women. Their willingness to show affection and participate in household labors that are typically thought of as female were far from an abdication of power, instead, the ability to actualize these behaviors demonstrated power.

Hegemonic Masculinity and the English-speaking group

A common theme among the members of the English-speaking group was their desire to maintain physical strength as a necessary component of their masculinity. Though some men were already inclined towards a life of physical exercise, others did not, and participated in this group, in part to make an effort to employ physical activity in their lives. This desire was further legitimized by the activities within the groups, which revolved largely around physical exercise such as weightlifting and hiking. Members participate in weekly "garage gym" at Pastor Ray's house where they were not only able to meet their commitments towards improving themselves physically, but also have the opportunity to bond and pray with their peers. Members frequently stated that they enjoyed each other's company so much that it was not a chore to maintain this commitment (as sometimes it was as early as 5 a.m.). This adds to their quality of life, according to Joshua, as they enjoy, "fellowship with loving men of god, encouragement, healing, and while hiking you spill life story, bond. All of that is all positivity." Rather than just a meeting with their peers, hiking is the ultimate safe space for bonding and

demonstrating vulnerability. Working out is not only viewed as masculine, but also as safe space to rearticulate hegemonic masculinity. The key event is the summer hike, which is framed as an epic adventure where the men can test their limits and show accomplishment in the conquering of a formidable goal. On his most recent hike, Victor states:

> We go on crazy hikes. At Kings Canyon we almost died, we were 12,000 feet up it was crazy. Honestly, I started to get worried about getting home to see my kids, but we got through this very crazy hike. You can't even explain it. We didn't stop to take pictures we were like deer in headlights about how get off this cliff. Making it through with these guys was amazing.

The epic journey of the hike fosters mutual respect among the group that translates to trust, friendship and support. In addition, this arduous hike provides Victor an opportunity to prioritize relationships in his life, mainly his family and friends in the men's group.

While the hike is typically in the summer, men are still able to connect in weekly workout sessions known as the "garage gym." The point is to work out, but also an opportunity for spiritual growth. Said one participant, "it is physical training but also praying and bonding, chatting: you can talk about what's going on-- an opportunity for release valve." Exercising with their peers becomes an important mechanism to achieve balance. Their strong bonds allow them to challenge hegemonic masculinity in a manner that will not make their own masculinity depreciate. Participants are aware that men are not supposed to ask for support, as is described by Michael:

> We know not to burden anyone else with our stuff. I'm a man so I'll take care of myself not looking for counseling so I think that it gives you an opportunity to be vulnerable outsides…close knit they know you, you get closer you get those opportunities consistently to let off steam before they blow. And when you know those things you can hold each other accountable.

Michael, like his peers, recognizes they are behaving outside the norm, yet feels he is able to because of the relationships they have fostered. What is deemed as commonly unacceptable is legitimized by their relationships, deep connections, and the organization's context.

Achieving such formidable goals as a group was the catalyst to not only their personal growth but also their ability to bond and trust each other. The success of the physical, spiritual and mental growth was correlated with the level of trust and friendship found among the men. Once the trust has been established between men, another member whom has not been a part of the trust building since the beginning could jeopardize the established rapport of the group. Though these men were enthusiastic about bonding with each other, an "outsider" would most likely cause the group to regress back to practicing hegemonic masculinity that is guarded and reluctant to be vulnerable. In discussing if he is comfortable sharing his feelings in the group, Joshua says:

Yes. I do in the group that I'm in mostly because I've been with those guys for a long time. Vulnerability breeds vulnerability. So when you hear someone break something down that they are going through and you can see that it's hurtful or emotional for them you can say you have a feeling that is similar. I know I'm not judging that person so you feel the same sense of trust that what you say is staying in that group.

Joshua is giving us insight into the dynamics of his group- that vulnerability is important and needs a safe space in which to take place. Joshua is also suggesting that religious masculinity needs the strength of these relationships to both acquire and sustain it.

In this case, challenging hegemonic masculinity, especially the norm hat a man should be emotionally detached and unwilling to share his vulnerabilities—was explicitly a part of the goals of the "Push" program. However, the ability to challenge hegemonic gender behaviors is made possible through engaging with them, in this case by working out and maintaining physical strength and conquering strenuous hikes that demonstrate strength, courage and tenacity. However, emotional and vulnerable displays were contingent on the absence of other men that had yet to bond with group. The men in the group were in consensus about being guarded with the newcomers, this was another instance where practicing hegemonic masculinity was acceptable.

In addition, failure to accept legitimate gender roles as prescribed by their religious masculinity is an indication of confusion about one's identity. A man that does not exemplify or attempts to exemplify masculinity is confused about who he is and unable to demonstrate authenticity. A truly masculine man will remain loyal to his ideals, despite any cultural factors that might influence them otherwise. When asked who might be the least masculine figure he could think of, Christopher mentioned the actor John Wayne:

Well I think that he is trying to portray somebody, so he's portrayed what culture wants to see… He needs be seen as his real self, not the tough guy, the guy that doesn't cry, the man that is not influenced by what he *should* do is the right thing.

Authenticity and consistency is of value to Christopher. When viewing masculinity as an inherent quality, it is truly masculine to rearticulate hegemonic masculinity despite the social sanctions that may arise outside of the practice of religious masculinity. Performing masculinity that is contrary to religious masculinity is not only frowned upon, but considered failed masculinity. Being brave enough to go against conventional gender norms without concern for persecution is what a "real man" is all about.

Hegemonic Masculinity and the Spanish-speaking group

Religious masculinity is indeed a practice, whose progress is demonstrated in a man's actions, most celebrated in contexts that are especially challenging. Though these ideals where shared by the congregation as a whole, the small groups of the Spanish-speaking group faced their own set of unique challenges. To begin, participants of the Spanish-speaking small groups were not all on the same page as to what the goals of the program and their reasons for attending. Though some of the men found this space as an

opportunity to share and seek the support from their peers, most participants attended the meetings with the intent to broaden their spiritual and biblical intellect. Therefore, there were mixed feelings about using this space to engage in vulnerability. On the legitimacy of performing emotion in the small group setting Luis states:

> I would say as long as it's related directly to god, like an epiphany type of thing. I don't know if every single meeting, the same person cries every single time I am sure… that they would kind of look at him like look there is the *chillón* (cry baby) … you know… here comes the crybaby. I'm sure that there would be some sort of negative connotation if you cried all the time. One time when you came to Jesus and its cool maybe you cried then but a year later…all right… if it's involved directly with God.

Luis is very clear about his disdain for vulnerability and showing that in this case, the group did not prioritize emotional support. Showing ambition regarding the pursuit of biblical knowledge was a more pronounced as proof of masculinity. Knowledge was more celebrated than emotional vulnerability.

This emphasis of biblical knowledge over demonstration of vulnerability allowed for a tolerated disengagement, where participants where implicitly excused from any obligation to engage in the conversation of the small group. In this way the men in the small groups contradicted the agenda of the small group of cultivating religious masculinity by maintaining hegemonic masculinity—that a man is not expected to demonstrate vulnerability and his desire to hold back is his manly prerogative and should be respected as such.

According to the men interviewed in this group, the lack of engagement in vulnerability is attributed lack of relatability, both among the men and in structure of the program. Members of the Spanish-speaking group included recent immigrants from Venezuela and Peru and Mexican-Americans that have lived in the United States their whole lives. Participants recognized this as difference and hindered their ability to connect and trust each other. When asked about why men do not readily demonstrate vulnerability in the small groups, Fernando attributed it to the *machista* masculinity demonstrated by his Mexican-American peers and the structure of the program:

> I want to remind you that the base is created over a *gringo* (American) platform. So when we try to apply that American platform to another platform that is completely different, you can't expect the same result.

Fernando is explicitly challenging the structure of the small group as un-relatable therefore not effective. He is suggesting that the *gringo* type structure is not accounting for the varying masculine attitudes that may be found among Latino men. Through my observations of the one "Redeemed Men" meeting I was able to attend in Spanish, I was able to confirm some of the behaviors Fernando was talking about. Fernando was the discussion leader, and it was the Central American members that were most likely discuss their spiritual knowledge and open up about how it relates practically to their personal concerns such as their marriages, citizenship status and desires to have children. In

contrast, their Mexican-American peers sat quietly, with folded arms and making very little eye contact during the discussion.

Though Fernando is correct about the differing structures of the Spanish and English speaking groups, these findings demonstrate that the differences are not necessarily about the American platform or the assumption of varying Latino masculinity. The main differences between these groups are the structures that the different programs lend themselves to different levels of relationships. To begin, programs tend to be seasonal. While weekly meetings for all members were routine, the "Push" program was especially intense and designed as a summer program, consisting not only of the weekly meetings and garage gyms, but also six Saturdays in addition to the summer hiking trip. Though many in the Spanish-speaking group spoke English fluently, they did not opt to participate in the summer program. The summer program is known to be a special commitment that requires much of each member's free time. The time constraints coupled with the lack of intimate homosocial relationships is what keeps the Spanish-speaking members from committing to the program. As Joshua from the "Push" program has previously pointed out, a large part of his motivation for showing up to group meetings was the presence of his buddies. The structure of "Redeemed Men" does not include the social extracurricular activities that "Push" provided and so there is less opportunity to bond and build the mutual respect and affection needed to make a best friend. Absent of such relationships, the Spanish speaking members have less incentive to show up and be vulnerable.

This is clear in the data found in the interviews while the English-speaking participants were enthusiastic about their relationships with their peers, the Latino ministry was more inclined to be disengaged from their peers. Their lack of connection does now allow a safe enough space for vulnerability, contradicting their religious masculinity and its call for authenticity. Despite this contradiction, the groups continue as they are, chalking up this disconnect to "manhood" as was discussed by the Pastor of the Spanish-speaking ministry, with the hopes of future improvement.

The association of masculinity with heteronormative behaviors such as taking a wife and having children was a dominant theme. All the interviews cited a connection with masculinity as a provider and leader of his family, which includes the bending of gender roles in the name of fulfilling their familial obligations. In addition, when participants were asked to describe a "bad man" they unanimously stated that a bad man is a selfish man: one who does not put his family first and lives only for himself. Though gender role bending within their households was a common theme among the responses, another common theme was gender essentialism in the differences between men and women. Many of the men discussed propensity towards emotional behavior (such as crying or sensitivity) as a biologically female characteristic.

Another common theme was a desire from all participants to be set apart from "other" men that did not live according to the same standards set by their religious beliefs. They wanted to reject extreme gender norms associated with masculinity, such as violence, aggression and sexual promiscuity. Instead, they promoted balance and self-awareness to monitor their behavior and ensure they remain above reproach in not

engaging in extreme masculine gender norms. The similarities between the groups are attributed being part of the same larger congregation, while their differences are attributed in the structures of their respective programs. Though both had empowerment goals, "Push" had a much more rigorous agenda that promoted intimacy within their homosocial relationships, and agenda that "Redeemed Men" lacked.

Discussion & Conclusion

The negotiations of hegemonic masculinity in male-only organizations vary by the philosophies and practices of the organizations, and by the local context in which they are embedded. In this study, I explored the negotiations of masculinities contextually within Valley Church, a religious organization, and among men that chose to engage in one of two small men's groups within the organization. Men in this organization engaged in *religious masculinity* that was embedded within the religious beliefs of the organization as a whole. Religious masculinity served as guide for the type of men they should aspire to be. Both the English and Spanish-speaking ministries demonstrated similarities in the heteronormative practices of being an ideal husband and father. These ideals provided a space where the men felt it was acceptable to challenge hegemonic masculinity by taking on greater responsibilities in the divisions of household labor and showing affection towards their children. Recall Christopher, who stated that his faith made him feel secure enough to bend gender roles, while not having to contest his position of power as a man.

Men engaged in *religious masculinity* were able to challenge some conventional gender norms associated with hegemonic masculinity because their place as men at the top of the gender hierarchy was maintained; their gender dominance was normalized by their religious beliefs, allowing them to reimagine a religious masculinity that emphasized some traits and aspects of masculinity that were not always associated with hegemonic masculinity. As the goals of the male-only programs called for empowerment in articulating religious masculinity, the two groups challenged hegemonic masculinity, in an effort to set themselves apart from non-religious masculinities. However, challenging hegemonic masculinity was contingent upon their borrowing from aspects of hegemonic masculinity. That is, challenging mainstream masculinity was only possible by practicing other forms of hegemonic masculinity, such as sports or intellectual competition, which legitimized the alternate form of religious masculinity.

For the English-Speaking group, defying hegemonic masculinity to display vulnerability was made possible by the depth of the relationships between members within each group, facilitated by practices that reinforced hegemonic masculinity prowess. Specifically, the English-speaking group's program had a structure that fostered intimate friendships by providing opportunities to bond during physical activities such as hiking and working out on a weekly basis. Sharing moments in intense physical activities facilitated the building of trust and promotes vulnerability. In this way, challenging hegemonic masculinity was made possible by engaging in avenues that legitimize it, leaving their masculinity uncompromised. Men in this group valued each other's friendships therefore giving their time was not a burden and they looked forward to their meetings and readily accepted each other's vulnerability. The Spanish-speaking

group's program did not have the same structure that promoted these relationships thus did not provide a safe enough space to challenge conventional gender norms or be vulnerable together. Their interactions sustained hegemonic masculinity by engaging in competition with one another through displays of biblical and spiritual intellect. Interestingly, men in the Spanish-speaking ministry were more likely to identify as feminists, despite their classed and racial limitations to male privilege. As we see with both groups, challenging hegemonic masculinity was made possible by engaging in avenues that legitimize it, leaving their masculinity uncompromised. Male dominance, therefore, trumped the empowerment goals of the male-only programs conflating male dominance with being "more like Jesus" Prioritizing male dominance in male organizations is not novel, as Schrock and Padavic (2007) found in their study of domestic violence intervention programs. Though the program they investigated in their study had a goal to turn men into feminists, the men collaborated with each other in their discourse and practice to justify their control over women (Schrock and Padavic 2007).

In general, a male-only program is deemed successful in reaching its goals of challenging hegemonic masculinity as long as there is a reframing of hegemonic masculinity that legitimizes members' engagement in behaviors that would otherwise threaten their dominance. This study confirms previous research that masculinities are dynamic (Connell [1995] 2005); Flores 2013; Morris 2012; Pascoe 2014; Shrock and Schwalbe 2009), and that by evaluating the practices and processes of men, researchers can think critically about the changing contexts of masculinity, even as men attempt to reaffirm their dominance over women through hegemonic masculinity practices (Carrigan et al. 1985; Shrock and Schwalbe 2009; Pascoe 2014)). Furthermore, this study shows that men as gendered beings are in fact limited by hegemonic masculinity in their attempts to challenge conventional gender norms, and attempts to do so appear to be only marginally significant.

In addition, this study supports the feminist view of religion as a platform for female subordination. Male-only groups that emerge within religious organizations that are intent on empowerment often frame these goals at the expense of female advancement. Though the scope of these goals differ between organizations like The Promise Keepers, where female subordination is explicitly mandated as a means for male empowerment, religopatriachal ideologies permeate the practice of religion. This is true for the groups of this study, where there was willingness to bend gender roles and accept gender equality to some degree, yet female subordination was still naturalized and a male leadership over women and family is an intrinsic step in achieving masculinity.

Limitations

This study is limited by the interview sample size (N=11), time limitations, and restricted access. The insights discussed in this study must be understood in this context. Additional interviews of participants of male-only programs, including men in leadership positions, would help support the theoretical assumptions and empirical implications of this work. This study would also benefit from expanding the sample to male members of the congregation that do not participate in male-only groups to evaluate the effectiveness of the groups in altering constructions of masculinity in addition to the study of the

female members of the congregation to gain an understanding of how women aid the dynamics and constructions of masculinities.

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