Bronies – Brave, Tolerant, and True to Themselves: Interpretations of Masculinity by Male Fans of My Little Pony Friendship is Magic

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Abstract

This paper explores contemporary understandings of masculinity as interpreted and mediated by adult male fans of a traditionally female TV show, My Little Pony Friendship is Magic. Ideas regarding gender have been shifting over the past several years, allowing more liberal interpretations to surface and begin to take root. Our ideas of what it means to be masculine are bypassing the traditional values of physical strength, a penchant for violence, lack of emotion and hypersexualization, expanding to include a variety of models featuring myriad attributes, some of which may once have been considered ‘feminine’ (Connell 1995; Kimmel 2008; Anderson 2011). As demonstrated by the young adult fans of My Little Pony Friendship is Magic (bronies) interviewed for this research, expressions of mascu
Lininity and femininity are no longer so rigidly bound to one’s sex. The overall meanings of masculinity and femininity are losing clout as the defining markers of one’s gender, becoming instead ways to express one’s specific identity as the characteristics are mixed together as markers of adulthood.

Introduction

In early March, I attended a small convention for fans of My Little Pony Friendship is Magic (MLP) which took place in a Holiday Inn in Alexandria, Virginia. Around noon on Sunday, everything was wrapping up. Merchants were packing their goods, new friends were exchanging info, and everyone seemed to be running around the hotel lobby and conference rooms saying goodbye. I was sitting along a wall, making observations while I waited for an interviewee to finish packing her booth, when I heard a guitar picking out a familiar tune. A group of bronies, young adult fans of MLP, had gathered in the lobby and were singing the My Little Pony theme song. I listened for a moment, smiled, then returned to my note-taking. After a couple minutes, I realized they were singing more songs from the show. I looked up again to see that the crowd had grown from a handful of guys to form a massive circle of twenty-five or thirty young men and women, arms draped over their neighbors’ shoulders as they swayed and sang. The fun was infectious. People strolled by me, quietly joining in on their own or with their companions, others happily recorded video of the song circle, and the circle continued to grow. Hotel staff and non-brony patrons watched the group, with varying amounts of confusion or curiosity on their faces, before moving on and out of the way. By the time the circle broke up, they ha
d sung about 9 or 10 songs, all with an immense amount of gusto. When they stopped, cheers and applause rang throughout the lobby, from bronies and outside observers alike. Neighbors turned to each other and hugged, seemingly whether they knew each other or not. High fives and “bro-hoofs” (fist bumps) were shared by all before dispersing.

After the conference I met up with my friend and began recounting the day. I mentioned the sing-a-long to her, using the word ‘silly’ in my description. She asked what I meant by ‘silly,’ to which I replied, “Oh, y’know, just that a group of people were singing songs from a cartoon in a hotel lobby. Just— they were having fun, it wasn’t like some deep, serious discussion. They were just having silly fun.” What I later realized was that the ‘silliness’ of the moment served a much greater purpose than supplying the bronies with a lighthearted end to the convention. It allowed them to express themselves in a way that men in American society are typically deterred from doing, because of the inherent emotionality, supposedly a ‘feminine’ trait.

The bronies allowed themselves to be a little vulnerable, to open up emotionally. By doing that through a playful, apparently non-serious behavior, the bronies appeared to put some distance between themselves and the emotions. The songs they sang often conveyed some idea of friendship or kindness in a way that men might feel is not freely accessible to them. That ‘silliness’ of singing acts as a sort of force field around the bronies that allowed them to express affection, community, and respect sincerely to each other. It allowed them to bond in what could be interpreted as a ‘touchy-feely’ or feminine manner, without engaging in traditional ‘male bonding’ behavior (violent, alcohol-fueled, hypersexualized) while making it acceptable through the sheer humor of the moment.

Why Study Bronies?

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of Research

The prominence of bronies in internet culture
made an impact on me when I first heard of the phenomenon. Many people I spoke with were certain I’d be working from a very small population, and were surprised to learn that “approximately 7 to 12.4 million people” identified as bronies (The Brony Census 2013). This number indicates that it's a much bigger trend than just a handful of guys watching the show “ironically.” When I first began to dig into the community, I found that a number of the bronies I talked with were often openly dismissive of “traditional” gender ideologies, such as the idea that guys can’t like girly things. This struck me as somewhat revolutionary when homosexuality (i.e. “feminized” men) is still being treated with a significant amount of hatred and persecution. The fact that these guys were willing to be open about their love for the show when they could still face abuse for stepping outside their prescribed gender role was both inspiring and intriguing. I believed these bronies were reflecting a larger cultural shift in Western conceptions of masculinity, that their openness and willingness to admit their appreciation for a “traditionally” feminine show might become more popular in the near future. I wondered about the implications of a masculinity that wasn’t based on devaluing other genders and sexualities. Could it result in a culture that was less tolerant, or completely intolerant of all kinds of violence based on sex, gender identity, and sexuality? Exploring that is well beyond the scope of this research, but I hope to investigate the culture shift that I believe is taking place in the brony community in order to understand whether the show plays a significant role in creating or supporting a new masculinity for its male viewers.

When describing my initial research idea to friends and family, I would frequently receive the question, “Why did you pick this topic?” The first few times I had to field this inquiry, I would struggle through an answer, citing first my own interest in the show as well as my own curiosity toward the brony community. If I wasn’t pressed for time
or feeling awkward, I would remember to mention the "crisis of manhood" discussion that had contributed to my interest in the topic, and feel disappointed and hesitant to continue if they were unaware of the argument. As I’ve progressed in my research and talked to my participants, I’ve come to better understand why I chose this topic.

The book Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men, by Michael Kimmel, argues that the hard-won progress for and by American women for gender equality – along with the ever-growing changes in American politics, health, economics, and education – has resulted in a multitude of consequences for their male counterparts. Women’s entrance into higher education and the workforce, access to birth control, a struggling economy, prolonged adolescence and a lack of guidance to the world of adulthood have left men in the lurch. There is no longer a clear definition for ‘manhood,’ causing men to struggle with their identities as they search for a clearly defined role in modern society. On the one hand, many men still try to adhere to older ideas of masculinity: physical strength, limited or nonexistent emotional displays and adopting the role of protector and breadwinner. On the other, they find their girlfriends and wives capable of providing for themselves, physical strength losing much of its relevance in increasingly urbanized and technological environments, and hiding their emotions grows ever more challenging as they attempt to understand who they are and who they can be.

Part of my motivation for choosing this topic is the desire to draw attention to the need to equalize opportunities for women as well as men. Advances in women’s rights have begun to support the need for a discussion on how men – straight, gay, or other – are constricted in our society, by patriarchal ideals. Men and women share the need for emotional expression, displays of affection, and the freedom to like whatever they choose without facing unnecessary judgment.

Review of the Literature
This research uses the theory of social constructionism to examine the concept of masculinity and the effects of social change on the expression of manhood. Connell (1995) presents the concept of hegemonic masculinity and its production and reproduction exemplified in society through media. Anderson (2009), both agreeing with and criticizing Connell, suggests a new conceptualization, inclusive masculinity theory, to account for gendered practices that hegemonic masculinity fails to cover (32). Both theories emphasize the fluidity of definitions of masculinity relative to the cultural-historical context in which a particular definition was developed. Both also recognize the importance of media in presenting or reinforcing these definitions, but Anderson took it a step further to point out media's ability to subvert hegemonic masculinity. Anderson suggests that hegemonic masculinity theory is not sufficient to describe current gender relations, evidenced by a decrease in particular identifiers of hegemonic masculinity and the more visible emergence of non-hegemonic masculinities. Existing literature on the demographics of unanticipated fans of My Little Pony Friendship is Magic provides a recent example for this study to explore.

In spite of the fact that the definition of masculinity is fluid, most individuals tend to think there exists but a single definition that has persisted throughout history and across cultures. A review of the history of masculinity, such as Michael Kimmel’s 1996 book, Manhood in America: A Cultural History, reveals the prevalence of diverse views of masculinity. Kimmel (1996, 2008) discusses the various definitions of masculinity in different periods of America's history. The disparity in definitions arises out of a difference in political, cultural, and economic context best evidenced by the conceptions of masculinity before and after the Industrial Revolution in America. Agrarian work was fairly egalitarian, with both sexes performing arduous labor in order to provide for the family. The second industrial revolution, during the se
cond half of the 19th century, was witness to a great urban migration; cities offered steady wages, the possibility of upward mobility, and an escape from the failing family farm. It also led to an increase in the gendered division of labor, mostly relegating women to the home and men to places of work beyond the home. The woman's labor, out of public view and producing no income, failed to garner the same social value as men's work. The wages from men's work were necessary for buying the things a family once produced for itself, such as food and clothing. Women, devalued alongside their work, became dependent on men for survival. Masculinity and femininity now encapsulated two highly differentiated sets of expectations for men and women; previous ideas of masculinity and femininity for agrarian life had expected hard work from both men and women, but these new economic conditions resulted in a structure of work that allowed for a clear division of labor expected to be done by each sex. These expectations were easily contained within one's supposed sex role.

The idea of sex roles was formed based upon the concepts of social roles and innate sex difference. The idea of social roles, identities that carried with them a certain set of expectations, was well accepted in social science by the 1930s. The sex role concept was produced by combining social roles with the late-nineteenth century debate which insisted upon the innate difference of certain behaviors and capabilities between the sexes. Sex role theory combined the expectations associated with social roles to the naturalized distinctions of sex differences to create a concept which held that “being a man or a woman means enacting a general set of expectations which are attached to one's sex” (Connell 1995: 22, emphasis in original). Thus, certain behaviors, attitudes, and duties came to be aligned with one sex or the other, and were presumed also to be innate to that sex.

The acceptance of sex role theory in the social sciences essentially stifled any discussion re
Regarding gender relations or “the effects of expectations or norms in social life. They were simply assumed to exist and to be effective” (Connell 1995: 24). The positioning of sex roles as 'naturalized' lent the theory a near-invincibility that was finally breached in the 1970s with the pressure of feminist and gay movements, which recognized that the male sex role, or masculinity, was based on subordinating non-masculine groups. One's adherence to masculinity isn't determined by sex alone; if one's race or sexuality did not align with those of the men in power, that person could be considered non-masculine as well. So while women were certainly a target for subordination, so were gay men and black men (Connell 1995: 24). Researchers were now able to analyze sex roles in terms of power, including power hierarchies among men, as Joseph Pleck (1977) and Jon Snodgrass (1977) attempted, but the reciprocity of the two sex roles made a real analysis of power difficult. Pleck dismissed the validity of sex role theory in 1981 by criticizing the “assumption of accordance between norm and personality – the idea that conformity to sex role norms is what promotes psychological adjustment” (Connell 1995: 25). Non-conformity to an imposed sex role simply makes people “feel personally inadequate and insecure” (Pleck 1981: 160; quoted in Connell 1995: 25) Sex role theory actually suppressed social change from within gender relations.

The dismissal of sex role theory opened the door for new approaches to the study of masculinity. Analyses of masculinity across cultures and time illustrated the variety of definitions and the transformational capacity of the concept, and emphasized the multiplicity of masculinities, rather than its position as a solitary, static construct (Connell 1995: 28). Many historical surveys and ethnographies regarding masculinities also reveal just how intentionally a certain archetype of masculinity was constructed by institutions to produce men appropriate for the context of war, economic dominance, or family building (Connell 1995: 29). Addi
tionally, the disparate masculinities found in different classes within our own cultures affirmed the possibility for and presence of multiple masculinities at one time in one culture (Connell 1995: 36). The result of this new knowledge was the creation of hegemonic masculinity theory, which concentrated on “the relations between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination” (Connell 1995: 37, emphasis in original).

Hegemonic masculinity theory uses Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony to reveal the power dynamics between masculinities. Hegemony works by naturalizing the position of the dominant class as well as the subordinate position of those who don't fit the hegemonic archetype. It is important to understand that hegemonic masculinity is not a type of masculinity itself, but “the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable” (Connell 1995: 76). Anderson labels the currently dominant masculinity as “orthodox masculinity” and identifies some of the key elements of this masculinity such as anti-femininity and homophobia (2009: 31).

The hegemonic masculinity is not always represented by the majority of men in a society, nor is it always represented by the men who wield the most power (Connell 1995: 77). Very often it is represented by highly visible figures, especially those which feature prominently in mass media. Actors, professional athletes, and movie or TV show characters often display the appropriate masculinity to justify the patriarchal structure of a culture (Connell 1995: 77; Anderson 2009: 30; Brod and Kaufman 1994; Kendall 2000). Upholding this type of masculinity, to any degree, ensures that most men will continue to reap the benefits of living in a society that values the men over the women (Anderson 2009: 36-37; Connell 1995: 79; Kendall 2000: 261).

Mass media plays a major role in the (re)production of hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel 2008; Kivel
Kivel and Johnson (2009) noted a link between media consumption and identity construction in their study, which used several focus groups to perform collective memory work on prominent media influences men remembered seeing as boys. The participants used the messages they took from certain media, such as G.I. Joe and Top Gun to help negotiate their transition from boyhood to manhood. However, media has the ability to increase the prominence of other types of masculinities as well (Anderson 2009; Conseur, Hathcote, and Kim 2008; Kimmel 2008; Neville 2009). Anderson identifies these alternative masculinities as “inclusive masculinities” and differentiates these men from their orthodox-adherent brothers by their “emotional and [physical] homosocial proximity,” a lack of homophobia, and acceptance of more feminine traits and behaviors (Anderson 2009: 8).

Inclusive masculinity theory, Anderson claims, arises out of a decreasing social stigma of homosexuality. Homosexuality was seen as the expression of feminine traits in men, and with femininity serving as the antithesis of masculinity, homosexual behavior—such as a sexual interest in men—was classified as feminine and thus the lowest of the low in the masculinity hierarchy (Connell 1995: 78). Homophobia, specifically the fear of being perceived as gay and suffering the consequences of such a perception, necessitates “hypermasculinity... for boys and it [makes] the expression of femininity among boys taboo” (Anderson 2009: 7). Anderson sees this trend of “homophobia, femophobia and compulsory heterosexuality”—which he calls “homohysteria”—fading in Western society. The accessibility of the internet and the preponderance of pornography therein has exposed much of the younger population to homosexual pornography, “commodifying and normalizing it in the process” (2009: 6). Cultural messages through media and legislation in several American states and European countries are telling people that “homosexuality is okay, homophobia is not” (2009: 6). Homosexuality is becoming se
en less and less as a deviant behavior attributed to a sick individual and more as one possible identity out of many. The historical association of homosexuality with femininity and femininity with anti-masculinity is becoming less prominent in Western culture, leading to more inclusive masculinities.

Michael Kimmel's Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men notes the future of these inclusive masculinities, but emphasizes that our culture is not quite there yet. Young men live in the world or life stage Kimmel calls Guyland: [Where and] when one has access to all the tools of adulthood with few of the moral and familial constraints that urge sober conformity. These “almost men” struggle to live up to a definition of masculinity they feel that had no part in creating, and yet from which they feel powerless to escape. (2008:43)

This is a life stage between childhood and adulthood, where young men desperately want to prove that they are men, but do not want to take on the mantle of responsibility that comes with being an actual adult (2008:4). Kimmel argues that Guyland is a place of violence – against women and other men – sex, false bravado, and a fount of a great deal of society's problematic views of women and homosexuality. Kimmel discusses the impact of “the Guy Code...the rules that govern behavior in Guyland, the criteria that will be used to evaluate whether any particular guy measures up” (2008:45). Usually, these rules are enacted in disturbingly violent ways, often physically, sometimes sexually. Kimmel describes three forces within Guyland which often allow the crimes performed in Guyland to go unpunished. “[A] culture of entitlement, a culture of silence, and a culture of protection” shields guys from owning their actions and living with the consequences (2008:59). With entitlement, Kimmel discusses how boys feel that, if they prove their masculinity they are then “entitled to power” (2008:60, emphasis in original). Power over women, power over each other, power over their own lives – thes
are the expected rewards for becoming a man, and young men sometimes get so fed up waiting for someone to give it to them, they take it by force instead. The culture of silence refers primarily to the passive bystander role that many guys play in their peer group. Even when guys witness violence, which they know is wrong, they'll often remain silent because “[they're] afraid of being outcast, marginalized, shunned. Or they're afraid the violence just might be turned against them” (2008:61). Sexist comments and jokes go un-criticized, bullying goes unchecked, and rapes go unreported, because proving your manhood means standing with your brothers. “That silence, though, is what gives perpetrators and the victims the idea that everyone supports the Guy Code” (2008:62). Finally, there is the culture of protection, where the community around the boys” ever did anything wrong, claiming that, instead of the boys being criminals, “'things [got] a little out of hand'” (2008:63). Opposing the culture of protection comes with the risk that the rest of the community will ostracize or attack “the whistleblowers” for overreacting (ibid.). Kimmel states that challenging these three cultures is what will shape our culture into one where men and women are seen as equal-status individuals, respected, and not assaulted for their sex or sexuality.

Interest regarding the fan community of My Little Pony Friendship is Magic has grown to a point where it, too, is gaining its own research literature. Two researchers and an independent brony produced three quantitative studies on the demographics of bronies. Edwards and Redden (n.d.), through a massive online survey, developed “The Brony Study” and a fan by the name of “Coder” (2012, 2013) generated the “Brony Herd Census and State of the Herd Report.” These three studies identify the majority of fans of the show as white, single, heterosexual males with some college education. As white heterosexual males, these fans align with three of the key tenants of today's hegemonic masculinity.
It is at this juncture of apparent presentation of hegemonic masculinity ideals, internet identities, and interest in an originally “feminine” show that this study intends to investigate.

Setting
My Little Pony was developed by the Hasbro Company in 1983 as a toy line of brightly-colored plastic ponies, marketed for girls. Beginning in 1984 and carrying on throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the toy line was adapted into several animated movies and three TV series (Hasbro 2012). In 2010, the show was re-imagined by artist and writer Lauren Faust, known by her earlier work on the shows Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends and The Powerpuff Girls, both of which received Emmy nominations (IMDb 2012). Faust redesigned the ponies and introduced a new storyline. The show's release was followed by a critique on a blog, which in turn spurred interest in the online community: The blog "Cartoon Brew" wrote a post condemning the existence of the toy-driven show. Members of popular forum "4chan's comic and cartoon board (/co/)", quickly criticized and poked fun at the alarmist tone of the piece. Several members, curious about the subject matter, actually watched the first episode of the new series and found it absolutely unlike anything they were expecting. The news quickly spread across the Internet and more viewers tuned in to see what the fuss was about. (Dennis 2011)

Out of this, the “brony” fan base grew. These fans interacted primarily online, developing their own websites such as Equestria Daily and MLP Forums to share user-created music, artwork, and fan-fiction based on the show, its images, and its musical score.

Methods
To carry out my research, I conducted semi-formal interviews with six bronies and an informal group interview with 13 other bronies. I found most of these participants online through the My Little Pony subforum on the website reddit.com, and I met several others at Cloudsdale Congress, the brony
convention in Virginia. All of my informants were gathered through convenience or snowball sampling. Most of my interviews were text-based, conducted over Skype or email, though three were conducted in person. I also conducted a group interview with several of my participants from the MLP subreddit to understand how bronies related to each other and whether their interpretations of masculinity really overlapped the way they often appeared. I also used information gathered in the Brony Census of 2012 and 2013. The Brony Census was organized and conducted by a brony known as Coder. He was interested in discovering more about the community he had joined. In 2012, 9,015 bronies participated in the survey; that number more than doubled in 2013 to 21,637 participants.

In my interviews, I used semi-structured and informal group interviews to gather descriptions of the fan community from voluntary participants found online, primarily through the websites reddit.com and mlpforums.com. All individual interview participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent form before being interviewed, or, if being interviewed online, to acknowledge their consent to participate within the interview.

I also used information gathered and distributed through the 2012 and 2013 editions of the Brony Census. Additionally, I took field notes during Cloudsdale Congress, and I have used these observations in my research.

"After a Few Episodes, I was Hooked": The Appeal of Ponies

An interest in cartoons among an older audience is not especially unusual. The main population of entertainment consumers—young adult men—is flocking to the theaters to see live-action interpretations of their favorite childhood cartoons, such as Transformers, G.I. Joe, and the multitude of superhero films featuring classic heroes in gritty reboots (Kimmel 2008:145). Children’s television, too, often features a decent level of adult humor, usually to entertain the parents that feel obliga
ted to watch TV with their children. The intense draw of contemporary cartoons for young adult viewers is likely based on three main factors: the strong nostalgia for their childhood cartoons, the adult humor, and a dedication to eye-catching animation in today’s kids’ TV. Shows like Spongebob Squarepants and Adventure Time have drawn in a similar college-age crowd, perhaps as the overwrought students search for a way to escape from their stress through crude and simple humor. The guys in Kimmel’s ethnography agree that their engagement with most media is in an effort “to relax, to hang out, to have fun,” (2008:147). They forget to add, however, that they are not just partaking in an occasional fit of relaxation, but that “these distractions together comprise a kind of fantasy realm to which guys retreat constantly...avoiding the daily responsibilities of adulthood,” (ibid.).

So how do these “kid-friendly,” less violent cartoons factor into guys’ entertainment choices? Some have favored cartoons over live action since childhood, while others are looking for a break from the blood and gore constantly filling their TV screens. Robbie, who cites his childhood love of cartoons for even considering the show, found that many of his other interests matched up well with MLP. In addition to his appreciation for Lauren Faust and many of the well-respected animators and writers, Robbie’s interest in film editing, music, theatre and visual art furthered his fascination with the show. “The music is great,” he says, praising both William Anderson, the composer and Daniel Ingram, the songwriter for the ponies’ songs. “[Ingram’s] even able to squeeze in multiple references to many different musicals. Off the top of my head, he’s given homage to Into the Woods, Sunday in the Park with George, and The Music Man.” These sorts of references are undoubtedly for the older audience, as well as for the fun and gratification of the creators of the show.

The writers and animators really go the extra mile that they really don’t need to. The inclusion of
Big Lebowski ponies, references to things like Doctor Who, actors from Star Trek to play characters reminiscent of their role on said show or a shot for shot homage to Star Wars aren’t necessary [for the younger audience.] (Robbie 2013)

Dan, another brony, shares Robbie’s love of cartoons. But more than that, he “[found MLP] to be rather relaxing and cute...and a good break from the standard violent shows” (2013).

Once viewers are drawn in by the art style, the clever jokes and pop culture references, they find even better reasons to stick around. Pinkie Pie, Twilight Sparkle and Fluttershy don’t exactly sound like names of complex, well-designed characters, but the image brought to mind by the mares’ names is a simple surface treatment of “real characters with flaws” (Robbie 2013). Any fan can be expected to have a favorite character from their chosen show, but bronies seem to take it to another level. Disagreement persists, and presumably will forever as to which pony is “best pony.” Checking the comments section of any pony-related Youtube video, tumblr post, deviantART submission or fan-fiction site will expose the reader to a great diversity of opinions among the generally agreeable brony community. Rarity, Applejack and Rainbow Dash, the other three of the “Mane Six” have their legions of fans as well. Sometimes bronies attach to certain characters because they’re “just plainly adorable,” as Scootaloo is to Dan (2013). Other times, a brony’s appreciation for a pony is based on his or her identification with her or the complexity of the character, sometimes an outright betrayal of her initial presentation. Rarity, who is Stephen and Robbie’s favorite pony, is one such character. Robbie viewed her with some apprehension for the first several episodes, because she’s presented as a fashion-conscious “high-class” pony. Robbie feared she would persist as a stereotypical, “overly ridiculous ‘girly-girl’ type of character,” but later found that she was the character he related to the most. Rarity secured Robbie’s approval in the 1
4th episode of season one, “Suited for Success.” In this episode, Rarity is commissioned by her five friends to create gowns for their attendance at the Grand Galloping Gala. Robbie, as a freelance film editor, identified with “the frustration of having to deal with...completely unreasonable clientele who have no idea what they’re talking about and giving rather unreasonable demands.” Robbie also likes that the show and design fields to see that Rarity is a serious and dedicated designer through “the use of phrases like, ‘That color’s too obtrusive, wait until you see it in the light,’” and the fact that she wears glasses when she’s working. Glasses are commonly used in cartoons to identify a nerdy character, but for Rarity they are a tool for work. The occasional inclusion of her glasses demonstrates her complexity and how a character, much like a real person, can’t be defined by one aspect of her personality or appearance. For Stephen, Rarity “embodies a lot of the things I like about the show in general. While she could easily have been a very bland archetypal ‘fashionista’ character, Rarity is much more developed...she’s a fashion designer...a devoted artist” (2013).

Rarity is also a favorite of Sarah’s, a female brony I met at Cloudsdale Congress. While drifting through the small conference room that served as the merchandise hall for the Con, I was tempted to stop at a table full of etched glasses, featuring the Cutie Marks of well-known characters. Cutie Marks are the emblems that appear on a pony’s flank when they discover their true talent, an indicator of what they are meant to do with their life. Sarah had drinking glasses, shot glasses and flasks, inscribed with a variety of Cutie Marks. While I struggled to decide which Cutie Mark to show my allegiance to, Sarah and I began talking our favorite ponies. We agreed on Applejack, but differed on Rainbow Dash, my other favorite, and Rarity. As we discussed our reasoning, I decided to ask Sarah for an interview, somewhat on a whim, since I ha
didn’t planned on interviewing many, if any, female bronies.

Sarah has been a My Little Pony fan since early childhood, but she was more drawn to the toys than the early versions of the TV show. However, like with many other bronies, a good friend convinced her to try the most recent incarnation, citing the quality of animation, voice acting, and humor. Upon watching the show, Sarah found that the characters possessed a measure of complexity and relatability rarely found in cartoons.

Sarah also saw the great potential in the show for catalyzing personal growth and self-awareness through relatable characters. For some time, Sarah babysat a co-worker’s kids, two young boys. She described the younger as being quiet and a little shy, but generally compassionate and considerate, while the older boy was a little more difficult to handle. She described him as being like the pony Rainbow Dash – brash and unmanageable. Knowing that trying to adjust his behavior through regular channels would likely fail, and that neither boy would have an issue with the gendering of the show, she introduced the two boys to MLP. “Ponies-as-parable time!” she exclaimed, as she relayed to me how the older boy changed over time. “He became quieter, more thoughtful. He became a better person by watching the show,” she said, after describing his personality before ponies, highlighting his selfish and thoughtless tendencies. She facilitated his development to maturity by asking him to hold himself accountable for his actions. “What would you have to write if you had to write a letter to Princess Celestia?” she asked him. “Would you be proud? Or would you feel bad?” Now, a couple years later, Sarah says watching MLP is one of the few activities the boys enjoy doing together.

The show itself possesses a certain level of maturity, well beyond that of many other children’s shows. It avoids the sometimes heavy-handed “adultness” of some cartoons, but still treats its viewers respectfully by not dumbing down the story o
r the characters. MLP doesn’t stoop to crude humor and innuendo to entertain; it relies on clever writing, pop culture references, and, occasionally, classic slapstick. The show emphasizes the fact that it’s not just for kids by sometimes conveying more complex and thought-provoking messages about friendship, responsibility or morality. After viewing the episode “Green Isn’t Your Color,” chosen as a random starting point to investigate the show, Robbie remembered thinking that “the message of being happy for your friends’ successes as much as your own was a…strangely adult and mature message to send to kids as opposed to ‘sharing is caring’ or something like that” (2013). MLP does offer a number of lessons that can be considered simple—believe in yourself, from “Hurricane Fluttershy,” friendship is more important than competition, from “Fall Weather Friends,” and the ever-truthful don’t judge a book by its cover, from “Bridle Gossip,” (though many bronies could argue that this lesson is presented in every episode seen by someone who doubts what the show has to offer for anyone over the age of twelve). MLP offers plenty of “friendship lessons” that stretch beyond what some imagine a child is capable of grasping, but this could allow for a discussion to take place between child and parent/care-giver to provide the child with a model for real-life situations they may encounter.

Beyond this, it gives the adults watching the show something to think about, too. Lauren Faust stated that the show wasn’t designed just for children, but for their parents as well (Faust 2011), and the idea that its target demographic is the only demographic it could hope to affect is both short-sighted and naïve. Everyone is always capable of learning, especially in an effort to better themselves. The same sort of close-mindedness that says that adults cannot learn from a cartoon likewise fuels the claims that men must present themselves a certain way or be shunned from society.

The only potential issue with MLP that it is historically and typically understood to be aimed a
t girls. Sarah's enjoyment of the show and figures from the 80's, along with the appreciation from other female bronies, is largely accepted because their gender puts them partly within the target demographic of the show. But many of the male bronies are all too aware of the implications that come with them watching and enjoying a show intended for little girls. Robbie, despite his progressive opinions on gender before watching MLP, briefly thought, as he watched the first episode, "'What the hell am I doing watching a show for little girls?'" (2013). Dan observed his roommate watching the show one day and posed a similar question, wondering, "'isn't that a show for little girls[?]'

"Bucking Gender Roles": Masculinity as Seen by Bronies Traditional masculinity may be losing its hegemonic status, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t still one of the most visible models. When I posed the question, “How does society define a Man?” to my participants and online discussion groups, I wasn’t surprised to see the same words pop up time and again. They see a society that demands that its men be “tough,” “violent,” and “rarely emotional.” They acknowledge that “[society] often tend[s] to view men based on their interests, and judge[s] them accordingly,” so if a guy isn’t fascinated by “football and guns” and “cars,” he can’t hold the title of Man. In Guyland, Kimmel notes “that masculinity is coerced and policed relentlessly by other guys,” that stepping outside that label is dangerous. The most common insult for perceived unmasculine behavior is to call a guy “gay,” less as a literal index of his sexuality and more as “a kind of shorthand for unmanliness” (2008:50), which is intentionally demoralizing. Robbie felt this when he was a kid, when classmates would call each other “gay” when they caught someone not conforming to stereotyped gender roles. “Now around here, that’s a double whammy if you, like me, are straight because for one, as a child who has what little integrity you have, you don’t want people calling you something you’re not. But the other thing is that
children have a tendency to use the word 'gay' as a term for 'stupid'" (2013). "Gay," in the hegemonic masculinity model, is unmasculine. To be unmasculine is to be devalued by social groups. Calling other students who don’t conform “gay,” ensures that the kids who do not conform to gender roles are somehow punished for it. By calling a boy or a man’s validity into question by claiming that he falls outside the traditional masculinity people are continuing the notion that homosexuality makes men ‘less than’ and demonized. This further encourages violence against gay men. The guys Kimmel interviewed were unwilling to take that risk, even if it meant, whether they were gay, or if, like Robbie, if their personality just doesn’t fit the macho stereotype. Kimmel's guys felt that “'It's not very safe out there on your own...in my fraternity, on this campus, man, I'd lose everything.'” They feared physical violence, losing friends, becoming isolated and depressed and using violence themselves to counter others' accusations (2008:50-51). But something is changing now. Robbie, who was thought to be gay by some of his friends for about a year, did not express any fears like these. “They weren’t the type to discriminate against gay people...I didn’t really get treated differently at all,” he said of his friends. He was not aware at the time that they suspected he was gay. However, Robbie could see how they came to that conclusion, since “the evidence for me being gay was pretty good. It just happened to be wrong” (Robbie 2013). But Robbie never feared for his life. Regionally, the level of tolerance can change, but overall acceptance is becoming more widespread. Condemnations of violence and actions against hate crimes against homosexuality are becoming the rule rather than the exception.

According to the Gay and Lesbian Task Force, as of July 1, 2012, thirty states and the District of Columbia have “hate crime laws that include crimes based on sexual orientation.” Ten states and the District of Columbia have full marriage equal
ity laws (NGLTF 2013) Increasingly, the call for “equality now!” is gaining more supporters and people are understanding that being gay isn’t a bizarre or “unnatural” fetish to be stifled – it is a type of love, and it is worth the same as any other type of love on which we confer our cultural blessing. The culture is changing, because of the visibility of homosexuality in entertainment media, in legislation, and in people’s personal lives. The world is more tolerant and, depending on where someone lives to some extent, a person won’t necessarily get beat up the moment he comes out. Some places will embrace him, will be happy that he feels comfortable enough around them that he’s willing to be honest about himself, that he loves who he is – he is confident, brave, and tough for living a life that has for so much of the past few generations been so hostile and vicious to people like him. To put up with the lies, the taunts, the ridicule, the demeaning statements implying that “he is” not worth real “man” or status just because he’s not interested in the opposite sex in a romantic/sexual way/

It's not just these characteristics that define masculinity. The main identifier of masculinity to our culture is the rejection of anything associated with femininity, from an interest in one's personal appearance to the display of emotions and including female heteronormativity, or romantic and sexual interest in males. At least, that's how masculinity has largely been defined for the past several decades. But now, many of these young men find themselves both willing and able to be open about their interest in a show that has been deemed by our society to be doused with a sugary and devalued coating of femininity. Bronies may understand what society expects from them as men, but they tend not to agree with the definition of masculinity that they glean from the media and their conventional peers. They have their own definitions and evaluations for what really makes someone a man. Robbie described it as “the ability to essentially stop giving a crap about what other people think of
them and...[knowing] when to actually be serious.” He realized, though, that “the big problem (?) with this answer is that it's not really confined to manliness or masculinity. It's more a determiner of maturity,” which I came to find was a fairly standard answer for the bronies I spoke with. Jackson said that being a man is “the same as being a person in general, being strong, strong enough to admit you are not perfect but to always try to better yourself, do the right things and be honest and faithful” (2013), while Art elucidated that the idea of a man, to him, was incredibly simple. “[A] man is a male that has fully matured. [N]othing more, nothing less” (Art 2013). Masculinity, to these men, is not a strictly defined identity that is based on one's interests, activities, sexuality or physical characteristics. A few mentioned biology, speaking genetically, (“It's all the chromosomes, ”) but Ed echoed a common sentiment, stating that one only needed to “identify as the male gender” (2013).

Bronies are departing from a standard-issue model of masculinity by establishing and living by their own definitions of masculinity that don't limit men to highly specific embodiments of masculinity. They allow for a significant amount of fluidity regarding the need to merely identify as a male.

Another brony broached the topic of transgender in his definition of a man:
You have a penis? Physically, you are a man. Of course if you don't feel that you are a man you can arrange to have the penis removed. But that brings up the mental aspect. Do you think you are a man? If so, you can also be a man from that standpoint. Society-wise, you should probably have a penis of some kind if you really want to be considered full-on man. (Colin 2013)

Robbie cited his own befriending of several transgender and gay people involved in his theatre group as a cause for the expansion of his own ideas on gender and how he came to see “how wobbly the idea of ‘gender’ as opposed to ‘sex’ actually is” by way of the discussions he has had with his friends
(2013). Through this, and his “laissez-faire” upbringing, Robbie doesn't put much stock in the idea of traditional gender roles. This, too, appears to be a common thread among the bronies I interviewed. Stephen, who was raised by his mother, notes that he possesses what he believes is a “more 'feminine' skill set. I can make an omelet and sew a button on a shirt, but can't tie a tie or change my own oil. I don't really see this as an issue. If people think I'm less of a man for this, then they probably aren't worth associating with anyway” (2013). Most of the guys I talked to, like Oscar, understood that gender roles came about in a less tolerant and more controlling context, “and to adhere to them in modern society is asinine. Actions and behaviors cannot be attributed to a gender” (2013).

Tom and Jackson, on the other hand, openly note their desire for a different vision of masculinity, one that allows for emotional expression and even encourages and praises feeling emotions. Too often, Kimmel recognizes, boys are taught that not only showing emotion, but feeling it, is not the appropriate behavior of a real man, so “from an early age boys are taught to refrain from crying, to suppress their emotions, never to display vulnerability” (2008:53). But Tom expresses hope for the future, observing that “[t]raditional gender roles are always changing and [while] it may not be "masculine" to like MLP:FiM right now, hopefully one day it will become more acceptable to be a caring individual as a man” (2013). Jackson asserts his right to feel and express his emotions. “Just because I am a man [doesn’t] mean that I can't be sensitive, caring and honest about my feelings” (2013). This is the sort of environment and attitude Kimmel insists that guys need in order to live beyond the cruel and destructive world of Guyland. Guys need “emotional resilience” (2008:270, emphasis in original) and real friends with whom they can “show vulnerability” (2008:278). Guys know that it's human to feel emotion, and that suppression of emotion is imposed by society, and it's damaging to both
sexes. All humans are capable of feeling the same emotions; thus, rejecting any aspect renders an incomplete experience of being human. Attempting to categorize feelings as "manly" or "feminine" restricts people's development (both emotional and logical)" (Ted 2013). Emotional development and resilience fosters empathy, allows men to understand the bullying and objectification faced by gay men, women, and others who don't fit under the model of hegemonic masculinity. Kimmel wants our culture to "make it clear that choosing between one's masculinity and one's humanity is a false choice - that one's humanity ought to be the highest expression of masculinity" (2008:270).

The people who watch this show, male and female, do so because they genuinely enjoy it, despite the possible implications of it being a "female-gendered" show. Some may have started out with a sense of irony, or certainty that everyone telling them to watch it was pulling some joke on them, but for most, if not all fans of the show, they stuck with it because they found something they liked. A significant number of fans, after getting into the show itself, quickly discovered the large online community and came to value that as much as, and sometimes more than, the show.

More than Love and Tolerance
While I was reading through posts on my MLP forum sites, I repeatedly came across threads that expressed gratitude toward the show and the community for impacting the user’s life in some positive manner. Sometimes, it was as simple as being happy to have found the show and the community because they like the show and they enjoy the discussions they have online. More serious thank-you’s might run along the lines of thanking other bronies for demonstrating that there’s no shame in running against gender norms; or they may express appreciation for a character to which they relate which has sparked self-reflective moments. On the subreddit MyLittleSupportGroup, where bronies can post topics asking for help, venting their problems, or offe
ring advice and encouragement, it is not uncommon to see a user remarking on this community somehow changing their life, or even saving it. To many fans, My Little Pony is not just a show. It is a catalyst that brought something to the surface in them, awareness of the limitations they face in their culture and the discussions they can initiate to change the world.

That first question posed by bronies the first time they find themselves watching the show—“isn’t this a show for little girls?”—brings up one of the most critical questions men can pose to society. Why are things divided into “for males” and “for females?” Why, if women can engage in masculine-type behaviors without receiving much criticism, can’t men do the same thing with feminine activities? Why separate? Why divide? My Little Pony has the ability to reveal this problem and encourage men, and women, to ask these questions. Beyond that, even, many men have begun to openly reject the idea that liking something that is feminine is emasculating. Al said that he had learned to be himself thanks to the community, that “[t]here is no reason to be ashamed of something that isn’t usually associated with your gender” (2013). Another, Charlie, didn’t see any risks in acknowledging that he was a fan. “I didn’t really have anything to lose, I’m already the weird guy in the group...” he said, regarding his open appreciation of MLP: The only memorable experience I’ve had as an out bronie was when I went to school wearing one of my MLP t-shirts, and a some guy in my class made a big deal out of it, I told him 'I had the guts to walk onto a college campus wearing a pretty pink pony even though I knew you would give me crap about it. I think that's more '[manly]' than anything I've seen you do, so lay off.' (Charlie 2013)

Charlie didn't just ignore the taunt he got for rejecting standard gender expectations – he threw it right back at his classmate, calling on his own courage and unwillingness to be shamed into traditional “masculine” behavior as markers of his mascul
inity, and his classmate’s teasing remarks as an indicator of his lack of masculinity. Connell notes that one way to develop a society that is more open to both men and women is to take part in “degendering...to recompose, rather than delete the cultural elements of gender. The result would be a kind of gender multiculturalism” (1995:234). Women have been appropriating masculine traits, skills, behaviors and symbolic markers, which has allowed women to move forward, albeit slowly, in their effort to gain gender equality. For men to get on the path to their own gender equality would require them to begin engaging in “traditionally feminine” behaviors, activities and symbolic markers. By appropriating things traditionally ascribed to the opposite sex, and making them a common sight on either sex, we show society that the boundaries between gender are permeable and malleable, and - to some degree - could even be evaporated. All it takes, claim the bronies, is an open mind.

The brony community has a glut of non-judgmental individuals, but for some fans, watching the show was their gateway to a more tolerant, open-minded approach to life. I was interested in seeing if anyone felt that they actually learned from the show, either from the direct “friendship lessons” penned to Princess Celestia at the end of almost every episode, or from their experience with the show or the community. Many noted that they were “kinder and more tolerant” after getting into MLP, and that the “community taught [them]...to be open-minded” (Paul, Todd 2013). Justin described his main take-away from the show in a way that makes it easily applicable to other issues in society. My Little Pony “taught [him] to appreciate things for what they are and what they represent rather than the labels society has placed on them” (2013), just as the fans did with the show, and as they do for each other.

That’s what the brony community really provides for the fans of the show. It’s not just a place in cyberspace to hang out and talk about what hap
ened in the last episode and what's coming next. It's a place where guys with similar interests—cartoons, voice acting, visual art, electronic music—have unified under the banner of Equestria and really own what the show stands for. "The community has been incredibly supportive to me," Robbie told me, echoing what I saw on MyLittleSupportGroup. He, and many other bronies, struggles with depression. "This show helps me pull through some of the rougher patches," said Jake, another brony with depression. "It makes me smile and laugh even when I feel like the world is ending and all hope is lost" (2013). Kimmel advocates this sort of community, friends who are open enough with each other to share their insecurities and emotions (2008:278). This is the beginning of creating a culture in which manhood is seen as maturity rather than anti-femininity, where femininity and women and homosexuality are not intrinsically devalued.

Conclusion

Not every brony reaps large emotional benefits from the show and community. Some simply watch it because it's funny and cute and some, like me before this research, never get involved with the online community. But this research demonstrates the potential of this show to open viewer's minds to the fluidity of gender definitions. While many of the bronies I spoke to claimed that they were already critical of traditional gender roles before becoming MLP fans, most still admit to becoming a better person in other ways by watching the show. My Little Pony Friendship is Magic and the brony community provide a safe space for guys to experiment with and learn from their emotions. Hopefully, from this arena, bronies can take their freedom to express themselves to non-brony friends, family members and co-workers, in turn opening up another location for their own discussions with the people involved in their physical life, rather than online. By opening up, the bronies may also encourage their male friends and family members to become more expressive while female friends and family conti
nue to support them and listen. Perhaps in time, this will manifest in an alternative masculinity which values empathy, openness, and respect.

Limitations

The major limitations of this study were time, scope, sampling, availability of participants and finances. With more time, I could have conducted a greater number of in-depth interviews, and gathered a greater number of participants. I had to seriously restrict the scope of this survey in the interest of producing a coherent paper in the time I had available. There are many different areas to address within the brony community, but this study did not look at markers such as class, race or age. Additional topics that were frequently brought up by myself, other bronies, and non-brony friends of mine largely concerned language and labeling, conventions, and fan-generated content. I also focused primarily on the online community rather than the local fan community at Warren Wilson College or in Asheville. My sampling for participants was mostly convenience sampling, with a few occasions of snowball sampling. A more randomized sampling method may have given me slightly different results. Finally, with greater financial resources, I could have attended more conventions, met with more bronies in person – and possibly even some of the people who work on the show itself – and bought the brony documentary produced by John de Lancie, Lauren Faust and Tara Strong in 2012.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide
Interview Questions
I wish we could meet face-to-face, but I’d at least like to tell you a bit about myself. My name is Leah, I’m 22, female. I grew up near Columbus, Ohio, and in San Diego, California. My current home i
s Chicago, but I go to school here in North Carolina. The school I attend is a work college, so all students work 15 hours a week on campus. I work on the college farm, which has been running since the college started in 1894. I’m in charge of the sheep operation. I’m studying cultural anthropology, but I’ve also taken classes in biology, writing, and film photography. I’ve got two older brothers, and my immediate family all know about my being a brony. None of them care, though my brothers occasionally tease me about it, my mom is amused by it, and I’m pretty sure my dad doesn’t even really know what it is.

With this interview, I am looking to understand perceptions of masculinity and your reasons for watching My Little Pony Friendship is Magic. For this research, there is no “right” or “wrong” answer to any of these questions; I just want to know what you think about masculinity in your country of residence, your own ideas of masculinity, and My Little Pony Friendship is Magic. You are free to end your participation in this research at any time. If there is a question you don’t want to answer, you can let me know, but know that all of your answers will remain confidential. If you have any concerns about security, you can let me know and we can talk about how I’m storing this data. If you have anything you wish to say “off the record,” simply note that by putting the information in [brackets]. I will consider anything within brackets “off limits” and I won’t use it in my research. I will identify you in my research with a pseudonym. If you have no preference for a certain pseudonym, I will provide one for you.

With these questions, please feel free to elaborate as much as you want – I want to hear what you have to say. If you have a story that relates to any of these questions, tell me! I want to hear your ideas, your opinions, and your experience. The more you say, the fewer questions I’ll have to ask in the future, and the more information I get. Let’s start with some basics:
How old are you?

Biological sex?

Do you identify as male or female, or something else?

Sexuality?

Race?

Where do you live? (You can be general here, if you prefer – but I’d at least like to know your country and state, if you’re in the U.S.)

Education level?

Are you employed? If yes, what do you do?

Hobbies?

Anything else you want me to know about you?

Describe your introduction to My Little Pony Friendship is Magic.

* How did it come to your attention - through what or whom?
* Why did you watch that first episode?
* What was your initial response to the show?
* What made you continue to watch the show?

Who is aware of your interest in the show? What do they think about it? How did they react when they first found out?

Who isn’t aware of your interest in the show?

Why not?

Why do you like MLP?

Do you have a favorite episode (or more)?

* Which one(s) and why?

Do you have a favorite pony? Who, and why is she/he your favorite?

Do you identify with one pony in particular? In what ways?

What traits do you associate with masculinity?

How would you define masculinity?

* Do you feel that the idea of masculinity plays an important role in your life?

What do you think society expects of men, in terms of attitude, behavior, likes/dislikes, ability, sexuality - essentially, what do you think is required to be ‘a man’?

Do you consider yourself masculine? Is it important
t to you to be seen as masculine or to portray masculine traits? Why or why not?
What do you think is the appeal of MLP to a male audience?

Thank you for your time and participation! If you’d be willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview, or if you would be interested in participating in a group interview with several other bronies, please let me know. If you have any other comments, let me know below!
___ Yes, you may contact me for a follow-up interview.
___ Yes, I would be willing to participate in a group interview.

Additional Comments:

Appendix B: Group Interview Guide
What does it mean to you to be 'a man?' What do you believe it means to society to be 'a man?'
Who was/is your primary male role model? What is he like? How is he involved in your life? (as in, do you talk frequently/about personal things; where/how often do you interact; what do you do together? etc)
How do you typically respond to sexist comments/jokes/behavior? What do you think of the idea of traditional gender roles (i.e., men are this, do this, like these things; women are that, do that, like those things)?
Have you learned anything from MLP? If so, what?
Are you an out brony or a closet brony?
- What made you decide to be out - or not?
- If out: What happened, if anything, when you came out as a brony?
- What experiences have you had as an out or closet brony?
Who is your favorite pony and why?

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Warren Wilson College
Swannanoa, North Carolina

1. TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY

A Study of My Little Pony and Perceptions of Masculinity (Working title)

* PROJECT DIRECTOR/INVESTIGATOR
Name: Leah Palmer
Faculty Supervisor: Siti Kusujiarti and Ben Feinberg

Telephone Number: 858-740-4285 Telephone Number: 828-771-3703 or 828-771-3709

* THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH
The purpose of this study is to explore the fan community of My Little Pony and perceptions of masculinity held by the male fans of the TV show.

* PROCEDURES FOR THIS RESEARCH
I have been briefed about the research, and am aware of my ability to discontinue my participation in this research at any time, without consequence. Semi-structured interviews will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour. I have been informed that the researcher can provide confidentiality if I request it, but that there is no risk if I choose to use my real name or real username. I have been i
nformed that, if desired, I may use a pseudonym for my interview (chosen by me or the researcher) to provide confidentiality, and that if I choose this, only the researcher will know my identity. I understand that the interviews will be taped using a computer-based audio recording device if the interview is conducted in person, and a computer-based audio/visual recording device if the interview is conducted online, via Skype. Interviews conducted via email will be saved in a text document. I was also informed that I have control of that recording device, and can stop recording this interview at any time. I am aware that part of the interview analysis will be included in a senior research paper, and in a Warren Wilson Capstone presentation, but the presentation and paper may not include my real name.

* POTENTIAL RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS
There are no significant risks to participating in this study. I understand that if I do not want something I have said to be included in the project, I will inform the researcher of those wishes. I understand that the researcher will comply with such wishes. I further understand that all other communication with the researcher relating to the project is available for use in the project. All transcribed interviews will be kept on a password-locked computer and hard copies will be kept in a locked box in a two-person dorm room.

* POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU OR OTHERS
This research could lead to a better understanding of self for both participants and readers regarding perceptions of gender and how such perceptions may disadvantage certain people. By discussing inclusive masculinity theory, the researcher hopes to raise a greater awareness of gender and gender discrimination on the part of participants and readers, and a willingness and capability to combat suc
h discrimination in their own lives.

* GENERAL CONDITIONS

I understand that I will not receive compensation for my participation in this study.
I understand that I will not be charged additional expenses for my participation in this study.
I understand that I am free to decline to participate or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this research project at any time without adverse consequences.
I understand that if I ask for something to remain confidential, it will be confidential except as may be required by federal, state, or local law.
I am 18 years of age or older

* SIGNATURES

I have fully explained to __________ the nature and purpose of the above-described procedure and the benefits and risks that are involved in participating in this study. I have answered and will answer all questions to the best of my ability. I may be contacted at 858-740-4285 or lpalmer.s12@warr en-wilson.edu.

______________________________                   __
Signature of Principal Investigator       Date

I have been fully informed of the above-described procedure and the benefits and risks that are involved in participating in this study. I have received a copy of this entire document. I have voluntarily given permission for my participation in this study.

______________________________                   ___
Signature of Participant                        Dat
Appendix D: Additional Interview Questions

* How did you become aware of the idea of gender roles and the associated issues? What or who influenced your opinion on gender roles?

* What sort of toys did you play with as a child? Were there any you weren’t allowed to play with?

* Do you remember any times when someone (a teacher, sibling, parent, friend) praised or criticized you for defying gender roles?

* Do you actively fight gender roles/inequality/discrimination in other parts of your life? (That affects you; that you witness; in society at large..) If so,
  o How?
  o Did you contest gender roles/inequality before watching MLP, or did MLP & the community bring that out?

* What do you think are some of the major consequences of traditional gender roles?
  o How do you feel they’ve affected you or people you know?

* Have you heard of the ‘crisis of manhood’ conversation that’s been a topic of national discussion in the U.S. over the past several years?
  o If you have, what is your opinion on the matter?

* How might the internet support the dissolution of gender roles?
  o How do you think the anonymity of the internet contributes to gender equality?
  o How does it reinforce gender norms?

* How involved are you with the brony community?
  o What sort of activities do you participate in?
  o Do you own any art or merchandise, either officia
l or fan-produced?
- Do you contribute to the community with art, music, writing, other creations?

* What has the brony community done for you?
- Has it affected your life at all?
- Have you made many new friends?

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