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Original Research

Perceptions of Masculinity among Undergraduate Students in Ethiopia

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| **Abstract** | |  | | **Article Information** |
| The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of masculinity among university students. Data were collected from students in Addis Ababa, Wollega and Addis Ababa Science and Technology universities. A total of 21 students (7 from each university) aged 18-25 years were sample data sources. Thematic Analysis approach was used to analyze the data collected through in-depth individual interviews. Qualitative data analysis revealed thatseveral core concepts were embedded in the meanings of masculinity, including a display of risky behaviors, bravery, self-reliance, controlling females, inexpressiveness, recording some achievements in life, etc. From this one can easily understand that the meanings ascribed to ‘being a man’ pointed out above reflected that most participants of the present study, particularly young men endorsed traditional/hegemonic masculinity depicted in the literature. Most literatures reveal that higher levels of traditional masculinity are associated with greater risky health behaviors; hence, it is important to indicate the direction to reduce this barrier. To this end, university educators should provide services that facilitate the expression of all ranges of masculinities, so as to help construct healthy masculinities to enable university men to behave according to their role preferences beyond the pressure of acting in accordance with normative expectations. | |  | | **Article History:**  **Received : 10-08-2017**  **Revised : 15-09-2017**  **Accepted : 25-09-2017** | | |
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**INTRODUCTION**

Recently, increased attention has been given to the study of masculinity and what it means to be a man in a society. This is perhaps due to developments in feminist theorizing about gender and the feminist movement (Jeftha, 2006). Historically, masculinity had been seen in essentialist and normative terms. This means, the way men behaved was always seen as a natural male behavior and thus, viewed not requiring any exploration. In relation to this,Hadebe (2010) explained that the popular ideology implying gender as a natural consequence of male and female biology denies the opportunity to explore structures such as culture, economy, politics, education and technology in their relationship to masculinity or femininity. Currently, however, the socially constructed nature of gender, both femininity and masculinity, is widely recognized (Hadebe, 2010).

Morrell (1998) suggested that special attention needs to be given to the study of masculine ideology (the beliefs about what men are like and how they should act) to assist us in understanding how young men construct their masculinity. Tied into this are the specific gender roles ascribed to men. Morrell revealed that traditionally appropriate gender roles for men in most societies include primary breadwinner, head of the household, and the holder of leadership roles not only in their families but also in their communities. These roles are paralleled to stereotypical ‘real men’ masculine identity that can be described as having certain personality traits, such as strength, independence, achievement, hard work, heterosexuality, toughness, aggression, unemotional, physicality, competitiveness and forcefulness (Courtenay, 2000).

In terms of their typical activities or behaviors what ‘real men’ in most societies are expected to do include earning money, initiating sex, solving problems, getting the job done, taking control, taking action, enjoying masculine activities (such as sports, drinking), taking physical risks, and supporting their families financially; while what they are prohibited from doing include crying, expressing feelings other than anger, performing women’s work (e.g., washing dishes), backing from confrontation and getting emotionally closer to other men (Weedon, 1987).

Likewise, although studies conducted on masculinity in Ethiopia are scarce, from the existing literature one can easily understand that most cultural practices foster traditional masculinity, as young men were encouraged to construct their gender identity in opposition to femininity and expected to be aggressive, brave, competitive, dominant, self-reliant, and willing to take risks, which are typical traits that signify traditional/hegemonic masculinity. For example, the Oromo proverb “With a woman’s rule, the gate remains unopened the whole day” depicts the ideology of male chauvinism in the household (Jeylan, 2005).Sumner (1995) also noted that proverbs in the society encourage men to maintain their masculinity by avoiding practices that connote inferiority. For example, the Oromo proverb “Farting once is masculineand farting repeatedly is feminine” serve this function. Furthermore, men are not only inculcated with masculine ideals, they are also encouraged to exercise those ideals in heroic deeds. For example, the Oromo proverb “A male person is dead from his birth” inculcates fearlessness as a masculine self-fulfillment. According to this proverb, whether it is for good or for trivial cause, a male person should not fear death.

Among the local studies, Levine’s (1966) work on ‘masculinity in Amhara culture’ is another important investigation in masculinity studies in Ethiopia. He defines the concept of masculinity in Amhara context as “wand-nat”. “Wand-nat” connotes the ability to make physical hardship, to live for a long time in the wilds, and to walk all day long with no food. According to Levine (1966), the Amhara ideal of masculinity has reference primarily to aggressive capacity. He noted that the ideal of masculinity is typically projected at the expense of, and defined in opposition to femininity. On the contrary, Mulat (2005) found out that the masculinity attributes of Awuramba male adolescents have been constructed from thoughts, beliefs and practices of gender equality, egalitarian way of life, peaceful manner, and valuing physical strength for the sake of being capable of physical work. He indicated that these beliefs and practices of the male adolescents are reinforced and encouraged by the community members. On the other hand, the tendency of displaying socially unacceptable behaviors is punished and ridiculed by parents and adults of the community.

Moreover, in his study on ‘notions of fatherhood among Ethiopian adolescents’ Belay (2008) indicated that Ethiopian fathers play masculine acting (disciplining) roles: control, punish, and warn children with respect to wrong doing, command order and make children respect parental orders, provide assistance under extreme problem conditions, and show seriousness and strictness. Belay further revealed that fathers play the role of masculine gender socialization: encourage acts, teach skills, and develop interests in masculine gender appropriate roles, bravery, strength, power, success, wining, etc.

Today, Ethiopia is facing socio-cultural changes. These changes have affected daily life and values of people, particularly younger ones, by influencing their perception of gender roles, male-female interactions and risk-taking behaviors. These days, it becomes a common practice to see young men who are displaying an ambiguous gender appearance or displaying gender atypical behaviors, such as having odd hairstyles like “Shuruba” hair style, hanging a big cross and piercing ears. Young men are exhibiting such traits of being a man simply by copying from Westerners as shown by the media.

Since the majority of Ethiopian population is young and the number of students enrolled in higher education has increased during the last decade, young men are experiencing more intermingling with other cultures and life styles that affect their understanding of masculinity and gender roles. However, the research on masculinity issue is scarce in Ethiopia. There was no published data on the understanding of masculinity among young university students in Ethiopia prior to this research. In response to this knowledge gap, the present qualitative research aimed to explore the shared masculinity conceptualizations among university students.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Study Site**

This study was conducted in three higher learning institutions in Ethiopia-Addis Ababa, Wollega, and Addis Ababa Science and Technology universities. While Addis Ababa University and Addis Ababa Science and Technology University are located in Addis Ababa, Wollega University is located in the western part of Ethiopia around 312 kilometers from Addis Ababa.

**Participants**

Participants of the study were undergraduate university students in the age range between 18-25 years, enrolled in the higher learning institutions. Although the majority of masculinity and health-related researches focused on engaging only male participants, based on Koon’s (2013) suggestions, stating that any individual can exhibit traditional masculine role norms, behaviors and attitudes, both male and female undergraduate university students were included in this study. Fictitious names were assigned for interview participants to maintain anonymity.

**Sampling Technique**

Non-probability sampling technique, namely purposive sampling was used to target potential respondents for in-depth individual interviews. Thus, 21 interviewees (7 from each university) were selected purposively, for their ability to provide detail information.

**Data Gathering Instruments**

In this study, in-depthindividual interview whichwas guided by a semi-structured interview was used to collect data. As the researcher wished to collect personal accounts and experiences on perceptions of masculinity, in-depth individual interview was preferred to focus group discussions.

**Data Analysis**

In this study, Thematic Analysis (TA) (Wilkinson, 1998) approach involving three stages was used to analyze the data collected through in-depth individual interviews. In the first stage, verbatim transcription of the audio-recorded interviews was made in Amharic/Afan Oromo. The interview transcripts were then translated into English. Translated transcripts were read and re-read in order to generate explanations addressing the basic research questions. During the second stage, these were sorted into specific themes. The third stage is the systematic organization of the entire data and matching it with the relevant research questions. This allowed for an understanding of the extent to which the qualitative data generated information directly related to the primary aim of the study and provides clarifications for the key findings from quantitative analyses.

**RESULTS**

The findings of this study are presented under the core heading of “The Meanings of Being a Man” (below), which depicts gender-related beliefs and attitudes among the participants. In this section, the research findings are presented and supported with representative quotes from the interviews in detail.

**The Meanings of Being a Man**

This section presents qualitative results related to the university students’ views of masculinity, focusing on respondents’ definition and description of what it means to be a man. The researcher’s focus here is on how the young adults from various backgrounds, namely different ethnicities, religions, cultures, languages, and geographical locations define what ‘being a man’ means to them.

Interview participants generally have shown that being a man connotes a lot of meanings. For instance, some of them emphasize the importance of characteristics, such as independence/self-reliance to describe being a man. This means, someone is considered to be a real man only when he is doing things by his own and when he is self-reliant. In this regard, Lambebo explained:

Being a man for me is doing everything by one’s own. I’m considering myself as a man, when I’m able to do something by my own without seeking help from others and able to cover all my expenses. When my families assist me economically, they may require me just to live their dreams, I don’t want this. I want to fulfill everything and decide for myself. (personal communication, June 25, 2013)

He also viewed being a man in terms of exhibiting manly behaviors than feminine traits. To be a man, someone has to have certain qualities that are not commonly found in women; for example, being “inexpressive”.

For me, talkative man is not a real man. To be a man means to be “inexpressive”, to be aggressive, to involve in manly activities like different sports such as lifting weight, to be responsible to one’s immediate environment, for instance, to be a fire fighter.

The key elements of masculinity identified by the interview participants also include drinking, using drug, smoking, and having multiple sexual partners. Sixteen respondents out of the 21 reported that there are some university students who perceive involving in these risky practices as symbolizing masculinity and life in the campus. Particularly, young men are competitive in these domains, and rank their performances; the more they engage in these practices, the more highly they are regarded. Thus, most young men involved in these practices to be viewed as a ‘real man’ by their peers. In fact, there is peer pressure and most young men strive to conform to the norms of their peers. In relation to this view, Addis explained: “Some young men in this campus don’t want to be involved in risky practices; however, fearing that they can be discriminated and can be also labeled uncivilized, they are involving in risky activities”. (personal communication, June 25, 2013)

For others, a key feature that distinguishes someone as a man is how he handles himself in the face of adversity. Bravery is a highly appreciated masculine trait because it suggests that he should be able to face any challenges and defend oneself and one’s family. The following quote serves to illustrate this description:

Culturally being a man is compared with a lion. It signifies courageousness, fearlessness and bravery. In our culture, there are different sayings which encourage men to be brave; for instance, in order that someone is not refraining from fighting there is sayings “are you not a guy”? ( Gebre, personal communication, June 26, 2013)

In the same way, Fenet described being a man denoting bravery as follows:

Culturally, a ‘real man’ is the one who is known in his community with bravery and who is always standing in front of the rivals during fighting. In the past, a ‘real man’ is the one who killed a lion or buffalo and took ‘faacha’, meaning the hairy tail of an animal to evidence he has really killed a lion or buffalo. (Fenet, personal communication, May15, 2014)

Being a man is also viewed in terms of recording some achievements in life.

The boy is considered a man when achieving better results and reach highest position; for instance, becoming a well known football player. I was born and grown up in Hawassa. There are best football players even playing for the national team who were from Hawassa. For me, they are brave. Moreover, I consider those people who held a leadership position and doing fine jobs regardless of oppositions and pressures, as real men. (Lambebo, personal communication, June 25, 2013)

Gebre also said:

For me being a man is not only wearing pants, rather to be a man means to have a goal and to strive to achieve that goal. Being a man means to be self-supporting, to be educated, to be able to change oneself, one’s family and one’s society; it is after these that someone is considered as brave, clever, and treated as a man. But if you are always at home, if you are not struggling to change yourself, then you are considered “womanish”. (Gebre, personal communication, June 26, 2013)

For other participants being a man means to have a muscular body, which is a clear indicator of a manly appearance associated with the notions of strength and power. This is related to the perception of the body as signifying manhood, emphasizing it as a tool for control and dominance. Men are socialized to use the body to symbolize manhood. In this process, the practice of sport is considered vital. In this regard, Ilala said: “To me, a real man must be muscular, his body has to be muscular and he must be strong. He has to have body shape, like muscle, and he is supposed to involve in sports like football” (personal communication, April 21, 2014).

Being a man is also denoted by having a girl-friend and being able to sexually satisfy one’s own partner. The following remark shows this fact:

Sometimes a boy is considered to be a man when having sexual intercourse. Now a day, even a boy is considered as a real man when he is able to sexually satisfy his partner. Yet females evaluate whether someone is a real man or not in terms of his sexual potency. For instance, if you ask a female who is a real man for her, she may judge in terms of how much she is sexually satisfied by someone. (Gemechu, personal communication, June 26, 2013)

Ebsitu added:“As boys are getting older, whether they are able to support themselves or not; whether they reach better position or not, to be considered as men, they are expected to have girl-friends” (personal communication, June 25, 2013).

Some other participants reported that there is a close link between masculinity and work. That means working hard and thereby funding oneself /self-supporting is perceived as a measure of being a real man. Firomsa validates this fact saying: “Someone is considered as a real man only if he is doing his job very well and becomes self-supporting; if he is wondering here and there without a job, he is disregarded as a womanish” (personal communication, April 20, 2014). Mohamed also said:

Being a man is mostly expressed in terms of jobs. Men are doing many hard jobs. For instance, they travel longer distances in search of water for their camels. Taking water from the deeper ditches requires much energy; thus, a man who is carrying out such responsibility is a real man to me. (personal communication, April 20, 2014)

Moreover, other participants viewed being a man in terms of personal qualities, such as honesty, being intelligent, etc. For instance, Tola said: “A real man is someone who likes truth, who speaks truth, who is doing something true. For such behaviors like gossiping and whispering symbolize women’s characteristics, a man exhibiting such behaviors is considered as a ‘womanish’ not as a ‘real man’” (personal communication, May16, 2014). Konjit also perceived being a man in terms of who someone is in his thoughts and attitudes saying:

I perceive being a man in terms of his maturity in his thought. For me, it is not for someone is passing the whole night in bar houses being drinking that he is considered a real man; rather, I consider someone being a man when he is properly leading his family and when he is solving difficult problems. (personal communication, April 21, 2014)

Thirteen participants out of the 21 pointed out that some young men in the universities want to prove their masculinity by exhibiting gender inequitable behaviors. For those young men, being a man is equated with having power over females. Participants’ report revealed that females often encounter sexual abuse and harassment in universities by male students. Of course, the role of gender offices, established in the higher learning institutions to protect female students from such and other related problems is not underestimated, at least in minimizing the magnitude of the problems. Thus, for it is difficult to use force directly in the campus, some male students approach females especially those who are academically weak with the intention to help them. After that, they request females to do sexual favor in return to the academic support accorded. Generally, most interview participants’ responses indicated that the existing power relationship between male and female university students is simply the reflection of what is being practiced in the society at large, i.e., the power relationship is more of traditional where young men’s domination prevails. In this regard, the following quote show that there is gender inequality between male and female university students:

Most of the time, males try to use force. For instance, some male students snatch female students’ mobile phone or money when they get out from the campus. They are doing this to force females to have sexual intercourse with them. (Tolera, personal communication, May15, 2014)

Fenet also described gender inequality between university students as follows:

There is no gender equality in our university; male domination is being observed. For instance, when we are nominating class representatives, the chance for females to be elected is very limited. This is because males are thought to be more confident to speak in public and more knowledgeable. On the other hand, some male students approach female students to help them academically. In return to the academic support they provide, they request females to have sex with them; to avoid being dismissed from the university or to graduate with good grade, some female students fulfill the request. (Fenet, personal communication, May15, 2014)

Most of the behaviors associated with being a man reported above reflected traditional masculinity ideologies. These characteristics of being a man revealed endorsement of hegemonic masculinity depicted in the literature. On the contrary, some of the participants viewed being a man in terms of endorsement of equitable gender norms. For instance, Hagos disclosed that he has a nontraditional view towards women:“To be a man for me is to respect women and to accept gender equality” (personal communication, June 26, 2013). Ebsitu also added: “I don’t accept the view that men should always accomplish jobs outside home; because as long as human beings are equal, they should share all kinds of jobs equally” (personal communication, June 25, 2013).

**Attainment of Manhood**

The majority of the respondents (17 out of the 21) said that attainment of manhood is associated with attainment of a certain status. These include getting married, taking care of one’s dependants and being the head of household. This means, manhood is tied to being independent, having a familyand being a breadwinner for the family. In this regard, Azeb described: “A boy is said to have attained manhood when he starts working outside and generates income for his family” (personal communication, April 20, 2014).

Other participants reported that attaining manhood is denoted by the physical and sexual maturity being attained during puberty. The following quote from an interview with Konjit is evident that the attainment of manhood is viewed in terms of biological maturity than socio-cultural meanings:

I thought that attaining manhood is marked by sexual maturity, when young men are starting to establish friendships with girls. The society grants manhood status to young men thinking that they are ready to have sexual relations with their partners. (personal communication, April 21, 2014)

Merertu also said: “Boys are said to have attained manhood starting from puberty i.e. when they start to have physical strengths” (personal communication, April 21, 2014).

Yet, another participant described attainment of manhood in terms of rites of passages marking the transition from childhood to adulthood. Ujulu explained this reality saying: “When a person is getting matured, his front lower teeth are pulled out symbolizing he is a mature adult; moreover, young men leave family home and build their own houses signaling that they are ready to get married” (personal communication, April 21, 2014).

**Reasons for Liking/ Disliking Being a Man**

An often cited aspect of masculinity among most men is that of being different from women. Fifteen respondents out of the 21 reported that they dislike being a man when men are displaying gender atypical behaviors i.e. gender inappropriate dressing, hair style, etc. They criticized some of the young men in the campus for exhibiting such mannerisms of being a man, simply by copying from Westerners as shown by the media. They reported that young men who adopted Western mannerisms are often convinced what is portrayed by the media are faultless; even they don’t know the meanings the Westerners ascribe to these mannerisms of being a man. The following quote illustrate why the respondents dislike students who are displaying gender atypical behaviors:

I dislike being a man when men are behaving in gender-atypical ways; for instance, there are some young men in our campus who dress in trousers below their waist, having ‘Shuruba’ hair style and piercing their ear. In the past, ‘Shuruba’ hair style was a sign of bravery; while ear piercing was symbolizing killing a lion or a tiger, it could also signify getting victory over the enemy. (Gebre, personal communication, June 26, 2013)

Likewise, Gemechu expressed his views about young men who display gender inappropriate behaviors as follows:

I consider those men who share some traits of women as unmanly. For instance, I don’t consider men who put their trousers below their waist, having odd hairstyles, hanging a big cross and piercing ear as real men. In the past, we know that ear piercing designates bravery; now days there is no such bravery i.e. there is no practice of killing animals. (Gemechu, personal communication, June 26, 2013)

Some female respondents (5 out of the 9) reported that they like ‘being a man’ for men are self-confident and physically strong, while they dislike being a man when men are harassing and abusing women. They reported that in the boy-friend and girl-friend relationships in the campus, a young man likes his peers more than his girl-friend. They establish romantic relationship with females only to be seen by their peers as a real man for having a girl-friend. Most female participants also criticize young men who are frequently changing their sexual partners and those who consider females as sexual objects. For instance, Addis explained why she likes/dislikes being a man saying:

I like to be a man for men are showing physical strength; for they have self-confidence. This means, they speak in the public with confidence, they also protect themselves and their family. I dislike being a man when men physically and sexually abuse women, thinking that women are powerless. (personal communication, June 25, 2013)

On the other hand, some male respondents (6 out of the 13) described that they like to be a man for men are privileged and not affected by biological factors like menstruation and labor as evidenced by the following quotes:

When I consider women’s labor and pregnancy, I’m happy for being a male; of course this could be a gift for women. The other thing that makes me surprised and makes me feel happy for being a male is the freedom I’m granted being a man. For instance, males can stand and pass their urine elsewhere; however, females can do this with great care and only after checking that there is no one around. (Gemechu, personal communication, June 26, 2013)

Lambebo also said: “I hate to be a woman because of the natural biological problems like menstruation and labor. Besides, some females feel dependent; for instance, they think that if they couldn’t graduate, they can get married and use their husband’s resources” (personal communication, June 26, 2013).

Yet, other participants evaluate their liking/disliking of being a man in terms of workloads assigned for men and women. For instance, Ujulu described this view saying:

I’m happy for being a man, I have an authority both in my family and in my community; I’m expected to have a wife, a child, and a home. But I dislike being a man for I’m shouldering all the responsibilities and for the entire family are dependent on me. (Personal communication, April 20, 2014)

Tola also explained: “For men are doing works outside the home, they are taking rest during the night; however, women are working starting from early in the morning up to the time they are going to bed to sleep” (personal communication, May16, 2014).

**Beliefs about Masculine Gender Role****s**

Gender rolesaretied with the divide between men’s work and women’s work, i.e., the traditional gendered division of labor demonstrating the cultural rejection of gender equality. A strong cultural sentiment here is the belief that men are heads of the household, which amongst other things, meant that they go out to work, while women are expected to do household chores. This shows conformity to the traditional gender roles. The following quote validate this reality:

There are many roles that are assigned for men in our culture. Manhood is tied to being independent, having a family and being in control of the family as head of the household; he is expected to lead the society. Females are given lower positions; they are expected to do household chores. (Gemechu, personal communication, June 26, 2013)

Similarly, Lambebo said:

In the family a man has to get employed and has to control the family as a head of the household, while a woman is expected to accomplish all the activities at the home. Men guide the family and also discipline children. A woman’s role is to receive and to put into action the orders; otherwise, she is not allowed to be equal to her partner when it comes to household decision-making. (Lambebo, personal communication, June 25, 2013)

Fifteen respondents out of the 21 reported that doing chores around the house is seen as a woman’s domain and men were viewed as responsible only for doing the manly jobs.A woman is not encouraged to go out of home; she is expected to stay at home and carries out household chores. Men are viewed as responsible only for doing hard jobs that may require physical strength and fitness. Their report further revealed that most men feel pressured to act masculine; it seems that there is a pervasive fear among males that the worst possible insult is to be labeled womanish. This is because society has taught them that male is superior and to act female is, consequently, inferior. The subsequent quote explains this traditional role division between men and women:

In my culture, there are roles that are assigned to men and women. For instance, a man is expected to be a breadwinner and the head of the household, but he is not expected to do chores around the house like cooking and feeding the family, washing clothes, cleaning, etc. It is only a woman who is expected to carry out such activities. A man who is performing roles assigned to a woman is considered as weak or sissy. He is ridiculed or he is discriminated; he is also laughed at. (Addis, personal communication, June 25, 2013)

Ujulu also described the traditional roles of men and women as follows:

A man is considered a real man if he engages in manly activities, like plowing, making house and fence, going to forest and killing wild animals for food; a man not carrying out such activities is said to have a womanish character, and thus not regarded as a real man. (Ujulu, personal communication, April 20, 2014)

Ebsitu further said:

Men are expected to carry out jobs that require physical strengths, for instance, chopping wood, plowing, etc, while women are expected to involve in cooking, cleaning, shopping, and washing clothes. There is a belief that men are responsible for jobs outside of the home. Men are also expected to assume leadership; even it is only when men assume leadership positions that the society expects something better will be done. (Ebsitu, personal communication, June 25, 2013)

Regarding the need to live up to the socially expected roles of being a man, most interview participants (18 out of the 21) elucidated that failure to conform to the cultural expectation of being a man leads men to be discriminated, to be labeled unmanly or useless. Unless they conform to the socially expected roles of being a man they are also unable to become a role model for others. On the contrary, they reported that meeting the requirements of the socially expected roles of being a man helps men to win acceptance and respect from others. In this regard, Addis reported: “When men live up to the socially expected roles of being a man, above all they win acceptance; they are respected” (personal communication, June 25, 2013).

Being unable to live up to societal expectations may put men under pressure. Men are considered to be real men when they are drinking, sexually satisfying their partner, controlling their family, and punishing/beating their wife; failure to conform to these roles means to be viewed as unmanly. (Gemechu, personal communication, June 26, 2013)

Correspondingly, Gebre revealed:

If a man failed to live up to the societal expectation, then he is discredited; thus, he is not considered as a real man. Unless someone is able to live up to societal expectation, he can’t be even a good role model for others. So, the disadvantage is failure to become a role model, while the advantage is by placing oneself in a better position and then becoming a good role model for others. (Gebre, personal communication, June 26, 2013)

Moreover, Ebsitu described society’s intolerable views related to unable to conform to cultural norms of being a man as follows:

If a man is unable to conform to the cultural norms of being a man, he loses his reputation. For instance, if a man is always doing household chores rather than doing manly jobs, the society may label him sissy. He may not even get friends i.e. he can be discriminated. (Ebsitu, personal communication, June 25, 2013)

**DISCUSSION**

The specific purpose of this study was to provide new information regarding the meanings ascribed to masculinity among university students. Thus, the results of the present study are discussed in detail in line with this specific objective hereunder.

The present study attempted to explore the various meanings ascribed to masculinity among undergraduate university students; consequently, several core concepts arose that reflected the meanings of masculinity among the study participants. This is in line with the social constructionist perspective of masculinities, which recognizes the existence of multiple masculinities and emphasizes the influence of social contexts in shaping these meanings. In this regard, FazliKhalaf et al. (2013) found out that socio-cultural factors, such as family environment, religion, public media and popular life style patterns help to shape and reinforce the meanings of masculinities among university men. In this study, most young adults associated ‘being a man’ with involving in risky practices (such as smoking, using substance, drinking, and having multiple sexual partners), fearlessness, courageousness, bravery, and recording some achievements in life. This is similar to the finding by Odimegwu, Okemgbo, and Pallikadavath (2005), who reported that both young and adult men associated masculinity with having many sexual partners, non use of condoms during sexual act, hard work, rationality, power and authority, aggressive, and tough. In the same way, recent studies of masculinity and social behavior implied that involving in risky health behaviors may be an important resource in the social construction of a masculine identity (Connell, 1995; Courtenay, 2000).

‘Being a man’ is also perceived as exhibiting manly behaviors not feminine traits; for instance, being inexpressive. This is supporting Rakgoasi’s (2010) finding, which revealed that an often cited aspect of masculinity among most men is that of being different from women. To be a man, someone has to possess certain attributes that are commonly perceived to be missing in women; one such attribute is inexpressiveness, which basically means that to be a man one should not be too quick to disclose his concerns to other people. Other participants further expressed their views of ‘being a man’ in terms of independence/self-reliance. These participants expressed desires to be their own men. This is in line with a study by Barrett (2001), who reported that men are demonstrating an alternative way of being a man by expressing their individuality and autonomy from social forces.

On the other hand, most interview participants reported that some young men in the university want to prove their masculinity by exhibiting gender inequitable behaviors; i.e. ‘being a man’ for such young men is equated with controlling females. Similar to Tesfaye’s (2006) report, this study revealed that the existing power relationship between male and female university students is simply the reflection of what is being practiced in the society at large i.e. the power relationship is more of traditional, evidencing males’ domination over females.

In this study, most interview participants perceived attainment of manhood in terms of achievement of a certain status, rather than biologically attaining a certain age. These include being independent, having a familyand being a breadwinner for one’s family. This is in line with the finding by Rakgoasi (2010), who reported that manhood as a social construct is attained by economic independence, marriage and childbearing; caring for and being in control of the family and being a responsible and respected member of the society. This finding is also similar to Barker and Ricardo’s (2005) report, which revealed that a primary mandate of achieving manhood in Africa is the achievement of some level of financial independence, employment or income and subsequently starting a family.

Most of the respondents of the present study reported that they dislike being a man when men are displaying gender atypical behaviors, such as having odd hairstyles like “Shuruba” hair style, hanging a big cross and piercing ears. They criticized those young men in the campus who are exhibiting such traits of being a man simply by copying from Westerners as shown by the media. This is in line with Simiyu’s (2007) finding, which revealed that walking the streets of Kenyan towns, it becomes a common practice to see young men who are displaying an ambiguous gender appearance or portraying feminine characteristics. She explained that this is due to peer influence, electronic and media influence, urbanization and women empowerment.

Consistent with most previous research findings, interview participants of the present study identified a range of socially ascribed and socially expected roles that men assume, such as the expectation that male is the head of the household (i.e. he makes important decisions), doing jobs requiring physical strengths (for instance, chopping wood, plowing, etc.) and disciplining children (Simiyu, 2007); that he should be responsible and responsive to the needs of his family (Hammond &Mattis, 2005); and that he is the breadwinner (Epprecht, 1998; Pyke, 1996). This finding is also consistent with the traditionally appropriate gender roles for men in most societies identified by Morrell (1998), which includes primary breadwinner, head of the household, and the holder of leadership roles not only in their families but also in their communities.Interview participants also reported that failure to live up to socially expected roles of being a man leads men to be discriminated, to be labeled unmanly or useless, to be unable to become a role model. This is in line with Odimegwu, Okemgbo, and Pallikadavath’s (2005) finding, which pointed out that failure of a man to demonstrate proof of manhood reverberates in shame, ridicule and street jokes.

Generally, the meanings ascribed to ‘being a man’ discussed above reflected that most participants of the present study, particularly young men endorsed traditional/hegemonic masculinity depicted in the literature. For instance, Courtenay (2000) explained that traditionally ‘real men’ masculine identity is denoted by having certain personality traits, such as strength, independence, achievement, hard work, heterosexuality, toughness, aggression, unemotional/ inexpressiveness, physicality, competitiveness and forcefulness.

**CONCLUSIONS** **AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The present study attempted to provide new information regarding the meanings ascribed to masculinities among undergraduate university students in Ethiopia. Accordingly, the study reveals that the university context provides a particular culture that constructs and reinforces the meanings of masculinity among young university students. Several core concepts were embedded in the meanings of masculinity, including a display of risky behaviors, bravery, self-reliance, controlling females, inexpressiveness, recording some achievements in life, etc.From this one can easily understand that the meanings ascribed to ‘being a man’ pointed out above reflected that most participants of the present study, particularly young men endorsed traditional/hegemonic masculinity depicted in the literature.

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