# Being and Becoming:
# A Photographic Inquiry with Bahá'í Men into Cultures of Peace

by

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## Abstract

*Being and Becoming: A Photographic Inquiry with Bahá'í men into Cultures of Peace* is doctoral research that asks how Bahá'í men know, experience and perform their own masculinities as told through their stories and photographs. Within the spiritual context of the Bahá'í sacred tenet of equality of the sexes it sought new knowledge about how participants negotiate and transform their masculinities to facilitate rather than thwart the building of cultures of peace. Using photographic, art-based methods it asked: What is it to be a man today and attempt to construct a new understanding of masculinity? How is this process evident in practice? What are the stories of resistance and/or negotiation with negative cultural norms of masculinity? The study is upheld by three theoretical guy-wires: Bourdieu's habitus, the Magic Mirror of visual introspection through photography, and Sacred Relationship a core Bahá'í and Indigenous lens into power, equality and accountability to *all our relations*. The study used PhotoSophia (a new photo-elicitation method), with a bundle of six methodological practices incorporating arts-based visual methods: Interview, PhotoSophia, group study and discussion, inscription, Photovoice and public exhibit. These methods were designed to seek deep reflection into masculine identity formation. The study concluded with a public exhibit of the photographs and inscriptions created by the researcher and participants opening the process to outside input through anonymous questionnaires. Findings include the agency the self-reflective *PhotoSophia* method itself as illumination into the shadows of masculinity. Primary findings are: willing vulnerability as a form of moral courage; ambiguity as a state of learning and resisting; the need for examples, a standard for a new masculinity; authenticity to be one's true self in alignment with the Creator, and all our relations, and finally practicing sacred spiritual relationships in shoulder to shoulder service with women and others. This study has both methodological and theoretical significance to Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) theory by providing new knowledge about the masculine qualities that best facilitate the building of cultures of peace, equality and human oneness.

## Acknowledgments

I must begin with praise and gratitude to the Creator, and for sending the Divine Mirror Bahá'u'lláh. I would never had pursued this degree without Their constant aid and inspiration. Next I must thank *all my relations*, my family, especially my beloved Dawn, our marriage for forty-four orbits of the sun is a *Fortress of Wellbeing and Salvation*, my sons Elliot Andrew, and Gregory Amoz, and Greg's wife Brittany, my mother Frances and father Charles Sr. It was my mother who early on recognized my learning disabilities and became a powerful advocate for my education while encouraging my artistic abilities. I wish she could read this.

My mentor, teacher, advisor and friend Dr. Jessica Senehi has from the start been my encourager, challenger and wise confidant. She combines a unique blend of qualities, a brilliant mind, a compassionate and empathetic soul, a tender heart and a fierce dedication to the discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) and her students. I am particularly grateful for her amazing whole brain approach, fully embracing the non-verbal and verbal, balancing and blending them in her dedication to storytelling as peacebuilding. My committee members, Dr. Thomas Matyók, and Dr. Lisa Landrum have supported and contributed the development of my thesis. Tom is a long-time mentor, professor in my PACS Master's program at the University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG) who encouraged my pursuit of a Ph.D. Lisa, has both challenged and encouraged my thesis and offered a steady calming influence, and an essential arts-based perspective from Architecture. Thanks to Dr. Cathie Witty for accepting and encouraging me in my master's program at UNCG and throughout the progress of my PhD.; professors Dr. Sean Byrne, Dr. Maureen Flaherty, Dr. Hamdesa Tuso, Dr. Graham Lea, and Dr. Cathryne Schmitz. Profound thanks to the Bahá'ís of Winnipeg, especially the wise and humble men who graciously participated in this study. Finally, I thank Audrey Unger for her fine editing.

# Dedication

## Mohammad Ali Parsa

Mohammad Ali Parsa was born in the town of Sang-sar in the province of Semnan, Iran on 21 May 1934. Mohammad was an active member of the Bahá'í community, serving on the Local Spiritual Assembly. This led to many difficulties when the Iranian Revolution came about in 1979 and Bahá'ís became the focus of a state-run pogrom lasting until the 1990s. His children were forced to leave the country to pursue post-secondary education, family members were arrested and killed in prison, and he himself was pursued by the Iranian authorities for the sole reason of being a Bahá'í. He was expelled from his job as a government engineer, his pension taken, his land and home confiscated, and Bahá'í books seized. He and his wife Zoleikha were forced to survive, moving from place to place for several years, at one time living in their car. During this time Mohammad and Zoleikha continued to provide moral and administrative support on behalf of Baha’i institutions, because official Bahá'í organizations were and continue to be banned in Iran, home to over 300,000 Bahá'ís. Eventually they came to Canada due to Mohammad’s serious health conditions and became permanent residents.

I was honored to meet Mohammad on many occasions. He always greeted me with a warm embrace, an inviting smile as his eyes beamed with light. Mohmmad sadly died June 24, 2018 just before the *Being and Becoming* study research began. He was well known by all the men in the study and we wholeheartedly decided to dedicate our work for the sacred Bahá'í tenet of equality in his name. He was the father-in-law of Jim Martin, one of the study participant’s. Bahá'ís are encouraged to pray for and dedicate good works to those who have passed on. We believe it aids in the progress of their soul in the next world, and that their prayers for us aid us in this world. Thanks to my dear Sarah Parsa Martin for sharing historic details about her grandfather.

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## Introduction

"This is an arts-based thesis-in-progress, a snapshot of research unvarnished, a sacred inquiry into truth and transformation – evolving and emerging. It is a "*workshop, not an art gallery*," offering a glimpse into an unfinished struggle for gender equality in the present moment." (Egerton, 2019a), unpublished poster from the Being and Becoming exhibit

Italics added ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1925, p. 518)

It is a sacred act to position myself in relationship to you the reader. What good is it to inquire into profoundly deep issues, such as masculinity in the context of gender equality if we don't understand each other? Our relationship is a prerequisite for deeper understanding as we in a form of sacred ceremony inquire together (Wilson 2008, p. 12). I am a photographer (Figure 1), artist/inquirer/teacher on a creative journey in the borderlands of my masculine identity, and I realize this masculinity is but a part of who I am. Many of us are aware of the artist within, that urge in us to create and transform. It has taken me a lifetime of practice to feel comfortable calling myself an artist. Often, we do not see art as part of the story of our lives, or that being an artist only relates to creative types we see as special, endowed at birth with unique creative powers to see the world differently. My personal experience teaching photography to thousands of students over decades has proven we are all artists. This inner artist finds form in a myriad of ways powered by the primal

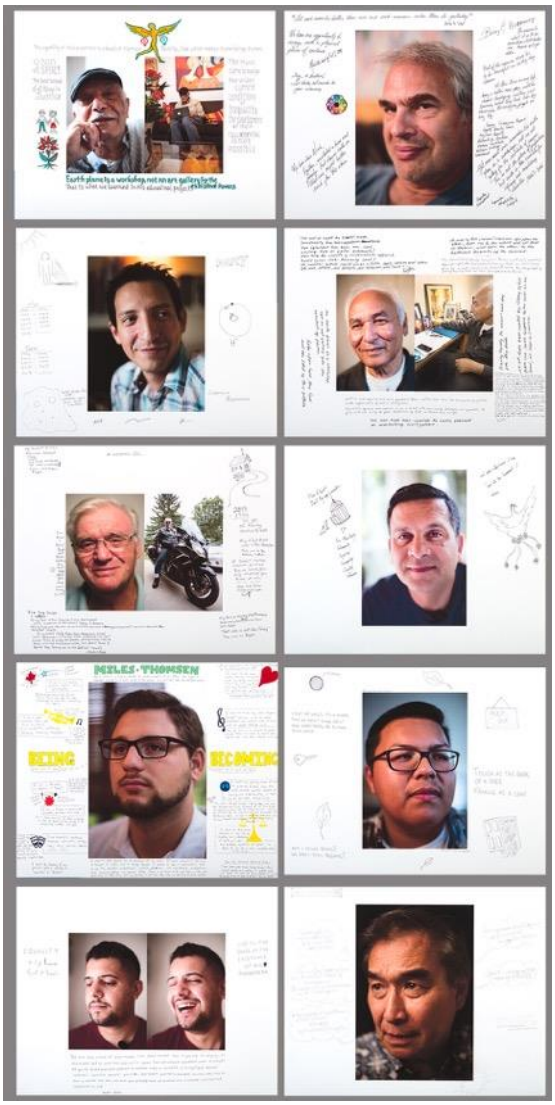



*Figure 1. Ten PhotoSophia portraits of participants in the study,© 2019 Chuck Egerton*

urge to leave an immortal mark on the world, make it a more just and peaceful place, to heroically proclaim truth and save others from harm.

Everything I know as a man has been narrated, edited and mediated. I long to break free of this confinement to find new ways of knowing and I will try to tell my journey's story through the agency of my doctoral study: "*Being and Becoming: A Photographic Inquiry with Bahá'í Men into Cultures of Peace.*" Our sacred relationship insists that who I am is related to who you are and that our realities intersect. I am accountable to you and to all my relations in the work that follows, as I pursue this inquiry through the shadows into authentic masculinity and peace. My title *Being and Becoming* reveals the trajectory of this journey, and Plato (2006) offers insight into this space when he writes, "[a]s being is to becoming, so is pure intellect to opinion. And as intellect is to opinion, so is science to belief, and understanding to the perception of shadows" (p. 522).

I must tell you I did not expect the enormity of the task and the sea of stories and knowing that flowed over me in this process. I feel much of it slipped through my fingers or has faded in memory, but perhaps that's the way it should be, stories shared are fragments of experience that each listener must sew into the fabric of their own reality.

This is a study on masculine identity in the context of establishing equality of the sexes. It asks how Bahá'í men know, experience and perform their own masculinities as told through their stories and photographs. Within the spiritual context of the Bahá'í tenet of equality of the sexes it seeks new knowledge about how participants negotiate their masculinities in a process of building cultures of peace. The Bahá'í International Community (2015) clearly frames the important context of this question to this study when they write "[a]t the outset, we wish to state clearly our belief that the equality of men and women is a facet of human reality and not just a condition to be achieved for the common good. That which makes human beings human—their inherent dignity and nobility—is neither male nor female. The search for meaning, for purpose, for community; the capacity to love, to create, to persevere, has no gender. Such an assertion has profound implications for the organization of every aspect of human society" (p. 2).

The strands of this inquiry include: knowing, performing, navigating, negotiating and transforming the kinds of masculinities essential in men who seek to build cultures and communities of peace. The focus is on men because at this point in time they hold the balance of power and influence at most every level of human society and organization. Because of their

controlling position the manner in which men perform their masculinities has massive implications for peace, equality, unity and justice for humankind.

In these pages I will explain how unhealthy masculinities are denying the world equality and peace as well as men's potential to be authentic human beings. *Being and Becoming* is about this journey in the *space between* our current state of being and the process of transformation and recreation to become our true selves and realize our great potential to work side by side with women and create cultures of peace on our way to realizing the oneness of humankind.

Ten men unified in a quest to know themselves and by walking together had the chance to see in each story and footsteps on this path a mirror of ourselves and a perhaps a guide to the way forward. It is a journey past what Bahá'u'lláh (1994, p. 156) called the "[t]rue loss" of an "utter ignorance of his self," to the ultimate goal "he hath known God who had known himself" (2014, p. 178).

We found it to be a pathway of accountability and responsibility, to strike the balance needed to build true cultures of peace, to "bring thyself to account each day" (Bahá'u'lláh, 2012, p. 11). To be accountable, men must find that their origin is in women, and in women is the innate power of bringing beings to life. "In the necessity of life, woman is more instinct with power than man, for to her he owes his very existence" (Abdu'l-Bahá, 1969, pp. 161–162).

The framing of this study was as a "workshop not an art gallery" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1925, p. 518). This is key to understanding the new knowing it uncovers. It was an effort to find light not darkness, to discover new pathways of self-knowledge and social behavior that can help us see a clearing ahead, a glimmer of light on the horizon, a touchstone to guide humanity, and especially men, towards a more peaceful existence. It is important to note that although the men in this study are Bahá'ís, and the sacred context is based on Bahá'í beliefs, all of these principles are not exclusive, finding resonance and harmony with the spiritual paths of all peoples. Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Prophet/Founder, taught that all religions come from one Creator, and that no group of people have been left without guidance. This can be found in the religious and cultural diversity of this small sample of ten Bahá'í men. It must also be clearly stated that Bahá'ís are not perfect. They are in the sacred struggle for gender equality working side-by-side with like-minded men of all faiths, and no faith. This is a struggle, not of politics and power, but for human authenticity and the enrichment of the spiritual life of the soul. It asks what qualities men need to be the best co-workers in the building of communities of peace, justice and equality. To add emphasis I

repeat this study is a “workshop not an art gallery” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1925, p. 518), a snapshot of the evolving struggle for gender equality in the present moment.

I was surprised at how willing and determined the men in my study could be, to engage in this deep introspective quest for equality, in both private and public. I was also surprised at how this study affected me, and my own search for self and authenticity, the life-long journey to align myself with the sacred principles of my faith, especially equality. I was surprised that the methodology I devised, *PhotoSophia*, became like a deep diving bathyscaphe into ourselves. Plunging into the depths of vulnerability, ambiguity, authenticity, uncovering the need for touchstones, and the vital role of practicing these attributes in working with others, especially women.

**Situating Myself as Artist/Photographer/Researcher**

My artistic hand is found in the design and expression of this study. The combination of art making, and peacebuilding in this study helps fill a gap in PACS research and practice, especially through its use of a new arts-based methodology *PhotoSophia*. The *art as finding* contained in this thesis is profound, and worthy of further research applying this method.

As photographer I surrendered control to my co-artist participants; they decided which images were to be used. I chose the framing, lighting and timing of the shutter's release. I wrote the interview questions; they answered them as they wished and approved it for use in my dissertation. I printed their chosen portrait on a large bordered paper; they wrote and drew the inscriptions. I suggested themes for their photovoice photos; they took the photographs and wrote the captions. I booked the gallery space; they helped in the design and display of the photographs. This has always been the way it is, as Sontag (2003) writes "[t]he photographer's intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it" (p. 39). The description of a photograph parallels the description of this study " [a photograph] is always an image someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude" (p.46). Here I had to trust the process I've set into motion, and that my co-artists, and co-researchers (and all my sacred relations) would lend a guiding hand.

# Chapter One

## The Construction of Masculine Identities and Cultures of Peace

This chapter will explore the context supporting the *Being and Becoming* study. It will inquire into the gender conflicts and inequalities, from both intra-interpersonal levels, as well as social conditions that warrant the research of this study. It addresses the context of this conflict in two parts. First, I provide a critical review of the theoretical and empirical literature on the social construction of gender, and the role of masculinity in peace and conflict studies theory, related to *Cultures of Peace*. The following critical review surveys the complex ocean of gender theories, concepts, and ideas. Come up for air as you need to. This is important to review in preparation for Chapter Two, which looks into these issues within a Bahá'í framework, weaving construction and essentialism, and with consideration of how culture intersects with gender in the ethos of the Bahá'í religion.

*"The fish will be the last to discover the ocean."*
- Old Folk Saying (David & Brannon, 1976, p. 2)

### Construction of Gender Identities

The most powerful products of the social construction of gender are the roles of femininity and masculinity — identities that occupy the social and cultural center around which almost everything revolves. These gender notions become realities that construct and constrict our collective truth and self-identity. They establish codes and rules on how to think and behave in the social order. People's blindness to these social codes does not preclude their existence or their power over us. The old saying: the fish will be the last to discover the ocean" (David & Brannon, 1976, p. 2), cleverly describes our predicament. Gender is the ocean we swim in, because it permeates our thinking and influences our behaviors. We cannot see its construction without conscious efforts to summon it.

The social sciences continue some debate over whether the sea of gendered truths and identities are embodied and innate, nurtured, or both. Most agree gender construction is a direct result of cultural conditioning, what Freire (1996) would describe as "an empty *mind* passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside" (p.75). Gender can be a

divisive, destabilizing construction when it is used to pit superiority against inferiority. We see evidence of these colonizing gender codes at all social and cultural levels from interpersonal (micro), to international (macro and mega). Hofstede et al. (2010) defines culture "as the collective mental programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another" (p.6). They are policed, as in Foucault's surveilling panopticon (Banks, 2001, at every level through direct, cultural, and structural violence (Galtung & Höivik, 1971). But there is no police force or formal training, everyone is drafted into service. Negative consequences can be applied to those not following the rules.

Butler (2004) critiques, what she views as feminist theory's assumptions, that the idealized feminine/masculine binary and hetero centricity are the only definitions of gender. She is concerned that such assumptions confine gender possibilities and could create and enforce new gender hierarchies (pp. vii–viii). Social science literature is heavily weighted with arguments supporting the theory that gender is socially constructed (Atkinson, 2011; Butler, 1999; R. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; S. Harper, 2004; O'Neil, 2015). The concept of gender performativity or gender as performance is also strongly supported (Butler, 2004; Englander, 2007; French, 1992). The construction of gender within families has been studied in psychology, sociology, gender, family, and men's studies. Non-binary and gender and sexual minority (GSM) identities residing on the fluid spectrum between the gender binaries have been under the research microscope in Queer studies (Butler, 1999; Jennifer. Coates, 2003; French, 1992; Harris & Harper, 2008; Kirsch, 2000; O'Neil, 2015).

It goes without need for emphasis that the inequality, liberation, and empowerment of women, has been and continues to be heavily researched and expounded in Feminist and Queer theories. Sprague (2005) challenges feminist researchers to seek and unpack the construction of gender roles in research subjects with social power. She argues it is too common to "study down" by researching those with less power or in the social margins. Researching only the "downside of hierarchies" takes the spotlight off the powerful, elite, and privileged who are seldom studied (pp. 10-13). In the context of peace work, Väyrynen (2010) raises the issue that post-structuralist feminism "calls for the understanding of the process of the construction of masculinities and femininities that takes place during the formative moment of peacebuilding" (p. 142). In the context of masculinities conducive to *Cultures of Peace*, Brienes (Mayton, 2009) states that the lens of gender research has aimed at women but has seldom looked at men. It is

the focus of this study to uncover the role men and masculinities can play in either promoting or preventing gender equality.

hooks (2000) places feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression” (p. xiii) and a “foundation of equality and justice” (p. x), but that feminism is not only about women gaining equality with men. A feminist approach to researching conflict in general seeks to uncover and deconstruct the hidden basis of societal power underlying the social construction of gender identities. The feminist study of gender has increased our understanding of the social mechanics of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and misogyny that sustain and perpetuate sexual inequality, sexual violence, and the oppression of women. hooks writes that feminism has always welcomed men to the feminist struggle; to raise consciousness on sexism to investigate, unpack, and understand their own masculinities, how they are social constructed, performed, and their potential to be transformed.

Gender identities are perpetually transacted, writes Hooper (2001), while at the same time we daily navigate our identities within the intersectional context of the power dynamics within our social circumstances, time and culture. She concludes that:

> gender identities are neither totally self-created nor completely determined, but are subject to historical development and may vary according to context. Nor can they be separated from other factors of identity formation; notably, class, race, and sexuality. Although biology is relevant to gender identity, it is not the foundation upon which our identities are built (p. 38).

The ability to change and transform our own conditioned gendered identities may seem impossible, even as they are challenged by social science, and the rising social movements of feminism, equality, and gender sexual minority (GSM) rights. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus aligns with Social Identity Theory to address how an individual unconsciously dons a socially constructed self, and how that construction interacts with others on the social field; that masculine identities are contextual. This, and how habitus relates to Bourdieu’s concepts of *field* and *capital* is explained in a section below.

Socially constructed gender realities can be like a stone wall, solidly assembled, built of interlocking thoughts, ideas, narratives, ideals, traditions, histories, and assumptions that stand on one another shaping our identities. Some want to build the wall others want to remove it altogether. Utt (2014) wrote that some feminists see the only solution as the “destruction of

gender" itself, putting an end to the very concept of traditional gender roles (pp. 2-3). Removing or rearranging even one stone can jeopardize the integrity of the entire construction and risk its collapse. This fixed social construction establishes its own social truth and protects its own construction. The binary frame of sex and gender is one of these constructions.

**Gender, Sex, and the Binary Frame**

Butler (1999) claims that in the dichotomy of male/female, masculine/femininity signify the "binary frame" that in their pairing imply and support unequal hierarchies of power (p. xxi). She explains that feminists avoid dichotomies and binary references because they are perceived as evoking differences rather than sameness, can diminish equality, increase reductionism, and always advantage male supremacy. According to Merry (2009), sex and gender are different. Sex is physical; gender is social and psychological. Sex is defined by the diverse bodies of women and men, our sex organs, hormones and chromosomes. She also points out that a true binary of male/female does not exist. According to Konner (2016) about one percent of humanity are on the continuum of diverse embodiments between female and male called intersex. Blackless et al. (2000) claims the number could be double that.

Gender can also be described as expressions and performances of femininity, masculinity, or a combination along a diverse spectrum of performances between the binaries. These performances are fluid, not fixed, and are based on social and cultural conditioning. The idea that gender is inherent to the physical body, a hardwired and inherent trait, is considered essentialist (Atkinson, 2011). The way most of us navigate these binaries is through gender culture.

**Gender Culture**

Stephenson's (2009) chapter on "Gender Equality and a Culture of Peace" published in *The Handbook of Building Cultures of Peace* traces the evolution of theories on gender difference in peace building and peace studies. Stephenson suggests that although there are no significant essential differences between men and woman, differences can be attributed to *gender*

*cultures*. She describes *gender cultures* in terms of stereotypes, perceptions and systematized differences (De Rivera, 2009).

An example of "gender culture" is found in Hofstede's (2016) Masculinity Index (MAS) which juxtaposes woman as "having a preference for harmony" against men, "having a preference for confrontation." Hofstede crunches data from international polling to create the quantitative MAS index with ratings from 1-100. The MAS index aligns with Stephenson's concept of "gender culture." It is used to define national characteristics as masculine or feminine, as a tool of correlation to better understand contrasting national worldviews, that could be the causes of conflict. Using public opinion polls, it gathers a telling picture of everyday gender attitudes. Gender cultural attributes and attitudes can be considered essentialist gender stereotypes, but they accurately reflect *cultural beliefs* and generally accepted social concepts and norms. Gender culture is the foundation upon which powerful social structures have been built, regardless of the hardwired vs. mutability argument (pp. 123-125).

Gender essentialism plays out in ways similar to how whites use the concept of *colorblindness* in race relations. Colorblindness is described by white proponents as unbiased, and that to acknowledge racial differences is unequal and itself racist. Most people of color view the acknowledgment of racial difference and diversity as empowering, equalizing and unifying. Is to acknowledge difference empowering or demeaning (Mazzocco, 2017)? Can there be equality in diversity? The social context and history of oppression and power must be considered. Whether socially constructed or essential, gender roles hold great social capital, define our gender cultures, and permeate our collective ethos. What matters and has meaning in the context of this study is that gender roles can be transformed by the agency of the actor performing them.

Leatherman (2005) writes that "The point of making a gendered analysis explicit is to highlight different social expectations and consequences that attend from the gendered roles of masculinity versus femininity." On masculinity, she concurs with most social scientists that the performance of masculinities is fluid, constructed, reconstructed and negotiated on a daily basis adapting to whatever social situation arises (p. 105).

Regardless of the debate on gender foundations it remains largely mutable and central to the construction of our realities and identities. It is gender assumptions, beliefs, myths, traditions and histories, that bring advantages/disadvantages, entitlements/disenfranchisements and

powerful hierarchies. It is the enforcement of these rules, expectations and codes that give privilege and power to some, while constraining and subordinating others. Although a full discussion of these issues in social science, feminism, psychology, and neuroscience is well beyond the scope of this study, it will be continued in my discussion of gender within a Bahá'í context in the next chapter. Human identity within the social context is deeply linked our gender identity. Social Identity Theory helps us understand these connections.

**Social Identity Theory and Gender**

Social identity theory gives insights into the social construction of gender. Developed by Tajfel it explains the human need to identify with a group to enhance one's sense of self-esteem and find pride and place on the social field (McKeown et al. 2016). Because identity is a basic human need its loss, fracture, or disintegration is cited as the source for many conflicts in PACS theory (Galtung, 1990). This space between identities can be a site of transformation because identity is latched to the basic human need to belong.

Lederach and Lederach (2010), in *When the Bones Cry Out* discuss identity in almost transcendental terms as a "construction of meaning" and as "mechanisms of negotiating a multiplicity of simultaneously held but highly polarizing and contrasting social realities." These divergent realities "victim – perpetrator," "violence and community," "separation and belonging." move in a fluid process. Although Lederach and Lederach's metaphors are not gender specific, they can be well used to describe the process of gender identity construction and performance (p. 154).

The menu of masculine performances within one man can vary enormously. Performances change according to social and cultural context. Each context has its own unique indoctrination and enforcement and all forms of hegemonic and hyper-masculinity intersect. We could consider each of these aspects of social interaction as a stage for performance, playing different roles. These stages are everywhere: family life, the military, sexuality, sports, workplace, and in religious, educational, and civic spaces. It is through acting and performing on these stages that our sense of gender is constructed.

**Social Construction of Masculinity**

Justice, equality and violence against women have all been under the lens of PACS theorists. In my reading, with some exceptions cited below, I have seldom seen the best known PACS theorists address the social construction of masculinity or the ubiquitous role of patriarchy in context of conflict analysis. This is one of the gaps this study seeks to fill.

It is helpful at this point to specifically include writers and theorists who help identify the intersection of the social construction of masculinity and patriarchy within the PACS discipline and theory. Webel and Galtung's (2007) triangle of violence can serve as a lens of analysis for gendered cultural, direct and structural violence. Galtung (1969) writes "when one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence" illustrating the concepts of direct (personal) and structural violence through gender violence (p. 117).

Confortini (2006) in writing about the alignment of Peace and Feminist theories critiques Galtung for equating the concepts of sex and gender, not acknowledging patriarchy as a permeating system of violence, and not including gender as a factor in every analysis of conflict. Väyryne (2010) argues that no peacebuilding theories "discuss the gendered dynamics of peacebuilding" (p. 138). Is not gender a significant and integral factor in every analysis of violence and conflict? This is addressed later by *PhotoSophia*, a new peacebuilding methodology within the discipline.

Lederach (1995) relates a story about gender conflict in a program focusing on Somali women during the 1990's. The focus on gender was perceived as "politically correct," "peripheral," and "irrelevant" by International Relations and other local experts from the patriarchal nomadic culture. Lederach's approach seeks local "natural" resources in the peace process and he concluded that Western instrumentalist male views coupled with tribal masculinism overlooked the great resource women's connections to inter-tribal "social webs" could offer peacebuilding (pp. 99-100).

Lederach (2005) writes that indeed, no single theoretical approach to any conflict could sufficiently explain or help transform it, and that peacemaking has as its purpose and goal to promote equality and justice in the quest for a more peaceful world community and the reduction of violence. His elicitive model of peacebuilding, emphasizes the embrace of complexity,

patience, listening skills, and the use of metaphor and artistic approaches that could be traditionally categorized as more feminine than masculine.

Writing about the state of phallogocentrism[1] Butler (1999) sees that the "effort to identify the enemy as singular" is to rely on a tactic of the colonizer themselves losing sight of the intersectionality of all oppressions. She cites Irigaray's concept of "masculinist signifying economy" which holds that all social capital including women are commodities to be exchanged by men (pp. 18-19). Byrne and Senehi (2012) raise concerns about patriarchy and the conditioning of boys as sources of violence, and scrutinize the violence in war, crime, domestic, sexual and intimate partner violence. Violent performance learned through conditioning and exposure to the "war culture" helps construct toxic masculinities (p. 87).

Schüssler Fiorenza (1995) defined patriarchy in *Bread Not Stone: The challenge of feminist Biblical interpretation,* as an intersectional concept:

> I use the term patriarchy as a heuristic category. I do not use it in the loose sense of "all men dominating all women equally," but in the classical Aristotelian sense. Patriarchy as a male pyramid of graded subordinations and exploitations specifies women's oppression in terms of the class, race, country, or religion of the men to whom we "belong." This definition of patriarchy enables us to use it as a basic heuristic concept for feminist analysis, one that allows us to conceptualize not only sexism but also racism, property-class relationships, and all other forms of exploitation or dehumanization as basic structures of women's oppression (p. xiv).

Fiorenza also coined alternatives to the term patriarchy in "the neologisms "kyriarchy" and "kyriocentrism" (from the Greek for "rule/dominion of the master") to describe the many socio-religious structural layers of "systemic oppression and dehumanization" (p. 173).

hooks (2004) in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, often uses the phrase "imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy" (p. 17), to describe the intersectionality of oppressions faced worldwide. She defines patriarchy, as a "political-social system that insists males are inherently dominating and superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially women." Men think they "have the right to dominate and rule" and maintain the

[1] phallogocentrism is a neologism coined by Jacques Derrida to refer to the privileging of the masculine (phallus) in the construction of meaning. (Dely, 2007)

system through “psychological terrorism and violence.” Addressing the harm of that system on men themselves, hooks turns the tables, stating patriarchy is “the single most life–threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation” (p.18), a statement that gives urgency to this study.

Because masculinity is knotted to femininity, gendered conflict cannot be viewed in isolation. A better frame is to see it within the context of humanity’s cultural evolution and progress towards peace. It is in seeking the process of the social construction of gender that the question naturally arises, what about gender is essential, embodied and inherent, and what is learned, conditioned and colonized into us?

## Nature or Nurture

### Essentialism

Gender essentialism is illustrated by Galtung's statement in Matyók et al. (2011), that "in general, men are more deductive, from grand principles, and women more compassionate" (p. 13) because it assumes hardwired gender traits assigned by sex. The anthropological theory of essentialism is disputed by gender feminists because it, posits that male and female embodiment creates inherent and hardwired characteristics, tendencies, and qualities that make them different from each other (Atkinson, 2011).

Väyrynen (2010) writes about the differences among essentialist, standpoint and poststructuralist feminisms. Essentialist feminists believe gender traits are hardwired; standpoint feminists believe gender traits arise from having different experiences; postmodern feminists believe gender is totally a social construction. Kuhle (2012) writes about "gender feminists" and "equality feminists." Gender feminists, "the dominant voice in the academy," argue that all humans regardless of physical sex are born with a clean slate onto which the social construction of gender is written through a process of conditioning or colonization, aligning with postmodern feminists. Equality feminists align with standpoint feminists who insist that the evolution of the brain over millennia is a factor in the difference between male/female cultural traits, but they do not rule out the heavy influence of social construction. These feminists say the hormonal evolution of the sexes and the influence of testosterone on stem cells can hardwire men and women to adopt stereotypical gender behaviors and identities. Gender feminists' view is that any effort to delineate differences between the sexes promotes the oppression of women, disputing the idea of any fixed male/female traits, and positing that all are mutable and entirely socially constructed. The young field of evolutionary psychology has also entered the debate siding with equality and standpoint feminists (pp. 38-40).

Boulding (1990), in *Building a Global Civic Culture,* seems to emphasize the *binary frame* by identifying the "two cultures of men and women." She identifies patriarchal rule of men over women, children, and weaker men as a source of "dominance, rule of force, and with war." Boulding does criticize the essentialist view of patriarchy, calling it a "social artifact, not a biological necessity" identifying with gender feminists. But then, aligning with equality feminists, she writes extensively about the important roles of women as mothers, educators of

children, economic resources, and peacemakers and as "the social cement of every society" (pp. 62-64). While Boulding's views contains elements of both gender and equality feminism she challenges the notion that patriarchy has always been the dominant structural rule in human societies. In support of this premise she wrote *The Underside of History*: *A View of Women through Time* (1976), that strives to bring women's historic role in building civic culture and peace out of the shadows. Boulding's (2000) later work *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History* changes the male/female emphasis from *two cultures* to *new partnerships* but continues to emphasize essentialist views of woman as peacemakers and peacekeepers.

Merry (2009), in *Gender Violence*: *A Cultural Perspective,* discusses how essentialism, the idea that all women as different than men form a monolithic whole, actually helped the battered women's movement by claiming that men's violence against women was a universal experience. The idea was that "defining violence as fundamental to patriarchy and patriarchy as a set of institutions and ideologies that subordinate's women, violence against one women became violence against all." But in reference to current gender feminist theory she acknowledges "essentialism is both politically expedient and analytically flawed" (p. 15).

Social science parsed gender from biological sex as early as 1935 when Margaret Mead (2001) wrote a compelling description of gender roles using the imagery of Bourdieu's habitus[2] explaining that "the personality traits we have called masculine and feminine are as lightly linked to sex as are the clothing [and] manners" based on whatever a society "assigns to either sex," and that there is "overwhelming evidence in favor of social conditioning" (p. 260).

Greer is one prominent voice that doubts social conditioning as one hundred percent responsible for gender performance. She sees significant differences between women and men and has been negatively labeled an essentialist by gender feminists (Wallace, 2009). Empirical studies of the difference or similarity of male and female brains have also been criticized by gender feminists (Halari et al., 2006; Joel et al., 2015).

Kimmel (2008) disputes the idea of evolutionary psychology. He rhetorically asks, if gender is so hardwired why does it need to be socially policed; if this kind of masculinity is so natural how come it "fits as comfortably as a straitjacket" (p. 51)? Merry (2009) suggests that gender is not hardwired but describes an intersection between biological sex and gender is

[2] Bourdieu's theory of habitus is discussed in detail on pp. 34-35

evidenced in the fluid continuum of diverse masculine and feminine performances.[3]

An example of the rapidly developing changes in these concepts reflecting in civil law appeared in a CBC report by Zeidler (2017) of the first legal instance of a gender-neutral birth certificate. It was reported that the parents' reasoning was to avoid the oppression of assigning a sex and gender to a baby before they can make their own informed choice. The rise of nonbinary identities is covered in a recent *New York Times* article, "Which Box Do You Check." Harmon (2019) writes about calls for gender neutrality that ask to add an *X* option to the current *M* and *F* choices on official identification cards and forms, and for the use of nongendered pronouns like *they/them/their*.

These various theories and positions on gender production can be complex and contentious. I include them in my exploration of current thought, deciding which one most accurately describes the reality of gender is not within the scope of this study. Bahá'í perspectives will be layered onto what we've learned here in the next chapter. Another nagging question related to new understandings of masculinity is whether human nature is inherently violent.

**Are men inherently violent?**

Fry and Souillac (2017), cite Sahlin's (2008) argument that "we have been duped by a perversely inaccurate Western view of ourselves as sinfully self-centered, brutal, and corrupt" (p.1). They posit that this view is contrary to science when seen through the lens of current research on early nomadic human societies and present a prosocial "new empirically based narrative" (p.21).

> Given the choice, humans favor equality and self-determination over dominance and exploitation" and that current movements for social justice and human rights "may reflect basic human desires for democracy, self-determination, and prosociality that would seem to date as far back as our nomadic foraging past" (p. 21-22).

They further posit that these early human "partnership societies" practiced gender equality. To support this Fry and Souillac (2017) cite Dyble et al. (2015) who write that ten thousand years ago a shift from gender equality to inequality occurred.

[3] It should be noted that in this study the term sex refers to physical embodiment as female of male or female and the term gender refers to social performance.

> Once heritable resources, such as land and livestock, became more important determinants of reproductive success, sex biased inheritance and lineal systems started to rise, leading to wealth and sexual inequality (p. 9).

This counter narrative, that humans are not violent by nature was presented over thirty years ago in the Seville Statement (UNESCO, 1986) written by eminent scientists who in five propositions sought to dispel the myth of inherent human aggression, violence and war. Each proposition begins with "It is scientifically incorrect" (pp. 10-11).

Equipped with the knowledge that human history does not indelibly damn us as having a violent nature is important in finding new understandings of masculinity. This awareness of peaceful beginnings directs itself to the central question of this study: what will foster and promote new constructs of identity and behaviors in men conducive to building cultures of peace? The next question is about notions of inherent or proven gender superiority.

**Are women naturally superior?**

"Boys and girls really are different, and so are the men and women they become," Konner (2016, p. 206) writes in *Women After All: Sex, Evolution and the End of Male Supremacy*. Konner's book takes forward the science first presented in Montagu's 1953 landmark book, *The Natural Superiority of Women* (1999). Konner writes of Montagu,

> [H]e recognized men's biological advantages: greater size and muscle mass, a higher basal metabolism, the ability to make sperm throughout life, performance […] that demands speed, muscle and fierce bursts of energy. But women's [biological] advantages were much more impressive: women were longer-lived than men, had lower mortality at all ages, and were more resistant to many diseases [… implying] greater fitness and adaptation […] Most importantly, women had in their bodies the ability to reproduce – really reproduce, not just donate a micropacket of genes (p. 207).

Montagu's original work listed for the first time the great achievements of women now updated. Cited in Konner (2016) Montagu writes"[w]e have not yet begun to see what women can do" (pp. 207-208). The concept of who is superior echoes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's (1969) assertion that"[i]n the necessity of life, woman is more instinct with power than man, for to her he owes his very existence" (pp. 161–162) and relates to his concept of humanity as two interdependent

and complementary wings: women and men, a bird that has never flown, discussed at greater length in chapter two.

Konnor (2016) cites, with supporting evidence that "violence and driven sexuality" are two distinctly negative traits that make men different from women (p. 211). hooks (2004) puts this in another perspective.

> As women have gained the right to be patriarchal men in drag, women are engaged in acts of violence similar to those of their male counterparts. This serves to remind us that the will to use violence is really not linked to biology but to a set of expectations about the nature of power in a dominator culture (p. 55).

These ideas direct themselves to questions for future study that arose in this study: if masculine identity is warped and broken, is not feminine identity also broken? Is this limiting the potential for peace? Since gender identities are interwoven and exist in some ways only in the presence of the other, this codependency in the presence of male dominance and power has warped how women and femininity are perceived and performed when dependent on men for survival and framed structurally within male domination. When this is seen from the lens of what is needed to build cultures of peace, a new understanding of masculinity cannot but bring about a new understanding of femininity.

Powers that be have hijacked the narratives of nature versus nurture, essentialism, violence and superiority to forward their own agendas. This leads to the question of patriarchy's role in preventing human potential because all three are folded into this social construct.

**The School of Patriarchy, and the Theatre of Masculinities**

Reardon (1996), in *Sexism and the War System*, first defines peace as "a condition in which world order prevails for the majority of the Earth's people", but unattainable under patriarchy which directly opposes it. She defines patriarchy as a "system of dualisms" which feeds the winner vs. loser, friend vs. enemy mentality of war in which women are always the negative pole. She points to patriarchy as the source of the "binary frame" (p.37).

French (1992) writes in *The War Against Women* that modern feminism was the first to challenge patriarchy on the world stage. French defines patriarchy as "institutionalized male supremacy which probably arose in Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium BCE" (six millennia later than Fry and Souillac now estimate). She wrote "patriarchists" worship domination and

have declared war on women through their structure of hierarchical classes and male privilege. Patriarchy's actual intentions have never been made public but have "subjugated women" by declaring them divinely subordinate by "god and nature" (pp. 16-17). In French's (1985) earlier work *Beyond Power*: *On Women, Men and Morals*, she cleverly undercuts the essentialist view on male dominance positing that they are not "dominant by nature" and that "patriarchy is an attempt to make male dominance a "natural" fact. The trouble she asserts, is that people tend to believe it is natural for men to dominate and cannot imagine a society not structured around that myth (p. 65).

Current news reports are full of senseless acts of violence, racism and misogyny committed by toxic masculinism, that intersect with notions of western male, and white supremacy, over gender, race, class, and sexuality. The #metoo movement has risen in resistance to it. The most conspicuous story is the rise of xenophobic, misogynist and narcissistic men in national and international leadership and its effect on the increase of direct, structural and cultural violence. This uncloaking of these violent behaviors and misogynist actions, most of which are not new, has created a backlash, promoting leaders who brashly defend and espouse them. This reaction supports the idea that a crisis of male identity is rising, as many men see traditional roles being attacked and eroding around them.

**The Crisis: A Theatre of Masculine Tragedy**

We can see the crisis of *masculinities* in acts of violence and desperation and as outcomes of gender identity conflicts. *Masculinities* (plural) is better than the singular because of the wide diversity of its possible performances. Men are resisting the inevitable changes to masculinities occurring on the social field. Kimmel (2017), in research for the latest edition of his book *Angry White Men*, identified "aggrieved entitlement" (p. x)" as what has fueled the righteous indignation of some white men who see "anything even remotely approaching equality [as] a catastrophic loss (p. xii)." Donald J. Trump lead a populist movement to win the U.S. Presidency, strategically exploiting and stoking white male grief and rage, and their sense of entitled victimization. Kimmel further describes this populist movement as a "cascade of outrage" and a mourning these men feel for the loss of their manly honor, dignity and integrity by the encroaching forces of feminism, immigration, gender and racial equality and from

economic loss (p.x). Leatherman (2017) describes Trump as a performer of *catastrophic masculinity*.

That this crisis of dangerous hegemonic masculinity, fueled by *aggrieved entitlement*, could find expression in extreme forms of violence such as domestic terrorism and mass shootings seems to be alluded by Gilligan's (1996) statement.

> I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed, and that did not represent the attempt to prevent or undo this 'loss of face'—no matter how severe the punishment, even if it includes death. For we misunderstand these men, at our peril, if we do not realize they mean it literally when they say they would rather kill or mutilate others, be killed or mutilated themselves, than live without pride, dignity, and self-respect **(**p. 110).

Many social scientists support the view that masculinity, and gender itself is in crisis: (Atkinson, 2011, pp. 1–2; Butler, 1999, p. xi; Raewyn Connell, 2005, p. 84; Faludi, 2006, pp. 77–78; Kimmel & Messner, 2010, p. 482; Real, 2017).

Recent statistics show that suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the United States. Of the estimated 22,000 suicides reported, 70 percent are white males. This illustrates a crisis in the area of white men's mental health ("Suicide Statistics," 2016). The shame Gilligan highlights can start early, and take the form of paternal sadism, a result of a boy child failing to learn the social codes and obey the strict rules of masculinity as described by hooks (2004).

hooks (2004), writes about the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of North America's social fabric and politics. She traces the creation of these dominating, psychologically terrorizing, and violent systems to religions that enforces a culture of obedience. She describes patriarchy as bestowing the right of men to dominate and rule over those considered weaker, and to embrace the entitlement of men and their inherent superiority to others. Violence and punishment is doled out to those who resisted being "schooled in the art of patriarchy." Indoctrination includes lessons that "force them to feel pain and to deny their feelings" (pp. 18-22).

There are many adjectives describing negative masculinities in the literature. This is what Leatherman (Leatherman, 2007, 2017) describes as *hegemonic, toxic, or catastrophic and hyper-masculinities.* Hegemonic masculinity expresses male supremacy and dominance and refers to the hierarchy of masculinities, one masculinity having power over another. hooks (2004) names

it "patriarchal masculinity" (p. 108). Popular culture has given names to particular acts of male dominance such as man-splaining (Burns, 2017), man-spreading (Higgins, 2018), and all-male meetings and presentations called: man-ferences, him-posiums, and manels (Katz, 2019).

But there are a many other kinds of masculine performances that are peaceful. Hooper (2001) asserts that the constant and fluid malleability of gender performances are constrained by how each individual intersects with the three dimensions of race, class and sexuality. One man could be defined by all these terms in the course of navigating their identity in interaction with others and relative to his position on the social field. Hooper prefers to use the term "masculinism" over patriarchy. Her aim is to describe the source of male privilege and power aside from the larger socio-political aspects of a patriarchal system. She created a "masculinism model" to unpack the many kinds of hegemonic masculinities (pp. 38-39). She further discusses how the contrasting representations of masculinity are often expressed in dualisms like *hard/soft* with one always signifying more value than the other. Cisgendered[4] men conditioned into traditional male roles are taught to admire and aspire to "hardness" because "softness" is considered feminine (pp. 43-44).

Basow (Worell, 2001) uses the terms *androcentric* and *androcentrism* (*andr* is Greek for *man*) as yet another way to describe the male centered paradigm, that assumes the center of power and marginalizes women and femininity (p. 125). This masculinist androcentrism is clearly presented by the roles played by four male archetypes.

**Four Roles on the Stage of Masculinity**

David and Brannon (1976), in their book *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* describe masculine performances in four themes or archetypes. Despite the flurry of these constantly changing, evolving, adapting and negotiating performances it's important to focus on the salient features of these four archetypical masculine scripts, repertoires, and how they are acted out. David and Brannon describe them as "no sissy stuff," "be a big wheel," "be a sturdy oak," and "give 'em hell" (pp. 125-126). The heightened drama and persuasive storytelling involved in the

[4] cisgender is defined as "people whose sex assigned at birth is aligned with their gender identity" (Pappas, 2019, p. 2)

socially constructive theatre of masculinities is clearly revealed as we pull back the curtain on these four archetypes.

The "big wheel" (p. 89) script trains men to be competitively driven to achieve social and material success, acquire social status and not be content until they the winner, admired and respected above others. It is to never admit mistakes or defeat, a *know-it-all* persona addressed in Solnit's (2015) work which inspired the term *mansplaining*. Social status is in Bourdieu's terms *social capital* and relates to his concepts of *habitus* and *field* explained in depth below.

The "sturdy oak" (p. 161) script demands male "toughness, confidence and self-reliance", encourages individualism, physical strength, lack of empathy, aggression and masking of emotion. It values efficiency and instrumentality. Insisting on a narcissistic self-confidence precludes listening or seeking advice from others, and never asking for directions because it could imply helplessness (Chrisler & McCreary, 2010).

The "give 'em hell" (p. 199) directive prompts a male performance of "aggression, violence and daring." It is the creation of an aura of *machismo* or male *mojo*. The willingness to engage in violence to defend or save face in maintenance of the above three prompts is written into this script. Here the ends (doing whatever it takes to be a man) justify the means.[5]

Finally, the "no sissy stuff" (p. 49) script directs men to foster homophobia and to gravely fear the "stigma of anything vaguely feminine." For example, the Boy Scouts were originally conceived to separate boys from the influencing femininity of their mothers. The fear of femininity and feminization is one of the cardinal principles of hegemonic masculinity. Allowing too much interaction with women and girls could potentially promote feminization, leading to homosexuality (Kimmel, 2004, pp. 80–81). We should note that as of February 2019 The Boy Scouts of America changed their program to "Scouts BSA" and will begin serving girls, as well as boys. (John & CNN, 2018) The Girls Scouts of America have sued them over this name change. The "no sissy stuff" script is central to hegemonic masculinity that flees all that is feminine, fearing emasculation by the ultimate putdown: queer.

[5] I used these four archetypes in a conference workshop called *The Theatre of Masculinity* utilizing Boal's Image Theatre techniques. See: http://www.theatreofmasculinity.blogspot.com.

**Male Socialization, the Fear of Femininity and Homophobia**

According to Kimmel (2004) the gender feminist view is that boys and men are conditioned into masculine roles in a cultural process of mental colonization (Freire, 1996; Galtung & Höivik, 1971). He explains that homophobia is fueled by a "fear of femininity." Homophobic men consider homosexuals to be gender traitors who have become feminized, and like cisgender women are attracted to men. In this paradigm, a *real* man must be ready at any moment to provide "validation, demonstration and proof" of his disdain of both women and gay men (p.45).

hooks (2004) writes the "[f]irst act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence towards women. Instead patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves" (p. 66). Boulding (2000) writes about her surprise to find that many men live in fear of being marginalized by other men, losing their privileged male status, and the protection of their peers. This is echoed by Harper (2004) that "boys grow up to be wary of each other" (p. 573). This constant state of competition and negotiation breeds a climate of mistrust and fear.

The maintenance of male supremacy in this colonizing system requires constant vigilance of and negotiation with other men. A hyper salience of when the expected male role is compromised is maintained and constantly demonstrated in the form of correcting behaviors.

Reading Ta-Nehisi Coates' (2015) statement that "race is the child of racism, not the father" (p.7), made me think about the intersectionality of the sister oppressions of racism and sexism. Borrowing from Coates, *patriarchy is the child of misogyny, not the mother*. Patriarchy is founded on men's fear/hatred of women and femininity. The path from fear to hatred is charted by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1992) who writes "[m]en hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they can't communicate with each other" (p. 273). Could it be that the first step in knowing and communicating with each other is to know one's self? This is especially relative in context of this study's introspective inquiry into gender identity.

With evidence that we do not know ourselves Kimmel (2004), writes that men do not conceive of themselves as gendered, but as "genderless" (p. 6). This could be explained as an effect of androcentrism, men being in the neutral center defined not by who they are but by who they are not. This is much like the racial concept of whiteness which is defined by all those who

are not white. Women, children and others in this colonization model are also required to enable and assist with the maintenance of male superiority. Any sign of disrespect for a man's pride, assumed superiority and sense of entitlement can produce a violent reaction.

The many forms of masculinity are not bound to sexual embodiment or to heterosexuality. Masculine performances are found among women, and people on the embodied spectrum between male and female and in gender and sexual minority expressions (GSM). An indicator of this shift of identity is found in a 2016 *Out Magazine* survey reporting that less than fifty percent of teenagers identify as "straight" or cisgender (Brathwaite, 2016). In addition, a 2017 *GLADD* survey reported that twenty percent of millennials identify as LGBTQ (Gaynor, 2017). However, it is my observation that being the victim under one form of oppression does not necessarily preclude being the perpetrator of another form oppression.

Bourdieu (2001) describes the specter of masculine domination as "imposed and suffered" with "symbolic violence" which he explains is "gentle." "imperceptible" and sometimes "invisible even to its victims" (pp. 1-2). He write that masculinity and the structures that support its dominance "dispenses with justification" that it "imposes itself as neutral" with no need to be defended as legitimate and is "non-marked and in a sense neuter in opposition to the feminine which is explicitly characterized" (pp. 8-9).

Atkinson (2011) writes "patriarchy, hegemony and masculinity are all "narrations" in the construction of homosocial "storytelling" (p. 38). It is in my characterization, a theatre of masculinities. He posits that these stories are so convincing that it causes men to ideologically "*buy-in"* to the powerful masculine mythology (p. 38). As we live in an era of "liquid modernity" (p.37) where new narratives of masculine and feminine gender performance are gaining a larger audience, it creates confusion for those who cling to the traditional story of how men should be. Atkinson further describes it as a crisis of "fractured masculinities" caused by "narrative rupture", a serious fissure in the story of traditional male identity (p. 38). Two more descriptive terms for this phenomenon are "heterotopia" used by Foucault to define a state of uncertainty and crisis and "liminality" describing a transition process with unknown results (p. 44). Matyók et. al (2011) describe the concept of "liquid knowing", as a non-linear, boundless thinking process needed to address complexity without reductionism (p. 18).

Many cisgender men who have benefited from male privilege and a system of patriarchy have reacted with anger to the *crisis of masculinity* feeling they have been blamed for every

social problem. Faludi's "*Stiffed*" (2010) researches the context and the claims of "aggrieved entitlement" (Kimmel, 2017, p. x), and questions a common presumption: "[is] the male crisis in America […] caused by something men were *doing* unrelated to something being done to them" (p.7)?

This leads to the compelling impact of military masculinities on all social levels. Understanding this form of masculinity may give us some insight into the crisis of masculinity. Campbell (2010) quotes Francis "war is founded on male gender construction." Military masculinities are founded on male competition and "practice of fighting." The concept that a boy will become a man through military service is a common belief. There is an aura of being authentically masculinity, heroism around a man who has been in the military (pp. 14-19).

**The Effects of Military Masculinities on the Cultural Ethos**

A war culture impacts the construction of masculinities that in turn effects gender relations and the process of building cultures of peace. Historically women had played a significant role, through direct action and support, and to an increasing degree in modern armies. This does not seem to have changed the fundamental premise that the war culture depends on gender inequality, and the continuation of male violence. It cannot be replaced until it is deconstructed to understand how it is built and upheld (Breines, Connell, & Eide, 2000; Byrne & Senehi, 2012; Reardon, 1996). The concern is that the military ethos impacts those outside formal military structures and institutions, and seeps into the construction of gender norms, and patterns of hierarchy in organizations and institutions in society in general. The question in context of this study is do the formation of military masculinities impact or impede the development of cultures of peace?

Campbell's (2010) thesis *Masculinities, Masculine Violence and the Prospects for Change in the Current World Gender Order* is not an argument for pacifism. It is not against the need for militaries, nor is it an endorsement of militarism. There is no question that defensive militaries are necessary in a modern world full of violence, aggressive states, terrorist factions, political power struggles, inequities, genocide and atrocities against the marginalized and powerless.

The attraction to military service is seductive in a time of shifting gender roles. It promises to promote self-esteem, courage, heroism, coming of age, and offers a sense of

meaningful purpose whether patriotic or religiously zealous, this in contrast to the fear and insecurity of present times. Recruiters of young men walk into the breech formed by the failure of social support and sense of meaning around them. Militant revolutionary and terrorist organizations like ISIL draft, recruit or enslave their young armies by sophisticated means such as gaming and through social media.

Campbell writes, “the way masculinities are constructed within military institutions can […] have harmful effects upon larger society” (p. 17). He cites Mac An Ghaill (1996) who argues that “any adequate theory of men and masculinity has to have the concept of power at its centre” (p. 97). Although the lenses of critical and feminist theory would help deconstruct this site of power and identify sources of inequality and oppression of women, and others, that is not enough. This process of deconstruction is only valuable, in my view, if it leads to offering new solutions to transform these military masculinities, into masculinities that build peace.

Social identity theory (McKeown et al., 2016) and Bourdieu’s theories of habitus, field and capital (Lizardo, 2004) would explain the human need for belonging to a group. They help unpack how the formation of coded identities and behaviors allow acceptance in a group and the acquisition of power. Bourdieu’s theories speak to the inner construction of individual identity as expressed externally through habitus and then how that habitus finds similar actors on the social field, in this case military ethos.

Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 2003) adds light. It explains that the motivation underlying personal worldview formation, self-esteem and hero emulation is to try to diminish the existential dread of our eventual death. Group identities, like the patriotic habitus of military service, offer self-esteem and some kind of endowed immortality, leaving one’s mark through heroic self-sacrifice for the group or by seeking a place in paradise.

How is militarism reflected in the greater society is a question beyond the scope of this thesis. But why military experience resonates with such impact on men and the cultural ethos needs more research. Men, socially conditioned and encoded with a hyper-military-masculine narrative could come to gain new insights by looking at how military masculinist elements are integrated into the training of boys. When this training is resident in social structures, businesses, and educational institutions, we must ask, how does it affect building cultures of peace?

**Training Boys and Male Violence**

The masculine ethos of the military, and those who were conditioned by it, influences how boys are trained to be adult men by male peers. In *War and Gender* Goldstein (2003) writes,

> Children act as "full social actors" – agents pursuing their own self-defined interests – in choices about gender groupings. Peers, even more than parents, transmute gender cultures to new individuals. Gender rules pass from older siblings to younger ones. Children with few or no siblings are "more likely to show gender egalitarian beliefs (p.235).

Sex role socialization is much more tolerant of boys breaking behavioral standards than girls. Military masculinities often give license to young men, to play with and act out on their feelings of aggression and violence within a culture of permission and obedience. Play, in boy culture can be quite competitive, risky and aggressive. This is socially acceptable because everyone knows *boys will be boys*. Tolerating and supporting sexist and misogynist behaviors in the process of male socialization may give boys and men license to think they can get away with it, now and forever. Boys are expected to live up to the tough male image. It is widely tolerated that boys are more frequently *called to the office* than girls, for acting out. Taking risks is another assumed and encouraged aspect of male behavior. It is often performed to seek acceptance by peers, to fulfill the masculine ideal, and to demonstrate as men we are not "pussies, punks or softies" (Harper, S. R., Harris, F., & Mmeje, K., 2005, pp. 569–570).

An example of *breaking the rules* on the national political level is found in a Washington Post article (Fahrenthold, 2016) describing how President Trump blew off accusations of sexual abuse by justifying it as *locker room talk.* This was an effort to minimize the crude and misogynist language he was recorded using to describe his violent sexual acts against women. The underlying message was that he believed those words and behaviors to be an innocuous, *normal* display of male behavior. This belief in the normality of inherent, instinctual and socially predictive male behavior is an essentialist argument that seals off the possibilities for transformation. Harris and Harper (2008) write that this risky behavior can also be acted out through alcohol and drug abuse and displayed in violent acts of sexual harassment and homophobia.

What makes a man is as an oft repeated story supported by a string of mythical tales, designed to secure gender roles as social realities, and ultimately, preserve male supremacy and patriarchy. Karp (2010) asserts, to maintain their charade men must suffer in silence, take great

care who they trust, stay clear of any word, action, or thought that would appear feminine, or gay, and forever be prepared to defend their manhood if it is questioned. Holding up this mythological shield maintains the gender status quo, and seals masculine identities in a suffocating paradigm, that suppresses and silences resistance.

This shield was pulled down by the rise of the *#metoo* movement, when the widespread extent of the sexual harassment of women was brought into the light. Almukhtar (2017), writes the sexual predators in the entertainment industry, which along with allegations of sexual harassment against national political leadership, started a cascade of daily revelations taking down powerful men. Some seemed surprised when misogyny and sexual harassment were uncovered in the youth cultures of high-tech Silicon Valley (Benner, 2017), and at VICE News (Steel, 2017). In response to these revelations Time magazine named women who were "Silence Breakers," their Person of the Year for 2017. These were women who started the powerful *#metoo* movement to support standing up against sexual harassment (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Sweetland Edwards, 2017). Illustrating the complexity of gender performances, Safronova (2018), reports that a group of one hundred French women lead by Actress Catherine Deneuve denounced the *#metoo* movement in a statement that reads "rape is a crime […] insistent or clumsy flirting is not a crime, nor is gallantry a chauvinist aggression."

In addition to men's sexual harassment of women, men were responsible or the evil violence of the Las Vegas massacre (Bui, et al., 2017), numerous school shootings, the New Zealand mosque shooting, Sri Lankan church shootings, and other mass shootings. Intersecting male gun violence is the racist white supremacist, nationalist, neo-Nazi violence in Charlottesville, Virginia and the equivocal and ambivalent White House reaction to it (Astor, Caron, & Victor, 2017), and the countless murders of Black men by white police. Other evidence supporting the increase of hyper-masculinity is the explicit exclusion of transgender soldiers from the US military (Shapell, 2017), the banning of Muslims from traveling to the US (McCarthy & Laughland, 2017), and recent legislation shifting tax burdens from the rich to the middleclass and poor (Thompson, 2017). Add to this the dehumanization of immigrants and refugees, families separated, and children being held in squalid cages, in concentration camps (New York Times Editorial Board, 2019).

Frederickson's (2017) article surveys "the war on truth," "the post truth era," and "alternative facts." Truth in the postmodern view is relative to context, and can be considered

socially constructed. But the cry of “fake news” spouted by powerful hyper-masculine men empowers the false narrative of male entitlement, privilege and supremacy, and bolsters patriarchy. To begin to make sense of all these troublesome events, Hooper (2001) again emphasizes the importance of context, to recognize in these events the intersection of gender, race, class and sexuality, and that one cannot be solved without the other.

But this male populist sentiment is more a nostalgic emotion than a political theory. Kimmel (2017) writes about the feelings of loss these men express as real but that the underlying excuses they cite are not, it’s mostly fake news, untrue, a misunderstanding of their situation, of what and why these changes are happening to them.

Further evidence of the crisis is that since the election of President Trump and in the year 2018 (Gun Violence Archive, 2018) there have been 340 mass shootings in the United States, and 14,749 people were killed and 28,194 were injured by gun violence. The clear majority of these violent crimes were perpetrated by men, mostly white men.

Sexual violence by men towards women is evidence that masculinism continues to support the structure of patriarchy permeating most all societies. As sexual harassment cases appear in the press daily CNN (Senthilingam, 2017) released a telling report: 35% of women on the planet have experienced physical or sexual harassment, 120 million girls have experienced forced sex or other sexual acts. And they reported on the percentage of women experiencing sexual abuse country by county: Cambodia 77%, Vietnam 87%, India 79%, Egypt 99%, United States 65%, Denmark 52 %, United Kingdom 44%, Brazil 86%. What these statistics do not address is the toxic, hyper masculinities perpetrating this violence.

Atkinson (2011), views the crisis of masculinity as an “in between” space (p.4). The spectral space between the traditional masculine and feminine binaries. Male superiority and patriarchy, and the violence associated with them has also been contested by cisgender male and female feminists. Atkinson writes, “metro sexuality” and “uber sexuality” are attempts at feminized adaptations by hegemonic males to appear less masculine, but without relinquishing the power and privilege of male supremacy (p. 128).

Hegemonic, hyper, and violent performances of masculinity are barriers to building cultures and communities of peace. If these negative expressions of gender are socially constructed with the function of upholding, maintaining and protecting a prevalent structure of patriarchy, what are those contributing factors and who commands the resources that power this

*gender training*? The question is confounding because patriarchy certainly exists, but resists being named, except by those who are marginalized by it. Without being named, patriarchy does not exist, no one is responsible for it, and it cannot be deconstructed. As Freire's (1996) supports "to exist humanly, is to name the world, to change it" (p. 88). Understanding homosociality is important to overcoming patriarchy, homophobia, and fostering social intimacy among men.

**Homosociality**

Homosociality is the process of same sex bonding and socialization. Hammermen & Johansson (2014) and Atkinson (2011) write that men undergo a ritual of homosocialization that can employ hazing, and bullying, to establish and enforce negative, anti-feminine and homophobic roles. In contrast, the homosocialization of women often results in bonding without homophobia. Atkinson also describes a mimetic process in male conditioning he calls *pastiche* which ingrains a *motif* of negative masculine performances and patterns into boys like decorations on the garment of masculine habitus. Homosociality can also be a positive and gender equalizing experience for men if it discards the compulsory conditioning of the fear of femininity and homophobia (p.47). All these conditioning processes combine to produce the male habitus a Bordieuan concept more clearly explained in the following section.

**Masculine Habitus**

Bourdieu's theory of habitus and field can be applied to help understand gender construction, performance and maintenance in social spaces. According to Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992), "[a] field is a game devoid of inventor and much more fluid and complex than any game that one might ever design" (p. 104). "A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)," "habitus consists of a set of historical relations "deposited" within individual bodies in the form of mental and-corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action" (p. 16). Habitus gives a *sense* or *feel* for the game on the field. Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) write:

> Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside […] when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a "fish in water": it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted (p.127).

Habitus is invisible and transparent to a man because: "[h]e knows it, in a sense, too well, without objectifying distance, take it for granted, precisely because he inhabits it like a garment" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 142). It is a "strategy generating principle enabling [men] to cope with unforeseen and every-changing situations." It utilizes past experience to provide a lens or "matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions [making] possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 18). Lizardo (2004) ties Bourdieu's habitus theory to the structural theories of Levi-Straus, Piaget and Durkheim, writing,

> habitus is itself a generative dynamic structure that adapts and accommodates itself to another dynamic meso level structure composed primarily of other actors, situated practices and durable institutions (fields) (p. 376).

Field Theory (Lewin, 1997) and Interactionism explain that environment can "retard or facilitate development" (S. R. Harper et al., 2005, p. 578). An individual is affected by the environment and affects the environment. For example, the environmental ethos of a fraternity house could enforce masculine rules, and elicit sexist and homophobic behaviors.

In *Men's Lives*, Kimmel and Messner (2010) explain how the concept of habitus links to gender performance,

> cultural ideas are taken up in the form of bodily habits and tastes that reinforce behavioral norms and social inequality […] where gender and racial knowledges are performed according to images people have available to them in actionable repertoires, scripts, and narratives (p. 4).

Atkinson (2011) in *Deconstructing Men and Masculinities,* discusses habitus in terms of masculine performance and protocols on the field of youth subculture. He defines habitus as,

> a socially learned personality structure that directs, but does not determine, one's tastes, preferences, or lifestyle choices. […] It is learned in gender socialization over time and can affect all outward expressions including body movements, speech and sense of humor (pp. 58 & 101).

A clear example of this concept is seen in Miller's (2016) research of habitus and field in Toronto's youth music scene. She shows unique forms of habitus performed on the fields of "metal" versus "folk" music, describing them as "metal head habitus" and "folkie habitus" (p. 330).

An understanding of habitus informs important theoretical grounding for the *PhotoSophia* photo-elicitation method. By tapping into the unconsciousness of inhabited conditioned masculinity performance, it paints for each participant a picture of their current state of masculine being, and provides the means to begin to envision, and transform into a masculinity they want to become. Regarding men's resistance to these masculine norms, Bourdieu (2000) discusses the "pressure or oppression" of the "unnoticed, of the ordinary things, the conditionings imposed […] by the insidious injunctions and 'inert violence' (as Sartre puts it) of economic and social structures and the mechanisms through which they are reproduced" (p. 141).

Do unconscious elements of habitus have the possibility to be consciously transformed, to express a different more peaceful disposition in a man? Can a peaceful habitus be visualized, as a touchstone for new understandings of masculinity? Before examining the peaceful transformation of masculinities, let's first get a clearer picture of the goal: *Cultures of Peace*.

**Envisioning Cultures of Peace**

Picturing a culture of peace is like a physician visioning the ideal of health when diagnosing an illness; it provides a goal, an aim point, a vision of prognosis toward healing. Elise Boulding (2000) provides a succinct definition of this vision:

> a peace culture is a culture that promotes peaceable diversity. Such a culture includes lifeways, patterns of belief, values, behaviors, and accompanying institutional arrangements that promote mutual caring and well-being as well as an equality that includes appreciation of difference, stewardship, and equitable sharing of the earth's resources among its members and with all living beings (p. 1).

Boulding lays out what would be the universal norms, values, attitudes and behaviors of this culture, a culture that would both transcend and incorporate all cultures. De Rivera (2009) defines this culture too:

> UN resolution (A/RES/52/13) (which) defines a culture of peace as involving values, attitudes, and behaviors that (1) reject violence, (2) endeavor to prevent conflicts by addressing root causes, and (3) aim at solving problems through dialogue and negotiation. It proposed that both states and civil society could work together to promote such a culture by acting to promote eight bases for such a culture. These are:(1) education

> (and especially, education for the peaceful resolution of conflict); (2) sustainable development (viewed as involving the eradication of poverty, reduction of inequalities, and environmental sustainability); (3) human rights; (4) gender equality; (5) democratic participation; (6) understanding, tolerance, and solidarity (among peoples, vulnerable groups, and migrants within the nation, and among nations); (7) participatory communication and the free flow of information; (8) international peace and security (including disarmament and various positive initiatives). Each of these bases is related to others and the overall goal of building a peaceful culture (p.2).

Gender equality is the fourth basis of a *Culture of Peace* which means it is recognized by the international community as a significant building block in the formation of peace. Achieving gender equality has the agency to "revolutionize all facets of human society" (BIC (2015) p.6). With a clearer image of health, we can ask the next question: what kinds of masculinities foster *Cultures of Peace*?

**Masculinities and Cultures of Peace**

"[I]t is not only a question of knowing under what conditions peace may be achieved and maintained, writes Galtung (1964), but of knowing under what conditions Man may be willing to adopt such measures" (p.4). We don't know why Galtung capitalized the world "Man," but in this context it carries a specifically gendered meaning as we ask: *what makes a peaceful "Man"?* Brienes (Mayton, 2009) echoes this appeal to men to find the will to "foster other masculinities more conducive to cultures of peace." She asserts two key points, first that men "need to be convinced that gender equality with new types of sharing and partnerships is a rewarding win-win situation for men and women," and second to "dissuade men from thinking that empowering women would subsequently disempower them" (p.139).

**What Makes a Peacebuilding Masculinity?**

What kinds of masculinities will build *Cultures of Peace*? Those that foster cooperation and equally share power, according to Schirch (2005) are what is needed in the design and building process. The right process, utilizing the right human qualities, can give form and substance to positive peace. This *rightness* is supported by the ancient *Astangika-marga* or *eightfold path* of Buddhism that includes right intention, right view, right concentration, right

speech, right action, right effort, right livelihood and right mindfulness (Lopez, 2011). Rightness of means is found in Gandhi's (1927) classic emphasis on means over ends,

> [t]hey say 'means are after all means.' I would say 'means are after all everything.' As the means so the end […] There is no wall of separation between means and ends. Indeed the Creator has given us control (and that too very limited) over means, none over the end. Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception (p. 236).

The means of building cultures of peace in peacebuilding is "the creation and nurturing of constructive relationships" writes Boulding (Reimer et al., 2015) "across ethnic, religious, class, and racial boundaries" (p. 14). Unequal, hegemonic, controlling masculinities "promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits," writes the Universal House of Justice (1985), "that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial [of equality] can be justified" (p. 7). Peace as the desirable *end* cannot be achieved without *noble* means.

*Peaceful Selfhood* is a model developed by Brenes (De Rivera, 2009) to define the "values, virtues, and character strengths" of peaceful masculinities, offering guideline for men to model in a process of transformation needed to create cultures of peace (p. 309-13). Mayton (2009) focusses on three aspects of nonviolent and peaceful selfhood. Body, heart and mind should seek alignment with "equanimity (capacity to treat all human beings with an equal sense of benevolence), equality of self and others (shift from an egotistical orientation to a more collective one), and commitment to altruistic life practices" (pp. 45-46).

"Many men in patriarchal cultures fully expect, the full privileges accorded to them" writes Mayton (2009), "and are not in the least interested in giving up their dominant roles." He quotes Brienes who suggests that "[a]chieving gender equality requires cultures to move away from patriarchal gender stereotypes," and that the difficulty is "to dissuade men from thinking that empowering women would subsequently disempower them." Brienes encourages men to nurture masculinities that value generosity and are "more conducive to cultures of peace" because equality will be a "rewarding win-win situation for men and women" (p. 139).

The hope for creating and maintaining *Cultures of Peace* comes from visioning positive masculinities and nurturing those that may already be occurring. The next chapter looks at a Bahá'í perspective on gender equality and masculinity to give background and context to the

later narratives and *PhotoSophia* interviews of Bahá'í men to see how they are navigating the struggle for equality. This quest for equality as health is a sacred and spiritual one. Bahá'u'lláh (2014), writes,

> The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind" "He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements (p. 123).

# Chapter Two

## Culture, Gender and Equality through a Bahá'í lens

To begin this section of the study I must be clear to self-identify as a Bahá'í. Although I know my objectivity is impossible, I will do my best to offer clearly factual information and show different points of view from my own understanding. You may however see my *Bahá'í-ness* coming through as Johan Galtung once commented to me during a presentation I made in my master's program. During the *Being and Becoming* exhibit there were many questions that arose about the Bahá'í Faith, its origins, beliefs and practices, and these chapters should begin to satisfy those curiosities. In this thesis I consider the Bahá'í Faith as a religion which incorporates within it a set of moral and spiritual norms, values and beliefs embraced by its followers in a life-long effort to transform word into action. This study seeks out rays and glimmers of light that may be signs of sacred equality in practice and the struggle to achieve it. As Kenneth Boulding put so simply, "[a]nything that exists is possible" (De Rivera, 2009, p. 11).

The following should also give the context needed to understand why the men in this study believe and act as they do. Knowing more about the Bahá'í paradigm and ethos will prepare for the deeper discussion of gender and its social construction and how these Bahá'í men navigated this study. It will help the reader find context and situate the Bahá'í Faith in the greater community.

### Bahá'í History and Tenets

The Bahá'í Faith began in the ancient, feudalistic, Shia Islamic nation of Persia (Iran) in the 1840's and was founded first by Mirza Ali Muhammad Shirazi (1819-1850) titled the Báb or Gate who foretold the appearance of Mirza Husayn Ali Nuri (1817-1992) titled Bahá'u'lláh or Glory of God. The Arabic name Bahá'í (ba-há-ee), derived from the name of Bahá'u'lláh, refers both to the religion and a follower of it. Initially the religion was viewed as a reform movement

within Shia Islam, but it declared itself an independent religion with Abrahamic roots to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Bahá'í religion claims two new prophets have arisen when Muslims traditionally believe Muhammad was the last, the “seal of the prophets.” This explains one aspect of why orthodox Muslim clerics declared Bahá'ís heretics and apostates of Islam. The Báb was executed at age twenty six and Bahá’u’lláh was a prisoner and exile most of his life, over forty years. Under the Persian Shah, and then by the Ottoman Sultan, he was exiled with his family to Palestine and was still a prisoner when he died in 1892. Tens of thousands of Bahá'ís were killed in Iran for their beliefs. Persecution continues today in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Egerton, 2014, pp. 320–322). Bahá'í was perhaps the first world religion to emerge in early modernity, as evidenced in its progressive beliefs (Shoghi Effendi, 1980, p. v). Although small in number, the religion is quite widespread geographically and diverse demographically. The official website site states Bahá'ís are “established in more than 100,000 localities” and includes “more than five million men and women from over 2,100 ethnic groups” with “communities in 235 countries,” and “with more than 12,500 organized local communities” (Bahá'í World News Service, 2016). As a young faith, most of its membership are recent converts raised in other religious traditions. The Bahá'í religion is viewed by its followers as divine in origin but also modern and scientific in its tenor. The Bahá'í Faith has no specific culture and actively seeks to build a new culture, as yet unknown to humanity, a culture of justice, peace, and oneness.

Bahá'í founders arose as photography, steam railroads and ships, the telegraph and electricity were invented, and modern social, medical and, physical sciences were emerging. The realism and objectivism of modernity, and the collectivism and equalitarianism of postmodernity can be found in Bahá'í tenets (Hicks, 2004, p. 8). Because the Bahá'í religion is young, just 176 years old, it incorporates followers from many other religious traditions, as is evident in the men who participated in this study. It is too soon to say it has a particular culture, but one way to get a sense of the flavor of the Bahá'í community, is by understanding its beliefs, and the lenses it uses to sort out the human condition, and our collective evolution towards peace.

Criticism is telling. What a critic chooses to criticize, reveals their point of view. Criticism has arisen from Christian (CARM, 2010) and especially Muslim (al-Munajjid, 2017) detractors, challenging the divine origin of Bahá'í teachings, calling it an eclectic religious/secular and even a political construction. These critics question if Bahá'í teachings were influenced by colonial powers in exchanges with contemporary philosophers and political

theorists. Orthodoxy, rivalry and resistance to progressive spiritual ideals of equality and oneness are behind much of these condemnations.

### The Emerging Bahá'í Ethos

Bahá'í tenets replace the clergy class with elected councils, posit the relativity of religious truth, require the abandonment of blind imitation, and encourages individual responsibility to investigate reality. Other contemporary beliefs include the equality of women and men, economic justice, establishing a universal language and world currency, ending all forms of prejudice, harmony of scientific and religious truth, and world peace (Egerton, 2014, p. 319).

This emerging Bahá'í culture values, according to Shoghi Effendi (2006a), is "humble fellowship" and "a spirit of frank and loving consultation," not "dictatorial authority" or "arbitrary power." It seeks to "to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other"(pp. 63-64). But the term *Bahá'í culture* is premature, in my view, *emerging Bahá'í ethos* is more accurate. Hofstede (2016) writes that a culture or a belief system is a collective unity of thought. A closer examination of Bahá'í beliefs and practices, family and community life will offer a sharper picture of that collective.

### Bahá'í Ontology and Axiology

What are Bahá'í assumptions of reality? What are the lenses Bahá'ís look through to judge and evaluate social forces and conflicts? As in all belief systems, the Bahá'í ontology tries to answer the universal existential questions: who am I, why am I here and what happens to me when I die? All Bahá'í beliefs are structured around the oneness of humankind, and the existence of one Creator who Bahá'ís believe has progressively revealed all of the world's religions. Life's purpose for a Bahá'í is to know, love and obey the Creator, and to carry forward an "ever advancing civilization" (Bahá'u'lláh, 2014, p. 215). It's a Bahá'í belief that each person's spiritual reality is a genderless soul that survives beyond physical death.

With its own set of narratives and interpretations of ancient scriptures, the Bahá'í scriptures explain creation and nature, establish values, norms and expectations, and like all

religions has aspects of mysticism, and apparent paradox. To Bahá'ís the Creator is not male, or a physical gendered entity but an "unknowable essence" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1984, pp. 220–221). Bahá'ís believe one can only know God through the prophets and messengers, and through the creation itself. Faith-based knowledge production is closely aligned with indigenous processes and in the Bahá'í context is multilayered, multifaceted, organic and transformative. In harmony with indigenous spiritual views, Bahá'ís see with the eye of oneness, believing in the sacredness and interconnection of all life.

It is important to convey with precision the meaning of the *oneness of humanity* from a Bahá'í perspective, and its impact on the development of *Cultures of Peace*. I know of no better explanation than this long (resistant to paraphrase) passage by Shoghi Effendi, the great grandson of Bahá'u'lláh (2006b):

> Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds—creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived. It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world — a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and

> language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.
>
> It represents the consummation of human evolution—an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations.
>
> The principle of the Oneness of Mankind, as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that attainment to this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, that its realization is fast approaching, and that nothing short of a power that is born of God can succeed in establishing it (pp. 42-43).

What will bring about an organic change in the structure of society not yet seen? What will challenge beliefs, ideas, social structures and institutions that are outdated and decaying? This implies acceptance of new truths about our collective global human identity including gender identity, and embracing an agency and potential far greater than anything conceived of before.

The oneness of humanity signifies the maturity of a healthy humanity at peace, working to build larger circles of a new human community. For Bahá'ís this is both inevitable and necessary. The furtherance of human civilization can only be gained through divine guidance and assistance from the Creator's messengers. Bahá'ís believe Bahá'u'lláh "has created a community of people who are united around a new set of beliefs about human nature and well-being and sacrifice their own interests to work for justice, the unification of the human race and the common good" (Lample, 2009, p. 15).

Bahá'í law informs Bahá'í practice and behavior. It forbids the use of alcohol and non-prescribed drugs, supports the full equality of women and men, prioritize women's education, forbids all forms of violence and the abuse of children, insists that military service be noncombatant, encourages interracial, interreligious, and intercultural marriage, limits sexual relations to heteronormative marriage, and prioritizes world citizenship, while at the same time promoting healthy national/cultural/ethnic identities. The laws require Bahá'ís to be non-political, non-partisan, to work for economic justice, emphasize science over superstition, and forbid backbiting as the most serious of sins. These laws and practices are based in Bahá'í scriptures (Egerton, 2014). Because Bahá'í worship has no ritual and no influence of clergy, it

opens a creative space between old and new, nurturing the development of this new cultural ethos, and integrating local and traditional cultures/practices that are in harmony with Bahá'í precept of unity in diversity.

The Bahá'í belief in the heteronormality of marriage and sexual relations has raised criticism. Bahá'ís explain that these laws do not restrict who one can love, but define sexual and marital relationships as sanctioned only between a woman and a man within marriage. They explain that this is not to impose judgment, or take a socially or politically anti-gay stance. but that it applies only to Bahá'ís - who do not impose their beliefs on others, homophobia is a forbidden form of prejudice. One can find in-depth discussions of this online and in print (Langer, 2015). More on Bahá'í responses to this and other issues are found in the *Navigating Criticism* section below.

A distinct Bahá'í principle expresses the importance of maintaining diversity with unity. It explicitly attempts to prevent the social construction of a fixed homogeneity and uniformity in its communities and practice (Shoghi Effendi, 2006b, pp. 41–42). This concept allows petite narratives of local diversity to coexist within the meta narrative of world unity. Shoghi Effendi (2006a) characterizes the Bahá'í community as one based on the "undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views" (p. 63).

In contrast to postmodernist, relativist, poststructuralist and materialist theories, Bahá'ís do believe in absolute universal truths and accept the authority of their Prophet with strict adherence, as the basis of moral authority and guidance. Meta narratives including specific values of right and wrong, what is normal and abnormal define the parameters of social, sexual, political behaviors. Sanctions for flagrant disobedience are outlined and prescribed in Bahá'í scriptures. These tenets can serve as a basis for understanding Bahá'í views on gender and how Bahá'ís ground and validate their beliefs, and the investigation of truth.

### Bahá'í Epistemology and Methodology

"[R]eligion must conform to reason and be in accord with the conclusions of science," writes 'Abdu'l-Bahá (2012) the son of Bahá'u'lláh. The requirement that an individual must search for truth makes each follower responsible to avoid blindly imitating past traditions, to question assumptions, and make informed decisions. He further states that "religious teaching

[…] at variance with science and reason is […] unquestionably superstition," because the Creator has "bestowed […] the faculty of reason […] to discern the reality of things." This empowers human intellect and reasoning to discover, inquire, find new knowledge in all things (p. 394). To this point Bahá'u'lláh (2014) writes:

> Every created thing in the whole universe is but a door leading into His knowledge, a sign of His sovereignty, a revelation of His names, a symbol of His majesty, a token of His power, a means of admittance into His Straight Path (p. 160).

Education is a high priority for Bahá'ís, who require women and men have equal access. Bahá'ís encourage scientific, and academic inquiry, as means to gain new knowledge and understanding. This spirit of inquiry powers the Bahá'í precept of independent search for reality, within a framework honoring the oneness of scientific and religious truth.

The Bahá'í practice of consultation is well described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (2014) who writes: "the shining spark of truth" appears "only after the clash of differing opinions" (p. 87). The practice of consultation is central to the Bahá'í ethos. The capacity for truth seeking aligns with the pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs — transcendence, or as Mayer (2000) characterizes it "the need for meaning" (pp. 16-22). Deconstruction in the postmodern sense is but one stage in the Bahá'í process of discerning truth, and is only considered of value if it seeks to transform conflict and build unity and peace.

Shoghi Effendi (2006b), writes Bahá'ís believe "religious truth is not absolute but relative" (p. 58). This belief is understood in context of the Bahá'í concept of progressive revelation. Progressive revelation is a meta narrative taught by Bahá'u'lláh (2003) explaining that spiritual truths have been progressively revealed to humanity in a continuous learning process that began at the dawn of history and in which the Bahá'í revelation is only the most recent actor. Bahá'ís consider some of the world's spiritual teachers to be: Abraham, Zoroaster, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Truth is not final because other prophets will come in future. The relativity of truth is also based on religious tenets that come in two forms: eternal truths and practical or social truths. Eternal truths do not change, are related to the spiritual purpose of life, the soul, the nature of God and the prophets. Social truths change from age to age in the evolving process of advancing human civilization (p. 199).

According to McMullen's (2000) interpretation of the Bahá'í teachings practical or social truths can change from religion to religion, because they are adapted to human needs at the time

and in the populations each religion arose. These could include teachings on diet, marriage, prayer and fasting and holy day practices. Bahá'ís believe the Creator adapts these truths to the condition of humanity at the time in context of seeking the advancement of civilization. Bahá'ís believe that most religions come from the same divine source, and that many religious conflicts can be avoided with an understanding of progressive revelation.

Another important tenet in harmony with Indigenous and other spiritual perspectives is viewing nature as progressive, adaptive, organic, and in a constant state of evolution seeking balance, rebalance and progress. The human world is part of the natural world and its deep reservoir of metaphors and understandings help explain human behavior, processes, relationships and narratives. Bahá'u'lláh (1994), wrote "nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world (p.142). This framework of inquiry is expressed in Bahá'u'lláh's (1993) admonition to seek the "*Middle Way*," of moderation (p. 35), a truth also found in Buddhism, as Galtung (1985) discusses in terms of basic human needs (p.6). Gandhi's philosophy to contemplate the "means" as importantly as the "ends" (Mantena, 2012, pp. 1–4; Gandhi, 1927, p. 236), strongly parallels the Bahá'í teachings of the *Middle Way*.

**Bahá'í Hermeneutics**

Beliefs and actions are based on what believers consider sacred scripture to mean. Interpretation is often a source of conflict. Questionable translations of ancient religious texts can compound these conflicts (Eichenwald, 2014). That Bahá'u'lláh wrote over one hundred volumes in Persian and Arabic challenges Bahá'ís to digest and internalize this vast collection of scripture. In the Bahá'í belief system two authoritative interpreters following the prophet's lifetime, creating additional texts in response to questions. This has helped the young religion avoid most interpretive and conceptual schisms.

A filter of skepticism is critical for scientific and scholarly inquiry. Sokal (2008), claimed in a reference to terrorism that all religions are "potentially dangerous" because believers accept their sacred scriptures too seriously and rely on "revelation rather than evidence," precluding "rational discussion" (p. 397). In contrast a Bahá'í believer approaches scriptural texts differently than other texts; they are not human words, but words of the Creator. They use two filters simultaneously, one of skepticism in the scientific mode of the independent search for truth, and another implicitly trusting the teachings of their faith. Even if it is not completely understood

intellectually, one could say they leave space for ambiguity, for fallibilism, for the hypothesis to be disproven. “To be a Bahá’í is to accept the [Bahá’í] Cause in its entirety,” writes Shoghi Effendi (Hornby, 1988). “To take exception to one basic principle is to deny the authority and sovereignty of Bahá’u’lláh, and therefore the deny the Cause” (p. 2). This trust could be described as a willingness to be open and accepting of scriptural truth. To judge a belief as blind acceptance without having undergone all the rigors of intellectual debate would be reductionist. Most Bahá’ís seem to base their belief in the divinity of the scripture’s source along with an informed a priori acceptance, because they have found no reason to doubt its truth before. To further describe Bahá'í hermeneutics Shoghi Effendi (1974) writes,

> emphasis [is] placed on the principle of non-violence; the necessity of strict obedience to established authority; the ban imposed on all forms of sedition, on back-biting, retaliation, and dispute; the stress laid on godliness, kindliness, humility and piety, on honesty and truthfulness, chastity and fidelity, on justice, toleration, sociability, amity and concord, on the acquisition of arts and sciences, on self-sacrifice and detachment, on patience, steadfastness and resignation to the will of God—all these constitute the salient features of a code of ethical conduct to which the books, treatises and epistles, revealed […] by Bahá’u’lláh, unmistakably bear witness (pp. 132-133).

Bahá'ís are nonviolent and believe, “[i]t is better to be killed than to kill,” (Zarandī, 1999, p. xxxv). This does not signify a pacifist stance, because self- defense is conditionally permitted.

Recognition of, and obedience to the prophet defines a Bahá’í believer (Bahá’u’lláh, 1993, p. 21). One who has accepted the truth of the prophet will act according to his precepts. Although scriptures have the authority of divine truth in the Bahá’í paradigm questions and discussions are encouraged. A sacred scripture can have great depth of meaning, offering new or different insights with each new exposure. In fact, Bahá’u’lláh (2003) writes mystically that each scriptural word has “one and seventy meanings” (p. 255). Living with what is read, thinking and meditating on the words, images, analogies and concepts, are part of the process of digesting meanings critically. Acceptance comes by trusting the source is reliable. Investigation of truth questions assumptions, and requires a sense of skepticism. A believer must feel convinced by sufficient evidence.

**Bahá'í Construction of Gender/Masculinity**

The above section offers an overview of Bahá'í teachings. Now, we will explore Bahá'í beliefs on the equality of women and men, and examine how Bahá'ís see the construction of gender. Because of the intimate and personal nature of the interviews with study participants, the analysis is on the individual level. I also must acknowledge that individuals are the building blocks of communities and institutions; primary among the three protagonists in the construction and performance of gender.

The Bahá'í International Community (BIC) at the United Nations has issued one hundred forty-three statements on the equality of women and men (Bahá'í International Community, 2018). The statement used by this study was directed to the religious leaders of the world. *Towards a new discourse on religion and gender equality* (Bahá'í International Community, 2015), was written to the 59th Commission on the Status of Women at the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Beijing conference on Women. Parsing out the themes of this statement will help to ground and unpack Bahá'í views on gender.

As spokesperson for the collective Bahá'í view the BIC (Bahá'í International Community, 2015) statement expresses that equality of the sexes will not only affect women but will "revolutionize all facets of human society" (p. 7) including men who, without equality, cannot reach their full potential. A passage that informs the heart of the study challenges all men in specific terms:

> It is they who must find the moral courage to convey and model new understandings of masculinity and who must challenge and question the narrow roles that society and the media have assigned to them (p.7).

The BIC (Bahá'í International Community, 2015) statement continues that "simply opening-up and allowing women into the present social structure is not enough, the goal is for women and men to work shoulder-to-shoulder," (p. 7) in all levels of human interaction and all social roles "to construct a society which allows for the flourishing of all" (p. 7). This focus disputes men's attitudes as expressed in Kimmel (2017), and Faludi (2006, 2010) blaming women for inequality and for the *crisis in masculinity*. The statement brings something new to the international discourse on equality, placing Bahá'ís in the dialogue with social science and other religions as it relates to the social construction of gender. It specifically focuses on unhealthy masculinities that damage both men and women and prevent cultures of peace.

The BIC statement (Bahá'í International Community, 2015), asserts the Bahá'í view that gender equality is a social reality. It also states that human meaning and connection is genderless and spiritual in nature. In its address to the world community. The BIC suggests that religious leaders reexamine their role in gender equality. Disputing a common excuse that modernity has relegated the importance of religion in people's lives, their statement assert that gender equality is a "facet of human reality" not just something for "the common good" (p. 1). Supporting this argument is the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNUDHR) (United Nations, 1948) and subsequent human rights declarations as having "provided the international community with a normative framework" of gender equality (p.3).

Often revealed in religious assumptions about sexuality and gender roles, the intersection of culture and gender is complex. Religion is a cultural force. For example, one need only consider the influential geographical sweep of Islam and Christianity across world cultures. Religion has infused cultures with gender roles, and countless social constructions that shape its worldviews. Religions have also endorsed and incorporated local customs that are damaging to women and equality. An examples of this would be the fact that female genital mutilation is not based in the Qur'an (Pasha, 2017). It is not always through an overt process of instruction and training but lingering *in the air we breathe*. Sex and gender are synonymous in most religions where cisgender alignment is assumed and sometimes enforced. As discussed above, physical sex is assigned by physicality, which is a designation assigned at birth. Being born to one sexual binary enables parents to assign a sex, and begin the construction of culturally normative gender roles.

This discussion in the statement by the BIC posits that Bahá'ís see the roots of gender as socially constructed, and mutable, but can also found in embodied elements of essentiality. differences. Bahá'ís seem to align with equality feminists and evolutionary psychology who posit that some essential predispositions are based in physical functional differences. Bahá'ís further align with gender feminists who stress the impact of cultural and media influences on construction of gender identities. The concept of "gender culture" developed by Stephenson (2009) seems to explain that generations of lived experience, social practice and culture still impact us today (pp. 123–125).

Bahá'í men have been challenged to resist imposed gender roles as well as the assumption that they are superior in *moral courage.* According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982) "[t]he

woman has greater *moral courage* than the man; she has also special gifts which enable her to govern in moments of danger and crisis" (pp. 102-103).

Is it the male domination of religious leadership that lead Galtung in Matyók et al. (2011) to write that the religious idea of being a "chosen people" contributes to "the war culture" (p.5)? Galtung and MacQueen (2008) further assess that the two "most troubling" aspects of religion are "its tendency toward violence and its inability to change" (p.11). Religion is, after all, one of the world's greatest sources of learned and enforced social normalization. Religions define the accepted parameters of marriage and family, who is a man, a woman and whoever exists between those binaries. It has established patriarchy as the norm and delineated boundaries to relationships as well as sexuality. In contrast to these views of religious self-centeredness and intractability are the BIC statement (2015) above. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1969) writes:

> All consider themselves, respectively, the only guardians of the truth, and that every other religion is composed of errors. They themselves are right, all others are wrong! […] [I]t is imperative that we should renounce our own particular prejudices and superstitions if we earnestly desire to seek the truth … make a distinction in our minds between dogma, superstition and prejudice on the one hand, and truth on the other (pp. 135-137).

Real cultural/religious change is slow to actualize because it requires spiritual transformation.

The BIC statement posits that gender is a social construction. In the Bahá'í view, gender equality is framed as a spiritual and moral imperative. They frame gender equality as a spiritual reality and moral imperative, in the Bahá'í view. Our inquiry sought to explore how these concepts are expressed in Bahá'í tenets as well as how they are structured in Bahá'í community life and law. We will next critically address two issues discussed earlier in a Bahá'í context: binary concepts and essentialism.

**Two Hands, Two Wings**

To begin we will examine excerpts from speeches made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during his tour to Europe and North America in 1911 and 1912. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son and successor to Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, had recently been released from a lifetime of imprisonment and exile by the Ottoman Empire. He was a religious prisoner, who had been

charged with *apostasy* for his Bahá'í beliefs. This included gender equality. His speeches were some of the first elucidations of Bahá'í concepts in a western context.

In a significant speech reported by the New York Times, (New York Times, 1912), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá illustrated equality with a binary metaphor. “Abdul Baha Abbas, the apostle of international peace, talked to the members of the Woman’s Suffrage Party and their friends about peace and woman’s suffrage last night” (May 21, 1912). He was introduced by the chairwoman of the sixty-thousand-member Woman's Suffrage Party of New York as “one of the most distinguished advocates of both Women’s Suffrage and Universal Peace” (Abdu’l-Bahá, 1912, p. 15).

'Abdu'l-Bahá’s (Abdu’l-Bahá, 1912) talk began with a discussion of the history of inequality. He addressed the false claims that women were inferior to men as justified by men who in some cultures declared women to be subhuman. 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued to assert that women and men are “coequal and that no difference in estimate is allowable,” that men and women are “two parts,” “composites of humanity,” asserted “in the estimation of God there is no distinction as to male and female,” contended inequality is due to the structural absence of opportunities and education for women who are denied rights and privileges. He added “universal peace is impossible without universal suffrage,” and reasoned that women as mothers would promote peace because of their resistance to sacrifice their sons to battle. “War will cease” as women become greater “hindrances and obstacles” to war when they “enter the world of law and politics” (p. 15). He then used a metaphor to describe the equal and interdependent role of women and men:

> There is a right hand and a left hand in the human body, functionally equal in service and administration. If either proves defective, the defect will naturally extend to the other by involving the completeness of the whole; for accomplishment is not normal unless both are perfect (p. 15).

Concluding he stated: “in all human powers and function they are as partners and co-equals.” In a later speech `Abdu’l-Bahá (2012), used a different binary metaphor: “the world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly” (p. 375). It may seem obvious in both metaphors which side is impeding the other’s potential and progress. Ta’eed (1994) observes that:

> interestingly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not label the female as the weak wing. In his talks in the West, he challenged the nineteenth century paradigm of femininity that women were weak and dependent, but emphasizing that female subjugation was not "due to nature, but to education" (p. 8).

In fact, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982) clearly infers that women are the stronger wing is a lively exchange with suffragettes in London in 1912:

> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned and said to the visitor: “Give me your reasons for believing that woman today should have the vote?” Answer: “I believe that humanity is a divine humanity and that it must rise higher and higher; but it cannot soar with only one wing.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expressed his pleasure at this answer, and smiling, replied: “But what will you do if one wing is stronger than the other?” Answer: “Then we must strengthen the weaker wing, otherwise the flight will always be hampered.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá smiled and asked: “What will you say if I prove to you that the woman is the stronger wing?” The answer came in the same bright vein: “You will earn my eternal gratitude!” at which all the company made merry. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then continued more seriously: “The woman is indeed of the greater importance to the race. She has the greater burden and the greater work. Look […] at her greater strength and fierceness, the lioness is more feared by the hunter than the lion. ..The mere size of the brain has been proved to be no measure of superiority. The woman has greater moral courage than the man; she has also special gifts which enable her to govern in moments of danger and crisis. If necessary she can become a warrior (pp. 102-103).

The comparison of the relationship between men and women as “two hands,” and “two wings,” references a binary relationship. I should note that binary and essentialist references are avoided in gender feminism because they are said to evoke difference rather than sameness. This serves to diminish equality and to increase reductionism which can in turn work to advantage male supremacy.

In order to unpack ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments that imply gender essentialism, we must revisit some fundamental definitions. Atkinson (2011), defines gender essentialism as “a belief that gender attributes have a direct correlation with biological capabilities and differences between the sexes,” therefore the way men and women perform gender is because of inherent biological tendencies (p. 19). Merry (2009), further defines essentialism in the context of

intersectionality. Essentialism posits that all men are the same because they are males, and all woman are the same because they are females:

> but people are defined by a host of other identities, based on race, class, ethnicity, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, and many other characteristics as well as gender […] any notion that there is a single, stable identity as "woman" or "man" fails to recognize this diversity (pp. 12-13).

Butler (1999), describes the dichotomy of sex and gender as the "binary frame" implying the constriction of the pairing in context of an unequal motivation, for the social construction of gender (p. xxi):

> When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one (p. 10).

Gender is an organic amalgam of all these identities. In this nature or nurture argument over biological or inherent essentialism, most feminists in social science have concluded that gender is solely a social construction.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks that women, as mothers, have a greater aversion to war and will be stronger promoters of peace than men. This concept would appear essentialist to many gender feminists but is a claim that is supported by Boulding (1990, 2000) as cited above. Confortini (2006) would contend that his views align with equality feminists, who believe that a mother's role as nurturer and caregiver is naturally pacifistic and that it assumes that women have a moral advantage over men. This view of a homogeneous peaceful and passive femininity can and has been used to disempower women and to empower *patriarchal* masculinities (pp. 333-334).

Väyrynen (2010) writes that the "coupling of war with men and women with peace" uses a modernist instrumental rationality, that sees women as subjects, not as actors. It often relegates them as "best suited for civilian roles in peacebuilding" (pp. 137-138). Väyrynen proposes the need to deconstruct these modernist views in a post-modernist mode of reflexivity.

To summarize, both Confortini and Väyrynen argue that assigning essentialist pacifistic tendencies to women assumes a uniformity of all women upholding hierarchical power structures that maintain the hegemony of men. The emphasis on "instrumentality" of women and their roles as mothers, obedient and subordinate to their male 'head of household' as a social construct is

antithetical to Bahá'í beliefs, because it impedes equality of the sexes and promotes patriarchal masculinity. What is a Bahá'í position on these questions?

**A Bahá'í Vision of the Future of Gender**

What did 'Abdu'l-Bahá (2012) envision as the future of gender? Was it a new equal paradigm that also acknowledges the diversity of physical sex roles and "gender culture?" His essentialist leaning statements seem to be balanced by his statements that "in the estimation of God there is no distinction as to male and female" (p. 134), and that physicality and intelligence is God-created "without differentiation or distinction as to superiority," that God "has created them equal […] there is no question of sex," and that "all differences and distinctions are conducive to discord and strife" (pp. 174-175). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's paradigm was primarily a spiritual one which viewed people as souls that are absolutely equal without gender or sex. These souls are connected to the body like light in a mirror for a short human existence as male and female on an eternal spiritual journey returning to the Creator.

Gender feminism attempts to reconcile that the bodies of men and women are different, function differently, and yet do not yield to inequality despite differences. These physical differences and functions may be few, but in the Bahá'í view they make women and men "co-equal" parts of a composite whole, totally equal, but complementary. This complementary relationship is expressed in the BIC statement's reference to *working shoulder to shoulder* (p. 7).

In considering physical differences, roles, and functions, the following questions come to mind. What is the purpose of seeking equality except to achieve human harmony, justice and peace? Does being a mother change anything about a woman's outlook on peace compared to a man's? If so, can a man attain peacefulness without female embodiment? Is the answer in 'Abdu'l-Bahá (2012) affirmation above that "all differences and distinctions are conducive to discord and strife" (pp. 174-175)?

The metaphor of the *two hands* and *two wings* metaphors leads one to ponder the condition of the whole of humanity, and its potential for living within a biology made of binaries. Lederach (2005), promotes the use of metaphor in addressing complexity, defending it as a synthesis of many shades of grey and not a venture into reductionism (p. 71). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's metaphors address inequality not only as an injustice itself, but an injustice preventing all humankind from attaining the peace and justice that is its potential and its divine destiny.

In order to further clarify the Bahá'í position Ta'eed (1994) gives emphasis to the last sentence of the following passage from 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the fluidity of gender performances, as a mutable balance between essentialist notions of masculine and feminine qualities:

> The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age-less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals [. . .] an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced (National Spiritual Assembly US, 1999, p. 8).

Ta'eed emphasizes that this challenges the Bahá'í community to more rapidly remove socially constructed sex and gender differences in order to achieve equality, and to more honestly address that the absence of dialogue on sexism and inequality has "reinforced male supremacy ideology" (p. 73). She points out the possibilities it raises for a future blending of gender performances through a kind of androgyny. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's declaration that balancing of the "masculine and feminine elements of civilization" (National Spiritual Assembly US, 1999, p. 8) and the feminizing of men aligns with hooks' (2004) term *feminist masculinity,* in contrast to *patriarchal masculinity* (pp. 108-110).

It is worth considering what the actualization of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's metaphors of equalizing and balancing would have on human potential. What if two equal wings allowed humanity to fly? What if both hands had equal dexterity, ability and strength? What could two hands do that one hand cannot do? *The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.*[6] Equality would yield more than twice the ability we now have, perhaps a quantum leap in the capacity of the human race to achieve its potential for peace. "Peace can only be based on equity and equality." Galtung (Matyók, 2011) notes, "a structure without those basic rights is not giving to others what they demand for themselves" (p. 6). The achievement of peace through equality would realize a wholeness and oneness we have never experienced.

In summary, as an emerging cultural ethos, Bahá'ís still unconsciously and consciously carry the baggage of their birth culture's constructions of masculinity and gender. For the men in this study the seeds for change and equality are located in the admonitions of Bahá'í scriptures

[6] a rendering from Aristotle's Metaphysics 8.6.

and are a work in progress. This process is to be learned and realized through practice and application in family and community life. With a small but diverse group of men, this became becomes evident in the study findings

The way Bahá'ís govern themselves informs the findings of this study. Bahá'í governance has a modernist flavor with no paid, professional or ordained clergy. Neither is there one single individual in authority. Local, regional and national communities are governed by democratically elected councils open to both women and men. Although when compared to other religious governmental bodies Bahá'í leadership has a higher percentage of women in elected and appointed roles (Bahá'í International Community, 2017). Next we will discuss criticisms of the Bahá'í faith, the first regards the elected membership on the international Bahá'í council which is restricted to men.

**Navigating Criticism**

The Universal House of Justice (UHJ) is the international governing body of the Bahá'í faith. Its nine members are elected to serve five-year terms and have no single or public leader. The UHJ is an institution unique in religious history that was created by Bahá'u'lláh who specifically limited its membership to men with no explicit explanation why. Observers of the Bahá'í faith have said that this appears hypocritical in light of the professed belief in the equality of the sexes. Other critics have called it contradictory, sexist and patriarchal (Bacquet, 2006).

Aware of this apparent contradiction the UHJ (2017) addresses the question on their website, explaining that the rule came from Bahá'u'lláh himself that "its wisdom will be clearly understood in future" and that it "can in no way be regarded as a sign of the superiority of men over women" because they are bound to unequivocally uphold the "established fact" of the equality of women and men. Making equivalences or binary assumptions in comparison to other governing institutions and their exercise of power would be reductionist. To better grasp this issue it is important to understand the purpose and functions of the UHJ which is unfortunately well beyond the scope of this study. As with all religions, the Bahá'í Faith does have apparent paradoxes that are seen by critics as incongruencies between its espoused beliefs and its institutional and legal structure and practice.

In another example of criticism against Bahá'í practice, the reader has certainly noticed the Bahá'í texts quoted in this thesis use gendered male pronouns. Hooper (2001) contends that

dichotomous gendered language can “valorize the masculine,” and associate masculinity with power (p. 52). The translation of the original Arabic and Persian texts into English (and eight hundred other languages) use an archaic style including male gendered pronouns, most of which do not exist in the originals. This translation style was initiated by Shoghi Effendi, the appointed successor to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. With this in mind the UHJ (Bahá’u’lláh,1993) explains:

> Bahá’u’lláh enjoyed a superb mastery of Arabic, […] the style employed is of an exalted and emotive character, immensely compelling, particularly to those familiar with the great literary tradition out of which it arose. [Shoghi Effendi] [i]n taking up his task would not only faithfully convey the exactness of the text’s meaning, but would also evoke in the reader the spirit of meditative reverence which is a distinguishing feature of response to the original. The form of expression he selected, reminiscent of the style used by the seventeenth-century translators of the Bible, captures the elevated mode of Bahá’u’lláh’s Arabic, while remaining accessible to the contemporary reader. (pp. 10-11).

The question then becomes: can one read a male pronoun in the archaic sense, and navigate around the contention that it gives *valor* and *power* to men? Despite the use of male pronouns in Bahá'í scriptures, fundamental beliefs state that the Creator/God is an unknowable genderless essence. Women and men are unquestionably equal.

A final area of criticism are Bahá'í views on homosexuality, important to this study because homophobia, and the fear of femininity are cited above as key underlying factors in the formation of hyper and toxic masculinity. The following passage from the UHJ (2010) serves to clarify the Bahá’í heteronormative position regarding homosexuality. It also conveys its stance on how Bahá'ís position themselves, as they defend the oppressed no matter who they are, or what they believe:

> The purpose of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh is the realization of the organic unity of the entire human race, and Bahá’ís are enjoined to eliminate from their lives all forms of prejudice and to manifest respect towards all. Therefore, to regard those with a homosexual orientation with prejudice or disdain would be against the spirit of the Faith. Furthermore, a Bahá’í is exhorted to be “an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression,” and it would be entirely appropriate for a believer to come to the defense of those whose fundamental rights are being denied or violated.” In attempting to

> reconcile what may appear to be conflicting obligations, it is important to understand that the Bahá'í community does not seek to impose its values on others, nor does it pass judgment on others on the basis of its own moral standards. It does not see itself as one among competing social groups and organizations, each vying to establish its particular social agenda. In working for social justice, Bahá'ís must inevitably distinguish between those dimensions of public issues that are in keeping with the Bahá'í Teachings, which they can actively support, and those that are not, which they would neither promote nor necessarily oppose. […] For example, Bahá'ís actively work for the establishment of world peace but, in the process, do not engage in partisan political activities directed against particular governments (p.1).

The Bahá'í masculine habitus is formed in a world full of opposing beliefs. Bahá'í men believe in the values of equality, the elimination of prejudice, respect for all, defending against oppression and discrimination, and not imposing one's beliefs on others. These masculine values are essential in the struggle to build cultures of peace.

Equality is a firmly held tenet of the Bahá'í faith. The above questions are raised because they may appear to reveal a misalignment between belief and practice. Bahá'í men do not declare they are free from sexism, or homophobia. Their responsibility is to navigate these challenging issues with humility and respect in all of their relationships and to prevent a sense of male or heterosexual privilege or superiority to form misogynist or homophobic attitudes. The issues raised above may live in paradox at the moment but that may not always remain so. Bahá'ís tie belief with obedience to the laws and the institutions created by Bahá'u'lláh. As is written in the ancient Katha Upanishad "Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the exalted ones, for that path is sharp as a razor's edge, impassible and hard to go by." (Panoli, 2018) (1-III-14)

These criticisms can be of benefit, helping to frame controversial issues in context of the entire body of Bahá'í teachings and practice. One has to ask: Has the Bahá'í Faith, because of these paradoxes, suffered damage, fostered prejudices or behaviors that are contrary to their central work for equality, unity, justice and peace? In general, Bahá'ís do not problematize these issues and may *live in the question* when their teachings are criticized, striving to respond without a sense of moral superiority or hubris, and work to refrain from imposing their views.

**The Challenge to Bahá'í Men**

The current state of world affairs poses many challenges for Bahá'í men if they are to achieve equality through "a new understanding of masculinity." Bahá'ís do not separate or isolate themselves from the greater community and do not consider themselves a *chosen people* in a superior moral role. They are guided by Bahá'u'lláh's (2014) admonition cited above, to "[b]e anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements" (p. 213). Although directly involved in social justice issues their teachings strictly prohibit involvement in partisan politics, political resistance movements, and any form of violence. Boulding (2000) confirms that Bahá'ís "are associated with gender and racial equality and social justice in all countries where they are found […] Bahá'í saints and martyrs provide strong role models for public witness on difficult social issues — for men and women equally" (p. 23). Boulding later acknowledges that in the past most religious "prophets and teachers of peace have been men" and writes that "peaceable men" do exist (p. 123).

Based on the literature reviewed, one could summarize the Bahá'ís view as sex is a fixed biological embodiment, and gender a mutable social construction, with essential biological or sex related characteristics, best explained by what Stephenson (2009) called "gender culture."

Finally, it may be helpful to view the BIC statement in light of the discussion on gender construction's intersection with the issues and crises facing men and masculinity today. The statement seems to intentionally strike at the heart of masculine motivation by using the term *courage*, "it is they who must find the moral courage to convey and model new understandings of masculinity." What does it mean to find "moral courage" and to use that courage to "convey and model" a new masculinity? This implies internalizing and donning the "new understanding of masculinity." Bourdieu's (2000, p. 142) concept of habitus is to robe oneself in the habit or garment of a new masculinity.

The BIC statement (Bahá'í International Community, 2015) expresses that men "must challenge and question," their masculinity, an allusion to deconstructing, unpacking, and diagnosing current understandings of masculinity. And they admonish men to contest "the narrow roles that society and the media have assigned to them" (pp. 6-7), addressing the social construction and maintenance of systems of patriarchy and power that confine men in a narrowly defined performance of gender. It also implies that social and cultural authorities enforce and purvey an unequal gender order through the powerful influence of media.

**Summary and Reflection**

The issues around gender and religion are complex, and this paper just begins to address them. There can be an enormous space between science and religion, positivist and faith-based approaches to reality. We find ourselves between "two ways of knowing: scientific and humanistic" (Matyók, et.al, 2011, p. xxv). Meanings and assumptions come from diverse sources: science and religion; tangible and intangible; text and image. All are different ways of knowing.

Bahá'ís assert that all truth is one, scientific or religious. That standard is high. As believers in both science and religion they strive to reconcile those differences. It seems reasonable and logical that there must be more than our physical senses can sense, and that our bodies can experience. To be an embodied human being is a profound experience. What takes it beyond a physical experience is the mindfulness of self-awareness, to be outside looking in. An author can write, a painter can paint, and then ask: "did I do that"? Science is still baffled with human consciousness. Where is it? Does it reside within our brain or is it somewhere else, beamed in like signals to a radio set? Empirical evidence relies on a belief that the physical and tangible world is a closed system of reality. Scriptural and indigenous evidence relies on a belief in both physical and spiritual realities working in unison, interconnected.

Masculinity can be experienced that same way. It can actually be summoned to the level of awareness and be seen as it is performed, or conversely never be given a thought. The saying goes, one can only change oneself, and perhaps that is so because we know ourselves better than anyone else, but only if we choose to know.

Some things do not sit comfortably in text, but we cannot help but try. Could this difference, this dividing space between science and religion be bridged through application of the arts, creative inquiry, and other indigenous ways of knowing? These spaces known in a/r/tography[7] as in-between or interstitial space, the border identity of contiguity? Perhaps we need a safe space of *not knowing* to understand our unity. One of the great challenges of building peace and cultures of peace, will be to navigate that space together. To conclude this section, it is evident that achieving gender equality is not "simply opening-up and allowing women into the present social structure," rather "the goal is for women and men to work shoulder-to-shoulder",

[7] a/r/tography is defined on p.94.

and to construct a new masculinity “which allows for the flourishing of all” (Bahá’í International Community, 2015, p. 7).

# Part II

# Chapter Three

# Research Methodology and Theory

*"A picture is worth a thousand words"* (Flanders, 1911, p. 18).
*"better than a thousand useless words is one word that gives peace"*
Buddha, Dhammapada (Mascaró, 1973, p. 50).

## Overview of Research Design

This study was designed with a variety of methods in the hope they would help to deeply explore self-identity, self-image in the context of masculinity and gender equality in a sacred act of social justice and peacebuilding. It was situated in participatory, qualitative and arts-based approaches and was driven by the launch of a new photo-elicitation method I devised and named *PhotoSophia*. Participants inscribed the photographs derived from the *PhotoSophia* method, provided photographs of their fathers, and took their own Photovoice photographs. All this was exhibited in a *thesis-in-progress* exhibit for public viewing and comment.

This study has three major guy-wires of theory: habitus, magic mirror, and sacred relationship. These theoretical foundations ground the six methodological practices: interview, *PhotoSophia*, group discussion and study, inscription, Photovoice, and public exhibit.

The first practice of the *PhotoSophia* method is an unstructured interview that can be described as a one-on-one discussion between the participant and the researcher. The session began with reading Bahá'í writings that had been provided in advance and discussing them. Interviews lasted between ninety minutes and three hours. Some included a meal, coffee breaks, and audio-visual technical set up. It based on the following four questions often with spontaneous follow-up questions:

Tell me a story about your name?

When did you first become aware you were a boy and that it was different?

What is difficult about being a man?

What is good about being a man?

This interview led up to the special *PhotoSophia* interview using photo-elicitation.

The second practice of *PhotoSophia* is a new photo-elicitation and photographic portraiture interview method I devised. It combines an intimate portrait photography session with a simultaneous open-ended, interactive interview. It used real-time photo-elicitation evoked from portraits taken of the participant in that moment and historic photographs of the participants father. An enlarged print of the *PhotoSophia* portrait chosen by the participant was later privately inscribed and then shown along with portraits of all participants in a public exhibit. The researcher also took portraits of the participant in a personal environment to be included in the exhibit. The exhibit placed participants in the public eye during the opening session and offered viewers the opportunity to submit anonymous questionnaires.

*PhotoSophia* questions included:

Describe the person you see on the screen as though you had never met them

What are the spiritual qualities you see in yourself?

What are your strongest masculine qualities?

What are your strongest feminine qualities?

If your masculinity were a cloak, describe in a detailed metaphor what it would look like, what fabric would it be made of, what decorations and colors would it have, what would it smell like, how would you wear it?

The third practice of *PhotoSophia* is group discussion and study. In this research it was held for a half day in a classroom in the Mauro Centre at the University of Manitoba and followed by a provided lunch (Figure 2). Seven of the ten men were able to attend The session began with prayers and readings from the Bahá'í sacred writings, followed by a study of these writings many of which were read during the interviews. (see appendix for this compilation). Instructions for Photovoice and Inscription of portraits were conveyed as well as how the public exhibit would be installed. *PhotoSophia* portraits of each participant were projected on screen and a discussion of the qualities seen in each man spontaneously ensued. The session ended with the distribution of *PhotoSophia* portraits printed on 16 x 20 inch paper with wide borders for inscription in private.

*Figure 2, Participants at the Study's group meeting Sept. 2, 2018 at the Mauro Institute. © 2019 Chuck Egerton*

The fourth practice of *PhotoSophia* was inscription around and on their portrait. This was a private and personal process that participants were given several weeks to complete. Participants were instructed to consider inscribing about the process from being to becoming, from where they are now to a new masculinity expressing gender equality and peace. They could write, draw, paint or attach anything anywhere on the portrait or surrounding borders. Completed inscribed portraits were picked up by the researcher or delivered before the exhibit.

The fifth practice of *PhotoSophia* was Photovoice. Photovoice gave participants a creative opportunity to take new photographs of metaphoric or symbolic objects and spaces. Self-portraits were taken based on prompts from the researcher, and existing photographs of significance to the participants were submitted. This photography had few parameters and minimal prompting, allowing participants to exercise their own artistic choices. The Photovoice selections were shown in the public exhibit along with the inscribed *PhotoSophia* portrait and included captions they each had written.

The sixth and final practice of *PhotoSophia* is a public exhibit. In this study the exhibit was arranged and held for one week at the Gallery of Student Art at the University of Manitoba Student Union. Participants were invited to help install the exhibit and five attended. The exhibit consisted of eleven sections for the eleven men in the study (An auto-ethnographic element was

inserted when I was photographed and participated in the *PhotoSophia* interview process at the request of Abbas, one of the participants). Each section included the *PhotoSophia* portrait, environmental portraits, a portrait of participant and father (and/or mother) and three of four Photovoice with captions. The second night of the exhibit was a public reception and included a spontaneous and brief gallery exchange between participants and the seventy members of the public in attendance. Forty-four anonymous questionnaires from visitors to the exhibition collected fresh data of perspectives from outside the study over the five days of the exhibit.

**Photographic Rationale and Theory**

Vision is not visuality asserts Rose (2016).Vision is common to all with eyes but visuality is socially constructed, mediating for us what we are seeing and how to give it meaning The use of visual research in this study offered the participants a look into themselves to arrive at new understandings and meanings of who they are as men, as Bahá'ís, and as gender performers. I was curious how Arts-based visual methodology could produce, as Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) describe it, phenomenological data from direct experience as a "counterpoint" to the "positivist paradigm" of social sciences research (p. xvi).

The positive research approach and design of *The Art and Science of Portraiture* methodology inspired the emergence of *PhotoSophia*. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) writes the "portraitist's stance is one of acceptance and discernment […] encouraging actors in the expression of their strengths, competencies and insights. She sees actors as knowledge bearers, as rich resources, as the authorities of their own experience […] in supporting the expression of strengths, the portraitist also seeks to create a dialogue that allows for the expression of vulnerability, weakness, prejudice and anxiety – characteristics […] best expressed in counterpoint with the actor's strengths" (p. 141). Like Portraiture, *PhotoSophia* is a shift "from preoccupation with disease to concern for health" (p. 142).

I was also curious about how the transformation of masculinities intersects with building communities of peace based on gender equity. There are many special considerations in using and experimenting with Arts-based Research methodology. With it I wanted to explore interpersonal and intrapersonal micro level masculine identity inheritance, adoption, negotiation, agency and transformation. My arts-based process was designed to be participatory to create new works of art both by participants and researcher. These artworks stand with captions, interview

transcripts and audio/video recordings to create a picture of how men can resist the qualities of unhealthy masculinities and negotiate their identities to incorporate the qualities of more peace aligned “feminist” masculinities (hooks, 2004, pp. 113–114) through the new knowledge produced. Artworks by the researcher and participants were displayed in a gallery exhibit on the University of Manitoba campus allowing public access and the collection of anonymous questionnaires from visitors

**Photography and Modernity**

To begin I will throw a wide net and share what I have gathered and now understand from the literature researching arts-based research, particularly photography and visual approaches that informed and supported the design, implementation and efficacy of methodologies used in this study. This will also provide context for why art-based approaches, particularly photography, are effective in accessing new knowing in the difficult to reach area of gender identity and equality.

To understand the impact photography has had on human research one need only imagine a world without it. Imagine if all one could see was a fleeting, unstoppable, moving stream of images in the present moment, none of which could be held except through memory. Before photography one’s sight was limited, except through optics, to the circle of one’s immediate bodily vision. The only way one could see a distant place, a famous face or a dead relative (if one could afford it) was to look at an artist’s interpretation through etchings, lithographs, illustrations or paintings. In an average family silhouetted shadow portrait profiles of loved ones carefully traced and cut from black paper for framing were the only affordable remembrance. To remember a person removed from one’s circle of vision by distance or death was to rely on oral or written memories or a memento or token. Without photography one’s ancestors remain invisible, and visual memories of children, family and friends slowly fade away with no way to pass them along to the next generation.

Then comes photography. What once took a horse drawn wagon full of photographic equipment and chemicals now fits in a pocket and is connected to millions of other cameras through the internet. We are approaching two hundred years with photography. Today we can see almost any photograph made since 1839 frozen in time, in exquisitely fine resolution from

almost anywhere. In fact, stopping time photographically has only been a gift to about seven generations of humankind. Now we can even place a photograph on a headstone!

Rosenblum (2007) records that shortly after the invention of photography in 1839 the artist Paul Delaroche proclaimed painting was dead. He feared that with the invention of a machine that could accurately capture visual likeness, artists would no longer be needed to do it. Regarding the difference between photography and other representations Sontag (1977) writes:

> what is written about a person or an event is frankly an interpretation, as are handmade visual statements, like paintings and drawings. Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire (p. 2).

Humankind was unprepared for the arrival of photography but welcomed it enthusiastically. The technical ability it brought to capture a visual reality changed everything.

Social media statistics support the ever-increasing popularity of photography: 685 million photos are uploaded to Facebook every day, 95 million to Instagram daily, and 1.7 billion to Snapchat (Bagadiya, 2017). Most of these photographs are selfies and one has to ask how will this abundance of self-portraits change our self-image and worldview? Cake bread (2017) of Business Insider estimated 1.2 trillion digital photos are taken by phones, cameras and tablets annually. A saying attributed to photographer Berenice Abbott “imagine a world without photography, one could only imagine” is to see a world without the wheel or electricity.

Rose (2016) writes that modernity is “ocularcentric” and equates seeing with knowing, citing Jenks’ comment that “looking, seeing and knowing have become perilously intertwined” making “the modern world … a seen phenomenon.” Postmodernity also exists under the hegemony of the visual but considers the image a social construction rather than knowledge, what Mizoeff called the “visual culture” of the postmodern age (pp. 7-8).

The connection between the photograph and the thing photographed is indelible. The light rays reflected off the object or person forever create a relationship with the image. As Barthes (1981) stated “every photograph is somehow co-natural with its referent” (p. 76). Photography literally means *to draw with light.* It can mechanically, chemically and digitally reproduce a physical likeness of what is before the camera’s single lens. The dimension and magnification of the image it captures is determined by the focal length and field of view of the

lens optic in relation to the film, plate or digital sensor size. The aperture size and distance from the subject determine what is in or out of focus.

Rosenblum (2007) quotes publisher and industrial designer Egmont Arens from 1939 describing the wide capabilities of photography at one century old:

> the camera counts the stars and discovers a new planet sister to our earth, it peers down a drop of water and discovers microcosms. The camera searches out the texture of flower petals and moth wings as well as the surface of concrete. It had things to reveal about the curve of a girl's cheek and the internal structure of steel (p. 393).

Walter Lippmann, in Sontag (2003) comments on the evolution of what is considered *real* in the age of photography: "photographs have the kind of authority over imagination today, which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real". Photographs are so easy to consume they almost replace the need for personal investigation and are seemingly delivered to us untouched by human hands (p. 25).

Photography is actually an illusion. Human vision is faulty writes 'Abdu'l-Bahá (2012) because:

> [t]hese images have no actual corporeal existence. Yet if you had never seen a mirror, you would firmly insist and believe that they were real. The eye sees a mirage upon the desert as a lake of water, but there is no reality in it. As we stand upon the deck of a steamer, the shore appears to be moving, yet we know the land is stationary and we are moving (p.21).

The illusion of photography helped create the state Atkinson (2011) called "liquid modernity" (p. 128), described as a loss of an anchored connection to past notions of reality. These notions have been replaced with new mechanical, scientific methods that include the still camera's ability to stop the present moment and fix it forever. As Arens (2007) mentions above, the invention of photography is largely responsible for the shift from verbal and textual sources of data to visual, deeply affecting human interaction and communication and how we see and research the world of reality.

But is photographic vision the same as human vision? In contrast to the way a camera "sees" human vision uses the combined binocular input of two eyes with fixed focal lengths from two slightly different points of view captured upside down on the cones and rods of the retina, and then raced through the optic nerve to the brain (Schwartz, 1994). Once there the visual

information is massively interpreted and mediated, named, categorized, contextualized and stored in memory. Camera designs mimic the human eyeball which itself is a *camera obscura*, or dark chamber that allows light rays reflecting off objects enter through its lens and iris to refocus on the retina at the back of the eye. The striking difference between these two physical methods of image creation and interpretation is that the eye captures a moving stream of images that constantly changes either by bodily or subject movement, while the camera captures a still photograph of a brief moment in time. The glass camera lens gives a monocular vision that is flat and two-dimensional, not at all like human three-dimensional vision. Binocular vision increases a sense of depth of objects in space, perspective and dimension while monocular vision flattens perspective and compresses visual form. A photograph is therefore not human vision, it is a revision of what was seen by the eye, captured and mediated by the photographer's choice of timing, camera angle, distance, depth of field and framing. Additionally, a photograph can be heavily manipulated in the darkroom or via software.

Before the invention of photography and motion picture research could only be "captured" textually via field notes, and visually via sketches. These methods moved data through the subjective filters of mediated meanings, interpretations and expectations that could taint scientific objectivity. Thoreau (1839) in the year of photography's birth describes the difference between 'looking' and 'seeing' because:

> many an object is not seen, though it falls within the range of our visual ray, because it does not come within the range of our intellectual ray, i.e. we are not looking for it. So, in the largest sense, we find only the world we look for (*Journal*, 2 July 1857).

For the scientist photography turned *search* into *re-search* in the true sense of the word, allowing one to look again, endlessly, repeating the gaze on the subject under scrutiny, to share it with others who could do the same in a collaborative process. It captured a visual version of reality on paper.

Anthropologist John Collier (1986) writes that the camera is for scientists "an extension of our senses." The camera offered a "whole vision" as it "faithfully" observes and records "what the human eye cannot." Its "precise memory" increases understanding of human behavior and emphasized the scientific value of holding a moment in time because it "could be examined again and again by any number of observers, now or years later […] and ushered in a new phase of human understanding that continues to expand our social thinking" (pp. 7-8). It is noted by

Tagg (1988) that once taken a photographic is static, the image is of something in the past that cannot be seen again in exactly the same way.

Once technically capable of capturing human subjects outside the controls of the studio photography could create permanent visual records to study, and research human activity and behavior. The shiny Daguerreotype plate was called a “magic mirror” (Rosenblum, 2007, p. 23) because it gave us a new way to look back at ourselves as never before.

That a photograph allows an image of something or someone to be captured, seen out of its original context and in comparison to other images also enhances scientific inquiry. A captured photograph can be copied and distributed, printed, published and broadcast infinitely. From its inception, photography has provided significant tools for examining ourselves and others in the world, breaking down many myths and traditions, shrinking the globe and offering science a new form of objectivity. Both natural and social sciences have benefited from evolving along-side the technology of photography. The ability to stop time and preserve memory accurately makes photography a valuable tool in research.

**Death defying time machine**

In the sliver of 1/100th of a second a photograph stops time with the permanence of death. Barthes (1981) observed “death is the eidos of that Photograph” (p.15), it can stop time, but it cannot stop death making salient our inevitable demise. Photographers that are “determined upon the capture of actuality, do not know that they are agents of Death” (pp. 91-92). Sontag (1977) writes “the link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people” (p.55) and describes a photograph as much more than an artistic rendering “It is also a trace […] stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask […] a material vestige of its subject” (p. 120) an “inventory of mortality” (p. 54). Relative to photography and death, Bourdieu and Boltanski (1990) write a photograph “can help one overcome the sorrow of passing time […] by providing a sense of the conquest of time as a destructive power” through “providing a magical substitute for what time has destroyed” (p.14). According to Fox Talbot, a father of photography the photograph records the “injuries of time” (Sontag, 1977, p. 54). Regarding the moment, a photograph is taken Alan Trachtenberg (1990) writes:

photographs transcribe, not "reality", but the world as it was seen and recorded [...] in the

> picture we see the world from the angle of the camera's partial vision, from the position it had at the moment of the release of the shutter (p. 251).

Less than one hundred photographs were displayed in the Being and Becoming exhibit. If we assume each of those photographs was taken at a shutter speed of 1/100th of a second, then we can conclude that the entire exhibit represents less than one second in actual time. Each of those slivers combine to create an indelible, time frozen set of powerful memories.

**Collective historic memory**

Is photography an artifact of personal and collective memory? Does a photographic image that is fixed, saved and passed through generations of viewing and reviewing revive or create memory? Matthew Brady distinguished Civil War photographer is reported to have said "the camera is the eye of history" (Sontag, 2003 p. 52). Photography gives families a visual heritage with the ability to know what ancestors looked like. A photograph, writes Barthes (1981), is not a memory in the past perfect tense but exists in an "aorist" or ambiguous tense that can actually "block" memory and become a "counter memory" (p. 91). Explaining the connection between history and memory he found it:

> a paradox: the same century invented History and Photography. But History is a memory fabricated according to positive formulas, a pure intellectual discourse which abolishes mythic Time; and the Photograph is a certain but fugitive testimony so that everything, today, prepares our race for this impotence: to be no longer able to conceive duration, affectively or symbolically (p. 93).

Photography offers a permanent memory that goes far beyond a symbolic memento to a relic bound to the actuality itself — exactly as we saw it before our own eyes. Illustrating this connection Sontag (1977) quotes British poet Elizabeth Barrett's 1843 letter to Mary Russell Mitford on the endearing sentiment contained in a photograph:

> I long to have such a memorial of every being dear to me in the world. It is not merely the likeness which is precious […] but the association and the sense of nearness involved in the thing […] the fact that the very shadow of the person lying there fixed forever (p. 161)!

The “shadow” she refers to is the awareness of the very real physical connection between a sitter and a Daguerreotype plate. It was a one of a kind image, much like a Polaroid, created when the light rays reflected off the face through the lens and permanently imbedded themselves onto its light sensitive surface. A photographic negative does look like a shadow.

A photograph can make up for “failures of memory” write Bourdieu and Boltanski (1990), “acting as a mooring for the evocation of associated memories” (p. 14). But photographs are more than memories, they are collected according to Sontag (1977) by travelers as a means to “take possession of the places they visited” (p. 50) in an act of acquisition. Beyond being a memory, a photograph is a symbolic visual metaphor one step away from reality.

*“seeing convergence*
*in midst of complexity*
*creates synthesis”*
(Egerton, 2016b)

**A nonverbal visual metaphor**

A photograph is nonverbal and metaphoric in that it silently represents something visually real. Completely different than text and writing, which Hall (1973) defines as a “symbolization of a symbolization” (p. 120), a photograph, though also a kind of symbol, is a concrete nonverbal visualization of what is seen in the world. Collier (1986) describes how photography’s ability to do this changed the way people see and provided important new communication skills.

> … in a sense we think and communicate photographically. The nonverbal language of photorealism is a language that is most understood inter-culturally and cross culturally. This fluency of recognition is the basic reason the camera can be of such importance in anthropological communication and analysis (p.9).

“Saying is not seeing,” writes Richard Zakia (1975, p. 80), and “photography is a language more universal than words” writes Minor White (Comer et al., 2006, p. 93). “The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera” wrote Dorothea Lange (Kirsch, 1978). Photography speaks the language of the image, or “imago” in Latin meaning “to imitate” (Barthes, 1977). In Sitvast et al. (2008) we find that Ricoeur’s hermeneutics theory can apply to the concept of imitation or mimesis in photography. The way the mind responds to art and imagery creates another version, a metaphor of reality that mirrors but does not duplicate the

original. This process opens a sacred or ritual space for deep investigation and interpretation. Neuroscience alludes that the ability to predict the thinking or reaction of others (theory of mind) is also found in this space. It is a phenomenon that Oberman et al. (2007) observed in mirror neurons, the brain cells that impact human empathy (p. 62). From a phototherapy perspective Weiser (2004) wrote that a photograph "becomes a natural 'transitional object' bridging realities" (p.260). These concepts thread together like pearls on a string, from artists, theorists, scientists and therapists who confirm the power of photographic Arts Based Research (ABR) to discover new knowledge and transform the people engaged in it.

Creativity is actualized through three skills, according to LeBaron and Pillay (2006): metaphor, storytelling and ritual (p. 112) all found in the photograph. Zehr (2005) writes that the "metaphor is an essential part of meditative vision in photography" (p.52) especially important "when we talk about things that we cannot see or touch" (p.55). Applicable to photography Lederach (2005) writes he prefers to "watch metaphors" rather than listen to them. "People talk in images […] metaphor is a creative act […] bringing something new into the world […] it creates an image of what the experience of living in the world is like" (pp. 71-72). Schwartz (1989) quotes anthropologist Paul Byers who writes:

> the photograph is not a "message" in the usual sense. It is, instead, the raw material for an infinite number of messages which each view can construct from himself. Edward T. Hall has suggested that the photograph conveys little new information but, instead, triggers meaning that is already in the viewer (p. 120).

"can't see, to can see
on the dim, narrow path to
a clearing ahead"
(Egerton, 2016a)

**Arts-based Research (ABR)**

"Creativity and imagination, the artist giving birth to something new, propose to us avenues of inquiry and ideas about change that require us to think about how we know the world, how we are in the world, and most important, what in the world is possible."
Lederach (2005, p. 39)

**Photography, Art and Peacebuilding**

The ontology of the art of photography itself is important to a critical review of its use especially as a method in PACS research. Where does it fit in the history of human knowing? How does it entwine with the social sciences and peacebuilding as threads in the cord pulling humanity into modernity? Lederach (2005) expressing his concern for PACS practitioners writes:

> [i]n the process of professionalization we too often have lost a sense of the art, the creative act that underpins the birth and growth of personal and social change. I fear we see ourselves to be—and have therefore become—more technicians than artists. (p. 73)

In a critical review Matyók et al. (2011) answered the question "what distinguishes the field of peace and conflict studies from other fields?" by describing it as a "design discipline" not seeking a place in the "academic center" but "creating a new center," with an "activist oriented" heart. In referring to PACS ways of knowing he asserts it is "future-centered", inquiring "what it can be" compared with "what it is" in science, and "why it is" in the humanities. He posits that PACS sees its "deconstructing" analysis of conflict as a means to focus on the "process of becoming" people of peace who build communities and cultures of peace. This creative design process is defined as "wickedly complex," an unattached engagement with all academic disciplines and arts not only the social sciences (pp. xxv-xxvi).

These are meaningful statements to me as a PACS practitioner and artist because they provide an inclusive framework defining what we research, why we do research and most importantly what that research can do to promote the process of peace in the world. It is within this framework that photography as an arts-based research methodology connects theory and praxis in this study. McClure (2010) suggests "that theory's capacity to offend is also its power to unsettle – to open up static fields of habit and practice." and that "the value of theory lies in its power to get in the way: to offend and interrupt. We need theory to block the reproduction of the bleeding obvious, and thereby, hopefully, open new possibilities for thinking and doing" (p. 277).

Picasso positioned art as "research" (Knowles & Cole, 2008a, p. 29), but more importantly that it's "not made to decorate rooms. It is an offensive weapon in the defense

against the enemy" (Picasso, 1943). In agreement jagodzinski (2015) writes "Deleuze was quite clear […] art had nothing to do with communication, but with resistance" (p. 295). Resistance is precisely what is required to "challenge and question the narrow roles that society and the media have assigned to [men]" (Bahá'í International Community, 2015, p. 7). These narrow roles and the policing that attends them are reminiscent of the all-seeing Panopticon described by Bentham (1791) and Foucault (1991) like *fingernails on a chalkboard* for any artist.

Hunter and Page (2014) parse out two very different kinds of art used in peacebuilding: *instrumental* and *integrative*. They explain "the instrumental value of the arts (as a "tool" for communication or social enterprise)"(p.115), differs from the "more nuanced attention to integrative values (with respect to the ways in which the arts make meaning within social, cultural, political and aesthetic domains)" (p.134). If we seek to nurture the creativity of the inner artist in peacebuilding, we must understand it is an outsider's view that straddles the fence between a collectivist and an individualistic identity and resists instrumentalization (Rank, 1932, p. 17).

The great benefit of being an outsider is that its anti-colonizing, skeptical and questioning point of view can immunize practitioners from unintentionally perpetrating the oppression they are fighting against (Freire, 1996, p. 62). PACS theory and practice align with McClure's characterization of disruption which also describes arts-based theory and research giving revolutionary *mojo* to practitioners.

Artists often find themselves in situations where they are asked or required to quantify and conform their practices, theories and outcomes into incompatible parameters. Sometimes in translation, there is no word that fits. Artist George Braque said it well "[i]n Art there is only one thing that counts, the thing you can't explain." (Gayford & Wright, 2000, p. 573). I believe, if art is given the freedom to tap its own agency, to create integrative newness, apart from instrumentality, it can have limitless potential in peacebuilding work.

**What is arts-based research?**

The promise of arts-based research (ABR) is to "allow one into a dimly lit cave that is lightened up – made even bright – by the luminescence of the work," Eisner and Barone (2010, p.6). Plato's (1997, pp. 1132–1138) allegory of the cave has meaning here. We know from Hursthouse (Hanfling, 1992) that "[a]rt can never truly represent reality [it] is an illusion, a

collection of mere appearances like reflections in a mirror or shadows on a wall" because "life itself, which art is merely a copy, does not represent reality" (p. 239). Barone and Eisner (2012) go on to define arts-based research as an "effort to utilize the forms of thinking and the forms of representation that the arts provide as a means through which the world can be better understood" (p. xi).

ABR is qualitative research and can utilize any art form or combination of art forms in its practice. "Arts-based research methodologies" as defined by Rolling (2010), "are characteristically emergent, imagined, and derivative from an artist/researcher's practice or arts praxis inquiry models," and as a means to new knowing "they are capable of yielding outcomes taking researchers in directions the sciences cannot go" (p. 102). To further understand this methodology Baden (2014) cites six ABR principles from Saven-Baden and Major (2012). First, the work must be "a moral commitment" to "promote personal transformation." Second, new "knowledge is generated through the work." Third, ABR work should be highly reflexive, based in the depth of the artist's commitment. Fourth, the artwork produced must be accessible to a wide audience. The artwork produced must be of quality is the fifth principle; "good art is also good research." Finally, it must be authentic, "the work and research must be intertwined and mutually shaping so there is sense of integrity" (pp. 292-293).

Reflecting on these principles, ABR shares many components with other forms of qualitative research but a significant difference is it centers on the artist/researcher's transformation through the medium chosen and produced by the artist. Another difference is that the *finding* of new knowledge may not be explicit because it is revealed through works of art braided together with the artist and the research itself, as was the case with *Being and Becoming*.

Rose (2016) established three criteria for evaluating "critical and visual methodology", "cultural significance, social practices and power relations." She insists that the interpretation of an image must be empirically grounded within the social context and it must "have an explicit methodology" to be defendable (p. xxii). Evaluating social power relationships is particularly important.

Barthes (1981) description of the photograph as a "weightless transparent envelope" (p. 5) relates to the concept discussed in Reavey (2011) that to unfasten "the idea of image from picture content, hopefully encourages us to *look behind* as well as *look at* photographs." Intersectionality is also addressed by John Berger (as quoted by Reavey) who used the phrase

"ways of seeing" noting that "we never look just at one thing; we are always looking in relation between things and ourselves" (p. 27).

To Baden's principles, and Rose's criteria we can add eight ABR practices and strengths from Leavy (2015) exploration of new insights, holistic approaches, evoking and provoking emotional responses, raising awareness in self and community, promoting empathy, deconstructing dominant ideologies, empowering marginalized people and points of view, increasing dialogue and social justice.

The medium of photography can get to the heart of peacebuilding, to this liminal space of ritual and transformation. It finds itself in that interstitial space because photography is a bridging force that combines wordlessness and timelessness. These can empower creativity, imagination, connection with others, and the building of new understanding, empathy and self-esteem. It can be the source of new sight and clarity.

"The haiku attitude" wrote Lederach (2004), "required me to think about simplicity as a source of energy rather than as the choice of reductionism." The haiku poem is a simple art-word-form that crosses the space between image and text, science and art, masculinity and femininity, war and peace. "It is the place," continues Lederach "where simplicity and complexity meet," "where the heart of peacebuilding pounds a steady but not often perceived rhythm" (p. 67). Schirch (2005) explains that "liminal spaces are in-between, set-aside contexts" often created through ritual. "There is an art to creating a place that can facilitate ritual's transforming power" (p.69). Peacemakers need to become architects of these spaces. An example is found in the CommonVisions case study.

**Case study: CommonVisions**

*CommonVisions* (Egerton, 2015) demonstrates the use of photography through an ABR methodology that aligns PACS theory with the principles and strengths of good ABR practice. As the artist/researcher for the project I can offer some insight into the connection between the artist/researcher and the new knowledge produced. *CommonVisions: Photographic Explorations of Unity in Diversity* was an arts-based photography project designed to fight racism and promote understanding and connection between diverse people in a small community in the southern United States.

The hypothesis of *CommonVisions* was that photography could provide a meaningful and word-less means to approach often contentious verbal-only dialogues on racism. Theoretical supports incorporated the medical model that examined the etiology of racism as a disease. As a faith-based project its structure and process reflected my moral commitment to the Bahá'í faith and its principles of racial unity, oneness and justice. Non-verbal theories borrowed from photo therapy helped create a sense of intimacy and belonging, avoid discursive gridlock, and promote community betterment and change. *CommonVisions* used Photovoice methodology as well as unique methods of studio portraiture and constructed photographic images designed by participants. As artist/researcher I created new artwork in the form of portraits of participants as well as designing the project, facilitating discussions and collaboratively creating and installing the public gallery space. Each phase of the project ended with a public showing of the work created by participants and the artist/researcher. Using Photovoice in an ABR context created a ritual space in which participants found the safely to explore and nurture new identities and build cross-racial relationships. The art-creating action-over-words oriented modality facilitated these conditions and opened up possibilities for transformation. The praxis of *CommonVisions* demonstrated Baden's principles, Rose's criterion, and Leavy's practices of ABR.

A/r/tography is another arts-based research paradigm that influenced the *Being and Becoming* study. The term a/r/tography is an acronym for artist/researcher/teacher making art. This form of ABR is like an extended deep-sea exploration into the ritualistic and transformative ocean between art and text, the interstitial space discussed above. A/r/tography, according to Springgay, et al. (2005) uses a concept of six "renderings": contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor and metonymy, reverberations, and excess (pp. 900-908). *Contiguity* or the state of bordering is important to this discussion as is the term *métissage*. They both refer to the condition of in-between-ness. Metis means racially mixed or blended and is the root of métissage from the French/Canadian usage of European-Aboriginal descent. It is a state of straddling a border, while simultaneously being an intimate component of both sides it divides.

Freire (1985) seemed to concur with the concept of merging text and image when he wrote: "reading is not walking on words; it is grasping the soul of them" (p. 19). A/r/tography then is about creating art that bridges what appears to be opposite, is in conflict or appears incongruous. Schirch (2005) writes that ritual can provide that "unique space" if only we "symbolically do something" to "create ambience", it will then increase "emotional and sensual

communication" and sense of community (p. 28). Identities in conflict can be transformed when entering the context of a ritualistic or symbolic "humanizing" space. Again, Schirch urges peacemakers to master the construction of these healing spaces (p. 127). The creation of art is a form of ritual.

"the kettle lightens
at tea time, floating ribbons
of steam like incense"
(Egerton, 2017a)

**The potential of photo-elicitation**

Harper's defines photo elicitation (PE) as "inserting a photograph into a research interview" (2004, p. 13). Photo Elicitation (PE) interviews were utilized in the *Being and Becoming* study to create a visual catalyst, to evoke stronger and deeper reflection and discussion in interviews with the researcher. Describing what PE participants could experience Barthes (1981) wrote that to see oneself in a photograph is different than looking in a mirror: "myself never coincides with my image." Seeing one's own portrait creates a distanciation "of myself as other" disconnecting "consciousness from identity" (pp. 11-12). Through PE this distanciation allowed participants to reflect more deeply on their gender roles, their compliance and resistance, their intentions and goals, their past, present and desired future state of masculine identity in context of their beliefs.

Photo elicitation is multi-modal and uncovers both verbal and non-verbal meanings distinguishing it from mono-modal or verbal/textual interviews (Reavey, 2011, p. 331). Photographs for photo-elicitation can be historic, found, or newly produced as part of the research project by the researcher or participants or both. The latter, specially created images, are the link between PE and ABR. When coupled with well-crafted, open-ended interview questions, researcher/ participant created photographs can help mine deeper data with more engaged conversations.

Beginning the practice of PE as early as 1957 Anthropologist John Collier (1986) wrote about photographs used in interviews as "communication bridges between strangers, unforeseen environments and subjects," and that photographs can "function as starting and reference points for the familiar or the unknown" (p. 99). PE is applied to elicit deeper conversation and

reflection in response to a researcher's questions in the presence of particular photographs eliciting emotional recall and below the surface responses in participants.

Rose (2016) lists four *key strengths* of PE. First, PE produces greater and richer data that verbal methods cannot. Secondly, PE evokes interviews that are more passionate, compelling and even indescribable. Thirdly, when participants provide, or take photographs themselves PE interviews often reveal a deeper reflection on their own lives. Finally, participant created images give PE interviewees a central role, engaging and investing them in the research process These strengths include interpreting images (pp. 314–319).

Epstein et al. (2006) write that through "using photographs and playing with content (what is in the photo) and process (how photos were presented) researchers can probe participants to discuss social relationships"(p.2). Reavey (2011) cites the study by Henwood et al. finding that photo-elicitation interviews also help participants "to speak of thoughts, aspirations, hopes and fears in ways that are not strictly referential – speaking not of things that have actually happened, but that operate as part of the imaginary" (p. 331).

PE is theoretically strengthened by a/r/tography's concept of a third space that pursues new openings, exploring and mixing what is between awake and asleep -- the unconscious (De Cosson & Irwin, 2004, p. 39). ABR researchers, according to Reavey (2011) "have begun to open up a space to examine "hard to reach issues" and that exposure to an image can "disrupt well-rehearsed present narratives" (p. 6). That PE can serve as a narrative disruptor could be what Barthes (1981) describes as *punctum*. Many photographs are, alas inert under my gaze […] they please or displease me without pricking me" (p.26), but found that particular photographs have *punctum*. "A photograph's punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (p.27).

Ricoeur (1973) wrote about the concept of distanciation in reference to mono-modal creative texts but his insights could be applied to the multi-modal art of photo-elicitation. He observed that when language (or a photograph) transcends the mundane it can create a "distanciation of the real from itself," "a story, a fairy tale, a poem," (and a photograph) have their own connection to reality and, though not real, can reveal "new possibilities of being in the real world. This modality works through "imaginative variations" that span the distance between "the real" and "itself," and therefore transform what *real* can mean. For example, in my study Photo-elicitation created a distance between "the real and itself" when men looked at their own

photographic portrait. They knew the photograph is not really themselves but couldn't deny it strongly references and symbolizes them. That distanciation created an "imaginative variation" and the possibility for "metamorphosis." It is to look at oneself from an outside perspective, in a two-dimension representation or likeness which is like a "story, a fairy tale, a poem" that is not you but refers to you. Creating this two dimensional "fiction," as is the role and function of photographs, takes one beyond everyday seeing to the realm of seeing with imagination, possibility and transformation (p. 141).

The first and second practices of *PhotoSophia*, PE were used during a one-on-one interview and real-time photographic portrait session. During this portrait sitting the researcher prompted responses by asking questions as the photographs of the participant was displayed in real-time on a computer screen. These portraits where later shared during the third practice of *PhotoSophia*, a carefully facilitated group reflection/discussion to prepare for inscription in privacy. The fourth practice of *PhotoSophia* involved the participant studying their printed portrait alone and writing text, and artwork in its borders based on prompts from the researcher. Through this process the researcher and participants collaborated in co-creating new works of art.

"woke in a white cloak
leaving darker things to show
our tie to the sky"
(Egerton, 2019c)

**Photovoice**

Together with PE interviews *Being and Becoming* participants took Photovoice (PV) photographs The Photovoice (PV) method (C. Wang, 1999) was the first research methodology that put cameras in the hands of participants. Photovoice was originally named *Photo Novella*, a form of storytelling in community action research. Photovoice is a process that focusses on the documentation of social issues and injustices by democratically placing cameras as research tools in the hands of everyday people. It rejected the idea that only professionally trained researchers, photographer and photojournalists could capture images depicting current social concerns. As Participatory Action Research, the creation of art though Photovoice photographs is not its central purpose. Bogdan and Biklen (2016) wrote that Action Research usually takes two forms,

Political Action Research "to promote social change", and Practitioner Research, "to promote individual or group change through education" (p. 209-210).

Connecting Photovoice with social change Reavey (2011) recalls Freire's (1972) term "*conscientizaçao"* (to raise consciousness) placing it in the context of arising from a state of colonization (pp. 35-36). Photovoice as a collective, long-term process seeks social justice and equality, by empowering the voices of those who have been disenfranchised, pushed to the social margins and discriminated against. Social change and equality are central themes of PACS theory.

In *Being and Becoming* Photovoice photographs were taken by participants based on prompts provided at the group sessions. These simple prompts asked participants to photograph locations, spaces and objects that have meaning to their sense of masculinity. Self-portraits could be included. Pre-existing photographs and historic family photographs including those of the father were also requested. Resulting photographs were submitted to the researcher, culled down to three to five images in consultation with each participant, and captions written to accompany each Photovoice photograph in the study exhibition.

Since art resists its own definition, it also resists attempts to be instrumentalized, as expressed above by Hunter and Page (2014), to have its power diverted as a tool, a function or a device for a desired result or outcome. Putting art into that box and expecting measurable results negates and invalidates its true potential to inform and transform and can steal its soul. In this regard I fear Photovoice has at times become *art on a leash*. To avoid this the participants in *Being and Becoming* were not given detailed instructions on what to photograph or what existing photographs they chose to contribute to the exhibit. Their captions were also unedited.

**Summary and Reflection**

In summary, an ABR approach was coupled with *PhotoSophia* in a new kind of photo elicitation interview that pulled on the ideas, theories and experience of PE and added a real-time, self-mirroring component. It should be noted that the terms PE and Photovoice have been mistakenly confused as the same method. As explained by Rose (2016) Photovoice is defined as a collective long-term participatory action research method usually seeking social justice. She

asserts that photo elicitation is uniquely employed for only one or two interviews between a participant and the researcher (p. 315).

PhotoSophia, as a methodology of research into human identities has proven itself, I believe, to be very effective. This is evident in the results and finding of this study. It is particularly effective with participants who may be resistant, and not respond deeply to a standard interview alone. I am encouraged at the responses I have had when demonstrating this method in groups. But may I offer a word of caution to those who may choose to employ this methodology themselves. The PhotoSophia artist/researcher should take care not to use PhotoSophia as therapy, or in such a way that could retraumatize persons who have suffered from trauma. The introspection of PhotoSophia is deep, emotional, and profoundly self-revealing. Take due caution to allow each participant the time and discussion needed to process their experience, and freely choose whether or not to share it with others, especially in a public forum. Informed consent is essential to avoid exploiting or harming participants.

# Chapter Four

## PhotoSophia

Before going into more detail, it will help the reader to know something of the evolution of the idea of participatory photographic portraiture (PPP) and *PhotoSophia*.

### The Roots of PhotoSophia

The process of developing participatory photographic portraiture (PPP) into the current method of *PhotoSophia* evolved early in my career as a photography educator dedicated to community racial justice work. Originally, I became inspired by photographer Wendy Ewald's work giving children cameras to take photographs of themselves and others unpacking racial identity (Ewald, 2002). Another inspiration was the 2004 film *Born into Brothels* by Zana Briski (Roth, 2010) documents a program of giving cameras to the children of prostitutes in Sonagochi Kolkata's red-light district in India. I began my own PPP work in the 1990's unaware of the development of *Photo Novella*, community social justice approach to participatory photographic documentation which eventually morphed into the current and ubiquitous method called Photovoice (Caroline Wang & Burris, 1994).

The steppingstones of *PhotoSophia* can be traced back to course exercises with photography design lab students digitally taking each-others portraits in a large studio setting that were projected in real time on a large wall, and another that asked twenty commercial photography students to take my portrait. The *East Side Photo Club* was started with a colleague and her daughter's friends and involved portraiture with a group of African American middle school girls. Another project was to set up a temporary photo studio and inviting participants to come during the local African American community's *May Day* Celebration to take portraits of each other. These resulted in an exhibit of very large black and white prints crediting the photographers. *CommonVisions: A Photographic Exploration of Unity in Diversity* (Egerton, 2015) described in detail above was a grant funded project lasting three years that involved over one hundred participants using disposable cameras and including studio portraiture to unpack messages of racism and transform division into unity. That project mounted five public exhibits. *Veterans Potential for Peace*, my master's level final project portrayed seven veterans in huge

photographic portraits and allowed gallery viewers to hear their audio statements in real-time, and included a short film (Egerton, 2014).

The final test before *Being and Becoming* was a pre-pilot project I designed and conducted within a PhD level Art-Based Research readings course with Dr. Graham Lea and discussed below. These projects all refined for me, in a process of learning and meditation, how PPP could be used to dig deeper into identity in general and human transformation through self-awareness, respect, and relationship building in the context of cultures of peace. *Being and Becoming* is just the latest expression of my creative curiosity.

**PhotoSophia's Theoretical Guy-wires**

*"I am he, O my God, that hath clung to the resplendent hem of Thy robe, and taken hold on Thy strong cord that none can sever."* [8]

(Bahá'u'lláh, 1998, p. 228)

*PhotoSophia* melds the concepts of *habitus* and the *magic mirror* of portraiture with *sacred relationality* for the purpose of explaining if and how Bahá'í men could, in the spirit of Freire (1972), "decolonize" from inherited or conditioned masculinist narratives. "Narratives serve as a rationale for action," argues Senehi (2002), "because cultural narratives encode the knowledge that everyone buys into, they can be reframed to comment critically and persuasively on social life' (p. 43). Masculinist narratives are inherently unequal, PACS theory's central theme of seeking equality and peace can shed light here (Matyók et al. 2011, p. 3).

*PhotoSophia* seeks to help participants reflect on and illuminate the ethereal masculine identities within us in a process of aligning with equality. Photo or 'light' relates to illumination of the photographic process to capture an image through drawing with light. Sophia means *wisdom*. "Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of the heart," writes Bahá'u'lláh (2005), "and water them with the waters of certitude, that the hyacinths of knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green from the holy city of the heart" (p. 50). *Sophia* is the root of word philosophy (love of wisdom). It is used in Carl Jung's writing on a balance between the archetypes of *anima*, and *animus*. He posited that *anima* refers to the feminine qualities hidden

[8] "strong cord" refers to the waist cord or sash of the Prophet's robe

within a man's psyche, and *animus* the masculine qualities hidden in a women's psyche. Through a process of *individuation*, a man becomes more conscious of his feminine anima (Karaban, 1992, pp. 39–40). Sophia according to Jung (1983) is "the fourth type (of positive anima) […] symbolized by Sapientia wisdom" (pp. 185-186). The idea that both anima and animus are potentially latent in all humans is enlightening to the transformation of masculinity in my study. Men becoming more conscious of their latent feminine qualities is one possible outcome of *PhotoSophia*.

A "face is the mirror of the heart" writes 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1976, p. 214). "The most important thing is to polish the mirrors of hearts in order that they may become illumined and receptive of the divine light. Therefore, our duty lies in seeking to polish the mirrors of hearts in order that we shall become reflectors of that light"(p. 218). A Bahá'ís heart or soul, to be true to its spiritual potential and *a new understanding of masculinity,* must willingly engage in the spiritual process of polishing to cleanse away negative attributes and reflect the attributes of the Creator.

A photograph has the power to stand simultaneously as a visual record and as a powerful visual metaphor, giving meaning and context that words sometimes cannot express. A photograph stops time, creates history, feeds memory and reminds us of our mortality. Our inner artist can muster an image of a peacebuilding masculinity starting with a wordless process. Art often employs metaphor to create what could be from what is. Metaphor, Zehr (2005) writes "allows us to see with eyes expanded beyond the simply literal, the cataloging of perceptions", it "allows us to see relationships" through the "[t]he two ways of knowing, --reason and intuition, science (metrics) and art (rhythmics) – must work together in response to the metaphorical imperative that is at the base of the human method. Maybe there is no truly human understanding without both" (pp. 55-56). The *PhotoSophia* method is a process of self-metaphor.

The hierarchy of *image* over *word* is important to note. Finding the moral courage and imagination in peacebuilding "is not found in perfecting or applying the techniques or skills of a the process" Lederach, 2005, p. 70). Utilizing intuition leads us to a deeper understanding, grasp of metaphor, "ways of knowing that see the whole rather than the parts, a capacity and pathway that rely on intuition more than cognition" (Lederach, 2005 p. 69).

Basho the Haiku master wandered medieval Japan writing poetry with the goal to leave the reader a profound "amari-no-kokoro" or "aftertaste" (Matsuo, 2000, p. xiv), — a lingering

resonance of emotion and insight. The Haiku poetic form is my favorite because it expresses an essence that transcends the very words it uses, and with a flash, in a whiff, a moment, a glance, a visual slice, conveys image, metaphor and meaning with a simple but not reductionist energy (Lederach, 2005, pp. 67–68). A *PhotoSophia* portrait, like a Haiku is a synthesis rather than reductionism. The balance between order and complexity is essential for effective visual nonverbal communication which conveys much more information than can possibly be put into words (Collier, 1986, p. 10). Like a Haiku a photograph is taken in the constraint of time and space; framed and in a fraction of a second, but leaving a profound resonance into the future.

Like the Haiku, archery in Zen Buddhism is another metaphor to understand *PhotoSophia* in practice. In Zen, archery is an art, a religious ritual, a spiritual exercise "whose aim consists in hitting a spiritual goal, so that fundamentally the marksman aims at himself and may even succeed in hitting himself. Archery is still a matter of life and death to the extent that it is a contest of the archer with himself […] thus becoming simultaneously the aimer and the aim, the hitter and the hit." (Herrigel, 1971, pp. 7–9). "[W]hile there is yet time and the arrow is in the bow, enter […] the chase and strike the game," 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1919) explains using an archery metaphor, "this game is the good-pleasure of God, and this chase […] living in accord with the divine instructions" (p. 574). *PhotoSophia* uses the target of one's own portrait as a means to hit the bullseye of masculinity in a process of internalizing and acting on sacred equality.

Beyond the physicality of manhood, masculinity is largely in the mind, as are all identities. Unlearning is not an easy process, but it is a prerequisite for decolonization, freedom from internalized oppression and the grip of socially constructed conditioning. As Fen-yang (Cleary, 2008) writes "[t]he genuine path of unminding is not a religion for the immature" (p. 62). Our self-image is formed by seeing ourselves mirrored in others, by social interactions that control us through approval or disapproval, to be part of the status quo or to flee it. To "*challenge and question the narrow roles that society and the media have assigned"* men, is a process of mindful self-knowledge and spiritual detachment (Bahá'í International Community, 2015, p. 7). *PhotoSophia* is a practice of unminding.

These methods were used to explore self-image, masculine image and the spaces between masculine/feminine identities in context of gender equity. *PhotoSophia* seeks to help participants reflect on and illuminate their ethereal identities between the gender binaries. It is designed to

raise self-awareness and aid in positive transformations of self by drawing from three theoretical areas (see figure 3).

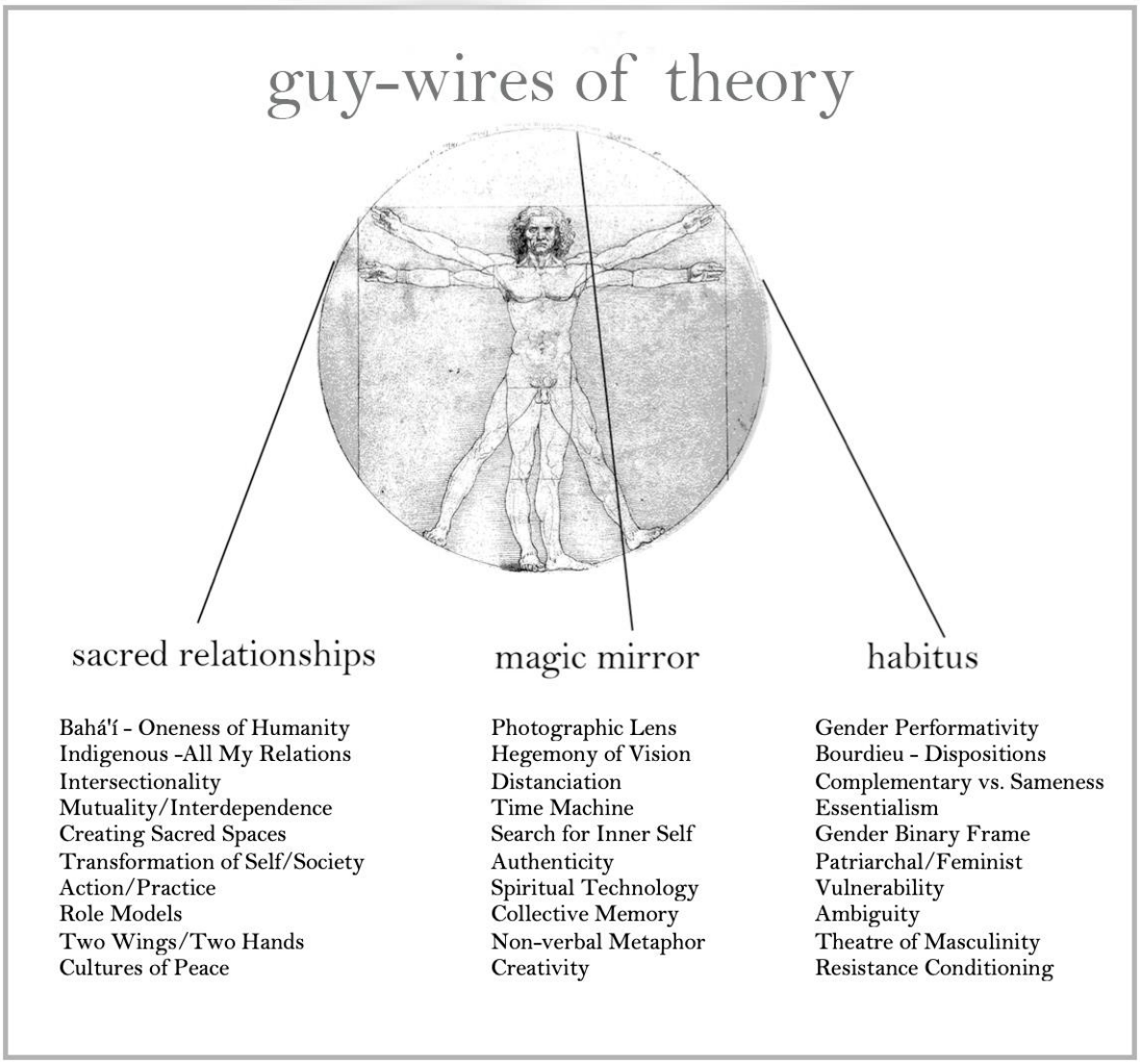



*Figure 3. Guy-wires of Theory*

**Habitus**

The first guy-wire of *Being and Becoming* draws from Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus defined in the theory section. A brief definition is offered by Kimmel and Messner (2010) who explain that gender habitus develops when unequal social and cultural ideals are internalized and then externalized in the form of habits, likes and dislikes, and unique patterns of behavior and style (p.4). Simultaneously habitus embodies the possibility that those dispositions can be changed or transformed through internal or social processes, acquiring new

knowledge (wisdom) to act differently (Lizardo, 2004). In this study habitus is defined as the dispositions a man has socially acquired regarding his own masculinity and how he chooses to 'wear it' and 'perform it'.

Coupling Bourdieu's and hook's terminology, once a man is made aware of his *patriarchal masculine habitus*, through the process of *PhotoSophia* he could muster the agency to transform into and shape a more *feminist masculine habitus*. This, in turn, could facilitate the acquisition of the social *capital* of equality and cooperation to move and occupy a new position on the *field* of gender performance, building new community and equal relationships. Put another way the goal of *PhotoSophia* is to help reveal a man's unconscious habitus to himself, and perhaps muster the agency to alter it and move to *a new understanding of masculinity*.

**The Magic Mirror**

The second guy-wire supporting *PhotoSophia* draws on the concept of a photographic portrait as a mirror of self. Here I use it as a metaphor of inner self. As mentioned in the introduction, at the birth of photography in the mid 19th century a shiny Daguerreotype was called a "magic mirror" (Rosenblum, 2007, p. 23). The photographic portraits in this study provided participants with a "mirror" of themselves to reflect on their own masculine habitus through as Barthes (1981) writes a disconnection with self (pp. 11-12).

As mentioned above supporting this concept of magic mirror is *The Art and Science of Portraiture* a qualitative arts-based narrative research methodology. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) seek to document subjects lives as though painting a portrait and to "illuminate the complex dimensions of goodness [a method] "of inquiry and documentation [...] to combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor" (pp. xv-xvii). *Portraiture* informs *PhotoSophia* because it focuses on the artist/model relationship within a research interview. To describe this approach more succinctly Geertz (1973) writes:

> This, it must immediately be said, is not a matter of methods. From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures, that define the enterprise.

> What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, "thick description" (p. 6).

Writing with light the *PhotoSophia* portraitist records a *thick* description of their subject in an intimate relationship similar to that of a portrait painter and model. The written portrait is shaped through dialogue seeking authenticity, essence, and goodness just as an artist or photographer tries to capture the likeness and spirit of their subject.

The *magic mirror* is also a metaphor for photography as a reflection of our identities and as a form of mimicry. Social Mirror Theory (SMT), Behavioral Mimicry (BM), and Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) along with Jacques Lacan's "mirror stage (Gallop & Gallop, 1982)," and new neurological science on mirror neurons, all give understanding to the factors that develop of our self-image and can therefore be used to transform it. Citing Herbert Mead, the originator of SMT, Whitehead writes:

> Mead believed that self-awareness and other-awareness emerge simultaneously [and] specifically theorized that the human level of reflective consciousness was made possible by role-play. Role-play, according to Mead, enables us to put ourselves in the shoes of 'the generalized other', and to observe our own minds from this third-person vantage point. Mead also emphasized the histrionic character of everyday life – that is, much of what we do while we are awake involves role-play (2012, p. 57).

Henwood et al. discussed (dis)identification between subjects and the photographs they view allowing them to imagine what the image evokes beyond what it physically documents (Reavey, (2011), p. 331). "This position of outsidedness" Bakhtin (1994) writes:

> provides an aesthetic surplus of seeing which enables the author to create a plastic and pictorial image of a life as that of a human being among other human beings. It is impossible to have the same kind of objectified image about oneself. From within consciousness, identity is always experienced as a dispersed, unfinished process, self - consciousness is always unboundaried (p. 88).

Seeing oneself portrayed in a photograph can be a mirror of transformation, a state of being in-between and unbounded as one contemplates self and meaning. The photographic portraits in this study provided participants with a *mirror* of themselves to reflect on their own masculine habitus and its relationship to equality. This leads us to the third theoretical guy-wire of *Being and Becoming*: Sacred Relationality.

The theories of Ricoeur and Bakhtin woven with the strands of SMT, ODT, BM, Critical Theory (CT) and Social Identity Theory (SIT) help form the supporting guy-wire of the magic mirror. *PhotoSophia* is a critical inquiry into gender identity, performativity and inner femininity in the context of adopting a new habitus and self-identity, embodying prosocial masculinities to foster the sacred value of gender equity.

**Sacred Relationship**

A third guy-wire of my overall methodology is to acknowledge, create and sustain sacred bonds, expressed through accountability to ourselves, each other, the Creator and all creation (Bahá'u'lláh, 2012, p. 20). In this study it was the Bahá'í ethos, expressed in a sacred relationship of oneness that facilitated the opening up of transformational, liminal spaces and atmospheres in which the research could be conducted. This was evident in the Bahá'í context of study, meditation and prayer using the BIC statement and passages of Bahá'í scripture that emphasize the importance of meditation, introspection, reflection, personal accountability, selflessness, and sacrifice. For a Bahá'í the purpose of life is to know and love the Creator (Bahá'u'lláh, 2014, p. 65) which is made tangible by acquiring and embodying, spiritual truths and virtues, an essential one being equality of the sexes (Bahá'u'lláh, 1997, p. 54).

This guy-wire is shared with Indigenous paradigms of research because as Wilson (2002) writes it "comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, or just with the research subjects … it is a relationship with all creation […] you are answerable to *all* your relations when you are doing research" (pp. 176-177). Another area of overlap is the belief in a oneness of science, art and religion as Cordero (1995) writes the Indigenous "knowledge base […] integrates those areas of knowledge so that science is both religious and aesthetic […] approached through the senses and intuition" (p. 30).

DeSteno (2019) discusses "What Science can Learn from Religion" as a means to help people change or take personal action. He cites Krista Tippett, host of the radio show/podcast *On Being* who coined the term "spiritual technologies," that can "work by nudging behavior subconsciously." Tippett posits that these "spiritual technologies" can also be effective outside of their religious context when used as "meditation and elements of ritual." Subconscious nudging

and ritual designed to reveal a better understanding of yourself are prominent in the exercise of *PhotoSophia* which could be described as a "spiritual technology."

Situated between the senses and intuition; science and religion are located in what Bhabha (1994*)* calls a "third space" and hybridity of culture. This "third space" is applicable to the de-colonization of the colonized mind, or in this study men resisting a socially colonized masculine performance. He asserts that "[i]t is the […] cutting edge of translation and negotiation. The *in-between* space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture." This interstitial hybrid space between *translation and negotiation* can facilitate transformation; "by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (pp-36-39).

Arab culture tells the story of the Lote tree planted at the end of a road as a signpost that the road goes no further. The Lote Tree, Sadratu'l-Muntaha (Rodwell, 2003, Qur'an 53:8-18), is also a sacred metaphor in Islam and the Bahá'í Faith representing an intermediary, in a third spiritual space between the created and the Creator; the Prophet or Messenger beyond whom we cannot pass and where our ability to know ends, except through knowing and loving them (Gail, 1969, p. 43).

Another strand that supports the guy-wire of Sacred Relationship is the transformative space of a/r/tography, which is a "methodology, a creative practice and a performance pedagogy" writes Irwin (2013, p.198). A/r/tography can be described as a new arts-based methodological paradigm but because of its resistance to definition can seem mysterious and esoteric. It emphasizes "living inquiry" into art that is a "metonymic métissage" in the present moment. A metonym is a substitute nomenclature, like a metaphor but with a broader, less constrained meaning. It is a blurring, merging and overlapping space between culture, language, symbol and image, the creation of a liminal space (De Cosson & Irwin, 2004, pp. 27–33). An artist lives in the borderland between; being both, neither and separate, the state described by Irwin and Bhabha of *contiguity*, or third-ness, between contesting binaries, separating, blurring or uniting dualism. In this state a man can navigate his own masculine and feminine qualities and find transformation. In this context Abdu'l-Bahá (1969) discusses love, unity and attraction in the transformative spaces:

> Consider: Unity is necessary to existence. Love is the very cause of life; on the other hand, separation brings death. In the world of material creation, for instance, all things

> owe their actual life to unity. The elements which compose wood, mineral, or stone, are held together by the law of attraction. If this law should cease for one moment to operate these elements would not hold together, they would fall apart, and the object would in that particular form cease to exist. The law of attraction has brought together certain elements in the form of this beautiful flower, but when that attraction is withdrawn from this centre the flower will decompose, and, as a flower, cease to exist. So it is with the great body of humanity. The wonderful Law of Attraction, Harmony and Unity, holds together this marvelous Creation (p. 139).

These concepts of transformational spaces guided the creation of this new method, my vehicle of passage into that masculine space: *PhotoSophia*. A habitus is a space between our authentic self and others, a camera is a space between the photographer and the sitter, creating an image for reflection, and sacred relationship is the space between that unites us all.

With these spaces and this new method, I tried to pry open, explore and transform what is between the conscious and unconscious, the elicit and implicit, the known and unknown, to reveal new, richer and deeper information (De Cosson & Irwin, 2004, p. 39). The space that a/r/tography metaphorically calls métissage is a merging of "autobiography and ethnography, of man and woman" where new knowing is created and discovered. It is both a barrier and a threshold forming "[s]paces that are neither this nor that, but this *and* that" (De Cosson & Irwin, 2004, p. 9). Like our divided brain's corpus collosum, the gatekeeper organ between the diverse processing of our right and left hemispheres, this liminal space both inhibits and facilitates the flow of information (McGilchrist, 2009, pp. 210–213). This *barrier* is also summoned in the Qur'an 55:19–22, cited in a Bahá'í marriage prayer (Bahá'u'lláh, Báb, & 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991, pp. 105–106) and was discussed during one of the *PhotoSophia* interviews and the at group meeting.

The term cloak, or mantle in the Bahá'í Writings is a symbolic covering or adornment. This has great spiritual meaning and application in the context of habitus because as Bahá'u'lláh (2014) writes "be righteous, well-wishing, forbearing, sanctified, pure, detached from all else save God, severed from the trappings of this world and adorned with the mantle of a goodly character and godly attributes" (p. 299). And in another passage writes "they who are truly wise have likened the world unto the human temple. As the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the *mantle* of justice and wisdom. Its robe

is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God" (2006b, p. 187). In another passage Bahá'u'lláh (1994) writes "A good character is, verily, the best *mantle* for men from God. Well is it with him who is adorned with the saintly attributes and character of the Concourse on High" (p. 36).

**Thick Description, Observation, and the Portraiture of PhotoSophia**

When eighty-one-year-old participant and artist Abbas Elias asked me if he could take my portrait for the study, I said yes. We switched roles; he took my *PhotoSophia* portrait and asked me the questions I had prepared, and asked him and the other men. As an artist he had no problem taking on the role of photographer/interviewer. I can't say I had any advantage in this reversal of roles. I answered the questions having heard how the other men had answered them but when faced with myself in my own portrait, all that vanished, and I spoke from my heart.

Realizing ,as a white American man I cannot step outside of my inherent biases in the role of researcher, I tried to give each participant's narrative voice precedence over my own. Everyone has implicit bias expressed in all facets of our identities, and as principle investigator, I admittedly mediated and shaped the content into this final form. I ask the reader to be aware of this as they digest these words and pictures through their own tinted lenses.

To get to this point the process was inspired by a project I had written about my family identity using old photographs of my grandparents, father, and mother. I decided to begin to richly, *thickly* describe them as an objective observer or a stranger would in an effort to evoke distanciation.

As mentioned above Gilbert Ryle (2009) first originated the term *thick description* as requiring a form of "circumstance detachment" or "disengagement" visually represented in Rodin's sculpture *La Penseur* (The Thinker) (p. 493). In my practice for *PhotoSophia* the first question, to describe what you see *thickly* but with detachment was preparation for what was to

come. This was my description observing a black and white portrait of my grandfather (Figure 4) taken in the first decade of the 20th century:

"A photograph of my grandfather as a young man taken in a Rhyl, Wales photography studio depicts him sitting upright in formal armchair before a fading bucolic backdrop slightly out of focus. Looking a bit thin in his dark tailored suit with four buttons on the jacket, he is neatly and formally presented in the best way as any Welsh boy would want to be seen. His head is slightly turned off the camera axis to the photographers left, while his eyes look as though someone he knew had just entered the room. He wears a high stiff Victorian collar and a striped tie pierced by a bejeweled tie pin. His pants have faint vertical stripes. Leaning his torso back in the chair his neck and head remain vertical, plumb being a prerequisite for any good paperhanger. Looking at his dark brown and evenly set eyes, his eyebrows cantilever from temples to the inception of his long thin nose. A truly British mouth he has, level and expressionless, with not a smile or a frown, but pleasant. The tightness of that portal is a visual reminder of his economy of words. His dark brown hair is cleanly parted in the middle. The right side looks less in control than the left where a curl or cowlick is spouting above his high cut sideburns. I think of my years with shoulder length hair parted in the middle, never thinking it was his style too. My grandfather's face is symmetrical and long. I clearly remember this as a child, it was a way I could distinguish him from anyone else, so tall and narrow from chin to brow and in contrast to my grandmother's rounder face. His arms have been carefully posed to look natural, his right arm is resting on the chair with hand dangling from his shirt sleeve, fingers curled under in shadow, his left elbow also rests on the chair but with hand lowered into his lap hiding his fingers behind the rise of his left knee. His legs are crossed softening the formality and adding a quiet sense of self-importance and confidence. The light enters the studio from upper right and casts a shadow to the left, this is seen in the highlights in his eyes and the shadow on his starched collar" (Egerton, 2017b).

*Figure 4, Charles John Egerton, my grandfather as a young man in Rhyl Wales.*

After this experience with several family photos I decided to take a self-portrait and try it on myself. As I developed the *PhotoSophia* method I also saw its autoethnographic potential to use self-portraiture as a way to test my hypothesis.

**A PhotoSophia Test Run**

Sophia in *PhotoSophia* means wisdom, self-knowledge or enlightenment. To dig deeper into my own masculine self, I took a pilot run. It was a journey of taking a self-portrait and writing a narrative of my contemplations and observations for over a month. It helped me form the practice and the questions I would later ask the men in the formal study.

I took my self-portrait (Figure 5) in the way I imagined photographing the men who would be in my study. It was a close-up framing just my head and shoulders, focusing sharply on my face. The image was lit by a large window to my left against a nearly blank wall. I shot five images and chose the fourth because it seemed the most vulnerable and authentic, without attempting to smile or pose in some way.

I preferred a black and white version of the photograph because it simplified the elements; it duplicated the way my grandfather, my father and I first saw ourselves, other than in the mirror. The final image was printed on eight by ten-inch paper with large white borders. This evolved into the larger white border used to write, draw and make comments in the *PhotoSophia* inscription process.

Looking at my own portrait was a strange experience despite how familiar I am with my own image from looking in the mirror, and from the many drawn and painted self-portraits and selfies. It was like hearing your voice in a recording, this image was undoubtedly of me, but I felt a strange detachment from myself, as Barthes (1981) observed above, “myself as other” (p. 11-12). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997, p. 4) write a portrait “did not capture me as I saw myself,” but captures an essence unknown to me before. This detachment, abstraction, and distancing was what I needed to delve into myself, like unmounting a computer’s hard drive to analyze and repair it. My *PhotoSophia* contemplations lead me to a state of abstraction, apart from the physical world, a “subjective mood immersed in the ocean of spiritual life” to “unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves,” as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1969) explains “[m]editation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries”(p. 175).

This experience rooted the first question of *PhotoSophia*: *describe who you see in this photograph as though you had never seen this person before, start by describing what you see physically, describe it as richly as you can*. The power of this question was reinforced when working on a pre-pilot project exploring a self-portrait and photo-elicitation in the development of *PhotoSophia*. I began the description of that experience writing a haiku:

*I lit two candles*
*for me and for my father*
*to honor his birth*

The Bahá'í sacred context of this exercise is captured in my recitation of this passage from Bahá'u'lláh (2005) in his book The Hidden Words, speaks with the voice of the Creator:

> *"O SON OF BEING! Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds"* (p.11).

To be accountable for my actions and who I am requires seeing in from outside. A photograph is a perfect means to observe and contemplate myself because the camera is a machine that 'kills' its prey, freezing it in time, making it terrifyingly like my own wake. Because of my experience in this pilot run the Hidden Word above was read aloud by each participant at the beginning of our *PhotoSophia* interviews. I decided to write two narratives, one objective (outer) and one subjective (inner) as I observed my self- portrait over time.

*Figure 5, The author holding his self-portrait used in the test run.© 2019 Chuck Egerton*

Outside myself, looking in is not the same as a mirror. The camera kills its prey making it still and frozen in time. If death is the nature of a portrait photograph, then this relates closely to the spiritual imperative to take account of your life before death suddenly arrives. Looking at my own portrait is a strange experience even though I know my own image from the mirror and many, many

photographs. And as an art student and artist I've drawn and painted many self-portraits over the years

***The outer portrait***

I wrote: The man portrayed and re-presented looks directly at me with glassy eyes and heavy eyelids. His only adornment is a black collarless shirt that defines his rounded shoulders against the background. I feel that I am very close to him because the only the plane intersecting his forehead, eyes, nose, lips and chin are sharp with the focus dropping quickly off to blur by the sides of his face, ears and shoulder line. He seems to emerge from a gray nondescript background with dark shadow above and to the right and left of his head. The light is entering softly from the right and one can see it's reflection in the highlights of his eyes. As the light crosses his face it first shows a white beard, ear and hair moving across his right cheek to his left eye. Let's stop here to describe it in more detail. His left eye is closest to the light and his eye lids cover about one third of the top of his iris. The eyes are dark, the pupil is moderately dilated. The lower eye lid is distinctly defined with a shadow progressively darkening as it dips in toward the tear duct by his nose. Scanning counter clockwise, below this eye are fine wrinkles that move diagonally toward his cheek bone with one large diagonal wrinkle crossing the bone. The skin fold of his eye lid on the right side is deep and the arch of the skin between his eyelid and eyebrow is puffy. The eyebrow is a darker on the left and lighter as it moves towards the light. Some gray eyebrow hairs are long and shoot up diagonally toward his hair line almost at an angle opposite the wrinkles below the eye. These create tangential lines that lead us to where the eye folds meet the bridge of the nose, perhaps the deepest valley on the face's topography.

Following the bridge of the nose down to its protruding and out of focus tip, the line continues to the outward then inward curve of the nostrils as the lead to the dark nasal openings.

This is a physical, optical description of my self-portrait. Going deeper I could make assumptions of his age, ethnicity, even his educational level and social status but not with accuracy. The short white and black hairs of the beard disguise the upper lip and chin line. The lips form a straight horizontal line. The light comes across the bridge of the nose and spotlights the left eye pulling it forward from the shadowed left side.

***The inner portrait***

I wrote: Having given myself some time to absorb and meditate on this trial run project I decided to approach my inner portrait as a letter first to myself and to my late father. What would I say about this portrait of myself, what would I type if I wrote him a letter? What would he write in reply? My portrait stares back at me. It is good that I have waited a month since I took the self-portrait. It has been out and looking at me for a full moon's cycle.

I don't believe this image is me. I feel a strange detachment, distanciation, that in some way objectifies it. In this portrait I see all my faces, selves and identities. I see those I want known and those I want to hide. I see my hopes and disappointments, my regrets and desires, my attachments to the world and transcendence of it. I seem to be paused, frozen between words, caught in mid-sentence, a sentence that ends with a question, with my bushy eye brows raised. Seeing this recalls a time when I watched my father shave. I stood on the toilet lid staring at his eyebrows in the mirror. I told him they were shaped like guns and he pinched them and made a shooting sound. I will let this memory rest for now, this story is too full of masculine inheritance.

I am frozen in a temporal sea, already a month older, having had a book full of experiences and discussions since it was captured. My eyes look tired, or maybe it's just that they're old, having looked for sixty-two years and seldom really seen. My mouth is tightly closed much like a portrait of my Welsh grandfather. The shape of my head is as recognizable as my gate, I would know myself from a distance, even in silhouette. The hundreds of motor-like muscles that can move to create my expression are locked still. My face seems to push forward toward the invisible plane that separates us. My eyes speak the loudest. Let me try to explain what they say: I am longing for connection and relationship. I am seeking to see the invisible. I want to know you. If I let my tired eyes relax as I stare at the portrait the image begins to blur and take on a fuzzy three-dimensional reality. I am waiting for that man to speak, to say who he is, to say why he is here with me but he remains mute, and lifeless. Because of the clock-stopping power of a photograph Barthes (1981, p. 92) warned, photographers are "agents of death." Sontag (2005, p. 120) agrees when she writes "a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask." In the end I finally came to see myself in the photograph.

I once wrote an assignment for my commercial photography students to take a studio portrait of me, their instructor. The portrait chosen by my wife would accompany my biography on the college website with the student's credit line. The assignment has several pedagogical goals, first to create a high stress situation within which I could assess, from a portrait sitter's point of view experience a student's *camera-side manner*, and second, to see their abilities with lighting and camera work at close range. But the assignment had another effect on me. As I stared at over twenty portraits of myself, I felt a numbing distanciation. Seeing and evaluating so many photographs of myself, and trying to be detached, dispassionate, and objective made me feel as though I were outside myself looking at a stranger. This is another experience that inspired the first question of *PhotoSophia*: describe the person you see as though you don't know them. What are their physical characteristics? Describe them in detail.

Like hearing one's voice in a recording, this image is undoubtedly of me, but there is a strange detachment from my authentic self. Perhaps this detachment, this distancing is what I need to delve into myself, like the software that un-mounts a hard drive, taking if offline, to allow analysis and repair. I'll first offer a *thick* optical, detached description, worded as though I were describing the details of a realistic pencil sketch.

The idea of a portrait not being recognized, or not looking like you are common occurrences. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997, p. xvii) refer to this experience as the image capturing the essence of the subject unknown to them before. There is a story that when the Daguerreotype was first invented in the 1840's patrons would walk out of the photo studio taking the wrong portraits home for the same reason (Ewing, 2012, p. 12).

What I carried away from this experience is that with each word I wrote I felt as though I was drawing my own portrait. To do it accurately I had to abstract myself, to first see myself as a stranger. The germination of one of the metaphoric questions came to me while walking on the windy wide beaches of the North Carolina coast at low tide, listening to the breaking waves. Looking to the east I could imagine seeing across the five hundred miles to Bermuda sitting well over the arc of the earth's edge in that vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. My feet left impressions in the wet sand, bits of massive boulders crushed over millennia, as I breathed in the sea air and felt the wind and sun on my face I contemplated how my European ancestors crossed this expanse as colonizer/explorers, enslaved Africans to work the land they stole from the first Nations; peoples who had thrived on this huge continent in the millions, as many still do in over

five hundred Nations, those that survived disease, massacre, starvation, imprisonment and generations damaged by forced assimilation through residential schools. I wondered about the role patriarchal masculinity played in that tragic drama and my part in its heritage.

Literally walking on the edge of the continent but simultaneously along an internal liminal, in-between space is where and when the question emerged that asked participant to imagine and describe a metaphor of their masculinity as a cloak. I began to think about how to include all the senses in my questions, especially the sense of smell, knowing how deeply subliminal it is. The question asked the men to go beyond just visualizing their masculinity by asking them how it feels and smells, and how it is worn. The cloak comes from my visualization of Bourdieu's habitus, the wearing of a disposition, the donning of a way of being for others to see as one navigates on the field of play, the many worlds we live and survive in.

"a golden leaf floats
spiraling against blue sky
to stand in the snow"
(Egerton, 2019b)

**Summary of PhotoSophia Methods Theory**

In summary, *PhotoSophia* applied habitus, magic mirror, and sacred relationship to permeate the studies ethos and they were implemented specifically in two ways. First, during a one-on-one photographic portrait and PE session, the researcher would prompt discussion by asking questions, while the photographs of the participant were displayed in real-time (as captured) on a computer screen in a form of elicitation. The second aspect of *PhotoSophia* elicitation involved the participant studying a printed portrait of himself (chosen by them from the interview) adding text and artwork in its borders based on prompts from the researcher (as seen in above). These *inscribed portraits* would then be shared along with portraits of all the men in the study, in a carefully facilitated group reflection/discussion format.

Many years of experience and learning converged to create the *PhotoSophia* method; my long connection with portraiture and self-portraits as artist, photographer, educator and promoter of social justice and racial unity. Photography is a transformative visual medium that addresses through the most dominant of human senses the way humanity looks at itself and the world. Immediately after photography was invented, it was seen as a tool for the physical sciences, and

was soon thereafter adopted by newly forming social sciences. One could say they grew up together.

Photography is a research methodology but as utilized in *PhotoSophia*, it is a theoretical support as well. I am not referring to its technical abilities. In combination with human psychology and our ever evolving cultural visuality, it seems to contribute to an understanding of our inner vison. As the artist Strzeminski (2016) wrote in his *Theory of Seeing*: "in the process of seeing, the important thing is not what an eye captures mechanically, but what a man is aware in his seeing" (p.1). It is something artists/photographers have long known but almost never tried to put into words. Anthropology has a more subjective and empirical approach to the use of photography but seems to arrive at the same conclusions about its profundity. Phototherapy has also long known this about photography's ability to tap the unconscious, to summon an inner 'magic' mirror of the self. Neurology contributes to the understanding of human mimicry and the impact of mirror neurons on what we see affecting how we feel and what we do. Mirror neurons are a brain center of human empathy, Ramachandran (2013) named them "Gandhi" neurons. How this profound way of knowing can be infused into the conflict transforming work of PACS is yet to be realized. There are great possibilities for photographic and arts-based research.

# Chapter Five

## Methods Praxis

The focus of the *Being and Becoming* study was to gather data on these research questions: 1. How do these men experience their own masculinities: what are their stories of masculine self-identity and performance? 2. How do these men experience their masculinities on the social level, in their upbringing, family life, and, in community with other men and women? *3*. How do Bahá'í men negotiate their masculine performance in a context of a belief in equality of the sexes? If these men are performing *a new understanding of masculinity,* how is it evident in practice? In this context, what are those stories of resisting or negotiating with negative cultural norms of masculinity? 4. Do these men show any evidence of the positive transformation from hyper, toxic and hegemonic masculinities into masculinities that nurture the construction of cultures of peace? If so, what does that masculine identity look like and how does it play out on the social field?

### Recruitment and Participants

To address my research questions, ten men who self-identified as adult members of the Bahá'í Faith in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada were recruited. They were initially contacted with permission of the local Bahá'í governing institution, through an Bahá'í email newsletter and asked to submit a form requesting to join the study. To avoid any expression of coercion or compulsion these communications specified that Bahá'ís are free to participate in the project, an that it was officially approved by the local Bahá'í institution. I chose Bahá'ís as subjects of this research, because they represent a religious culture and adhere to a belief system that holds the equality of women and men as a sacred tenet. I am also a Bahá'í, and therefore an insider into the beliefs and emerging culture of the community. This does not predict Bahá'í men are acting on that principle, but places them by choice in a community of women and men committed to equality within a diverse, world-wide community committed to the process of building *Cultures of Peace*. Bahá'ís would define the PACS term *Cultures of Peace* as one of the prerequisites for

the achievement of -- *the oneness of humanity* – the central goal of their faith. These definitions were discussed in chapters one and two

Recruitment started 1 June 2018 and was by the email appeal, word of mouth and invitation. Eight of the men in the study had expressed interest in my research during my two year interaction as a member of the Winnipeg Bahá'í community while a student. Once ethics approval was received, eight of the men directly contacted me and requested to join and two of the men contacted me through the newsletter email appeal to join. No one who requested to join was rejected. Participants randomly represent very diverse racial, ethnic and national origins and come from a variety of educational and socio-economic, urban and rural contexts. Participants were informed that they would need to attend three to four sessions scheduled over a two-month period, and that participation in this study could take a total commitment of around twenty-four hours.

The ten Bahá'í men who began this study were quite diverse in nationality, race and religious origin. How I was added as the eleventh member is discussed later. The list includes:

Corey Bighorn, Cree, Bloodvein Nation from eastern shore of Lake Winnipeg
Payam Towfigh, Jewish, family from Hamadan, born in Tehran, Iran
Abbas Elias, Coptic Christian, Alexandria, Egypt
Rayan Akhtar Khavari, Zoroastrian, United Arab Emirates, family of Iranian origin
Jordan Bighorn, Lakota, Fort Peck Assiniboine and Yankton Tribes, from South Dakota and Oregon
Krishna Sharma, Hindu, Brahman, from Katmandu, Nepal
Jean-Michel Molin, Catholic, French Canadian, family from Northern France
Rod Sasaki, Buddhist, family from Japan
Miles Thomsen, Christian, Winnipeg, family from Scandinavia
Chuck Egerton, Presbyterian, United States, family from England and Ireland
Jim Martin, Lutheran, Winnipeg, family originally from Scotland and Germany

Many Bahá'ís are converts, and because of the Bahá'í belief in the oneness of all religions their previous religious heritage is not abandoned or scorned, but celebrated. This diversity of religious origins is celebrated by Bahá'ís who believe all religions come from the

same Creator and have been progressively revealed to humanity. The diversity of cultural backgrounds also brought with it many expressions of masculine habitus.

Once request forms were received potential participants were sent an email that outlined the commitment required and that consent, copyright and usage forms would have to be understood and signed before beginning the study. I decided after input from Research Ethics Board to adjust the schedule of meetings to make the first meeting the one-on-one interview which could begin with discussion of and signing the consent forms. (copies of consent, copyright and usage forms are in the appendix).

**What Happened?**

Over an eight-week period I accompanied ten Bahá'í men, through a process that in some ways was organized like a creative and spiritual workshop. Our individual and group meetings took place in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The design of this study was flexible, interactive and participatory. The participants took on the role of co-researchers and co-artists in the process of uncovering new knowledge related to themselves through the research questions and practices. The best worked research design must willingly yield and mold itself to the real world of participants both by circumstance and suggestion. This was welcomed, for example in the suggestion that I participate in a *PhotoSophia* portrait, which I had not planned. Participants gave their informed consent to all interviews and sessions being audio/video recorded for future use. Each had their portraits taken by me, but they chose the time and location. The *PhotoSophia* inscription process was done in private, with minimal prompts on what they should inscribe. Photovoice photographs also had very few instructions or prompts and were done alone. Participants were also be asked to provide photographs of their fathers (in some cased they also provided their mother). These photographs were used to explore the generational transfer of masculinity through photo-elicitation. Participants wrote captions for their Photovoice photographs displayed in the group exhibit. They also hosted and spoke at the exhibit reception with a public audience to view their creative work. Informed consent was required from all participants who did not remain anonymous, and whose real names accompanied their images and photographs.

This study was conducted in a Bahá'í context with Bahá'í men, and in practice this that meant prayer, meditation, and readings from Bahá'í writings were a part of each interview and

session. The idea of the sacredness of all things, that we are all in relationship with the Creator and all creation, as well as being accountable to them, are Indigenous concepts that with Bahá'í beliefs strongly align with.

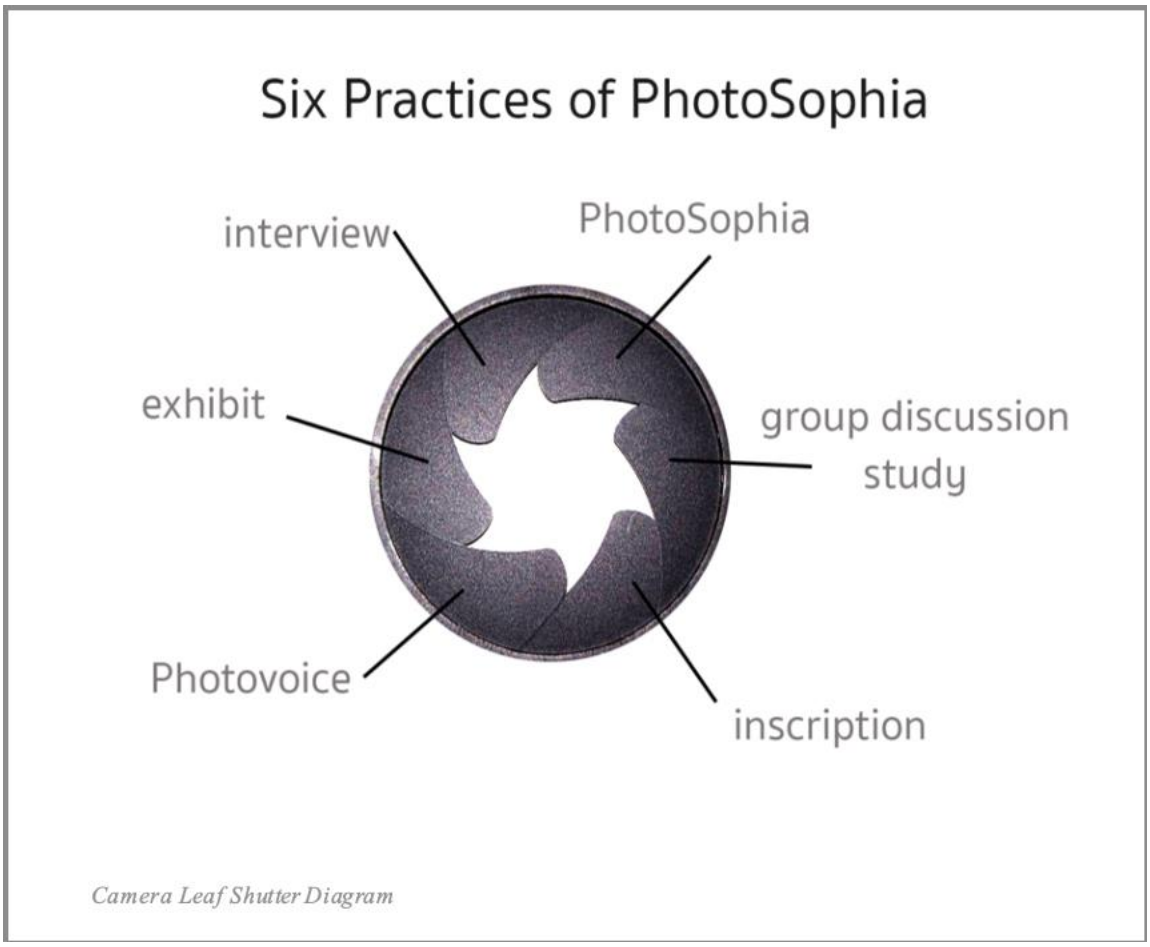



*Figure 6. Six Practices of PhotoSophia, Camera Leaf Shutter Diagram*

**The Six Practices of Being and Becoming's PhotoSophia**

The six practices of *Being and Becoming* (figure 6) were described briefly in Part I, to give the reader context, as my methodological theory and context were presented. Below these practices are explained with *thicker* narrative detail as they unfolded during the praxis of the study.

**Practice one: interview**

The interviews were unstructured and could be described as one-on-one discussions between the participant and the researcher. Interviews were conducted for as long as they took to complete, from ninety minutes to three hours. All were video and audio recorded, and took place in private locations of the participants choice, with only the researcher and the participant present. Ethics Consent and Copyright forms had been emailed in advance and were discussed and signed at the beginning of this first session. This practice had no photo-elicitation elements.

The interviews began with reading and discussing Bahá'í writings that had been provided in advance (see appendix). Some interviews included a meal, coffee breaks, but all included audio-visual technical set up and tear down. Discussion was based on the following four questions, often with spontaneous follow-up questions. The participant was encouraged to answer these questions with stories and examples:

Tell me a story about your name?

When did you first become aware you were a boy and that it was different?

What is difficult about being a man?

What is good about being a man?

Bahá'í Writings and discussion of these religious texts were a central part of every interview, with an emphasis on how they might relate to the *Being and Becoming* quest for *a new understanding of masculinity* to achieve gender equality. This interview led up to the second practice of a *PhotoSophia* interview using photo-elicitation.

**Practice two: PhotoSophia**

*PhotoSophia*, a new photo-elicitation and photographic portraiture interview method I devised combines an intimate portrait photography session with a simultaneous open-ended, interactive interview. It used real-time photo-elicitation evoked from portraits taken of the participant in that moment, and historic or current photographs of the participant's father/mother. An enlarged print of the *PhotoSophia* portrait, chosen by the participant, was later privately inscribed and then shown along with portraits of all participants in a public exhibit. The researcher also took portraits of the participant in their personal environment to be included in the exhibit. The exhibit also placed participants in the public eye during the opening session in the art gallery, and offered viewers the opportunity to submit anonymous questionnaires.

Based on what I learned in my test run I will explain how this *ceremony of inquiry* was applied in practice –as if the reader were a participant. Imagine you are about to have your portrait taken after an extensive interview discussing masculinity, equality, spiritual meaning, and personal transformation, and the relationship of these concepts to equality and cultures of peace. The interview has been audio/video recorded to this point but now the camera is taken off the tripod and the computer screen is turned so that the participant can see himself in live view. Four instructions were given to each participant. First, this is unlike any portrait you have had taken before. It is an inner, not an outer portrait. A portrait taken so you can see deeper within yourself than before. It is like a mirror of your inner self. Second, you do not have to look into the camera or smile. You do not have to present your best look. You can close your eyes, look away, or use your hands. Third, we will take a series of portraits in silence and you can see them if you wish, as they appear on the screen. We will stop to review them as you wish and finally select one that you choose as your *PhotoSophia* portrait. Fourth, this selected portrait will then be placed on the screen for you to intently view as you are asked another series of questions.

The *PhotoSophia* method is a photo elicitation in real time. The physical arrangement between the researcher and the participant remained almost the same as the initial interview, but the researcher added the role of photographer and moved closer to the subject with the camera. To explain further, the participant was asked to pose for a very close portrait, that was different from any he had experienced before. This was to be an inner portrait, unlike a studio style portrait, there was no need to smile, look into the camera or attempt to achieve his best look or expression. The participant was seated close to my computer screen and my camera was tethered to the computer so that each photograph would immediately appear for the participant to view. I took between 12 to 40 photographs, until the participant found one that they wanted to use as their *PhotoSophia* portrait. The participant reviewed the screen periodically as photos were taken. I would mark those they favored, as we culled them down to two or three, until they made a final decision. Once this process was complete, the chosen portrait was displayed on the screen and the participant was asked to study their image, as I asked the following questions:

1. Describe yourself, what do you see physically, describe the person as though you don't know them. What do you see spiritually?
2. What would you say are your strongest masculine qualities?
3. What are your strongest feminine qualities?

4. What do you want to change about your masculinity? Leave behind, newly acquire?

A final question asked the participant to create a visual metaphor and image their masculinity as a cloak:

5. Think of your masculinity as a cloak. Describe what it is made of, what it would look like, the colors, textures, patterns, ornaments. How is it worn? How does it move? What does it smell like?

The last question is related to Bourdieu's habitus, to imagine one's masculinity as both clothing and disposition.

Their descriptions were rich describing various fabrics, ornaments, and ways of wearing it. Their fragrances very also very telling such as rosewater, a forest, cologne, and fresh air. Asking participants to imagine a metaphor of their masculine habitus provided new insights into the visual, tactile, fragrant and spatial dimensions of being a man.

To illustrate the final what the final artwork could look like see my *PhotoSophia* portrait (Figure 7) taken by eighty-one-year old fellow artist/participant Abbas Elias. It was at his request that I became the eleventh participant in the project. Figure 5 also shows how the inscription could look around the *PhotoSophia* portrait.

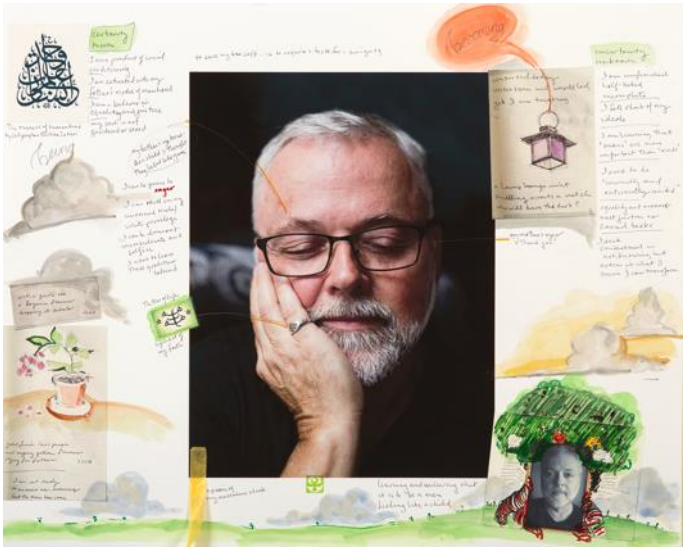


*Figure 7. My PhotoSophia portrait (taken by Abbas) with my inscription. .© 2019 Abbas Elias and Chuck Egerton*

A second part of the *PhotoSophia* practice was looking at the photograph of their father's (and in some case mothers) photograph and taking a portrait of the participant with the photograph. This conversation focused on these questions:

1. How has your father (and/or mother) influenced the kind of man you are today?
2. Describe your father's masculinity

These interviews were lengthy, and as a result, a photograph taken of the participant, with their father/mother's photograph was all we had time to do. Some of the men wrote a caption for this photograph that appeared with it in the exhibit.

A third part of the *PhotoSophia* practice was taking an environmental portrait of the participant either in the space we conducted the interview or somewhere meaningful to the participant nearby:

Rod in his downtown frame shop/gallery

Abbas in living room with paintings surrounding him

Rayan in his living room on couch with computer

Miles in grandparent's garden by the gazebo we sat for the interview

Corey by Red River in a park next to his apartment

Krishna at a desk in his basement office with photos of his mother/ father

Payam in the garden outside the sun porch of his home

Jim on motorcycle outside his home's garage

Jordan in is home office where we conducted the interview

Jean Michel in local restaurant near family's Albert Beach cabin

(please note a photograph of the researcher in his environment was not taken)

The location of this environmental portrait were often a mutual decision and in most cases were outside the interview space.

***PhotoSophia as ceremony***

I went into the use of *PhotoSophia* without knowing what it would reveal. As I related above, I had completed a test run project. Taking my own self portrait, contemplating my image, and writing what came into my consciousness was a profound experience. I knew the mysticism of portraiture as a ritual and process, would go far beyond just recording a likeness. I relate it more to the making of a drawing or painted portrait as is discussed in the Portraiture method of research. Activating the camera's shutter, the curtain opens and closes within a fraction of a second, revealing and exposing the image projected by the lens onto the film or digital sensor. That shutter is also like a cloak, its role is to hide or reveal the light sensitive receptor from the impact of the light until the author, the photographer pulls it back in a moment of choice and intuition.

For me as photographer/researcher the process began much earlier, devising the best method to capture the audio, video and photographic process that would go on between us. This

was for several purposes: 1) to record what happened for later review in the writing of my thesis 2) as a tool in the *PhotoSophia* process/ritual 3) as a way to share with others what happened through a public exhibit, presentations, and in the future making of a documentary film. The process of the creation of *PhotoSophia* had come from many influences and experiences which molded its form as a new research methodology

The ritual began with arranging a time and place for the interview long before entering the interview. A phone call explaining and allowing questions had occurred over a month before entering the living place selected by the participant. The onsite ceremony of *PhotoSophia* began with entering the chosen space of each participant with the equipment needed to record the session. I used three audio/video capture devices, and one strictly audio recording device. Each location required some negotiation for placement, near power sources, and window light if available, and which allowed room for my equipment. Places were basements, sun porches, apartments, home offices, condos, cabins, a business and a garden gazebo. Often, we spent time looking for the best natural light, and had to cycle fans and air conditioners on and off for better sound recording. Each participant saw and approved the image/framing/lighting of the video and still photos seeing them all in preview on my laptop screen.[9]

Throughout this ritual there were intersections of intimacy in relation with the participant. Placing the lapel mic on the participant reminded me of when my father would show me how to tie the proper knot on a tie. Seeing themselves live on the laptop monitor would often prompt self-awareness of hair and glasses in place, shirt collar straightening, and background arrangements. They were told the process would take two to three hours, and none was less than about two hours.

The interview finally began after forty-five minutes to an hour of setup and preparation. I gave each participant a sheet of quotations from Bahá'í Writings telling them that what we were about to engage in was a sacred task, seeking to understand ourselves in relationship to equality of the sexes -- a sacred tenet of the Bahá'í faith. I asked a series of questions, beginning with tell

[9] For those interested in the technical set up and specifications: I sat next to a tripod with a Bogen cross arm to hold the camera (Canon 6D DSLR) on one end, tethered by a USB cable to a Macbook Pro laptop, on a tray at the other end. Subjects were positioned less than a meter away from the camera lens (Canon 50mm f/1.4). An iPhone and a smaller digital camera were used to acquire video from different angles and backup audio recording. The primary sound was recorded on a Zoom H5 Digital Recorder using both its L/R microphone for ambient sound and a wireless lapel microphone on the subject. A Rode shotgun microphone was also mounted on the camera's hotshoe as backup. Additional lighting was added in low light situations.

me the story of your name or tell me a story about your name. This question revealed the participants sense of identity tied to their family, background, ethnicity, nationality, language, as well as profession, education, relationships, travels etc.

The intense focus on the task, couched in the reading of sacred writings between answers transformed our relationship from researcher/participant to co-researcher/co-artist. We joined together in our search for truth and meaning in the presence of the Creator. This sacred transformation of space was also evident in the group meeting.

**Practice three: group discussion and study**

Group discussion was held for a half day in a classroom in the Mauro Institute at the University of Manitoba, followed by a lunch I provided (figure 8). Seven of the ten men (and myself) were able to attend. This practice had several parts.

*Figure 8, Being and Becoming group meeting Sept. 2, 2018 at the Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of Manitoba. I am standing with the talking stick, wired with a microphone. © 2019 Chuck Egerton*

1. The group discussion began with prayers and readings from the Bahá'í sacred writings, and then study of those writings that were read during the individual interviews.

The group read and discussed sections of the 2015 BIC letter which was the catalyst for this study with a facilitated discussion afterwards

2. Instructions for Photovoice

3. Instructions on inscription of *PhotoSophia* portraits

4. Public exhibit was discussed, and exhibit installation volunteers requested.

5. *PhotoSophia* portraits of each participant were projected on screen and a discussion of the qualities seen in each man spontaneously ensued.

6. Informal lunch provided.

7. The session ended with the distribution of *PhotoSophia* portraits printed on 16 x 20-inch paper with wide borders for inscription in private. Three men could not attend. Two I took to lunch in the ensuing weeks to cover the content of the meeting, the other I met in the gallery space after the exhibit was installed.

**Practice four: inscription of the PhotoSophia portrait**

Each participant was given their 16 x 20-inch *PhotoSophia* portrait, printed on paper with wide white borders to take home and inscribe. Although this is listed as the fourth practice it is an extension of the *PhotoSophia* portrait session (practice two) and intimately related. Inscription preparation at the group discussion told participants they could write, draw, paint, attach collage (including over their portrait), anything related to the topic of their journey as from being to becoming. This included the transformation from where the participant feels they are now, to they would like to be, in the quest for a new understanding of masculinity, in the sacred Bahá'í context of equality. This was also facilitated by the motivational phrases included in the BIC statement (Bahá'í International Community 2015, 6–7). They were told they could, (to the left of their portrait), express their current state of *being* by writing/illustrating those unhealthy masculine qualities they would like to leave behind, the social construction of masculinity one is resisting. To the right of the portrait, in an expression of *becoming* they could write/illustrate the qualities they want to acquire for a healthier masculinity, those they want to nurture in themselves, to achieve gender equality, and an authentic self. The inscribed photograph partnered the participants with the researcher, as co-artists and co-researchers in the co-creation of a work of art, something new, a blending of image and text. Each participant's *PhotoSophia* portrait printed on a large 16x20 piece of paper with wide borders, was given to them for inscription. This *PhotoSophia* print was displayed in a public exhibit along with each participant's other photographs and captions.

Inscription was a private and personal process that participants were given several weeks to complete. Completed inscribed portraits were returned or picked up, one by one before the exhibit.

**Practice five: Photovoice**

Photovoice gave participants the opportunity to take new photographs of a metaphoric or symbolic nature, which could be of objects, spaces, and self-portraits based on few parameters and little prompting. The Photovoice photographs could also be existing or historic photographs. These could include places, objects, self-portraits, historic images of meaning to them as men in the context of transforming masculinity. The one restriction was not using photographs of people, because ethics had not approved it. These photographs were shown in the public exhibit along with the inscribed *PhotoSophia* portrait and included captions they each had written to accompany the images. Each participant submitted three to five images and captions via email to the researcher, who printed them along with their captions for the exhibit. They were displayed in the exhibit along with the *PhotoSophia* portraits, environmental portraits, and with their father/mother's photo.

Berger (1972, p. 8) writes, "We never look just at one thing […] we are always looking in relation between things and ourselves." Using the Photovoice method in this study helped participants express their internal inquiry through nonverbal and visual means, making it possible to share it externally. The captions they wrote took the process further but did not always define the image for the viewer. A reference from the artist's point of view was provided, but the observer brought their own interpretation to the art.

**Practice six: public exhibit**

*Figure 9, Visitors to the Being and Becoming exhibit's opening reception at the GoSA Gallery, University of Manitoba. © 2019 Chuck Egerton*

The sixth and final practice of this study was a public exhibition at the Gallery of Student Art (GoSA) University Centre, University of Manitoba Fort Gary Campus. The inscribed *PhotoSophia* portraits were combined with Photovoice images with captions, photographs of participants in their environments, and with photographs of fathers/mothers. The exhibit

consisted of eleven sections for the eleven men in the study, including me, the researcher (figure 9). Additionally, large posters with quotations on the study and from the BIC statements were displayed.

All participants were invited to engage in installing and hosting the opening of the public exhibit in the gallery space. The second night of the exhibit a public reception was held with seventy in attendance. Participants presented at the reception, giving them an opportunity to make public comments about their photographs and the study and field questions from the audience. Guests at the opening session and throughout the seven days of the exhibit were asked to fill out an anonymous questionnaire about the exhibit and place them in a locked suggestion box. The Research Ethics Board required that each person submitting a questionnaire have two handouts: a detailed overview of the study and the BIC statement. The questionnaire asked them to identify by gender and religion, and requested their observations about the exhibit. Forty-four anonymous questionnaires were collected (see text of questionnaire in appendix).

# PART III

## Chapter 6

## Introduction to Findings in Eleven Narratives

### Situating Myself as the Researcher

The majority of the participants in this study represented minoritized groups in Canada and North America. They were of from Iranian/Jewish, Arab/Iranian/Zoroastrian, Nepali/Hindu, Egyptian/African/Coptic, Cree, Lakota, and Japanese/Buddhist descent. The minority were of European decent. I am a white man from the United States of Welsh/Irish/Protestant background and three other men of European ancestries were from Scotch/German/Lutheran, Scandinavian/Protestant, and French/Catholic backgrounds.

As the researcher, I have dedicated myself for over three decades to racial justice, racial unity and anti-racism. I tried my best to be keenly aware of my unearned white and male privilege, entitlement and class advantages as I designed and directed this study. I would never say I am not racist, sexist, misogynist, or homophobic because they are in the air I breathe and have permeated me since birth. I am in a life-long process of recovery from those ills. Extricating myself from my own conditioning and colonization is a perpetual process, much like a twelve step program and I pray my personal shortcomings have not tainted this sacred process.

Findings are richly abundant in the data provided by the study. They come from *PhotoSophia*, itself both a method and a finding. Interviews including pre-*PhotoSophia* and *PhotoSophia* questions, group meeting discussions, inscriptions written/drawn/painted, and Photovoice captions written by participants. The also include answers to questionnaires completed by visitors to the exhibit.

### Key findings

1) Vulnerability (willing vulnerability as *moral courage*, selflessness, as an act defying hegemonic, dominant masculinity)

2) Ambiguity (as learning, resisting narrow roles and moving into the unknown, detaching spiritual qualities from male/female labels, and resisting imposed masculine roles.)

3) Need for example/standard (a touchstone for modeling and conveying a new masculinity, for Bahá'í men the primary role model is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, among others)

4) Authenticity (as desire to be one's true self in alignment with the Creator, and all our relations)

5) Sacred Spiritual Relationships in Practice (community service with women and men in Bahá'í consultation as *shoulder to shoulder* transformation)

Findings analysis in arts-based research is like trying to identify the many different spices combined to make a delicious and complex dish. In some instances, they can be distinctly defined, in others their combinations have so intertwined that they create something new. I based my analysis of the eleven narratives that follow on the four original research questions for this study with some modifications. These four questions are infused in the six practices of the study. Participant's words (indicated with italics) are sometimes direct from the transcript, but also paraphrased and summarized, and at times rearranged to clarify meanings that were unclear in the spoken word. The arts-based photographic approach shed light into the shadows of identity, sometimes by my photography and *PhotoSophia* questions, and sometime by their self-revelation in the inscriptions, Photovoice photography and captions.

***1. Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

The research question is: *How do these men experience their own masculinities? What are their stories of masculine self-identity and performance*? This idea was distilled to seek instances that describe individual, self and masculine identity. I was looking for statements that described self, located each participant in the world, situated them in heritage and family, and that impacted their view of their own masculinity at the moment. In most narratives I found myself pulling from the questions that asked them to describe themselves as a stranger, their strongest masculine qualities and the story of their name.

***2. Stories and experiences with masculine social identity***

The second research question asks: *How do these men experience their masculinities on the social level, in their upbringing, family life and, in community with other men and women?* This was refined to seeking each participant's masculinity in a social context. With this question I sought to cull out descriptions of their masculinities as they are performed socially. Questions

that I found most helpful in shedding light here were remembering, the first awareness that being a boy was different, what is difficult and what is good about being a man. Stories told about family and parental relationships, sometimes with fathers but especially with mothers, wives, daughters and other women shed light as well.

***3. Practices of a new equality: navigating a masculine/feminine balance***

The third question asks: *How do Bahá'í men negotiate their masculine performance in a context of a belief in equality of the sexes? If these men are performing "a new understanding of masculinity"*[1] *how is it evident in practice, what are those stories? In this context what are their stories of resisting or negotiating with negative cultural norms of masculinity?* This was boiled down to praxis, seeking how were these men were thinking and taking action in negotiation, performance, resistance, and negotiation related to their masculinities and equality. This question was informed by *PhotoSophia* interview questions on the participants' strongest masculine and feminine qualities, their spiritual qualities, and the cloak metaphor.

***4. Masculine identity transformation on the path to cultures of peace***

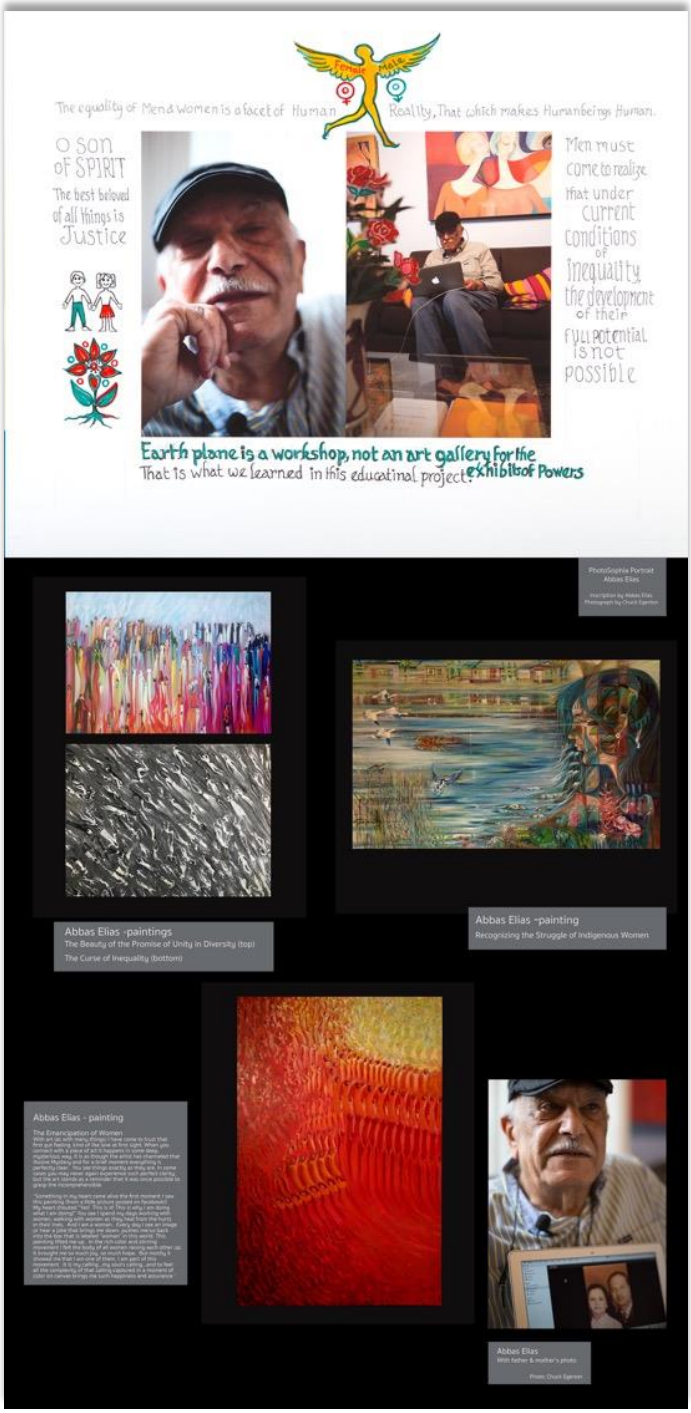
The fourth and last research question asked: *Do these men show evidence of the positive transformation from hyper, toxic and hegemonic masculinities into masculinities that nurture the construction of cultures of peace? If so, what does that masculine identity look like and how does it play out on the social field?* This question sought to sift through the abundance of data to reveal evidence of transformation, that would enhance the possibility of equality and oneness and the building of *Cultures of Peace*.

Evidence of transformation in the context of cultures and communities of peace is not easy to nail down. Stories told about instances of new understanding of self-identity and actions, or practices of alignment (or misalignment) to equality in relationship to others were helpful. This is where their *PhotoSophia* inscriptions and Photovoice captions provided significant input. Comments recorded in the group meeting were also revealing. What participants said in their interviews was recorded, and in this analysis their statements are paraphrased, summarized or quoted exactly from the transcripts. These sections are *italicized* to separate them from my

questions and analysis. The questions used in the six practices of the study were designed to illumine the cave and make clearer the four central research questions.

# Eleven Narratives

**Narrative one – Abbas**




**Abbas Elias**

**Interview, 2 August 2018**

I rang the doorbell and Abbas (Figure 10) greeted me with a smile. This was my first interview and I was both excited about the discussion we would have and anxious that my audio/visual technology would work as planned.

I lugged in my cases of equipment and sat down to a wonderful Egyptian lunch with Abbas and his wife who had prepared fresh tomatoes, feta cheese, bean soup, and pita bread, salad with olive oil and lemon dressing, sliced beef, acorn squash soup, watermelon and limeade.

The Elias's home is bright, and its walls covered with Abbas's large paintings. Inside the double doorway of their condominium his small studio is on the right and to the left a bench to remove and replace shoes, the Winnipeg cultural norm. Through a short hallway one sees the dining table, and to the left, a small kitchen. Beyond the staircase to the right is a large living room with patio windows opening onto a wooden deck. It is an Egyptian home with small visual indications scattered about, and heard in the melodious tones of their Arabic accents. The sound is beautiful

to my ears. A large black and white photo from their 50th wedding anniversary stands on an easel.

I must note a heartwarming flashback occurred to me as I pinned the lapel microphone onto Abbas's collar. It reminded me of my father's intimacy, when teaching me to tie a necktie as a child. The moment was repeated later with Abbas took my *PhotoSophia* portrait, and clipped the microphone on me.

Abbas was instrumental in this study in several ways. As an artist himself, he was encouraging and supportive of using an arts-based approach to inquire about gender equality. It was he that suggested my portrait should be taken, and offered to take it himself a few weeks later. He was keenly interested in helping to arrange and install the work in the gallery space. Abbas befriended fellow participant Krishna during the study. They did not know each other well before this encounter. He saw that Krishna did not have many Photovoice images for the exhibit, and decided to contribute by making a painting of Krishna's Bird of Paradise flowers.

***1. Abbas - Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

Abbas was not the only participant who found it difficult to identify with his photo, when trying to describe himself from the point of view of a stranger (in the first question of the *PhotoSophia* portion of his interview): *I see a strange man, I don't relate because I never get really old in myself, when I look to myself it's like looking at somebody else. The years have put their mark on my face, and its full of a lot of beautiful experience, sad experience. As a whole I'm still a younger man seventeen or eighteen maximum … but the map of all the experiences I went through is right there. This is the reality and I have to accept it, I'm eighty years, now eighty-one, layers of maps, almost every ten years there is a layer, each with its own character.* His reaction supports the theoretical purpose for this question to function as the first in the *PhotoSophia* interview designed to create a sense of being outside of oneself, to elicit a distanciation to open the door and shed new light on the deeper questions that followed.

Giving background on his heritage and culture he said: *my name is Abbas Sobhi Elias, I was born in Alexandra, Egypt in October 1937 in a place very close to the Mediterranean Sea. I was born in a Coptic* [Christian] *family. It is well known about Copts that* [they] *are a religion and it's also about culture, it's not only a religion. Copts they do not marry other religions, mostly Copts in Egypt are very strict with their faith, they don't change, they don't give away*

*their faith or blend with other faiths.* Abbas grew up as a double minority, a Coptic Christian by heritage and now as a Bahá'í, an officially unrecognized religion in Muslim Egypt. Up until a decade ago Bahá'ís were not issued official government identity cards because the government required all citizens to identify as one of the three official religions - Judaism, Christianity or Islam. Bahá'ís will not dissimulate their faith and they suffered without government services until the law changed allowing a simple dash on the card to represent those who did not identify with one of the official three religions.

Another point of resistance to tradition and creating new culture was the story he told of his father naming his children: *Abbas was never a name used by Copts because Abbas is a Muslim name. My father wanted to tell his* [Coptic] *family that he is a Bahá'í, not because it is a good idea, but because he believes in the Bahá'í faith, that there is no difference between religions, and that there is unity between religions. Abbas is from the name of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas* [the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh].

A third minority identity I see in Abbas, is that of being an artist. From my experience as an artist it is to take on the role of the outsider, as was discussed in the section on ABR. For example, according to Abbas, even though his father was breaking Coptic traditions, for economic reasons, he was less understanding of Abbas's desire to be an artist than he was of his brother, who was good with mathematics.

When asked about his strongest masculine qualities (while looking at his *PhotoSophia* portrait) Abbas mentioned *love of my family, my experience*. He continued, *I don't want to call it masculine, I don't deal with sticks or guns or knives, we deal with knowledge and wisdom.* Abbas' words indicate an abandonment of the binary, in terms of the qualities needed to build cultures of peace. Describing his masculinity as a process he went on to say *that's my masculinity, we add our experience and pass it on to our children, and the friends. The workshop means I am not an exhibition, you learn from me and I learn from you, the workshop is still on.*

The reluctance to name or define these qualities as either masculine or feminine was a recurring theme, a finding of how ambiguity is seen by most of these men as a positive force in their quest for gender equality.

***2. Abbas - Stories and experiences with masculine social identity***

Regarding gender and equality in his family Abbas described it in terms of a *new culture* when he said *my sister and myself and brothers, were equal in every way, we had our own way of believing, a kind of new culture.* Telling the story of his father and mother, who were born in 1901 and 1902 and married in 1919, gives some insight and context into this transformation into *new culture*. As Abbas's Coptic born father investigated and then became a Bahá'í his wife noticed changes in him, *she found him to be very peaceful when he was in a meeting or in contact with the Bahá'ís.* Abbas added *usually my father was a little bit hyper, but my mother would say once he was in a meeting he becomes like an angel. She connected being an angel with Bahá'í prayers and the Bahá'í community. My parents were very good examples for us. Among my siblings, all my brothers and sisters, there was not any superiority to anyone because of gender. We were born knowing that whoever was working the others should be helping, not waiting to be helped.* This is evidence of striving to transform generations of unequal traditions to equality in a few generations.

Abbas was well aware of the contrast between his family's Bahá'í worldview and the worldview of his neighbors: *the people around us they are scared, it's like they are going to lose something* [to be equal]. *They are controlling the women tightly, so they have no voice, it was not healthy, half the world has no voice*, he said. He said his parents were *good examples for us*. Later in our group discussion Abbas returned to this point, describing the life of most women in Egypt and the Middle East as *miserable: look to the countries that have these kind of attitudes, that the woman is made only for the pleasure of the man*. And it's interesting he ends this statement describing this *loss* with an acknowledgment, similar to the BIC statement of how inequality lessens the potential of men: *they lose a lot of the wisdom of women*. Going further about men's attitudes in the Middle East he said: *this beautiful country of Egypt* [is] *losing a lot, they are so scared of giving women a voice* […] *but give men a free hand to control the lives of women. They are so scared to give one inch to women*. Abbas refers to the process of establishing equality as a *revolution*.

Describing how his parents example affected his views on women Abbas said: *we never have the slightest feeling of the old ways of looking at the woman, we always have a dignified image of any woman, exactly like she is my mother, or my sister, or my daughter, nothing more than that, you look at any woman in the whole world, poor or rich, old or young, either as a*

*mother, or a sister or a daughter, with great respect.* This view, that a man sees all women as his equal relations (in the indigenous sense of *all my relations*), not as objects for his dominance, signifies a culture that de-sexualizes human relationships. This view promotes the kind of partnership between men and women needed to build cultures of peace. It is also a reference to the idea of working "shoulder to shoulder" from the BIC statement (Bahá'í International Community, 2015, pp. 6–7).

***3. Abbas - Practices of a new equality: navigating a masculine/feminine balance***

In answering the question about his feminine qualities Abbas refers to the balance: *my feminine quality is natural; I have respect for the feminine part in me. I don't see a greater percentage of femininity in me or masculinity in me, I see a good balance* […] *still learning and the workshop keeps going*." Continuing to speak on the balance he said*: "There is no difference between the two genders. A woman has to be a woman, a man has to be a man. If one wing* [using the two wings metaphor] *is 60 percent and the other wing is 40 percent the bird will go in circles. They have to be 100/100,"* then he adds, they also need a common aim to *fly in the right direction.*

The further clarification of the two wings metaphor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes a thinking through the change needed in masculine roles to come closer to a social gender balance. In this case Abbas goes further to say, it is not enough to get the bird flying, it must also have a flight plan, a direction to go in to build cultures of peace. In a Bahá'í context this means establishing individually, socially, spiritually and in human governance, the *oneness of humanity*.

Abbas's art is also a life practice of expressing and promoting equality. *We had our own way of believing, a kind of new culture. If I try to describe that new culture, I need some brushes and colors, no words can justify that. I paint more than I write. My paintings glorify women, you won't find many men in my paintings. There is no difference between women and men in my new culture, if you want to say. I knew that worldwide women were not taking their rightful position among mankind*. He goes further to describe his role as a male artist to establish equality: *my job until I die is to glorify women and appreciate them and put them in colors, try to give them respect, and hopefully my paintings with have an effect on what people think about women* […] *that mankind should appreciate and respect them more.*

Abbas's Photovoice submissions were copies of his paintings of women and demonstrate how the practice of creating artwork is intimately tied to his identity as an artist, a man and a Bahá'í. They present a new understanding of masculinity as a man holds up women and femininity through his art. One print from the exhibit contrasted two very different paintings, on top: *The Beauty of the Promise of Unity in Diversity*, a colorful depiction of a sea of people in vertical upward flowing lines. In contrast is the painting *The Curse of Inequality* in grayscale depicting people in great turmoil with a diagonal downward flow. This painting reminds me of the depictions of hell by the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch[10]. Another was his painting: *Recognizing the Struggle of Indigenous Women,* depicting a strong female profile integrated into a natural landscape. For his painting: *The Emancipation of Women* in red, orange and yellow Abbas included in his caption a quotation from a woman who had admired his painting and wrote: *my heart came alive the first moment I saw this painting* […] *It lifted me up* […] *brings me happiness and assurance.*

In Abbas's artwork you see his meditation, intent, action, an understanding of the current state of inequality and a vision of equality. It is an example of what a man can do through his artistic practice to give vision and foster the transformational path to building *Cultures of Peace* and equality.

### *4. Abbas - Masculine identity transformation on the path to cultures of peace*

Abbas referred to an inner and outer struggle when he said: o*f course, it is not an easy thing* [building a new culture of equality] *it is like struggling with your own self, it's not something strange.* In a comment repeated by several of the men in this study he downplayed the importance of gender differences in a future culture of equality. *I think the terms masculinity and femininity are going to disappear very soon* […] *I think difference means complimentary. There is not a war between the two* […] *it would be foolish for one to take advantage over other, we know we need each other, we complement each other.* When asked if women are superior to men he responded in an deferential expression of his new masculinity. *The scientific way of thinking is there is no superiority* […] *but if you want to say the women should have voice, and they are*

[10] Hieronymus Bosch, (c1450-1516) was an Dutch painter whose works depict sin and human suffering. https://www.hieronymus-bosch.org

*smarter than the men, and if these women bring peace back to mankind, then why not, yes I would agree that they are superior and give them all my support.*

Abbas's description or metaphor for his masculine cloak, relates to his vision of the oneness and equality of humankind and building of *Cultures of Peace*. *It's a shell. When you have sea shell you have a beautiful pearl inside, it is made of a wound inside the body* […] *and a product of the tears and pain of that shell that makes the pearl. When you see the shell, it is not as beautiful as the pearl itself. The cloak is the shell, the soul is the pearl.* His is metaphor refers to the pain and suffering *the wound* required to make the pearl of *equality* and the spiritual relationship between the inner and outer transformation.

Abbas inscribed his *PhotoSophia* portrait with a vision for the future of gender and peace. It is inscribed with his beautiful drawings and colors and lettering, using a Bahá'í quotation "*Earth plane is a workshop, not an art gallery for the exhibit of powers*," and adds his own words nestled beneath: *that is what we learned in this educational project.*

Abbas expresses his hope that the product of this workshop can be passed down to his children and the world and that it will continue until his death. He said: "*I just want my children, when they become as old as I am, to know that I never gave up. I am still facing the obstacles of life, I am still dealing with life as it is. I want them to know that their father is a good worker, still in the workshop, still working, and I hope I keep working until I am well deserving to go to the next world. While I'm ready to understand the difference between masculine and feminine, because in the other life there will be no masculine and feminine anymore. I'll be getting ready for this kind of life.* He concluded with an ancient Egyptian saying: *You will come to the stage where you can't hear, your hearing will be lost, you can't see, your vision will be lost, all your senses will gradually vanish, and then you will become so light that with a little puff, you will easily fly to heaven.*" Here Abbas seems to allude to the Bahá'í belief that the human soul has no sex or gender, it will go away when we die.

In the group meeting Abbas mentioned the *uncertainty, vagueness* and *ambiguity* of male/masculine roles compared to female/feminine roles as we move forward towards equality, As men we need to *consider our own thoughts be truthful to ourselves about what we've inherited*. He referred again that life is a workshop, and to the fact that we live in the world and inhale the same air as all men and cannot be perfect: *you take, and you give*. He also talked about the gradual process of transformation. Being in his eighties, and raised as a Bahá'í, he was also

under the influence of a strong Egyptian culture. He told the story that when he and his wife came to Canada: *she was more like an Egyptian woman, her voice was not obvious, but now gradually she took her place. I recognized she's a whole person and to be a whole person I must let her be strong.*

Abbas is clear that he is in the process of transformation toward equality, and that his guide, his standard, and his inspiration for this transformation is his relationship with the Creator and Bahá'u'lláh's writings.

**Narrative two – Rayan**

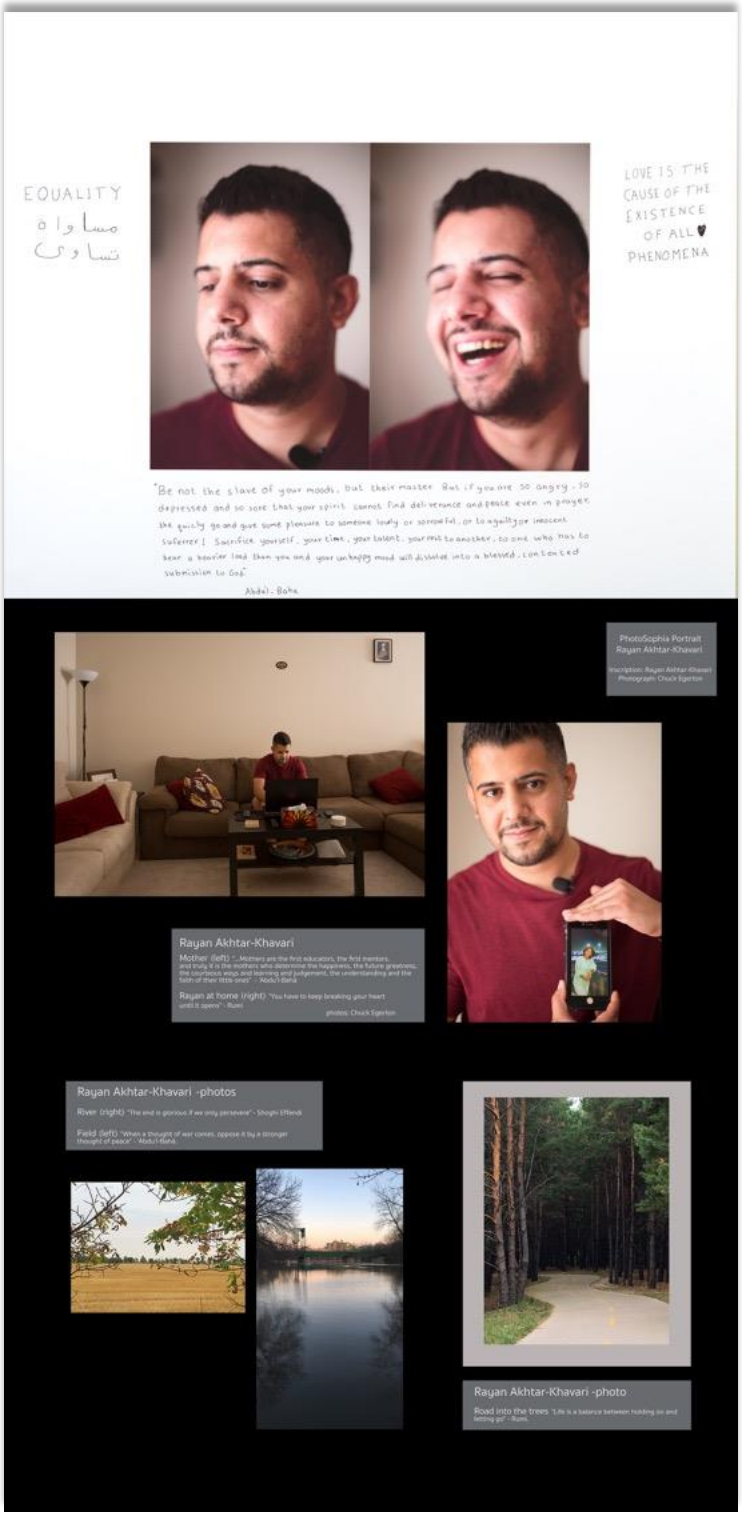



*Figure 11. Images and captions from the Being and Becoming exhibit. © 2018 Chuck Egerton & Rayan Akhtar Khavari.*

**Rayan Akhtar Khavari**

**Interview, 3 August 2018**

It was a warm clear August afternoon in Winnipeg, Manitoba when I set out for my second interview. I got lost trying to find Rayan's apartment. It's not far from the University but he had to guide me in by phone, where my GPS would not go. Rayan (Figure 11) met me at the door and kindly helped me carry my case of equipment up the stairs. I was served hot Persian tea in a tall glass cup with a handle.

It was a simple apartment with a long sectional sofa that wrapped along two walls. The walls have few decorations, only a photograph of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and a small oval framed Greatest Name, a calligraphic symbol of the Bahá'í faith. On the opposite side of the same room sunlight was pouring in through large windows by the kitchen table. With the curtains drawn the light was diffused and softened and we chose that spot to set up for the interview. I worked to set up my cameras, lights, microphones and computer for the interview as we chatted (figure 9).

I had become friends with Rayan during my PACS coursework in Winnipeg. We had an intense discussion of my work on masculinity at a restaurant with his girlfriend (now wife) Ai I. His passionate opinions on the topic, inspired me to invite him to participate in the study.

***1. Rayan – Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

Rayan, when asked to describe his own portrait as though it were a stranger said: *a person that thinks too much, calm but worried, worried eyes. Tough kid. Been through so much. The eyes. Lot of pain in the eyes, I have scars, eyes are sad. This person has stories to share... nice tan, fair, light skin. Look like he's from Italy, Spanish, Latin American, middle eastern, or Persian*. Many of these observations are clearly evident in what follows. During the *PhotoSophia* interview when Rayan was asked to describe his spiritual qualities while looking at his photographic portrait. He said: *kindness, patience, dedication, Pain? Forgiveness and patience, finding love in hard times and hardship for others*. When Rayan openly recognizes his *pain, hard times, scars, worry* along with his *toughness* it indicates an openness to being vulnerable, a quality noted by many of the men in this study as a product of living up to equality.

Rayan said his last name Akhtar Khavari was given by Bahá'u'lláh to the first Zoroastrian Bahá'ís and means "*Star of the Region*." Mulla Bahram, a distant relative, was the first in his family to join the Bahá'í faith in Iran. Rayan was born in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1988 as the son of a third-generation pioneer. During the *Ten Year Crusade* his grandfather was named a *Knight of Bahá'u'lláh*[11] when at the urging of Hand of the Cause[12] Mr. Faizi pioneered across the Persian Gulf to UAE. Rayan's mother was born in UAE, his father also pioneered there.

To answer what was difficult about being a man Rayan talked about his resistance to the competition between hyper masculine men. They are always trying to prove to themselves who is materially better saying *I'm doing this, I'm good at this*. *They do it without thinking, it comes*

[11] *Ten Year Crusade* (1953-1963) was an initiative to settle Bahá'í teachers or *pioneers* around the globe to build the Bahá'í community. They were not missionaries, but were self-supporting laypersons. Anyone who pioneered to an unopened post during that period was designated a *Knight of Bahá'u'lláh*.

[12] The designation *Hand of the Cause* refers to a small number of Bahá'ís appointed by the Head of the Faith to a special lifetime position of service. They were not clergy, but laypersons, they served to guide and protect the Bahá'í community.

*naturally to a lot of men. "I have this car, this career" and bragging about their girlfriend or wife. I like to win at sports but in life I am not very competitive. I find it difficult to be part of that discussion, I don't want to be a part of it. I look at my phone when these things come up. When guys are sitting alone [away from women] it happens so many times*. I asked how he deals with it? How do you resist that tendency? He answered *I try to focus on myself and what I have but I don't look at material stuff too much. I feel sorry for them because I don't need to do that to prove myself. I can do other stuff, more meaningful than that. I try to ignore that but sometimes I challenge it. I ask them how is doing that helping the people around you? We are happy for you, no one is jealous, but come on, we have better things to talk about. What can we do for our neighborhood and our society? I intellectually challenge without insulting because if I insult or attack it is not helpful. I have empathy for that person also. I challenge them sometimes and ignore them out of empathy.* What is the source of this competitiveness, I asked, is it seeking approval? He answered with one word: *insecurities*, [but] *what are they seeking approval for? Everyone has insecurities no one is perfect. It's a cover we put on as men, saying we are not insecure.* Here Rayan talks about another kind of masculine cloak, or a mask to hide inner feelings of insecurity.

In response to asking Rayan about his strongest masculine qualities (while looking at his *PhotoSophia* portrait) he responded: *competitive, moving forward into the future, very persistent, stubbornness in a good way, focused on what I want*. When asked if masculinity is learned or inherent in men he responded: *I think it is learned, it is normal, it is okay. It is learned from your Dad, friends, older brother, siblings, cousins. We can see friends that are more gentle, not soft but gentle. You look at their household, the brothers, uncles, the school they went to. Me and my brother are totally different. What we watch affects us, seeing men built-up and bulky, tats, and haircuts that are masculine.* Rayan expressed that his masculinity is a product of his environment and the role modeling of men around him, but also the creation of his own choice and religious worldview.

***2. Rayan - Stories and experiences with masculine social identity***

Rayan's national identity was broken when he had to leave the UAE. The country does not recognize birthright citizenship and requires one be of UAE heritage. He was forced to leave because he is of Iranian ancestry. He could not go to Iran, a foreign country to him where Bahá'ís

are severely persecuted and not allowed higher education. He moved to Turkey and then to Canada. The most difficult challenge to living in western culture he said, was the individualistic non-communal culture of Canada. He also mentions himself as a minority in terms of race and skin color saying: *My brother has darker skin than me, when we went to India, I had greater privilege. They would treat me different in airports*. *I feel that, imagine how much more a woman feels.*

He clearly described his masculine social conditioning, that *to be a man in the male dominated Middle East was to be tough, stand up for yourself in an aggressive not gentle way, to act tough and to be tough, and not to smile too much*. Rayan told a story of an incident that illustrates this. *One time my Dad, an optometrist, asked me to go pick up some lenses for him. We love our Dad. On the way back, walking down the street two boys started teasing me. In the back of my head I felt I needed to show them who's tough. I played soccer and felt I had the ability to defend myself. They hit me on the back of the head and beat me up quite well. I ended up breaking my father's lenses during the fight. My dad was pissed about the lenses but was also glad I defended myself. He supported me because he knew the culture. I see strength is not physicality or a louder or thicker voice, it is spiritual qualities, and love for the other. The core of it is love not violence.*

Responding further to his own *PhotoSophia* portrait he said: *I am very emotional and this photo shows it, at least I can see it. My eyes give me up. I get emotional thinking about it. Females have that, they are very honest about emotions. If you need help you need to be open. We keep it in [for men] its weakness to ask for help*. I asked who do you see more in yourself, your mother or your father? (Rayan chose to use his mother's photo during *PhotoSophia*). He answered: *I'm a mama's boy, in a good way not the sarcastic way. I look up to her, I think she taught me a lot on how to be honest with myself and to face my problems, to walk away from them to solve them. She was calm and she has a quality, a part of what it is that women have, patience, kindness, caring, generosity, not just with money but time, being there for someone and generous with your time*. Rayan's story about fighting contrasted with the decision to use his mother's photo . This choice reveals how he is navigating a transition through the binaries of masculinity and femininity, towards a more authentic and unified self. His honesty is a gift.

***3. Rayan - Practices of a new equality: navigating a masculine/feminine balance***

Rayan said he doesn't learn if there is not some kind of conflict. He said sometimes he created conflict with other men. He told a story of how he negotiated conflict with other men. *I was once out with friends who had white privilege. I like to challenge it, he said, while some of these friends choose to not see it, to ignore it. While talking about Indigenous people and this land [Canada] they were sarcastic and joked about being the colonizers, and invaders of Indigenous land. This is not funny to me and I decided to respond to humor with humor, that's how my masculinity came in. My reaction was to injustice, not to masculinity. Comfort does not help us learn; conflict will give me more perspective. The outcome of that conflict was good but at the moment there was a lot of tension and didn't feel good. Afterward we had a conversation, they stopped talking like that, no longer saying we are superior, and they are savages. You have that privilege and you use it for a positive purpose, by the method of turning the challenge on the challenger. We are now good friends. It's a process of learning from each other. You learn that materialism, and consumerism is not as important. I'm learning day by day as a young man. As men we have to accept that change is happening. We learn a twofold mode of purpose: the act of being and doing, not just talk but to do something about it.*

Rayan's expressions of his experiences with the social aspects of masculine identity shed light into the cave where men are challenged with competition, injustice, self-aggrandizement, and material acquisition He told me how he navigated through this as a Bahá'í man. He recognized male and white privilege, and sought to turn it around as a way of helping others transform. Not all conflict is harmful.

***4. Rayan - Masculine identity transformation on the path to cultures of peace***

To describe his masculine cloak in a metaphor (while looking at his *PhotoSophia* portrait) Rayan said: *It would be a suit, a coat, a grey suit, medium gray, with a red tie and a black shirt. The fragrance would be the Aigner Cologne I wear, fresh not very strong, I don't know how to describe it. Personally, I don't like the strong fragrances. It's a relaxing smell, my friends compliment me on it, 90% of females like it, say it's fresh. I used to wear strong colognes.* This masculine metaphor seems to be a description of how Rayan sees himself when he presents himself publicly. I can imagine that these clothes hang in his closet and the cologne is on his

dresser. This metaphor seems to be is a statement of reality, the way he actually is, and not a fantasy of being someone else. In the context of what Rayan said in the interviews, this suit and red tie have no connection with images of toxic masculinity, rather, they are an expression of what he said was meeting privilege with privilege, face to face. Perhaps it is to say, I can be independent of the symbols of hyper-toxic-masculine men.

Rayan's *PhotoSophia* portrait included two portrait images, one serious and one laughing. He requested to use two. Perhaps by juxtaposing his smiling/laughing and serious portraits he showed resistance and opposition to the *not smiling* Middle Eastern masculinity he described. Rayan inscribed his *PhotoSophia* portrait by writing on both sides and below leaving the top clear. On the left the wrote the word "*EQUALITY*" in capital letters and below it the same word in Arabic and Farsi. In his inscription is a quotation from Bahá'í writings: *LOVE IS THE CAUSE OF THE EXISTENCE OF ALL (HEART) PHENOMENON* from *Foundations of World Unity* (Abdu'l-Bahá, 1972, p. 88). Below the portraits Rayan wrote another quotation from Bahá'í writings: *"Be not the slave of your moods, but their master. But if you are so angry, so depressed and so sore that your spirit cannot find deliverance and peace even in prayer, then quickly go and give some pleasure to someone lowly or sorrowful, or to a guilty or innocent sufferer! Sacrifice yourself, your talent, your time, your rest to another, to one who has to bear a heavier load than you — and your unhappy mood will dissolve into a blessed, contented submission to God." 'Abdu'l-Bahá.*[13] I remember there were many people reading this quotation on Rayan's portrait at the gallery reception, and commenting on it favorably. His simple inscription combined with his two juxtaposed portraits create a wholeness of self, they show his current *being*, and his desire to *become*, visually and in the words and quotations he selected. Everything the men included was self-reflective, and the beauty of art, is that it does not need explanation. Every person who sees it can come up with their own interpretation. I see it as positive movement toward *a new understanding of masculinity*.

Rayan's Photovoice photographs and additional portraits also have captions he wrote that tell something about his hopes for the equality, oneness and cultures of peace. The captions for

[13] The Research Department of the Universal House of Justice has found that these words were attributed to 'Abdu'l-Baha in an unpublished English translation of notes in German by Dr. Josephine Fallscheer taken on 5 August 1910. Found at: https://www.bahaiblog.net/2014/02/learning-let-go-losing-someone-love/#footnote_7_10106

the Photovoice images were: "*Life is a balance between holding on and letting go*" – Rumi, and "*When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace*" -'Abdu'l-Bahá. For the River photograph his caption reads: "*The end is glorious if we only persevere*" -Shoghi Effendi.

The photo I took of Rayan working at the computer in his living room had the caption: "*you have to keep breaking your heart until it opens*" - Rumi. Rayan's photo with his mother (on his cell phone): was accompanied by the following text: *"Mothers are the first educators, the first mentors, and truly it is the mothers who determine the happiness, the future greatness, the courteous ways and learning and judgement, the understanding and the faith of their little ones*" - 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Both of these images summon a vulnerability. The recurring theme of suffering and pain in both his own words and the quotations he chose are telling and shed some light into the cave of masculinity. The insecurity, pain, heart breaking, expressing the withholding of emotions publicly and perhaps even from oneself, the need to overcompensate with bravado and public display of power and acquisition, all describe a picture of vulnerability, a need for connection, and direction in how to be the kind of man that can build cultures of peace. Rayan sees what is going on around him in the world of hyper-masculinity, and also recognizes how it has influenced and shaped him to some extent. He seems to be in a process of finding new ways to express his spiritual and feminine self through service to others, especially in his work with Junior Youth. His recent marriage will also be a new field of learning, practice and transformation to a *new understanding of masculinity*.

**Narrative three – Jim**

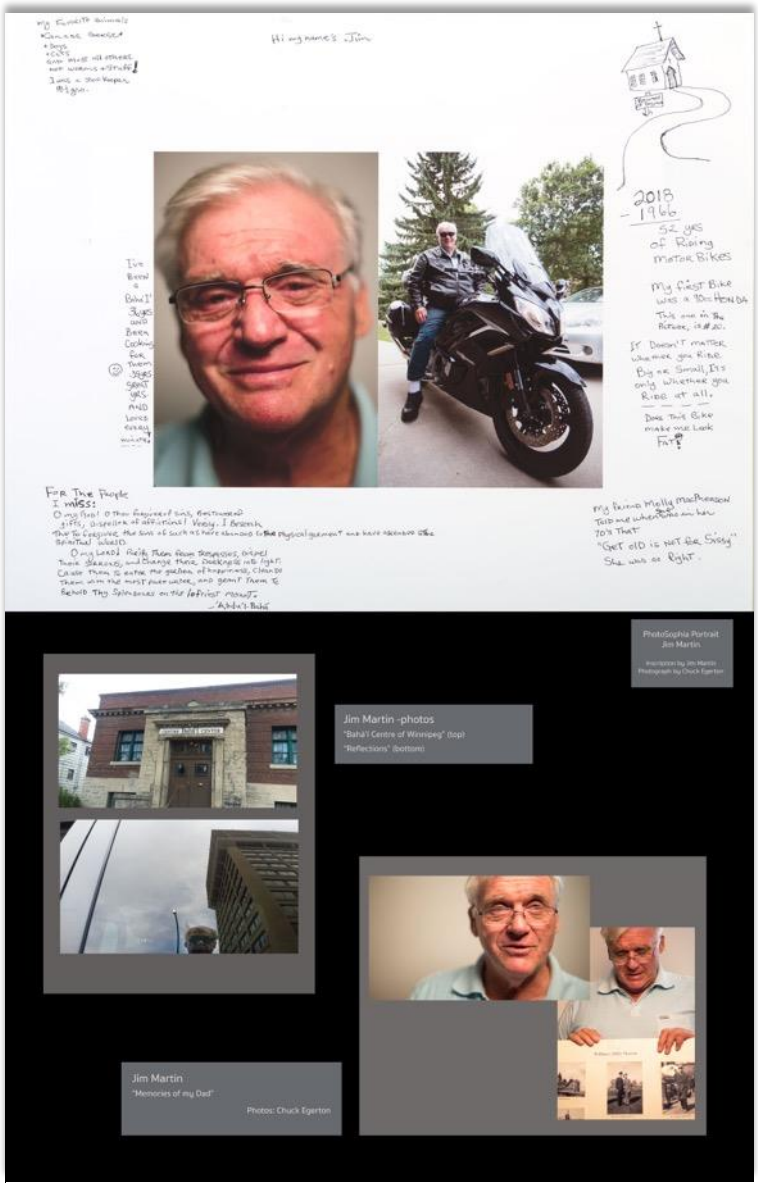



*Figure 12, Jim Martin, Images and captions from the Being and Becoming exhibit. © 2018 Chuck Egerton & Jim Martin.*

**Jim Martin**

**Interview, 4 August 2018**

Jim (Figure 12) is a born and raised Winnipegger. When we met, after lovingly vetting me for the presence of any *ugly American* qualities, he seemed to find me acceptable. Jim gave me a sense of context while living in Canada and Winnipeg, the history of people and places. He loved to show me Winnipeg (its eateries') and surrounding areas and we took many excursions in his minivan. He knows the city well.

Jim's wife is Iranian and a Canadian refugee who came after the revolution in Iran in 1979 and they have two grown daughters. His wife's Iranian parents, also refugees, moved in some years ago and sadly her father Mohammad Ali Parsa passed away recently. We chose collectively to dedicate the study to his memory (see more about him in on the dedication page).

Jim chose to have the interview in the basement family room of their new home, that he jokes is as "big as Toronto.". I learned a lot from Jim about Winnipeg and Canada. He told me many personal stories about the Canadian culture, mostly good but some were about the racist treatment of Indigenous Canadians in the days when a pass was required to leave the reserve.

Jim generously gifted me a Diamond Willow walking stick early in my time in Manitoba. It is Indigenous made, about chest high, and light cream in color with burned-in patterns and designs that overlap into diamond shapes. The wood is full of knots that look like eyes. I felt immediately it was very special and kept it with me on my journeys across the continent, as a guide and protector. This staff was used as a talking stick during our group session.

***1. Jim – Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

To begin, Jim, when describing his (*PhotoSophia*) portrait as though it were a stranger said in a self-critique: *Someone that's changed compared to years ago. It's different, the eyes, the complacency, tired of it, years and years and years of working […] but the -eyes are the window to the soul. Never thought I'd get this old. I didn't know I would get this old, I don't feel old.* This kind of *getting real* response to one's self-image was common, to describe oneself physically is usually expressed with self-deprecating adjectives, or not said out-loud at all. Another reason for self-deprecation is seeing the onset of aging and therefore the realization of our mortality. This was brought to consciousness in each interview by reading the Hidden Word: *"O SON OF BEING! Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds*" (Bahá'u'lláh, 2012, p. 11). Death and the *next world*, as Bahá'ís call heaven, was mentioned repeatedly in favorable terms, as something sought after, as a spiritual condition that would lift the burden of masculinity and gender forever. It also expresses how vital personal accountability is for *being* who we are, and for transformation to *become* who we want to be.

To tell the story of his name, Jim situated himself and his heritage in this time and place. He said: *My name is Jim Alexander Martin; my middle name Alexander is from my Grand Dad. My last name is German but spelled the English way (Martens to Martin) It means field apprentice. I've been a Bahá'í since 1982 – 36 years. My background is in a working-class family in Winnipeg. My mom was from St. Vital Winnipeg and my Dad was from a farm in Saskatchewan in the Yellow Grass area. My dad trained in wireless for World War II. He worked as a painter, decorator and carpenter, built some of the furniture in this room. My mom was really home oriented, they were very devoted to each other. She would take small jobs (notions at Eaton's) and wait tables and cook for the Grandparent's restaurant.*

*Grandmother and mother were very talented cooks. Mom was the Scottish side; Dad was the German side who came to Wisconsin first. Grand Dad was born in the United States, but his first language was German. Some of the Scottish on my Mom's side would speak Gaelic. Visited my Grandfather place of birth in the upper Hebrides when I was 19. He didn't have shoes until he was 13 and came to Canada for a better life economically. My Grandma's Scottish side were pretty religious. The spirituality I got was a basic decency and kindness.*

Jim's placement of himself in the world from a family with blue-collar Canadian and meager European origins gives him a particular lens on masculinity and different challenges in his quest to transform himself into a new model. I relate to his blue-collar origins, my own grandfather, from Wales, apprenticed as a house painter and decorator and emigrated to North America for economic opportunities. Jim often tells stories about being a zookeeper, working in England, Australia, and in Winnipeg were he also supervised crews of men, maintaining the citie's parks. These stories are rich with lived masculine experience.

Jim had two Photovoice photographs in addition to a second portrait I took of him and a portrait with a photograph of his Father. For that photograph which was displayed on the right he wrote the caption: "Memories of my Dad." His two Photovoice images were displayed top and bottom on the left. For the top image he wrote: "Bahá'í Centre of Winnipeg". For the bottom photograph of his reflection in windows he writes: "Reflections." Jim wanted to display a photograph he had taken of his wife by the graveside of his Father-in-Law Muhammad Ali Parsa to whom the study is dedicated. Unfortunately, I could not get ethics approvals in time. Jim's Photovoice photographs go directly to his deep identity as man and as a Bahá'í.

***2. Jim - Stories and experiences with masculine social identity***

To answer the question about how he first became aware he was a boy Jim illustrated it in a story about a traumatic experience in school. *Went to kindergarten, the boys line up here and the girls line up there. Some boys and I went to the washroom and we had been told to always wash our hands. We found that the paper towels had been packed in too tight in the dispenser, so to get them out we pulled off little pieces and shreds fell on the floor. The principal walked in. A thin man with a three-piece suit, key chain and wire glasses. We were all taken to the work room*

*and hit with a strap on our hands. The principal said, 'that will teach you!*' Jim recounted*: It took all the ginger off the biscuit, right off. If it were done now it would be child abuse.*

He felt that the treatment in public school set up a life of fear, of acceptance of inequities, class and power distinctions including gender. He said: *You put the clay on the wheel and start molding it. They start off with the fear trip, if we don't go with it what are we supposed to believe? Inequities, self-esteem issues, beat up by the system, you become cynical as a result. If I hadn't found the Bahá'í faith I'd be there too.* This is a significant statement, because Jim seems to say it was his embrace of Bahá'í teachings, that inoculated him with an ability to resist falling victim to a cynical and unequal system.

He told another story that clearly signaled to him that the boundaries of being a boy would be structurally enforced: *We lived near my grandparent's lunch counter and I would go there all the time on the way home from school. My grandmother would give me a plate of chips and a Coke. I loved watching them cook. When I went into school the kindergarten had a play kitchen set up and I would get all the guys together and pretended to cook short orders, hamburgers, hotdogs etc. The kindergarten teacher and principle were very worried and pulled me aside to talk to me. I didn't twig,*[14] *I didn't know what they were talking about. They believed that cooking and working in the kitchen were strictly feminine tasks. I was worried that some girls wanted to play with it and I had to share! But when I told them about my grandparent's lunch counter they were relieved, having been concerned I was being too "feminine" working in the kitchen with pots and pans.* He concluded*: all are responsible for equality of men and women. Look at people for the qualities of their hearts. You look past the bag we come in.*

This story gives testimony and shape to many of the issues raised in this study regarding the limiting and "narrow roles assigned by society and the media" (Bahá'í International Community, 2015, p. 7) of what is acceptable masculinity. Jim's response to this conditioning demonstrates resistance and an awareness of how this conditioning of men and women limits human potential by denying equality.

### *3. Jim - Practices of a new equality: navigating a masculine/feminine balance*

Asked to describe his masculine qualities Jim said: *Clichés. Defined by strength, strong enough to be gentle, strong enough to return to the Path.* He contrasted with the traditional

[14] To not "twig" means to not understand

qualities of: *shaping egotism, competition, who's cool and who's a fool.* Then he said: *To have a philosophy and to maintain it. Reading the [Bahá'í] Writings, understand them and incorporate them into your decisions. Suffering in the world. The most important thing for Bahá'ís is to be is happy.* It is interesting to note that part of Jim's definition of masculinity is given shape by describing what it is not. It is in this contrast he sketches what a new masculinity could be, and perhaps suffering in needed, to find happiness.

When I asked Jim what's good about being a man, he answered by telling another story about being on Bahá'í pilgrimage in Israel.[15] He describes going into the pilgrim house on Mt. Carmel and the only people sitting on the divan were Hand of the Cause[16] Mr. Furutan and Hand of the Cause Dr. Varga. Jim was asked to sit next to Mr. Furutan. When he sat down between the two men, Mr. Furutan asked Jim : 'tell me your story.' Through tears he told his life's story and they really listened. There were tears all around. Jim concluded that this experience of active listening and raw emotion between men, defined the new masculine and the new feminine. A contrasting story shows another side of Jim's masculinity when he mentioned that Tommy Douglas[17] was a big influence on his life: *I actually met him one time and shook hands with him. I would never have come to religion without him, like my uncle Walt he was a boxer, wouldn't take crap from anybody.* Jim's encounter with men he highly respected in a spiritually intimate surrounding where they focused on him made a deep impression. The presence of humble men not afraid to be vulnerable, willing to share their shortcomings, hopes and dreams without judgement was significant to Jim's masculine and spiritual development. The hope and the reality of men trusting one is another a central finding.

Asked his strongest feminine qualities Jim said: *Trust, kindness,* then he paused and asked *what is feminine?* I asked him to define *feminine* for himself. Many of the men, it is interesting to note, resisted placing clear lines around what is *feminine* and what is *masculine* in their own definitions. Jim continues, *what my mother passed on to me was loyalty. If you were in the family you were in, maybe it's Scottish. Unconditional love, is that a part of loyalty? You do*

[15] All Bahá'ís are expected at least once in their lifetime to perform a pilgrimage to the Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh and the Bab at the Bahá'í World Centre in northern Israel.
[16] See note #12
[17] Tommy Douglas was a famous Canadian politician who introduced Medicare to Canada.

*what you say.* He then commented*, I'd like to know how to teach*[18] *people without upsetting them.*

Relating how he puts these qualities into actions he said: *When I get an opportunity to help someone, I help them. If I have the chance to make someone else's day a little better, I take it. It's okay to work with the people you like but better to work with the people you don't like.* But he ended this comment with a statement that tells this was not always well received*: but motivations are second guessed.* This is clearly a part of the pain Jim refers to earlier, how people misread one another's words, intentions and actions. Putting this in action, Jim asked me one winter day to help him make a lunch for the homeless at a downtown Winnipeg church. Payam, another research participant, and I served the soup and sandwiches. Jim made a hundred homeless people have a better day.

### *4. Jim - Masculine identity transformation on the path to cultures of peace*

Like all the men in this study, Jim's masculinity was implicitly molded by traditional social structure. This contrasted with his belief in gender equality. It seems clear that all the men in this study have to some degree one foot in the past and one in the future, children of the half-light in a place of transition, change and transformation.

The process of taking portraits was challenging for many of the men. While taking Jim's portraits and trying to select one, he made a few comments expressing his vulnerability: *I look like the RCA dog listening. Who is that old guy? I look pissed off there. That's about as good as you're gonna get! Oh God, a little bit better. Sigh, where did all the hair go? Oh well. That one's not bad. So different each time. I look so defeated. That one's okay.* Jim wrote on his *PhotoSophia* inscription *"getting old is not for sissy's."*

When asked (as he looked at his *PhotoSophia* portrait) to describe his masculinity in a metaphor of a cloak Jim said: *It would be like a 17th or 18th century cloak you see in old movies, dark in color. It would smell like when it gets really cold and you go inside wearing wool, it's a wintery cold smell. It's like the smell of frost clinging to your cloak, a familiar comfortable smell. A coming in from the cold smell. The cloak would hang from shoulders to feet. Dark wool like a pea jacket, dark navy blue. No ornaments.* Perhaps I am going too far in unpacking the underlying meaning but my reading of this metaphor, of coming in from the cold is like the

[18] To "teach" in Bahá'í terminology is to share your faith with others.

transformation of masculinity from cold to warm. Hyper masculinity is stereotypically cold and insensitive like winter. This contrasts with coming indoors to the embracing warmth, a movement toward the feeling and emotion of femininity. The lingering essence of coldness or masculinity are savored as is the navy-blue wool pea coat, but they have moved into the warmth and only the freshness of the cold lingers.

Jim's *PhotoSophia* portrait has two portraits printed side by side, on the left a close-up portrait, and on the right Jim on his motorcycle. I chose to juxtapose those two images, and Jim agreed. They show the range of Jim's masculine dispositions, soft and deeply spiritual, to harder, traditionally macho and playful. These are also evident in significant pieces of his inscription: his connection with animals, cooking as a service to others, prayers for the dead, a warning to "*beware of dogma*" in his drawing of a church, love for motorcycles (52 years). In a follow-up call many months after the study practices I asked Jim what he got out of the experiences, he said that everyone has the same reality and trust between each other. It was not a veneer, and that *I'm carrying my own bricks too. We gained new tools, but they remain under the surface because we are afraid to use them.*

In the group meeting Jim gave many comments of significance: *We make a commodity of everything. We have to learn to use these new set of rules, a common language. If everyone learns the common language*[19] *we can achieve the equality of men and women. But we don't use the same language, we are in the gold standard not the heart standard.*

Jim said referring to the Hidden Word that states we are dust[20]: *Underlying reality, there is always some kind of permission to do something. Spoken or not and refers to this happening with the Rohingya persecution, they have permission to do it because no one will do anything about it. Manitoba was one of first places in Canada women could vote. The key to remember we are dust. People can make up their own truths, and that kind of reality goes through current society, they are allowed to do so. Women see the foibles in men, to get the real equality of men in women, we have to walk shoulder to shoulder.* (A reference to the BIC statement). Perhaps to

[19] referring to the Bahá'í Ruhi Institute's Book Eight, used in study circles around the world.
[20] "O CHILDREN OF MEN! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest…" Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Arabic #68

emphasize the urgent need for men to be authentic and live up to the Bahá'í teachings on equality, Jim referred to the Hemingway line President Obama quoted at Senator John McCain's funeral: *'Today is only one day in all the days that will ever be. But what will happen in all the other days that ever come can depend on what you do today.'* Ernest Hemingway, For Whom the Bell Tolls (Hemingway, 1998, p. 432).

Jim expressed: *This new understanding of masculinity, I don't know the definition. There is education, there is a scientific approach and a spiritual approach, but we get type cast. What you do (your profession) does not necessarily define you.* This statement adds to Jim's feeling that men are misunderstood and defined through traditional lenses. He then refers to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's example as an expression of his masculinity, *but I am not sure how to define it … maybe acts of kindness?*

Here is another finding that coincides with several of the other men in the study: the need to seek a guide or example of how to perform the new masculinity. For many of the men 'Abdu'l-Bahá is that example. Without going into the many stories of his life and actions suffice it to say, 'Abdu'l-Bahá for Bahá'ís exemplifies the qualities needed, in both men and women, to build cultures of peace, shoulder to shoulder, that will lead to the oneness of humanity. Shoghi Effendi, the appointed successor to 'Abdu'l-Bahá described his role as "the perfect Exemplar of [Bahá'u'lláh's] teachings." (Shoghi Effendi, 2006b, pp. 128–139) 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself wrote that the Bahá'ís should use his life as an example.[21] This example includes his performances of gender, both masculine and feminine, documented in the public realm. The literature contains a multitude of biographies on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's interactions with men and women in his travels west after being released from imprisonment in 1909. Many references to his public statements on gender equality are found earlier in the Chapter Two.

[21] 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "Look at me, follow me, be as I am; take no thought for yourselves or your lives, whether ye eat or whether ye sleep, whether ye are comfortable, whether ye are well or ill, whether ye are with friends or foes, whether ye receive praise or blame; for all these things ye must care not at all. Look at me and be as I am; ye must die to yourselves and to the world, so ye shall be born again and enter the kingdom of heaven. Behold the candle, how it gives light. It weeps its life away drop by drop in order to give forth its flame of light." (Baha'u'llah & Abdu'l-Bahá, 1928, pp. 502–503)

**Narrative four – Payam**


*Figure 13, Photographs and captions from the Being and Becoming exhibit. © 2019 Chuck Egerton & Payam Towfigh.*

**Payam Towfigh**

**Interview, 5 August 2018**

I interviewed Payam (Figure 13) the day after his family's vacation. It was a quiet and warm Sunday morning with the prairie winds blowing the sun in and out of clouds. I think for Payam it was a time between relaxation and anticipation of returning to work. He suggested we talk on their sunporch, a space with a tiled floor and walls of windows on two sides looking out into his modest garden. He kindly offered breakfast and coffee.

I had known Payam from my first days in Winnipeg through the Bahá'í Community. I had been invited to visit for dinner during the Bahá'í fast and met the whole family. On this day sunlight streamed into the room, mixed with soft diffused light when the clouds came over. There was a constant breeze rustling the leaves**.**

***1. Payam - Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

When asked to describe his most masculine qualities Payam said: *I think I'm a driven person. If I decide to do something, I'll give it all I have to achieve it. Persistence. I never thought of these as spiritual qualities, steadfastness? Perseverance? Obedient, (sighing) Reliability, I don't know if it's a masculinity. If I give my word, I try to follow through …*

*trustworthy.* These are very straightforward answers. One could say they are more traditionally masculine qualities (except obedience which tells more about Payam's faith). They are qualities every authentic human being would want, again shedding light on the ambiguity of a strict gender binary.

Asked the about his background Payam replied: *I was born in Tehran, Iran a city of about ten million people. I grew up in a Bahá'í family, with two brothers, two sisters, I am youngest. Our life was a fairly normal life until the revolution happened in 1979. We were a religious family. My father was a very staunch Bahá'í, he had a very black and white view on the Bahá'í faith. I admire him a lot but I give my mom credit because my dad was always away on Bahá'í activities. He was a banker. My mom was at home taking care of all the affairs of the family. He was very involved in our spiritual upbringing, and that's all he cared about .He was very straight forward about that. Our mom looked after the more material necessities of the family.* Payam describes a fairly traditional separation of gender responsibilities with the father away from home working and the mother present.

*My parents were from the region of Hamadan in the northwest of Iran. Both from my mother side and father's side, they were from very religious Jewish families. They became Bahá'ís at the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* [before 1921]. *A large number of the Jewish community in Hamadan became Bahá'ís during those days*.[22] This is indeed an interesting background to have as an Iranian. In many ways Payam was a double minority in his Shia Muslim dominated country, from two communities that struggled under persecution.

Asked to tell the story of his name Payam said: *I was born into a Bahá'í family and I was confirmed as a Bahá'í when I was sixteen. Payam means "message," Towfigh means "success" so my name means "message of success,"* He joked, *unfortunately it has not materialized but maybe someday! The name Towfigh was from my grandfather, it comes from a prayer. At that time in Iran they had to certify themselves with a last name. Before that your last name was your town, if you were from Hamadan it would be Hamadani.*

When asked to describe his masculinity in the metaphor of a cloak Payam responded: *Now you are really pushing me Chuck! It's something majestic, that covers you as a quiet strong type.* His reaction to the question came from him feeling less capable in the realm of art, being an

[22] A book on the topic is:. (Amanat, 2013) *Jewish Identities in Iran: Resistance and Conversion to Islam and the Bahá'í Faith.*

engineer by profession (but look at what he drew on his *PhotoSophia* inscription!). Before approaching the cloak question Payam describes his masculinity as he sees it*: I see my masculinity I hope, that you don't have to shout or do anything, you don't have to show power. People can feel it in a positive way, someone they can rely on, depend on. Quiet strong type. Being at work, within my family, don't have to say much, a look will say what you mean and direct people to do what you want them to do.* I am interested in Payam's view of masculine power and might and how he conveys it silently and nonverbally, but before I could ask more he began forming a metaphor describing his cloak*: It is a thick robe, like in Game of Thrones*[23]*, John Snow's black thick robe, as a masculine robe. I like rose water, I know that's not very masculine, that's very feminine. Not what John Snow's robe would smell like, it probably would smell like buffalo hide and sweat*. In a way Payam's metaphoric visual and olfactory description of his new masculinity as a cloak explains his meaning about power and might. His buffalo skin metaphor is well contrasted by the smell of rose water.

***2. Payam - Stories and experiences with masculine social identity***

When did you first become aware you were a boy and that it was different? Payam answered: *Where I grew up it was a hyper masculine culture. Being a boy or a girl was really black and white. I always thought it was the way it was. Girls didn't play in the streets, boys were out there horsing around, girls would get together inside the houses, they didn't venture out. It was not looked at very positively for girls to come out and play with boys. Up to grade five girls and boys were together in school, I lived in a progressive neighborhood, but that was before the revolution, after that I don't think even kindergartens* [had boys and girls together]. This regulated segregation of the sexes is similar to the growing up and conditioning experiences of Abbas and Rayan, all from Middle Eastern countries.

*I used to have fights on regular basis,* Payam continued, *I was a bit of a pain in the butt kind of kid, my clothing was ripped on a regular basis coming home. I was beaten up and picked on sometimes for being a Bahá'í. I wasn't taking it, I was giving it back as bad as I was taking it. I wasn't behaving like a Bahá'í child. I was very aggressive, but it was an aggressive society. It was expected that if you were challenged physically you had to give it back.*

[23] *Game of Thrones* was a fantasy television drama series broadcast from 2011-2019.

*I remember in second grade my best friend and I had a fight and I ended up hurting him. His back was hurt and he couldn't come to school for a month. His family were so nice and understanding and it's a very interesting story, we continued to be friends and neighbors. The story goes we were passing by portraits of the Shia Muslim saints Imam Ali* (601-661 CE) *and Imam Husayn* (625-680 CE) *and we had an argument. He said these are real pictures* [photographs] *and I said no they weren't because there were no photographs back then. He said how do you know, you are a Bahá'í? I got mad and we had a fight right there. He was hurt and I was so ashamed and disappointed in myself. He recovered* [and] *we are still great friends and our families get together.*

Payam told another story about being a Bahá'í minority*: I was one of the only Bahá'í kids in my school, all my friends were Muslims. The teacher would pick on me as a seven or eight-year-old. The inhumanity of an adult shaming a kid in the front of the class. I was always taught by my parents that I was different so don't feel bad. At that time, with the persecutions you didn't make a big deal of it. In a sense it makes you stronger and you develop this shield, you accept it as what it is. My parents knew about it but didn't make a big deal of it because they had been persecuted their whole lives. They had wanted to kill them, and my dad had been in prison. Now as an adult when I look back, I see the inhumanity of it — dealing with a kid that way, the intolerance. Not that I'm mad, Bahá'u'lláh said the chief cause of all wrong doings is ignorance, and I see that ignorance, it's so systematic in that society.*

Payam's experience as a persecuted religious minority in Iran shows us how he navigated as he sometimes physically engaged in conflict from an early age, and faced dangers unknown to Bahá'ís in the west. It is helpful to this study to show that the experiences of boys can be so different. I see it as a strength that Payam survived, which has transformed his life and guided his way of being a man in transition.

### *3. Payam - Practices of a new equality: navigating a masculine/feminine balance*

When asked to name his strongest feminine qualities Payam answered: *Caring, I'm not saying I'm a very caring person, I strive to be caring and compassionate. Another concept I think about is humility (not that humility is masculine or feminine) But not to just act humble but to feel and accept humility. Humility is viewed in this culture as weak. The issue of humility is very important to being caring and compassionate, in a sense bring yourself to the individuals*

*you are interacting with not from a position of power. Bahá'u'lláh says [paraphrased and translated from Persian] when you have no power and you are humble, and you have no wealth and you talk about generosity it is very easy. When you have power and you are humble and have wealth and are generous that is when it shows your character.* He then continues *we are all in positions of power within our families and community to have that and then to be humble is very important. But I am a very competitive person.* Humility is related to vulnerability, a willingness to take the risk to be wrong, to humble yourself before others, in contrast to the hyper-masculine archetype to "be a big wheel" discussed in chapter one above.

*In the group meeting Payam said: we see this hyper-masculinity that is so prevalent in this society and a lot of it comes from the internal shortcomings, lack of confidence and security that we have as men.* Then he told a story: *a couple of days ago I was driving with my ten-year-old son, and this guy had a Hummer with extended cab and big tires and my son said "Dad do you think he's compensating?" [everyone laughed] It is a lack of self-confidence we have as men where we have to go to ridiculous lengths to compensate for it … this masculinity becomes almost like a cloak to cover our insecurities in a sense.* The insecurity Payam mentions in this story was cited several times by men in the study. To be authentic is to know oneself, and be humble enough to show vulnerability.

When asked what is difficult about being a man Payam said: *I really never thought there was anything difficult about [being a man]. I never thought about it that way.* We talked about social science's definition of sex being different than gender, was it nature or nurture I ask? Payam said*: I think both, obviously hormones and testosterone, I am be no means an expert, that has a lot to do with the way men behave. I feel myself that these hormones make a big difference in how you interact with the world and events that come your way. How you grow up in your community and family has a lot to do with it as well. Where I grew up, we didn't have these kinds of discussions, it's so black and white. There was a shade in between or a line between, of course as you grow up, you'll see some guys were more feminine than others, but it was definitely looked at negatively.*

Payam continued with discussing male privilege*: Well, I think for thousands of years men have had the privilege of having access to most of the resources that mankind been able to offer. I really feel women have taken the short end of the stick when you really think about the history of humanity. That is of course because of the physiology, of being stronger and being dominant*

*in that sense and as fifty percent of population have always taken advantage of those privileges. Although I took it as it was, I was able to do things, especially in Iran, that women are not allowed to do, to experience new things. As a boy I was able to experience things that brought a lot of enjoyment and excitement where perhaps women and girls did not have that advantage in that very hyper masculine society that I come from. And I still see that in Canada as well, in a lot less intensity but I still think that we have a very unequal society and hopefully it will change and it is changing and even in the thirty years that I have been in Canada I see that there really is a positive shift taking place.*

Male privilege was named several times by men in the study. Payam well identifies what underlies this privilege. Perhaps growing up in Iranian society, so permeated and blatant with toxic male privilege made it easier for Payam to see and understand.

When we read quotation #9 [24] Payam responded: *I am truly a believer of that [that the future will more be balanced feminine and masculine], 'Abdu'l-Bahá says world peace will be achieved by more feminine behaviors, because up to now masculinity has been a dominant driver of how nations would even deal with each other. Women have a much harder time sending their sons to the battlefield where for men it becomes a lot more natural and easier. And I can see that in the relationship my wife and I have with our kids. Where she feels a lot more protective and connected of our kids compared to myself in that sense. So, I can truly recognize that if women are in charge and in power will have a second thought of going into battle compared to men. I can see that between myself and my wife. If she was in charge of an army she probably wouldn't go to war as easily as I would. I think about these things, and I think I'm a peaceful person but I can tell you because of the way I am it's just more natural for me to look into power and strength and might rather than humility and love and compassion, where it comes more naturally with women. We are different and I can see that as the power shifts towards women, having power in key positions the world will become a calmer place.*

[24] (#9) "The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals . . . an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced." 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Wendell Phillips Dodge, "Abdul-Baha's Arrival in America," in *Star of the West* 3 (April 28, 1912), no. 3, p. 4).

These comments bring us back to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Elise Boulding's discussion of feminine characteristics being more peaceful and resistant to war.

I asked, how have you shifted power in your life? Payam answered: *I think in our family, I always think about this and talk about it because I am in a very special position as the father of twins, a boy and a girl. From their early age I was aware of how I relate to both of them, to make sure that I will not unintentionally give preference to our son over our daughter. So, I was very much aware of it, the way that I related to them, and I even talk to them regarding that, fairness and justice and equality. Even now we talk with them at age twenty-two. But that was always part of the responsibility I felt as a father to make sure that happened.*

Payam's unique position of being the father of twins, a girl and a boy situate him in a very tangible space of transition. He clearly recognizes his (and his wife's) critical role in the practice of equality and the realization of gender equality.

I asked about the idea some have expressed that women are superior to men. Payam said: *No I don't agree with it, no I don't see it through superiority. I believe they are very different but that doesn't make them better or worse. I think men have attributes that women don't have that allows them to be effective in some matters. Women have attributes because of the way they are to contribute to certain achievement. Of course I believe that as both of them come together that's how we can really become amazing achievers. The synergy that they each bring into this equation. Again, some of this comes from the physiology that we have where you may see that the man could be more driven because of physiology, getting something done, moving ahead, being of that individualist nature, that perhaps testosterone contributes to it. But that of course bring lots of other issues such as violence. But if women have the equal power and authority they can temper the negative aspect of it by being more nurturing and being more caring. And when you combine these that's how I think we can see the amazing achievements that we can do and perhaps shed some light on the negative attributes of this and what the more masculine part of men could bring to the table.*

It seems Payam is describing an essentialist view, that woman and men are inherently different. If their complementary equality can be achieved, in that *synergy*, something new can be created. In that balancing, some of men's negative hegemonic qualities can be tempered.

***4. Payam - Masculine identity transformation on the path to cultures of peace***

Payam said: *I have to say what took place in my family and the Bahá'í community was very different than the rest of society. The way men and women were related to in our own family of course was very much according to the references of the Bahá'í community. My dad, the way he treated my sisters was very equal, and coming from a traditional family that was amazing to see. Now I appreciate how the [Bahá'í] Faith transformed him. He was such a deepened Bahá'í and I could see in his behavior the writings of the Faith regarding the equality of men and women, how it affected him. He would even talk about that. So, my older sister, twenty years between us, back in the sixties, which was not very common in Iran, completed High School, and was accepted at a university in Shiraz in the south side of the country, to go there by herself. That was something not common. He used to boast about this saying I told her "even if you go to the other side of earth to be educated, I will send you there!" She went to Shiraz and studied economics. To her credit she now lives in Ottawa. Came to Canada and got her PhD, and got into amazing places because of her education, and really it goes back to the belief that my father had in educating girls. You see the effects of it on my father who was from a small town with a very parochial view of men and women how it transformed his understanding, and view of how he should consider his daughters.*

I asked what do you think motivated your father to make such a paradigm shift in his world view? Payam answered: *It was the love of Bahá'u'lláh, he was motivated to talk about it, obedience. He really tried to use the [Bahá'í] Writings in his day to day activities, he was not perfect neither are any of us, but he would make it known to us that the faith was above everything else including his family. That's how he treated us with fairness and respect ….* Payam said in the group meeting his mother's father could barely read or write but because of the Bahá'í teachings he sacrificed so his daughters could be educated.

Payam said*: 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged the early Bahá'ís in Iran to open schools for girls. The argument against it from the highest level of Muslim clergy was that allowing girls out of the house to go to school would make them loose, like prostitutes. The letters 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to the Bahá'ís in Iran caused this transformation in women's education, this doesn't take place very fast normally, look at history of the west. It is the transformative power of the* [Bahá'í] *Faith to change the minds of individuals, their thoughts in rapid form. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that this social transformation happened in just one or two generations because of divine education and the*

*transformative power of divine revelation can change societies. You see that in the history of Iran and in my own family, that how the* [Bahá'í] *Writings refer to this notion of the equality of men and women and how individuals, even though they may not one hundred percent understand it but because through obedience and through this transformation that the word of God brings about. They bring this concept of equality and justice which humanity has really been lacking for thousands of years between men and women. And really as Bahá'ís we look to the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá [for guidance].* This is one of the solid finding in this study, using 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a guide on how to act and perform the new masculinity.

Asked about masculine qualities he would like to put behind and those he'd like to acquire Payam said: *I hope I am* [in the process of shedding old, and acquiring new masculine/feminine qualities] *obviously no one would accept that they are a Chauvinist individual. Sometimes I do feel my masculinity takes over, personally I don't feel that I have some of the feminine qualities that I should have. I'm kind of forceful in some sense, that may rub people the wrong way. But that's just who I am. But I do, through meditation and prayer,* hope [I have] *at least some of the other attributes, such as justice. … although I may not be as compassionate and soft as I should be. But I think if I'm just and fair and really believe in the [Bahá'í] Writings I could mediate some of those shortcomings. Because I can't pretend to be somebody else, you know I am who I am, I might not be a sensitive person as my wife always reminds me (laughs). I do really take notice of this and taking account of myself every night [referring to quote #1]*[25] *and how to improve that the next day, so within that process I make sure I don't get ahead of myself as far as my behavior and conduct is concerned. But we have temperaments that you know we do have.* It is interesting how some of the men have used the word *soft,* which can have negative feminine connotations from traditional masculinity but in our discussions seemed be the best word they found to describe the quality they desired to acquire.

In a discussion of the question "what is moral courage" (Bahá'í International Community, 2015, pp. 6–7) during the group meeting Payam said: *We are prejudiced against women and we don't even recognize it. Female CEO's are interrupted during presentations, much of it is unconscious, it's the baggage we carry* [as men]. *It will take moral courage. We*

[25] "O SON OF BEING! Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds" (Bahá'u'lláh, 2012, p. 11).

*have to be mindful of it, we learn from other's experiences, but you have to look at ourselves. Taking account each night, examine and see how we can improve.* These statements by Payam are the strongest and clearest I heard, regarding men's unconscious prejudice toward women. This relates to the fear of femininity and homophobia discussed earlier. I would to know your authentic self is a significant finding.

Payam called me on a cold rainy night, two days before the exhibit. He had asked for extra time to finish the inscription of his *PhotoSophia* portrait. Upon arriving, I jumped into the passenger seat of his car and he retrieved the large envelope containing his *PhotoSophia* portrait from the back seat. I asked if I could see it. He was hesitant but said yes. We clicked on the dome light, while rain splashed off the windshield. As I slowly slid the portrait out of its sheath, I was amazed at the drawings he had done, after telling me during a break in the interview "*Chuck, I am an engineer, I don't do artsy things.*"

Payam's *PhotoSophia* portrait was printed in the middle of his page with him directly looking at the viewer. His inscription begins on the center left where Payam quotes Bahá'í scripture*: O Son of Spirit! Burst thy cage asunder.* He then drew a wire bird cage hanging by a chord tilted to the left with a bird, both wings outstretched, flying away to the left. Below the cage he drew an arrow pointing to these words below, each on its own line: *Toxic Masculinity – Inhumanity – Injustice – Inequality – Cruelty – Unfairness*. On the right side of the portrait at the upper corner is written (continuing the scripture begun on the left side: *"and even as the Phoenix of love soar into the firmament of holiness*."[26]
He drew a Phoenix flying with wings stretched upwards holding four flower bedecked ribbons flowing into the air beneath its feet.

In addition to four Photovoice photographs we displayed two more portraits, one of Payam standing in his garden outside the Sunroom where we conducted the interview. The other is of Payam holding up a framed photograph of his father. A caption for a Photovoice photograph was: *Father's Prayer Rug* "This rug has a lot of history in our family and brings me a lot of great memories of my dad." Payam took me to see the rug, it is finely woven in dark

[26] "O SON OF SPIRIT! Burst thy cage asunder, and even as the phoenix of love soar into the firmament of holiness. Renounce thyself and, filled with the spirit of mercy, abide in the realm of celestial sanctity." Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Persian #38

crimson, light blue and orange colors, and sits on his bedroom floor aligned in the direction of Bahji.[27] He said the carpet means so much to him because it is *filled with my father's tears*.

In the group meeting as we discussed the question, what is the present state of inequality, Payam told a story. He was leaving the Bahá'í Centre late one night and rushing to his car turned into the alley and almost bumped into a woman walking alone. She jumped in fright and he said: *for the first time I realized how it feels to be a woman walking at night in the dark*. He made reference to another quotation from Bahá'u'lláh and put it in the context of masculinity and the balance of genders, giving it new meaning for the work "*The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed*" (Bahá'u'lláh, 1993, p. 85).

Payam gave so much thought and spirit to the tasks of the study, even though they rubbed him the wrong way at times. He struck a note on several major findings of the study: vulnerability, the need for a standard to guide men to a new masculinity and the reality of resisting a prevalent prejudice against women (among others).

[27] Bahji is the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh near Akká, Israel. It is the Bahá'í qibla or direction faced during daily obligatory prayers.

**Narrative five - Rod**

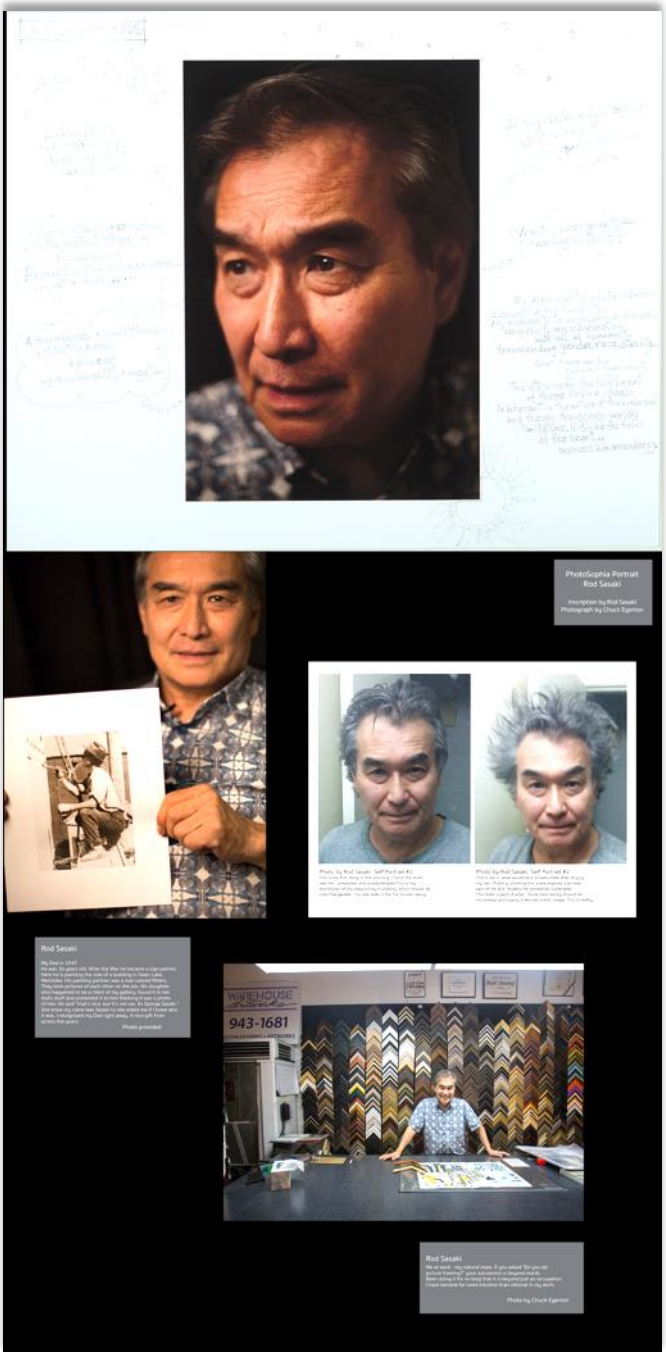



*Figure 14, Photographs and captions from the Being and Becoming exhibit. © 2019 Chuck Egerton & Rod Sasaki.*

**Rod Sasaki**

**Interview, 7 August 2018**

Rod (Figure 14) and I began to build a relationship when I first contacted the Spiritual Assembly of Winnipeg[28] by email before I moved to Canada for my studies. The first time I met Rod face to face was attending a Sunday morning devotional unannounced. It was at the Bahá'í Centre on McMillian Street, the old grey stone Masonic Lodge built in 1912. I felt that his warm embrace and kindness set a tone for our future interactions. I was impressed that he is so well read and experienced as a Bahá'í.

Rod chose to have his portrait and interview at his business, Warehouse Art Works in the Exchange District of downtown Winnipeg, after closing time. His business is a gallery and frame shop he has owned and worked for many decades partnering with his daughter. It sits on a corner in the Exchange District, an old shop with large glass display

28 The Spiritual Assembly is the local governing institution for the Bahá'í faith. There is no clergy and no single leader or hierarchy. Nine adult Bahá'ís, women and men, are annually elected by secret ballot (without nominations or campaigning) and manage the affairs of the local community making decisions using a distinctive form of consultation. Nearly 12,000 local Spiritual Assemblies exist worldwide in over 188 national communities.

windows. Inside artwork is displayed on multiple levels. You see the space in my portrait of him standing behind the counter before a wall of multicolored and finished frame samples arranged in a herringbone pattern. We went up a short stair to a work area giving an overview of the shop. I got the impression this space was one Rod is very comfortable in. We set up for the interview beside a large worktable. Rod pulled a black curtain behind him, critically aware of how the background would look but also allowing us privacy from anyone walking by on the darkened streets.

***1. Rod - Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

Starting with his description of his *PhotoSophia* portrait (as if a stranger) Rod said: *Pensive. Somebody needs more sleep, bags under the eyes. Seems to be reasonably well taken care of, nothing extreme or excessive. This is hard to do for myself. Hair is kind of thinning, good shaped head. Hair is naturally got some length to it. Not too many wrinkles on the face, but just the forehead. Pensive?* Rod was honest about how difficult it is to describe yourself like this, but he did it, hitting the required note of distanciation and detachment helpful in preparation for the questions to come.

Describing his spiritual qualities Rod commented: *I see a constant, this thirst to know more, not to be just content with what I have, not to just absorb life, but kind of push the boundaries. A certain seriousness and touch of playfulness, (sort of half smile). Always ready to do something, not just relaxed. Yearning for understanding, yearning for more understanding of truth. That's the big one that comes to mind. I'm ready to go — in a ready state, and sometimes relaxed. Overall, the idea is this feeling is never going to end. It will never end (this yearning).* He says with sarcasm*: Oh, that's enough, I'm just going to click off and put it on cruise control.*

*Yearning for an ideal which we know we'll never reach, and it's a constant motivator, to keep* […] *pushing is a tough word because it sounds aggressive. Trying to be constantly moving forward, in increments or small steps. I don't want to create regrets this late in life. Lying on my death bed — I should have done this, why didn't I do that. That's for 30-40-50-year old's. I look at it more as fulfillment, there are certain qualities and capacities that I have. Have I fulfilled them?* Again, Rod gives a heartfelt answer and addresses the urgency of now, in taking action to

transform without regrets. It seems related to the "take account"[29] reading we read in each interview.

Asked the story of his name he replied: *My name is Roderick Hugh Sasaki. I am 68 and have been a Baha'i since 1977. Matsumoto was our family name, — great or great, great grandfather's. As a cultural practice the oldest son would go live with another family and he took their name Sasaki, so we became Sasaki from then on. I was born in Elmwood and grew up in North End of Winnipeg. My friends were mostly white, Ukrainian, Jewish, Polish, English, a gang of ten boys. Grade seven we moved to Transcona, Manitoba*.

*My mother was born in Canada in 1925 and lived in Fraser Valley, Maple Ridge, British Columbia where her Grandfather had bought land. My Father lived in the New Westminster area. Mothers family worked in farms around Winnipeg. My Father got as far as Toronto, took up sign painting. To explain, there is the story that began in the early 1940's when my Mom was in her teens. Times were economically tough and contemplating the future with lots of kids, decided to return to Japan. The whole family booked ship tickets. An Uncle, my Mom's younger brother fell off a truck and broke his wrist which postponed their trip* […] *then Pearl Harbor happened. Think of a time in your life when you had a fork in the road, my identity would not have happened.* This story amazes me, so profound and spanning the globe, shows how the entire world and our collective history of migration and war are interconnected and how one incident can change everything.

*My grandparents had come to Canada and blended in for economic reasons. They had anglicized their names and changed their religion from Buddhist to Christian. When Pearl Harbor happened if they stayed in on the west coast in British Columbia they would be held in a camp, but farm workers were needed to the east and in Manitoba.*

Referring back to the quote *"Bring thyself to account each day"* (Bahá'u'lláh, 2012, p. 11) he said: *There needs to a standard to give account. If I don't know the standard, I can say I did okay, If I know the standard, I can really take account. We need to delve into that standard every day. I'm more an artist than a scientist.*

Rod's focus on needing a standard, or in other words an example of how to put on this new understanding of masculinity is vital to making progress toward equality and accountability

[29] see footnote #25

to humankind. His question is to the point: How does one know they are transforming if there is no clear standard or example to strive toward? This is a central finding of this study, having a standard, an example to guide us. Artist versus scientist is another socially constructed binary which Rod brings into the light. It summons the idea of sacred and scientific truth being one, in Indigenous ways of knowing, and aligned with the central Bahá'í principle of oneness. This idea is discussed in support of arts-based methods in earlier chapters.

***2. Rod - Stories and experiences with masculine social identity***

Describing his masculine qualities Rod said: *I would say forthrightness, at this point I'm less likely to be radiantly acquiescent. To be counted on, trusted, to be relied upon. People have confidence in me*. [It is important] *that others feel good in my company, not pushing them away. Somewhere in the Bahá'í writings this idea is expressed: may no one ever feel hopeless in your presence.* [Other masculine qualities are] *empathy and intuition, I can perceive other people's hurt by visually looking at them.*

Rod named: *forthrightness, trust, reliability, being a confidant, empathy, intuition*. These ideals, especially that *no one feel hopeless in your presence* are genderless, spiritual dispositions, a kind of habitus that is placeless and timeless, and finds welcome everywhere.

Describing his strongest feminine qualities Rod said: *Empathy and intuitive assessment of situations. Mirroring those around me. With empathy I feel it but don't mirror it. I want to make a good impression and miss the here and now. Things I want to enhance - to instead of thinking about a good response, hearing what is being expressed. There is not time to be guarding things, you don't want to be regretting things, go with your intuition.*

Rod named: *empathy, intuitive, mirroring*. To improve: *listening before speaking, less guarded, trusting intuition*. These are nonbinary qualities.

Describing himself as a boy and youth Rod said: *I was never this strong male figure. I was very, extremely shy. I didn't initiate things. Not shy with other boys. I am a different person today. I don't remember ever saying I'm glad I'm a boy not a girl.*

Rod said: *I have two brothers and three sisters. My dad liked to rough house with the boys, mock wrestling. Take off his shirt and lay down and boys would tickle him. He bought boxing gloves for the boys. Four boys were born in a row, then two girls. In grades four-five-six*

*I became conscious of females. In Junior High and High School that consciousness grew, not necessarily at home.*

Rod had three photographs exhibited in addition to his inscribed *PhotoSophia* portrait. For the portrait I had made of him in his business he gave the caption: *Me at work, my natural state. Been doing it for so long that it is beyond just an occupation. I have become far more intuitive than rational in my work.*

Rod submitted two similar but different side by-side Photovoice self-portraits. For the left he wrote: *This is me, first thing in the morning. This is the most real me – unwashed and unadulterated. This is my expression of my masculinity/humanity which should be interchangeable. The real male is the full human being.* For the image on the right, showing his hair standing straight up, he wrote: *This is me in what would be a private state after drying my hair. Publicly showing this state exposes a private part of me and renders me somewhat vulnerable. This state is part of what I think masculinity should be -not always portraying a desired public image. This is reality.*

These two self-portraits and the accompanying captions visually and artistically demonstrate Rod's willingness to plunge willingly into vulnerability as a man. He provides an example of the workshop rather than art gallery approach to life and noted as a rare quality in men by women who answered questionnaires for the exhibit.

***3. Rod - Practices of a new equality: navigating a masculine/feminine balance***

Regarding equality Rod said: *There's a strong implication that to really understand the true equality of men and women requires a close relationship and affection with someone of the opposite gender. To really understand equality as a male, I have to give up some if not all of my identity.* Here Rod, as well as some of the other men, particularly Jordan, talk about equality

being developed and formed within trusting relationship, whether in marriage or friendly partnerships, in work or in Bahá'í consultation and decision-making processes.

The idea that engaging in Bahá'í consultation (or working shoulder to shoulder with women)[30] as a practice ground for learning equality is another finding. Rod was not alone in expressing this idea.

Rod said: [*It's like*]*'Abdu'l-Bahá walking the mystical path with practical feet,*[31] *I'm embracing new qualities for the new masculinity, like intuition. Yes, I'm a believer* [in intuition]. *You have to perceive things that are not in your face. Empathy is an additional sense to our five senses, that gets developed through consultation, and reading Bahá'í writings.* I ask Rod what motivates empathy as a Bahá'í man. He answers: *It's not a conscious thing, you've got to see it in action. When there are conflicts in meetings sometimes, a blocking* [occurs], *and we can't consult any more.* [You are] *trying to see from their perspective,* [but] *I'm irritated for being blocked. Empathy requires you to go outside yourself. Giving way to the self. The self wants to be irritated.* [It is] *not a conscious thing, I'm not telling myself to be selfless, its thinking entirely of the other person.* [This] *requires a certain amount of love and empathy. Sometimes it doesn't have anything to do with positive or negative qualities, it's rather about understanding where the other person is coming from. It requires me, the male to give up a lot. Give something up for another, your impatience, anger or your irritation. Which implies you have to have some kind of vision. Otherwise why would you do it?*

This question is very important. Brienes (Mayton, 2009) writes about having to convince men that equality is a win-win for them (p. 139). This implies a forward-thinking vision of the benefits of the practice of equality on the self and society. But what Rod discusses is an inner process of spiritual transformation, from selfishness to selflessness, to finding fulfillment and happiness in service to others.. Giving up these qualities for the betterment of the relationship, for unity and progress, is a form of self-sacrifice.

[30] "In the final analysis, it is not enough to create space in the current social order for women to play their rightful role. Rather, the goal is for women and men to work shoulder-to-shoulder, each as the helpmate of the other." (Bahá'í International Community, 2015, p. 7)

[31] This is a reference to Stanford University President David Starr Jordan's introduction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1912 when he said "Abdu'l-Bahá will surely unite the East and the West, for He walks the mystical path with practical feet." Retrieved from: https://bahaitributes.wordpress.com/category/abdul-baha/

The need for a touchstone, a vision, is again addressed by Rod, a central finding in this study. The importance of the figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the lives of Bahá'ís cannot be overemphasized. He is considered the exemplar (see previous mentions) of what it means to be a Bahá'í for both men and women. If one were to look at his qualities and it would be very difficult to divvy them up as masculine or feminine. Of all the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life was most in the media spotlight, especially during his western journey's, and his life is an open book.

A finding that emerges in Rod's narrative and seems repeated with many of the other men (Jim, Abbas, Jordan) is that to have a standard, a role model of how to be, how to act, that is neither masculine or feminine but *right acting* in the Buddhist sense. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is a man who grew up under the shadow of his father Bahá'u'lláh, whom Bahá'í's view as the Mouthpiece of God in this day, and suffered exile and imprisonment by his side for most of his life. This is perhaps the reason Bahá'í men express ambiguity and question the current gender binary and policed gender climate, reluctant to name and categorize what they see as spiritual qualities in terms of masculine or feminine. This view, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call for the complete equality of women and men, when seen through a toxic, hyper masculinist lens is self-emasculating, and demeaning. It can have negative social repercussions on those men that profess it because it is breaks rank with patriarchy and the mythology of male supremacy. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's example, of, self-sacrifice, and breaking rank with patriarchy and the mythology of male supremacy, sustains their efforts.

A second finding, a discussed briefly above, is the need to learn and practice the attributes needed for equality within relationships, in family and integrated with community building activities. This relationship is built when men to do this with like-minded women, seek unity of thought and vision, revere the same Exemplar, and work in equal partnership to hold up as sacred the same teachings and divine authority. The practice of Bahá'í Consultation is what Rod points to as such a space. In Bahá'í communities and spiritual assemblies, that sacred space of consultation protects the right of everyone having an equal voice and is governed by the principles of selflessness, humility and in a spirit of unity and service to the Creator and humanity. This is further illustrated in Rod's answer to question four.

***4. Rod - Masculine identity transformation on the path to cultures of peace***

Rod discusses his awareness of the fluidity of gender expression in his work on Bahá'í Assemblies saying: *The Bahá'í International Community statement implies that we have some control over gender. Having been exposed to this in the context of the Bahá'í community at local and national levels for forty years, it's really difficult to define masculine and feminine. Generally speaking, it's not a clear line in the Bahá'í community. There are things from the old world that are brought in. I've served on the Spiritual Assembly of Winnipeg almost half my life. I'm an intuitive Assembly member and I am constantly analyzing Assembly meetings. It used to be that the majority was male. Lately there are 4-5 female members [out of nine] locally in last five years. I am noticing a difference in the way that males and females consult, not every female and every male. On a Local Spiritual Assembly, the decision-making process takes nine members. It works if you put in your contribution and let it go, no strings attached and usually happens when no one cares about a topic. Women approach in a more emotional (I feel this) or intuitive way. Men are more fact based (logical approach). Men have [intuition] too but are not aware of it.*

Speaking on intuition Rod says: *I've met women who understand me better than I do. You won't find too many discussions about this. Intuition induces a certain vulnerability in men. A man would draw a conclusion (generalization) based on fact, deduction. The other is inductive reasoning, it's just a perception that kills me. It's not logical and it's not there in black and white. I was moving in a certain direction with a thought, but the intuitiveness finished it off for me. But I think there is a certain element of trust in the relationship that helps in both conversation and consultation. You get insights into others. I am still not over someone finishing my thought. Both sides have to be open to that. Trust and love. Motivation. I think it's with that kind of intimacy and trust, the borders between individuals become less defined.*

I asked about his thoughts on the role of competition. *Male to male or male to female competition describes the old world.* [32] *Those social habits, of dominance, competition, and winning making sure your point gets heard. I think the intuitive parts is developing in me.*

Answering the question to describe his new masculinity as a cloak, Rod did not hesitate to reply. *Definitely multicolored, covered in flowers, not quite floral, vibrant. I think there would*

[32] 'old world' is a Bahá'í term for worn out traditions, ideas, institutions and processes.

*be black in it though, has to have black. I don't think it would be overly heavy, raw silk. I love raw silk. Fragrance, what fragrance would it be, something natural, not overly sweet. Like a forest or a meadow, not too perfume-y. How am I wearing my new masculinity? Hanging off my limbs and shoulders, letting the breeze take it, light enough for the breeze to take it.*

Rod's quick response to the question, seems to display is sense of spontaneous intuition. The cloak evolves and takes form as he speaks, thinking out loud. The most striking element is its lightness and fluidity. He described it as *wearing his new masculinity*, but this was not the way all the men responded to the question. Their responses are rooted in the reality of being in the present moment with elements that foresee becoming; what it could be in the future. Rod went straight to the goal.

Rod's *PhotoSophia* portrait and inscription had one portrait image. In pencil, Rod wrote to the left of his portrait *VAIN IMAGININGS* (Bahá'u'lláh, 2014, p. 204) Extracting his written statements from the artwork he wrote: *Lurking behind a pragmatic front is an inner child ready to play…* In the middle bubble he wrote: *Some intensity & earnestness with constant threat of irreverence flavored with a dash of sarcasm (smiley face) … just a dash … A thoroughness and inquisitiveness – a thirst to know balanced by a vulnerability & angst … An impression of quiet longing adrift on a sea of unrequited ideals …* In the middle thought bubble, he writes: *wait, who's going to be reading this?? My 'masculinity' is but a nebulous element of my humanity. My humanity is an inclusive oneness, reciprocity and collaboration with all humanity transcending gender, race diversity […] The striving for the fulfillment of these Divine ideals in inherent in the nature of the human soul and thereby transcends worldly limitations. If this be the focus of the heart… oneness is in ascendency*.

The findings I can collect from Rod's *PhotoSophia* portrait, are seen in the unity of thought created by the words *'vain imaginings', intensity, earnestness, threat of irreverence, thirst to know balanced by a vulnerability and angst, quiet longing, unrequited ideals, my masculinity is a nebulous element of my humanity …* Then he defines his humanity in his own terms. *It is an inclusive oneness, reciprocity and collaboration, transcending gender, race diversity. Striving for fulfillment of Divine ideals. If this be the focus of the heart, oneness is in ascendency*.

Rod was the central designer and installer of the exhibit, bringing his expertise and intuition to present it well. He attended the exhibit reception and stood up with the group of

participants in attendance. When the exhibit installation was complete, I saw Rod pull a pencil from his back pocket and write a new paragraph or two in the lower right corner of his *PhotoSophia* portrait as it hung on the gallery wall. This illustrates the fluid and ever evolving nature of the process towards a new understanding of masculinity.

**Narrative six – Krishna**

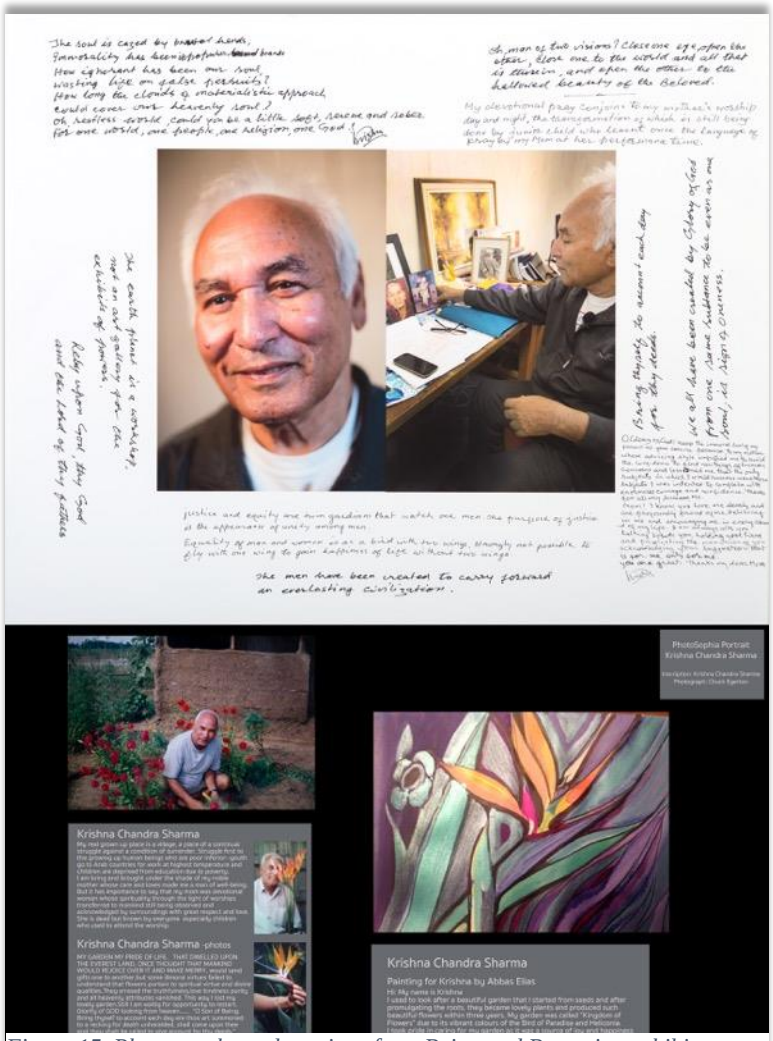



*Figure 15. Photographs and captions from Being and Becoming exhibit. © 2019 Chuck Egerton & Krishna Sharma.*

**Krishna Sharma**

**Interview, 9 August 2018**

Krishna (figure 15) was waiting for me on the front steps of his home the first time I met him. He is an immigrant to Canada from Nepal and a new Bahá'í and requested to be a part of the study. He kindly greeted me and ushered me in by the side door. I was captivated by his smile although it took some time for my ears to become attuned to his rich Nepali accent. Krishna's Hindu roots are of the Brahman caste and he is well educated. His wife is a practicing Hindu, with a beautiful shrine kept near where we held the interview in their finished basement.

The fragrance of the house was rich with cumin, turmeric and other pungent cooking spices. During the time in his home I met his entire family and was generously served tea and snacks. He also fed me lunch when we were finished. At first, he was going to stand next to me, but I convinced him to sit and eat with me. His oldest son is a Buddhist and there are a combination of Hindu and Buddhist images decorating the house. We met during a special Hindu religious observance period. The room was cool on this warm day and filtered light entered from high horizontal windows.

***1. Krishna - Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

Describing his image as though a stranger in the *PhotoSophia* interview Krishna said: *This guy is thinking about something more than day to day matters. Serious but small life. Looking at what the world is doing. He looks simple. Tries to understand matters. Grey hair and face. His body may not be so old, but his gray hair is steady. His eyes, simple attentive man.*

Telling the story of his name he said: *My name is Krishna Chandra Sharma, I am 75 years old and was born in 1942 a Hindu in the Brahman Cast.*

We read a Hidden Word[33] on justice and Krishna said: *This is the blessing of justice, desire me, love me, see with thine own eyes, keep it in the mind and heart. It is a gift to you. This is why* [we] *don't look at the other, make your own ideas. To be a good man you have to judge yourself as you are.* Krishna emphasizes the importance of independently investigating truth, a basic Bahá'í principle. This principle is essential in the process of unbuckling ourselves from inherited and socially conditioned negative masculine qualities.

Regarding his immigration to Canada Krishna said, *I have three daughters and only one son. And according to Hindu Law,*[34] *both in India and Nepal there is a strict dowry system that costs so much money. That situation, in addition to my wife and mother being threatened with death by Maoists because my horticulture business had a big area [growing and exporting flowers, Birds of Paradise] and they thought I had lots of money. Agriculture is lowest caste. They demanded we leave or be killed. I lost everything and we moved to Canada. As a Hindu I am in the Brahmin Caste* [the highest Priest class], *we honor the guardians* [parents], *it is a system of paternalism. My marriage of more than fifty years was arranged by the guardians.*

***2. Krishna - Stories and experiences with masculine social identity***

When asked when he first became aware that being a boy was different Krishna expressed that: *I knew I was a boy due to sex, born in my mother's brother's house, and after nine days they gave me my name and cut the ambilocal cord.* Then he described the differences

[33] "O SON OF SPIRIT! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes." (Bahá'u'lláh, 2012, pp. 3–4)

[34] Dowries are now illegal in Nepal but tradition dictates its continued practice.

in the ways boys and girls were treated in school: *In primary school, low level, boys and girls were together. After that, boys are selected to go to a higher-level school. Woman's education stopped at menstruation around age nine or ten, but that was when I grew up, not so now. My wife had only primary education, could not operate a telephone.* Krishna wanted her to get more education when he got a good job, but she was over burdened with family life and obligations (raising three daughters). He goes on to describe other cultural and structural differences in the treatment of men vs. women: *I was married at age 21, no sex before that! Boys had preference for jobs and more economic opportunities, they were also pressured to be married. Preference was given to boys for education and other aspects, good clothing, travel, etc. Boys could be bold and go in the street, girls were not allowed to go outside If girls went out there was concern for their morality, if she spent a night somewhere, and who she talked with before marriage. No one would marry her if she was considered immoral. I was the only son from a very poor family and responsible for both parents.*

I asked about the unique duties of a man. Krishna replied: *He has to be disciplined. Mother has a great role, she showed devotion to God, every morning saying mantra's, prayers, going to ceremonials at temples You were taught love, affection, mercy, health, cooperation, thanks. If you are a good man you must show this. This is a gift from the Lord, from spiritual belief.* Then he remarked*, men don't know how to explore these virtues.*

As a caption for one of his Photovoice photographs of him in his garden and describing his identity as a gardener he wrote: *My garden, my pride, my life. That dwelleth upon the Everest Land, once thought that mankind would rejoice over it and make merry, would send gifts to one another, but some [immoral] virtues failed to understand that flowers [pertain] to spiritual virtue and divine qualities. They erased the truthfulness, love kindness purity and all heavenly attributes vanished. This way I lost my lovely garden. Still I am waiting for opportunity to restart. Glorify of GOD looking from heaven.*

Working in horticulture (and his love for it), traditionally placed Krishna in the lowest Hindu caste. This was contrary to his birth into the Brahman class and seems to indicate Krishna putting the caste system behind him. He describes his loss of that garden in Nepal as a repudiation of spiritual values by forces beyond his control (political forces who threatened him). He lost a source of his pride as a man.

***3. Krishna - Practices of a new equality: navigating a masculine/feminine balance***

He describes his masculine qualities looking at his *PhotoSophia* portrait in these words: *Perfect man, broad forehead. He desires himself qualities and virtues a man should have. He believes on God, and regards his wife, worshiping God.* Asking about his strongest feminine qualities Krishna responds: *I would like to maintain virtues of love and affection,* and quoted a Shelley poem: Ode to the West Wind*: "Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud! I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" O God, that is one of my feminine qualities.*

For reference the entire stanza of Shelley's poem is below:

"As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud."

Ode to the West Wind, Stanza IV

(Shelley & King, 1992)

For Krishna to recite this line from Shelley in the context of asking him about his feminine qualities is telling. Could he be declaring his lightness and vulnerability to be hurt, to bleed in the process of internalizing gender equality? To bleed or menstruate is also an inherent characteristic of the female body tied to fertility and reproduction. I write this because in the group meeting, when everyone was asked to cite the "conditions of inequality" that prevent men's potential Krishna spoke about the Nepali tradition for girls to be removed from the family, public and educational sphere, segregated in dark rooms for days as soon as they begin to menstruate, that menstruation is seen as unclean, a practice degrading to women.

I asked are women superior to men and Krishna replied: *The nature of women is soft, love making, family concerns. Men join the life, step towards the life, under this practice they lose their virtues, become materialistic, have conflicts, struggles, and act with violence.*

The idea that women are soft and men are hard, arises in several interviews of the study. However, in contrast women are extolled as having capacity for greater pain (childbirth) and endurance and being ahead (either by nature or nurture) in the acquisition of qualities needed to build cultures of peace. The question of why most of the world's violence is created by men was only tangentially addressed during the study.

***4. Krishna - Masculine identity transformation on the path to cultures of peace***

Krishna described his masculinity in the metaphor of a cloak, while looking at his *PhotoSophia* portrait: *Plain is good, don't make it so much gorgeous, white cotton, soft, no decoration, with a blue collar, it would smell like cotton, don't like perfumes but it could smell like Camphor,*[35] *light, mild, fresh, not so hard, not irritating. That matches with your body. How would you wear it? Buttons up with a collar. Wear it outside, but wearing it inside it will last longer. My masculinity will not be apparent. It must match your personality*.

Krishna like many of the other men in the study describes his masculine cloak as not fancy, light, fresh, primarily internal, rather than external, even invisible. Perhaps this is a strategy of transformation, to reduce the footprint of strong and dominant masculinities, allowing spaces for men to change and for women to ascend without hinderance. Invisibility was a quality given to the cloak by several men, I wonder what this means?

In his *PhotoSophia* inscriptions and captions Krishna focuses on the important role of his mother and all mothers, contributing to the balance of feminine and masculine qualities in men. He writes a poem in the upper left corner. *The soul is caged by brutal hands; immortality has been its popular brands. How ignorant had been my soul, wasting life on false pursuits? How long the clouds of materialistic approach could cover our heavenly soul? Oh, restless world, could you be a little soft, serene and sober for one world, one people, one religion, one God! [signed] Krishna.* He continues to laud and praise his mother and her role in his life. *My devotional prayer conjoins to my mother's worship day and night, the transformation of which is still being done by the junior child who learnt once the language of prayer by my Mom at her performance time*. Ending with a prayer for her: *O Glory of God! Keep the immortal soul of my parents at your service. Because, to my mother whose advising style impowered me to build the confidence to find new things of human concerns and lessoned me that the only subjects in which I would have success where those subjects I was intended to complete with enormous courage and confidence. Thanks for all my success Ma. Mom! I know you love me dearly and are profoundly proud of me, believing in me and encouraging me in every second of my life. I am always with you talking beside you, holding your hand and protecting the memories of you,*

[35] Nepal Camphor Tree leaves have a fresh smell, and the wood is used for making sacred objects, highly valued, repels insects like Cedar.

*acknowledging your suggestion that is for me, only for me. You are great. Thanks, my dear Mom. [signed] Krishna.*

Another caption also relates to his relationship with his mother: *My real grown up place is a village, a place of a continual struggle against a condition of surrender. Struggle first to the growing up human beings who are poor are seen as inferior, where children are deprived from education due to poverty. I am under the shade of my noble mother whose care and loves made me a man of well-being … my mom was a devotional woman whose spirituality through the light of worship transferred to mankind and is still being observed and acknowledged her surroundings with great respect and love. She is dead but known by everyone especially children who used to attend the worship.*

The finding of the importance of relationship with women in the pursuit of a new masculinity also emerged. Here, Krishna extols the role of his mother in creating his life and being the example for how he should be a man. Others expressed their awe at the ability of women to endure the pain of childbirth and produce a new life. This gives emphasis again to the concept of working *shoulder to shoulder*, women and men, in the pursuit of equality. And, it may also be important to note that this work is actually the work of community building, the creation of cultures of peace that exemplify the unity, oneness and equality of all humanity regardless of race, gender, educational, or economic status.

Krishna attended and helped with the installation of the exhibit and participated in the reception when the men were asked to stand and answer questions. On the last day of the exhibit he called and asked me to meet him at the gallery, that he had a closing ceremony. When I arrived, he presented me with the gift of a black Nepali cap and a red and white Buddhist Nepali stole. He also gave me gifts for my wife, a Nepal ball cap, for her to wear in the garden, and small purse holding a ninety-five-bead rosary, used by Bahá'ís in daily prayer. He expressed how happy and honored he was to participate in this study. I was truly honored that Krishna was part of the study and that he presented me with these meaningful gifts.

In a written statement Krishna sent to me, he said: *A father is as much a verb as a mother, no sentence gives full meaning without a verb*. He also pointed to the role of masculinity in causing and potentially creating economic solutions *to remove the gap between poor and rich due to economic distribution that creates social discrepancies and starts conflicts*. This is an

important aspect of gender inequality that is seldom discussed; the economic gender imbalance and control of capital by men.

## Narrative seven – Jean-Michel

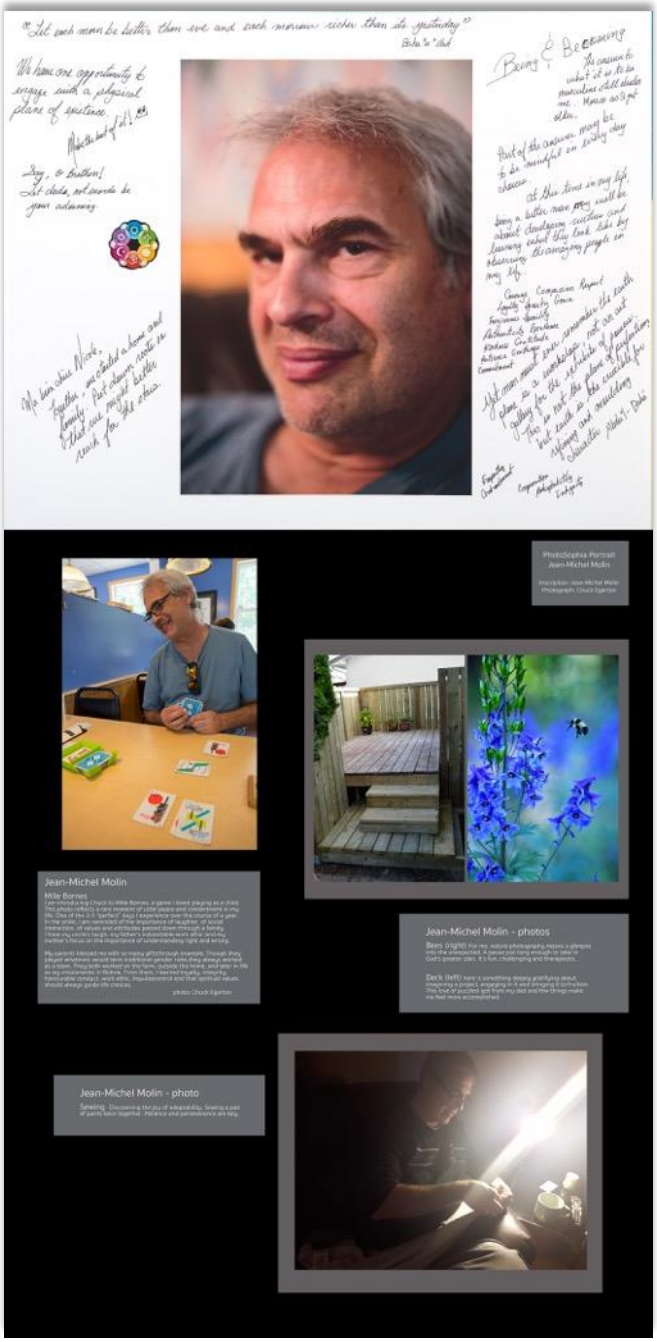



*Figure 16. Photographs from the Being and Becoming exhibit. © 2019 Chuck Egerton & Jean-Michel Molin.*

**Jean-Michel Molin**

**Interview, 11 August 2018**

It was a hot August day when I met with Jean-Michel (figure 16) at his family's cabin. Albert Beach, on Lake Winnipeg, is about an hour's drive north of Winnipeg, paralleling the Red River, through flat farmland and prairie fields. I arrived at the appointed time and the family member who answered the door explained they'd had a late (and difficult) night and were still in bed. I offered to come back in an hour and decided to return to a farmer's market I had passed nearby. When I returned, they were up, and I shared a gift of homemade banana bread from the market. I again offered to postpone but he kindly expressed the wish to continue.

Jean-Michel had reached out to me to join the research. I had met Jean-Michel on several occasions during Bahá'í community events. He kindly offered me coffee as the family arose. They went out for breakfast avoid disturbing our interview in the small cabin. As I installed his lapel

mic, we talked about his electrical work in the cabin, especially how to wire a three-way switch, something I had been struggling with at home.

After the interview Jean-Michel took me on a walking tour of the Albert Beach area. We visited a shop where I bought a Chakra stone bracelet for my wife and had a lunch of crepes at a local restaurant. We also played the French card game Mille Bornes there, something I had not played since childhood. This is where I took the environmental portrait of Jean-Michel. We walked out to the beach where his wife and some family members were sitting in the shade and watched the cloudless blue sky meet the horizon line of the lake. It was calm, and tiny waves rippled onto the sand in the $100^0$ F ($38^0$ C) air.

***1. Jean-Michel - Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

Asked to tell the story of his name and background Jean-Michel answered: *My name is Jean-Michel Molin, I'm fifty-seven years old and I've been Bahá'í for seventeen years. My dad grew up on a farm. I was born and raised in St. Boniface (a suburb of Winnipeg). When I was about 6, we moved to the town of Île-des-Chênes, 20 minutes south of the city and then to a nearby farm where I worked with my parents while going to school. I'm now very close to where my parents live because they still live there. My parents were lay missionaries in Bolivia until recently. They spent seventeen odd years out of the country. My parents are both Roman Catholics. My dad and whole family came to Canada when he was sixteen in 1947 right after World War II from the north of France, Fruge and Lille area. You can imagine Europe at the time, how much of a mess it was. It was a new beginning and new start. My grandfather, dad's father never became Canadian, never learned English, he lived to his death in his own world. My dad was one of the three oldest children so he truly experienced being an immigrant, the children who were born in Canada never knew the difference. I'm first generation Canadian. When I was born, a lot of the adapting [to Canada] had already happened. In certain things, it was obvious [that he was an immigrant] … he had no clue what hockey was.*

When I asked Jean-Michel when it was that he became aware he was a boy, he laughed and said: *Okay. You'll get pauses from me, I think, like most men, before I say anything.* I asked him to tell me more about this because that has not been my experience. He continued*: In this [my] environment of mostly women, my perception is the women immediately talk around it, and around It, and keep doing that, and coming to a conclusion which can change at any moment.*

*I'm not like that. If a man has something to figure out, whether it's to puzzle out how to add a lamp on the ceiling or whether it's of a personal nature, you just sort of go into a cave, and do a lot of processing in your head until you have a solution. I've learned over the years, (this is where I'm at right now), that if a man that you know very well, and that you have an ongoing relationship with (to the point you know what's going on in their day-to-day lives) it's okay at some point to say, hey it seems like this is going on, is there anything that I can do to help, can I be of assistance in some way. But you wouldn't do that unless you had that very solid, very ongoing kind of relationship. As a man, asking for help is difficult. But if you do ask a man for help then he will gladly give it without hesitation, because he already knows it wasn't easy to ask. I've certainly always been like that: happier to offer help and be of help then to ask somebody to help me.* Jean-Michel seems to have navigated his way around the fear and vulnerability of appearing helpless or being rejected by consciously making the decision to ask for and offer help to other men.

Back to the question: *The physical differences, I remember knowing about them in my head but actually seeing them for the first time. Growing up a little later, girls worked in the house and boys worked outside on the farm. I didn't take care of laundry. Driving the grain truck, driving the tractor. It was more likely that my mother and the girls would tend the vegetable garden. I honestly didn't know what my sisters did most of the time. It had to be that I learned how to be a boy by osmosis. It was never explained to me like 'your job in the world is… as a man you should be ….' That kind of language came much, much later in the context of how to treat women, that was around the time I was getting married. It was not about roles but how to treat a woman, like patience and kindness and willingness to compromise, those kinds of things. But even thinking hard about it I'm not getting a sense that I was ever told this is what men do.*

The implicit education about manhood boys receive is clearly an example of something missing that men crave. This came up in several interviews and in the group meeting. A finding is the need to create social support mechanisms for boys and men and their particular needs.

In describing his spiritual qualities while looking at his portrait Jean-Michel said: *How can you see spirituality? I think you really see spirituality in action, not sure you can see it just looking at somebody. It does look like I'm deliberately looking, actively looking, as opposed to when your eyes are just open, but you are not looking at something. There is a certain*

*acceptance. Willingness to engage in what's going on in the moment.* Other men balked at this question also, but just as Jean-Michel, proceeded to observe beneath the surface. My hope is that these questions lingered and resonated within them for some time. Here "*actively looking*" and "*willingness to engage*" are significant and are expressed without being tagged as masculine or feminine.

***2. Jean-Michel - Stories and experiences with masculine social identity***

Jean-Michel answered the question, what are your masculine qualities this way*: I'm physically strong. I'm very good at seeing a challenge as a puzzle and breaking it into pieces. I'm nervous even though I've done many of the things before. Every time you do it's a completely different puzzle. I know that I have the ability to break it down to smaller tasks that I can manage and figure out, and to be honest about if I get stuck.*

*Something I've always thought was masculine, maybe I'm wrong, but for me being a man as opposed to a woman, I definitely tend to try to figure it out in my head before I share. So, if I have a challenge, a problem, I try to sort it out* […] *be it spiritual, emotional, physical it's all the same. I feel like I owe the situation, not to just blurt out this or that, I feel like I have a responsibility to do what I can on my own first before I put it on somebody else. I have, and I would call this a masculine trait as well, I get very frustrated if 'we're going to do this, do this, do this' and I fight it but it's so ingrained in me that I constantly forget, I assume that that's written in stone, I don't know that it can change again in five minutes. Because I forget that it was decided upon in a, to me, willy-nilly is the wrong word, without any real thought, thinking it all the way through. So I should know that that can change as quickly as it was formed, but I constantly forget. Impatient, I used to get very impatient, the emotion, the outside expression of it was anger. What comes out, what people can see, is different things.*

Jean-Michel is revealing about how he thinks and choses to act within his masculine identity. What men do, and the way that they choose to do it is telling, especially in his expression of pausing to contemplate before action. It is also significant that he notes what triggers his impatience, frustration and anger at decisions in family or at work changing suddenly when "*I assume* [it's] *written in stone."* The differences in the way men and women frame and go about doing things can be a source of conflict without good communication.

When I asked him about what is difficult and what is good about being a man he replied: *Conflict resolution between men is very straight forward. When two young men have a disagreement, they might yell about it, they might wrestle about it, but it's usually very fast and it's done, it's really done. I don't at this point in my life believe it's necessary to be physical, but it does go there. Something from my own experience, when I was in grade eleven.* He told a story about being confronted by another boy, that he physically subdued him without harm, and gave him the choice to stop or be hurt. He concluded: *my life in that place changed that day, people got out of my way, people were nice to me, I had a defender at every turn. It was weird. I don't think it's that I defended myself, I think it was how I did it. I could have done this kid harm clearly. Part of it may have been that [people now thought] if push comes to shove this kid will defend himself. But I think a lot more of it was a level of respect. Things were much easier after it.* This honest account of the conflict of youth reveals how boys/men use force/violence to control each other and build a hierarchy of power – no matter how small. It is amazing that Jean-Michel navigated a fairly nonviolent way through this situation.

Jean-Michel further explained why he was bullied as a youth. *My dad was of European decent, I stood out like a sore thumb. Before puberty, I was in the church choir (a soprano) and was teased. I did not play sports and was isolated. By grade eleven I had a lot of experience as the kid who was bullied. I'm not the only kid that has ever been bullied, and what happened then is of no importance to me now. These were turning points in my life. These were moments where I asserted myself physically, but I didn't destroy someone, I didn't crush them, I just needed for something to stop.*

***3. Jean-Michel - Practices of a new equality: navigating a masculine/feminine balance***

With the next question Jean-Michel begins: *are you asking me if I think* [gender] *is nature or nurture, for someone to see themselves as having feminine or masculine traits? I had a grade ten religion teacher who made a statement one day that the older he gets the less he is sure of what he knows. Coming from him, who was a very imposing, very intelligent and absolutely brilliant man* […] *it was kind of like, whoa if he doesn't know where he is going, how will I ever know? Because I didn't necessarily understand the humility in the statement, at that age I was trying to figure out where I belonged. I'm not super clear on what masculinity and femininity is. I would be willing to say that a huge, huge, piece is learned. Like the conversation*

*about men speaking first or not. I had a woman at a spiritual retreat come up to me, hold my arms and say, 'you're the only man I know who thinks before he speaks.' But I would say that it is socialized. I can't tell you that its one hundred percent, I don't know. But as far as making it or breaking it, one way or the other, I would say that is the overwhelming factor.*

Jean-Michel echoes the same refrain as almost all the other men in this study when he says: *I'm not super clear on what masculinity and femininity is.* It seems to be an intellectual ambiguity perhaps purposefully resisting clear definitions because they know there are qualities that overlap and blur. It is evident that the embodiment of masculine qualities, perhaps unconsciously expressed, is present in their stories and actions. The story Jean-Michel's tells of the honest exchange he had with a woman, informs us about what often divides the sexes in the process of working and talking together. This is also a recurring finding, that transformation to equality is found in the liminal space between men and women in relationship, working together.

Jean Michel continues: *Change for men is not an easy road, you are very set in your ways very early, I find. Growing up as a young adult I was always the listener, and I enjoyed that role immensely. As I've gotten older, especially in the last five years, I have really decided, consciously decided, and I share that when I share my thoughts with people in situations, I've decided that if I feel something about someone, I'm going to tell them. Because, maybe otherwise no one ever will. I haven't had a negative response yet. Yeah, I do feel it is a man perspective, I don't feel like I'm tapping into my feminine side, I sometimes joke about that. I do feel that I'm tapping into where I am at this point in my life because* […] *I have not taken those opportunities sometimes and regretted it. I have enough regrets; I don't want more.* These comments build on Jean-Michel's experiences which have led him to a space where he is willing to be vulnerable and humble enough to speak his feelings to others including men. He brings us what Rod also expressed; he doesn't want regrets.

***4. Jean-Michel - Masculine identity transformation on the path to cultures of peace***

When asked about his strongest feminine qualities he replied*: Empathy, I think I have a very real ability to quiet myself and listen to someone share where they are at and where their feelings are. And keep myself quiet long enough so they can express that, and sort of navigate, because it's a navigation. So, I think I have a real ability to listen, and that ability is interfered with what to me is a masculine trait, sometimes a resentment or a […] Put another way, I listen*

*best to people that I don't know as well, people I don't have negative baggage with, and I think that's probably true of everybody. It's sometimes hardest to really listen to my spouse. Empathy and willingness to actively listen are qualities repeated by several of the men.* These comments often where couched in the following sentiment: *I don't see a continuum that goes feminine at one end and masculine at the other. We were talking about toxic masculinity. I assume that's the men who are always angry and getting into physical trouble … I know people like that, yeah, I definitely know people like that.* The ambiguity of the feminine/masculine binary is echoed throughout the study and is another important finding in this group of men. They also clearly felt an aversion to expressions of toxic masculinity.

In describing his new masculinity in the metaphor of a cloak he said: *It would be a fabric that doesn't exist, it would be either invisible or something that doesn't exist at the time. It would be a dark color, I'll say black, but it could be dark blue. What would it smell like? I don't think it would have a smell. Like an invisibility cloak, not to make me disappear, but to give me access to whatever I need to see at that time …giving insight maybe is better, something that allows insight, real insight. When asked how he would wear it he replied: Pretty much like a hoody but it would go down to my feet, so like a robe, like kind of a maid's robe (laughs), but it's light, like it doesn't sit on me, it hovers.* Jean-Michel's metaphoric description is rich with images and supernatural abilities. It confirms the use of this question in the study because most of the men's answers are inexplicable, available for anyone to interpret as they wish, the very essence of artistic expression. It makes me consider engaging a sketch artist who could try to visualize these cloaks on paper working with each participant.

Jean-Michel inscribed his single *PhotoSophia* portrait with beautiful cursive handwriting the lines of which are sometimes straight but also tilt right and left. He quotes: "*Let each morn be better than it's eve, and each morrow richer than it's yesterday*" Bahá'u'lláh. Then writes: *We have one opportunity to engage with a physical plane of existence. Make the best of it.* Another quotation from Bahá'u'lláh: *Say, O Brethren! Let deeds, not words be your adorning*. Below this he affixed a round colorful sticker that includes the symbols of six major religions. Below this he writes beginning in French: *Ma bien chère Nicole* [Jean-Michel's wife] *Together, we started a home and family. Put down roots so that we might better reach for the stars.*

On the right side, Jean-Michel writes in large letters *Being & Becoming*, then in smaller letters*: The answer to what it is to be masculine still eludes me. More so as I get older.* Below

this he writes: *Part of the answer may be to be mindful in everyday choices*. At the next level below: *At this time in my life, being a better man may well be about developing virtues and learning what they look like by observing the amazing people in my life*. In smaller letters he writes a list of qualities: *Courage Compassion Respect Loyalty Honesty Grace Forgiveness Humility Authenticity Excellence Kindness Gratitude Patience Gentleness, Empathy, Contentment Cooperation Adaptability Integrity.* Between the words in the list he quotes in large letters: *Yet man must ever remember the earth plane is a workshop, not an art gallery for the exhibits of powers. This is not the plane of perfection, but earth is the crucible for refining and molding character. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá.*

There is so to unpack in this inscription! Jean-Michel frames his writing in terms of being and becoming, including a sweet message to his wife, and repeats his feelings of masculine/feminine ambiguity. The list of qualities he has acquired or is in the process of acquiring, is meaningful, when framed as a workshop in progress.

In addition to a portrait I took of Jean-Michel as we played Mille Bornes in an Albert Beach restaurant are his Photovoice photographs. We were unable to include a portrait of his parents because of ethics and consent issues.

His Photovoice photos include a close up of bees, a deck building project which he captioned: *There is something deeply gratifying about imagining a project, engaging in it and bringing it to fruition. This love of puzzles I got from my dad and few things make me feel more accomplished*. The last photo was of him sewing which he captioned: *discovering the joy of adaptability. Sewing a pair of pants back together. Patience and perseverance are key.*

In the group meeting Jean-Michel was vocal and these are a selection of his comments in the discussion*: The more we have this conversation, the more I want to get rid of the whole concept of masculinity and femininity. Possibly more than that, I don't know what I would replace them with. Because what I see of femininity and feminism, of women trying to take their rightful place, they are doing it the same way that men have held onto their place, so it's no good. So, I'm thinking what's the alternative? The alternative is* [he laughs] *I think it might be unknowable right now at least by me. I look at those around me,* and pointing to Jordan he made comments about how he perceives his marriage *as a beautiful example for him every day.*

The comment: *getting rid of the whole concept of masculinity and femininity,* piles on other comments expressing the same sentiment, as well as his observation that women seeking/

holding onto equality *the same way men have* [is] *no good.* Ultimately, he comes to a place of not knowing the answers and living in the question.

He went on: *What am I trying to say? I'm better now than I was, I was desperate to be there for my wife and my babies and [had] no idea how to do it, I wish somebody had taught me, I'll put it that way, because I know how to do it now with other people's babies* […] *I didn't feel masculine or feminine doing it, I felt human.* This idea of wishing he'd been taught and supported by other men when a new husband and father was significant to me – because when I thought about it, I was alone too. This discussion inspired the idea within the group to be more supportive and perhaps meet more often to talk about these issues together. Another finding worth noting.

## Narrative eight – Miles

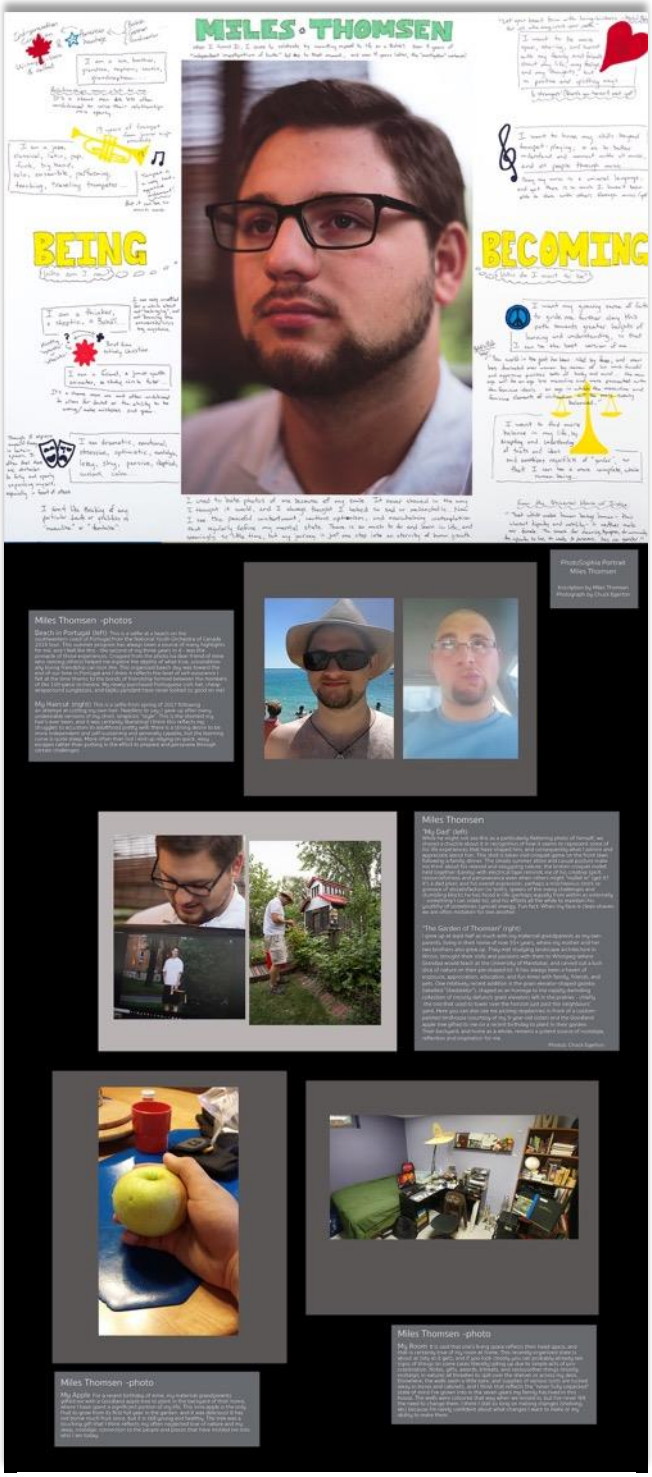



*Figure 17. Photographs and captions from the Being and Becoming exhibit. © Chuck Egerton & Miles Thomsen.*

**Miles Thomsen**

**Interview, 13 August 2018**

Miles (figure 17) chose a small rustic screened gazebo for our interview. It is a meaningful space for him, in the backyard of his grandparent's lovely garden designated a *NatureScape* an attempt to create a habitat growing every known species of flora and fauna native to Manitoba. It is beautiful.

The family kindly welcomed me into their home. I met his grandparents, originally from the United States and Miles younger sister. With coffee provided we began setting up equipment in the small space. Miles was very helpful and generous with his time. He wore a bright white polo shirt with the Canadian/American International Music Camp log displaying both county's flags. He's an accomplished trumpet player and we had worked together on a dramatic musical and reading project created by fellow a PACS student. He travels quite a bit performing with cruise ship bands. After the interview the family provided a wonderful lunch and great conversation.

***1. Miles - Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

Miles richly described himself (as though a stranger) while looking at his *PhotoSophia* portrait; *He's got short-ish brown hair with a part on the side, needs a haircut a trim maybe. Thick semi-rectangular black rimmed glasses. A few faint acne scars on his forehead, a fairly prominent lower lip, notable facial hair, a shadow on the neck. Chin strap, and a roughly groomed goatee. Comfortable wearing a white polo, the nose is a little more prominent, fairly smooth rounded edges. The ears look fairly moderate, Is that a tiny little mole on the cheek? Maybe one on the neck. Someone who values their appearance but doesn't want to appear to value their appearance too much.*

Telling the story of his name and background Miles said: My name is *Miles Christopher Thomsen, I'm twenty-five and have been Bahá'í just over four years. Born and raised in Winnipeg, my roots run very deep here. My parents born in the states, moved up before they were five years old, went to High School together, dated and married. We are at mom's parent's house, my Grandmother is from Nebraska, my Grandfather is from Chicago. They met in college, lived in Germany, North Dakota, and moved up to Canada during the Vietnam war to teach at University here. Mom was born in Pennsylvania. Two or more generations back on Mom's side is Scandinavian, Grandpa's heritage is between England and Germany.*

I asked when he first became aware, he was a boy: *I always get stressed about my early years, sometimes I wonder if I'm remembering a video rather than what happened. Aside from being allowed to wear shorts and no top at the beach, I can't think of anything that would've been especially masculinizing. School? I remember being a little embarrassed by my Thomas the Tank Engine*[36] *backpack. In Kindergarten and grade one the cool kids were getting ear piercings and using neutral [colored] back backs. Showing affection for a beloved children's series* […] *I didn't feel fully comfortable with that anymore. When age seven or younger (I still have a shred of guilt about this) for Christmas I got a really cool electronic Lego deluxe train set. But later unwrapped a simple tin Thomas the Tank Engine lunch box and cried tears of joy. That was what set me off, not the train set. I don't think I ever brought that to school. As much as I loved it, I felt I shouldn't show that I'm still into this. Feeling I shouldn't [because of the] social code of being a boy among other boys.*

[36] Thomas the Tank Engine is a popular animated children's television series

I identify with Miles, remembering similar feelings of mourning my childhood toys: zoning out after school playing with wooden blocks, Matchbox cars, and green plastic army men. I asked how is this different for boys than girls and Miles responded: *Whatever the source may be, the shows we watch or the media we absorb, they begin to portray boys as taking on those more mature masculine roles at earlier ages. Why did girls get to enjoy their childhood back packs all the way to high school, but we couldn't? It's sort of a hurry up and grow up mentality. A conflicting and contradictory message, from parents, media or school, socially perceived perceptions. Hurry up and plan your life out. Where are you going to college? What will be your career? We have the American dream here in Canada too! You do a career quiz at school and then you're pressured (school and parental) to go into a particular field. This gave me a lot of anxiety in high school.* Miles describes a disparity in the way boys and girls are acculturated and expected to mature. Boys must give up emotional attachments and find their profession in life.

When asked to describe (from his portrait) his spiritual qualities Miles said: [long sigh] *From a photographic standpoint, I kind of like that one eye is less out of focus. Looks like someone contemplating. Nor a morose or sad or unhappy appearance. Looking ahead thinking about the future. It doesn't look like someone reflecting on a previous event, more contemplating what is to come. Hint of a smile, looks content, relatively peaceful, maybe there is some not uncomfortable but serious things contemplated, its calm, its calm. Maybe a little wistful. The eye focus (one in and one out of focus) is a reality of where I'm at, trying to see through more than one lens.* The use of these questions and *PhotoSophia* photographs summoned profound and vulnerable answers, deeper than I had expected.

When asked to list his strongest masculine qualities (while looking at his portrait) Miles said: *Physical sense, I am a pretty hairy guy. I have taken a small amount of pride to be able grow facial hair. I'm a fairly large person structurally, I take up space, that's a part of my masculinity to take up space. [Going deeper] I'm less and less sure what to describe as a masculine quality these days. Maybe the first thing that comes to mind is leadership, I never saw myself as a leader or socially dominant person, but through my socialization in music, I've been put or put myself in leadership roles. I think it's a trait that I've developed a lot more that I thought I could. When it's appropriate, I feel compelled to step up or step in to help. I'm not sure why I think of that [leadership] as a masculine trait. I've always enjoyed being, for lack of a better term, a 'rock' for other people. I've always enjoyed being emotionally strong in that*

*regard, being someone that people can come to. Maybe trustworthiness, but I don't want to say that's a masculine trait either. Being a source of emotional support for other people, to feel safe around, not only physically, strength.* We've discussed the repeated sentiment of masculine/feminine ambiguity, but Miles goes into a new area: leadership as a masculine quality expected of men. Were the expectations higher for boys than girls, I asked? *I almost feel it was the other way around, [girls were pressured] to have a career plan too. Maybe to make up for the past.*

***2. Miles - Stories and experiences with masculine social identity***

As a prairie wind blew through the gazebo, Miles said: *The message [conveyed is]: You are a boy you can do whatever you want, you don't have to have it right the first time. When you put away your toys what did that do with your feelings? Okay no more time for that, for nostalgia and joy, no more place or reason to be involved in triviality's and frolicking about. You have to be a provider.*

I asked if there were any difficulties being a boy that girls didn't face? He answered: *I can't speak to what women went through. There is that implicit kind of peer pressure to be tougher, faster smarter, be better (pretty vague term) by being those physical visible things. Not in intellectual ways. Nothing as clear cut as media portrays in high school -- Geeks and jocks more flexible.* The wind chimes ding as he thinks, and a beam of sunlight crosses his face. *There were times when I remember things that are uncomfortable in my peer group found expressing in sexuality. In terms of (hyper-sexualization in the media) sexualizing women and femininity in general. Later in elementary school this happened. You might act out in strange inappropriate ways. I wouldn't usually associate myself with troublemakers, I was a good student [but sometimes would] hang out with people who were more risqué. There were alarming times when we would have sexualized something in a certain way and had a laugh, a perverted joke. That's not how I want to be now.*

*I think, that lingering expectation explicit or not, still felt, that I'm twenty-five don't have a stable job, place of my own, or a significant other. Twenty-five may be early for that. Are you going to be a successful man or live in your parent's basement? And that is exactly what I'm doing. What are you doing with your life? I've had envious jobs on cruise ships. So where I am*

*right now is not reflective of those expectations. But I am not necessarily upset with that, I sustain a lot of judgement about that, if I hadn't had the travel and freelance experience lately.*

Miles mentioned (video) gaming, that there is a *slippery slope of how much time you take with it and it takes from you. My peer group had a hard time socializing. It's not an addiction but I do spend a good amount of time with it, large collection of games and movies (I've since slowed down on that spending). For some friends that is how they spend free time … For other friends, it has become a very central part of their lives, most of their time.* This is a generational issue for men around Miles age and younger who grew up in the digital gaming age. Violence, lack of empathy and hyper-sexualization of women are concerns in game design. Some games glorify immorality, war, killing and promote toxic masculine qualities.

When I asked the question what's good about being a man Miles replied: *A lot of what's good about being a man, its what's always been good. All of the things that have been acceptable have not changed, not bad for men, but there are ways we could do better. Being able to be taken more seriously by peers, colleagues', educators. Feeling safer walking the streets at night. (He tells a story about giving a ride home to female who was not comfortable walking alone on the streets at night) This person has rational reasonable fear of that person staggering down the street in front of us. It was a reality check and helped me to realize. Have you used the term male privilege? I separate the white privilege from it, that is a huge, huge factor. Like the controversial "Manspreading," unconscious way to spread your legs to assert dominance over the space.*

I asked Miles, as a man who believes in the equality of the sexes as a sacred principle what's different about the way you live your life? *I hope a lot!* Then he paused, collecting his thoughts and discussed the hyper-sexualization of women by men and the cognitive dissonance it creates in the process of being a Bahá'í who believes in equality. He said: *It can't be good for anybody especially [equal] relationships. I've had some positive conversations with close friends and have come away thinking, this is not normal, not the way things should be, and you are not alone in dealing with it.* I consider it courageous for Miles to open up this critical and sensitive issue of sexualizing women, so important because it is often the *elephant in the room*, as he said.

***3. Miles - Practices of a new equality: navigating a masculine/feminine balance***

In a discussion of the "two wings quotation #7[37] Miles asked: *Is it women who need to come up to same strength as men? As much as we men have historically put ourselves on this pedestal, a moment to ponder, there are a lot of signs of [male] weakness through that. That need to show off, there's like an insecurity there, we have always needed to demonstrate we are the stronger smarter more capable, writing women out of the history books or asserting that dominance, and institutionalizing that — only men need to be educated only men get to be the hard workers. Well, that speaks to that insecurity. What if it were [that men] weren't [stronger], would it be that bad? Maybe someone is afraid of that. A lot of ingrained ideas, that might have been functional in the past but not today. Woman have demonstrated that they are equal.*

These comments on men's insecurity and the need to compensate for it align with many expressed by the men. Also Miles conclusion about being afraid of equality honestly frames this sense of insecurity.

Discussing Quotation #9 "*The world in the past has been ruled by force"* Miles said: *I think certainly, just the fact that these topics are more prevalent and less taboo refers to the mental alertness etc. in the quote. I've always been characterized as being more in touch with my feminine side, whatever the heck that means. I agree with that more than ever, whether it is was nature or nurture. I have found myself in that situation where I had more female friends and the there was a level of trust with them. The culture of the arts and music community may be a reason.* This is a revealing comment from Miles about positively identifying with women, being characterized as having feminine qualities that seem to evoke trust in women.

I asked about his view on the social science theories that say that sex differs from gender. Is it nature or nurture? Miles replied: *In the last year or so, I've connected to a lot more diverse people, chat room or forums on a particular show. When it comes to Queer issues, it's gotten me to ask a lot more questions and see things through other lenses. I think there is a lot of good progress in that. I'm reading up on and investigating how the [Bahá'í'] Faith views sexuality. I*

[37] (#7) "The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment for humanity will not be realized; humanity cannot wing its way to heights of real attainment. When the two wings . . . become equivalent in strength, enjoying the same prerogatives, the flight of man will be exceedingly lofty and extraordinary." 'Abdu'l- Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 375

*think the social sciences are liberating a lot of people. I'm recognizing how in the Faith, that there is a lot of emphasis on sexual relations at the heart of the issues that detracts from the truth we are striving for. Recognizing that the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are the prescription for our age and that's where we want to be. Growing pains of revealing and uncovering how things are and how to get there. The primary goal is the unity of humankind. That must guide us, if things aren't lining up with the details, that may not be as important as getting through things together and learning together, [like] the workshop.* Here Miles expressed how he has found a way to navigate dealing with paradox, conflict and incongruity around issues of sexual identity: *If it's not in keeping with Bahá'í ideals, that's not important necessarily in getting there. Especially so early on when we are just learning about it. We have to take care of ourselves. What someone else is going through is their business and their experience and it's not up to us to impress upon them or pressure them into a certain way of being so long as we can work together for a grander purpose. That's the headspace I'm in now.* This discussion of how Miles navigated current issues of sexuality and identity is revealing and again comes back to the finding that having a standard, touchstone, or example of behavior is important to embrace for Bahá'ís.

Miles continues: *Thinking about what is masculine vs. feminine qualities is quite challenging. I am more of the emotional sort, if that's a feminine quality then absolutely. Empathy, with others, observing others, putting myself in other's shoes, not being terribly judgmental of other people. Not necessarily not wanting to dominate conversations, but not always the case when I'm in a comfortable situation. One on one I can tend to ramble. Maybe that's a feminine quality? Oh no! [I'm] listening, observing others, whether a part of the conversation or not, it varies. [Coming to accept the Bahá'í] Faith is an example; I beat around that bush for a long time. If I do focus on something, I will zoom in all the way. On the flip side I do feel I do my best to take in the bigger picture.* Here again, we see Miles questioning the definitions of masculine and feminine qualities and emphasizing the importance of having empathy and listening to others as part of his personhood.

**4. *Miles - Masculine identity transformation on the path to cultures of peace***

When asked to describe his masculinity in the metaphor of a cloak Miles replied: *This is a great question, I love this. Something soft, cotton-ish, I think it will be blue, while I hate that blue is so associated with the male gender, it always felt more feminine to me. Standard primary*

*blue, blue, a lighter blue. Maybe it's more wool, woven, soft, comfortable but with a bit more friction than other material. It would have to be thick and have a nap to it. With, bit of basic hemming at the bottom and cuffs, may have some wear and have some patching and stitching where it has torn. I think it would smell a little bit musty, earthy, not quite cut grass, a small whiff of campfire, a sense that it was a bit stale. A cross between a bathrobe and a long overcoat with a tall collar. My cloak of masculinity does not make any noise, it might billow in the wind a little bit.* Miles seemed to revel in the taste of creating a metaphoric cloak for his masculinity. He supplies us with rich detail and like some of the other men it is blue in color, thick in texture and smelling like nature. Since Miles is a musician, I asked him what it would sound like (Corey is also a musician, but I forgot to ask him), interestingly it is silent.

Miles inscription of his *PhotoSophia* portrait was extensive to cite some of the highlights: *I am a son, brother, grandson, nephew, cousin, grandnephew… Relationships mean a lot to me. It's a shame men are less often conditioned to value their relationships more openly …BEING … Who am I now? … I am a thinker, a skeptic, a Bahá'í … mostly "agnostic" or "atheistic"? … I was very unsettled for a while about not "belonging," and not "knowing the answers" to life's big mysteries … I am a Friend, a junior youth animator, a study circle tutor … It's a shame men are not often conditioned to allow for doubt or for the ability to be wrong/make mistakes and grow … Though I express myself freely in certain spaces, I often feel there are obstacles to fully and openly expressing myself, especially in front of others … I am dramatic, emotional, obsessive, optimistic, nostalgic, lazy, shy, pensive, skeptical, curious, calm … I don't like thinking of any particular traits or qualities as "masculine" or "feminine." … "Let your heart burn with loving-kindness for all who may cross your path." -'Abdu'l-Bahá … I want to be more open, sharing, and honest with my family and friends about my life, my feelings and my thoughts, but in positive and uplifting ways … & strangers! ("friends you haven't met yet") …I want to hone my skills beyond trumpet -playing, so as to better understand and connect with all music, and all people through music … Who do I want to be? …I want my growing sense of Faith to guide me further along this path towards greater heights of learning and understanding, so that I can be the best version of me…I want to find more balance in my life, by accepting and understanding all traits and ideas and emotions regardless of "gender," so that I can be a more complete, whole human being …* From the *Universal House of Justice: "That which makes human beings human – their inherent dignity and nobility – is neither male nor female. The*

*search for meaning, for purpose, for community; the capacity to love, to create, to persevere, has no gender."* His comment echoes the ambiguity of defining feminine and masculine qualities mentioned by so many in the study.

In addition to the portrait I took of Miles in his grandparent's garden by the gazebo and the portrait of him showing the a photo of his father on his phone, Miles had four Photovoice photographs, of "My Room," "Beach in Portugal," "My Haircut," and "My Apple."

In the group meeting Miles contributed to several lines of questions and discussion. One was on the difference between justice and equity. He provided a cartoon showing people of different heights trying to see over a tall fence. When they were each provided the same size box to stand on (justice) the taller people could see over the fence, but the shorter people could not. When they were each provided boxes to stand on that considered their diverse heights (equity) they could all see over the fence. A third option, called liberation or freedom removes the fence entirely (or makes it transparent) so there is no barrier, or all could see without the need of boxes. This discussion was insightful as both *justice* and *equity* are used in Bahá'í texts, and the men speculated that new definitions might be needed as they apply to gender equality.

Miles echoes Payam's statement about becoming aware of male privilege when walking at night, coming to consciousness in a situation with female friends. He said they saw a *Guy staggering down the street. My female friends' fear took over, terrifying, that fear is real and rational. It is awareness of reality. We don't have that perception, perspective of what reality is like for anyone but ourselves [as men], that is incredibly limiting to our potential.* This is similar to the story told by Payam about the woman in the alley and shows a heightened awareness of inequality and how women navigate the same spaces they do.

On motherhood: *Going back to the idea of motherhood, and the obstacles created by inequality in her lack of education. This robs the potential of her male children to be raised by a mother without the education that might come from an uplifted female role model in your life. It contributes to a lack of compassion and emotional intelligence. Spawns the negative cycle of toxic masculinity, how men learn to treat women and each other, a damaging cycle*.

Miles expresses his desire: *to embrace the feminine traits, that I may have been teased about in my youth. But I struggle to associate traits as masculine or feminine behavior, or that we should even feel that way about it. The need is for balancing of all those qualities because*

*they all contribute to humanity as a whole. If I want be a whole human, I need to embrace all of them for balance.*

Regarding family life and marriage as it relates to masculinity Miles said: *Perhaps as the only single person in this room, I am assuming lots of things maybe. In the* [Bahá'í] *Writings, the idea of building a global community starts at the level of the family unit, building a foundation one block at a time, then you can build on top of that from the core family unit. Between two people who can be a family unit … two individuals, a man and a woman …we are talking about constructing a new society here. It just comes back to that concept of marriage itself, and maybe that's where we can glean answers by looking to the individual family unit of what the [Bahá'í] Writings say a Bahá'í marriage should look like … the idea being two souls completely united and bettering each other….* The Bahá'í writings do offer some excellent guidance on marriage relationships, and although not all interactions between women and men are in that frame, they can offer a standard. This relates to the comments by many of the men who felt they need a guide for their new masculinity. Examples of fathers and couples that are trying to live to that standard can help. As my wife says, equality is like an equation, it is the interaction of two entities.

One final note, Miles expressed to me after the group meeting, that the discussion between the men here had inspired him to definitely pursue marriage, family life and to becoming a father. Fast forwarding to the present, Miles is now happily married.

**Narrative nine – Corey**

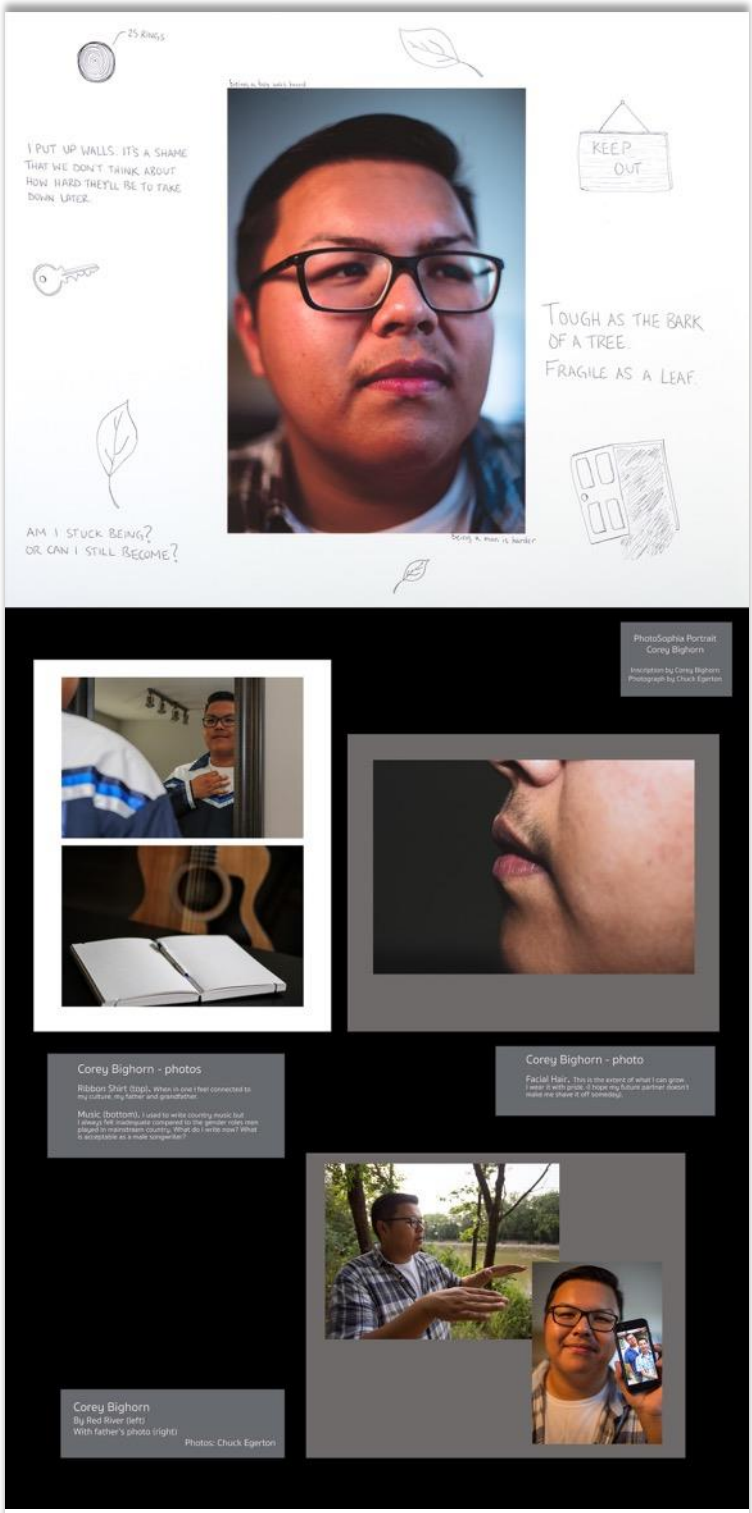



*Figure 18. Photographs and captions from the Being and Becoming exhibit. © 2019 Chuck Egerton & Corey Bighorn.*

**Corey Bighorn**

**Interview, 19 August 2018**

I found Corey's apartment building and parked. He met me at the door and helped me with my equipment. Corey had been out of the country and missed our group meeting an lunch. To make up for this I brought him a lovely lemon tart from a famous French bakery in Winnipeg. We set up next to the window by his kitchen where the light was good. Corey (Figure 18) attended to the details behind him as he could see the framing on my monitor.

This was the first time I had a real face-to-face discussion with Corey alone. I had known him from the first summer I arrived in Winnipeg and attended the Manitoba Summer School at Pinawa on the edge of the Canadian Shield. He performed (singing and playing guitar) many beautiful original songs during devotionals, and I could tell

he was well liked by everyone especially the youth. I remember it well, be it was on that occasion I met many in the Winnipeg community for the first, time and felt welcomed into Canadian Bahá'í community.

***1. Corey - Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

To tell the story of his name and background Corey said: *I am Indigenous from Bloodvein First Nation [210 kilometers north of Winnipeg where the Bloodvein river enters the eastern shore of Lake Winnipeg] Women lead, it was a matriarchal society until colonization. Then gender roles were reversed, and the scales were tipped to men. It used to be ruled shoulder to shoulder, now all the chiefs are men. The nation is in a meth and suicide crisis.*

*My name is Corey Bighorn, I'm twenty-five years old and have been a Bahá'í for six-seven years. I was born Corey Cook and raised by grandmother. I did not know my father, lost him to suicide in 2010. I left Bloodvein at fourteen for boarding school. At the time there was no road. Now it's a 3-hour drive* [from Winnipeg].

*At fifteen I met Jordan Bighorn [boarding school counsellor]. I left [Bloodvein] because I did not fit; it was a culture of alcohol and addiction. I felt I belonged with Jordan's family, and moved in at fifteen. I felt from age 15-23 I needed to change my name. As a child I prayed to be saved. I changed my name to Bighorn.* Corey names the disease *toxic masculinity* in clear terms and his desire to resist and rebel against it.

I asked what's difficult about being a man: *I think there are a lot of* difficulties [of being a man]*, after understanding the classification of being passive, by the way I don't look at that as being a truth, there is a spectrum [between passive and aggressive] but there was some truth to that. When I look at the word 'man' I look at the perspective that society holds. The difficulty that I think all men face is that they have to arise to what that perception is. It's a toxic-ness that breeds more toxic-ness among men, because of the feeling that they need to be that [perception] and reach that state of being that 'man,' that toxic masculine-ness, that hyper, macho, whatever you want to call it. It was the years of breaking down the essence of their being to eventually be that, putting away their emotions or hiding feelings and ambitions and aspirations and dreams for their life. The difficulty was being raised in that and fortunately I have realized this, and I rebelled against it. I'm glad I did but I see a lot of my peers, how they live today, they*

*unfortunately, the strength wasn't there to fight against that, to rise above it. The difficulty of being a man, is being a man, having to be a man.*

I asked, what's good about being a man? Corey responded: *The things that come to mind aren't so good. To be real, there is this idea in recent years of male privilege. I think the good things about being a man are those privileges that men have. It's nice sometimes to recognize just how much privilege you have, I think. Although it feels nice to have, I feel its ultimately born out of injustice, historically. When I think about what is good about being a man, when I look at the [Bahá'í] writings especially, you see that you have this special duty, that call is also a gift, to repair something that has been damaged by society. I think truly what is good about being a man today is that we have this guidance now from God and this station to arise to. Another good thing is I'll never have to have a child and give birth (smiling), so I'm really happy about that one. [I ask him to tell me more] It looks really painful and from what I hear its beyond what I can image. I look at women and their ability to do that — its mind blowing. My mom is pregnant with a girl*[38]*, will be the first in the family. I text her a lot about women and how they are amazing. I am envious of their capacities, but I also know I have roles and capacities of my own that I need to further develop and respond to.*

When asked to describe himself (as though a stranger) from his *PhotoSophia* portrait Corey said: *I see someone who is dark haired, very intense photo, no smile, there is something going on, don't know quite what, a sense of curiosity, but more observant than involved. He's wearing glasses, has a rounder face, eyes that kind of go down, very structured eyebrows, a nice nose not very round, straight, larger lips, a little facial hair, round chin and cheeks.*

When I asked Corey, what are the spiritual qualities you see in yourself, he responded: *I kind of mentioned an observation quality, but not necessarily wanting to know, just watching. No smile means something is going on. Some sort of trauma preventing me from wanting to be involved in the things I'm observing. As my grandmother said, "You don't have to survive anymore, you are alright." Not needing to protect myself anymore. I see a calmness a little bit of certitude, a little worn, the worn-ness has led to calm more than faith and certitude have. Worn by life and trauma, dealt with so much, what next could happen, I'm not going to be surprised.*

38 A healthy girl, Corey's sister, was born some months after this interview.

*Still kind of protecting myself, but knowing I need to push myself. I'm not going to be hurt; I know that now. Would you call that faith? That I know. When I pray, I pray to Bahá'u'lláh now.*

***2. Corey - Stories and experiences with masculine social identity***

I asked "when did you first become aware you were a boy and that it was different?" Corey replied: *It was the day in grade four that I rushed to find paper towels to clean a spill on my desk. With the boy's washroom closed I ran into the girl's washroom to get paper towels. I was in trouble. I was made fun of and teased by the other boys making it clear to me what the parameters were of maleness. I didn't understand the feelings at that time but I was being emasculated.*

*A huge piece of my childhood up to high school that gradually formed my sense of identity was gym class. That was a huge one, where I definitely noticed these powers and forces and how detrimental they were. I remember our teacher pointing at each one of us and categorizing us as either "passive" or "aggressive" and had us sit together in those categorizations. I remember he pointed at me and said I was "passive", but I didn't know what it meant at that time. I went to sit with my group, but it stuck with me, that I was being very clearly put with a group, it didn't feel very good. That feeling continued in gym class for years. I was very different, I was Indigenous, I went to schools where I was one of the only Indigenous students, and I'm also overweight. Always in these classes, I was always the only one. Dealing with the locker room, having to change in front of people, it was something I always avoided. Participating in gym class, doing the tests, the chin-ups, push-ups, hurdles, all those things I always tried my best to avoid, because I knew I was different, and the other boys knew I was different too. It was very apparent to me and in High School it only got worse, I actually failed gym class twice because I didn't want to go. That really impacted me, I didn't graduate as soon but was allowed to make up credits. It was always in those spaces where I felt the most uncomfortable. As I got older, I established who I am, knowing who I am and want to be, and acting to be who I want to be. I always knew that I didn't want to do what the hyper-masculine guys would do; I didn't want to be who they were. I was targeted a lot and made fun of. There were a lot of barriers I put in my own head too, there were things I wouldn't do because I was looking at myself through their eyes. There was a lot of hatred of myself and not accepting myself*

*because I knew I would look funny doing something I knew they could do better. Gym class taught me a lot about masculinity, the toxic-ness and what's wrong with society in that space.*

*My sexual identity is complicated with the Bahá'í Faith. I know my role within this faith, I love what the faith has contributed to my life, it has literally given me a life and a place within a community that I can contribute to, I owe all my life to the Faith.* [My identity] *is always changing, it's the spectrum and will always continue to change. I know there will be a day when I have children, I have always known I wanted to have children. I think about these things, sexuality, gender, gender roles, and what it all means for the day I am a father and a husband. It's still an ongoing process, it will go on for a long time.* This discussion is very personal and Corey's decision to bring these issues up in the interview made him very vulnerable. How Bahá'ís and Bahá'í communities express love and understanding without negative judgement, as they navigate sexuality is an important story to hear. These issues are another finding in the study: that the younger men are dealing with a different world of sexual identities and relationships. I could also be that they are more willing to be honest and discuss it openly. This willingness to be vulnerable has an effect on their new understanding of masculinity.

When I asked what are your strongest masculine qualities, while looking at his PhotoSophia portrait Corey said: *Well, looking at this photo I was taught that the definition of masculinity is sort of that detachment from emotional things, so I can see that in this photo, I'm not smiling. I get that comment a lot, but I do smile quite a bit. I know my resting face is very -- people think I'm looking at them in a negative way or there is something wrong. I always have to assure people that I am not feeling that way at all, but I don't know how to … I don't know if I know those expressions as well as I could have if I had a better childhood.*

Corey mentions learning to express *detachment from emotional things* and that performing this has caused misunderstandings as others try to read him emotionally. This is a revealing aspect of unhealthy masculinism, and he shows moral courage to bring it to the surface here.

Corey continues: *Masculine qualities? I do take some pride in the little facial hair I can grow. I never shave that, laughs, that's about it. Traditional dark hair dark eyes, dark facial hair, just like a stone expression, very, I don't want to say stoic. That process of inner reflection and connecting with it and accepting it for what it is. Not hiding from truths.*

***3. Corey -Practices of a new equality: navigating a masculine/feminine balance***

I asked, what's difficult about being a man that believes in the equality of women and men"? Corey responded: *When you are a man that believes in the equality of women and men you are therefore less than in the eyes of men in today's society. When you hold that idea it kind of discredits you as a man today. There is a lot of extremeness on both sides of the spectrum with human rights and liberation, women's rights and feminism, those ideas have really been chipped away at by men and groups of men and many people out there to the point if you even say the word feminism, feminist or women's rights, you're kind of laughed at if you're a man. You are discredited along with that group. So when you hold those beliefs there's the difficulty of standing beside a group that is marginalized so therefore you feel that marginalization as well and you are removed from that group of men that you probably never ascribed to in the first place, but you are now the 'other' It's very clearly defined and you have a lot more work to do, but I think its work that everyone is capable of.* Corey's comments were echoed by others in the study, when he makes real this negative side effect of being a man who believes in and stands up for equality. The stronger social pressure is to fit in, not make waves, be one of the boys, to get along and not stand out. This highlights the need for support from other men who are resisting toxic qualities and trying to restory their identity as men.

I asked, how do you navigate through those difficulties? *I personally have never been confronted. I think the recognition and the beliefs that I hold, I feel a security I never had as a child. Now as an adult I feel very secure in my beliefs. I think that in spaces where people are being marginalized it is a place where you can do something as a man.*

***4. Corey - Masculine identity transformation on the path to cultures of peace***

When I asked, what are your strongest feminine qualities (while looking at his *PhotoSophia* portrait) Corey said: *I can see it in this photo, but I can also feel it. Because of the masculine qualities and upbringing, I've had, I've always kind of looked at these qualities as being false. I care too much, I'm too considerate, I go too far and above and beyond for people who would never do the same for me. So, I feel like in the masculine view of things in today's world those are weaknesses. But I look at those qualities as strengths. But it is difficult to have*

*those qualities in today's world. It does often leave me feeling a little disheartened, hurt sometimes. But I love that I have those qualities, the caring.*

*Then of course the very apparent one I think about is back to my physical education teacher's* [comments], *that passiveness, that quietness that helps me be more calm, I can logically and critically think about my actions and words. So, I'm not brash, but I grew up feeling I was supposed to, to be that aggressive person, to assert my beliefs and ideas, but that's not who I am. So, I think that is one of the feminine qualities, to take a back seat, like looking before I do anything.*

*In my community, and in many indigenous communities, I mentioned those roles reversing, the perceptions of what is masculine and feminine have also reversed. Who I view as warriors today are the woman, [who express] some of that outspokenness, the assertiveness. Those masculine qualities, it's the women who hold that.*

This is significant to hear about the cultural reclamation of what was originally a matriarchal social construct in a present day First Nations community and an example to the greater community.

When asked to describe his masculinity (while looking at his *PhotoSophia* portrait) using the metaphor of a cloak Corey responded: *I picture something that isn't so heavy and dense in fabric. Probably something really breathable like cotton.(Laughs). I picture it moving as being very flowy. In terms of color, I could see it being navy in color, there are not features or defining features on the "blanket" cloak. The inside of the cloak is a different color, I think it's another shade of blue another, a tad shade lighter, but not too light. The cloak is long, like it does brush along the ground. In terms of smell, I would think something like sweet grass or pine, something very earthy. I would wear it like a regular cloak, sometimes I would drape it over one shoulder. I would wear it with pride. I like that it's navy. I've always been drawn to various shades of blue. I want it to reflect the things I love in nature, three thing: one I like seeing light shine through a leaf; thus the fabric is light not heavy; I like seeing the wind blowing through tall grass; and finally cool breezes coming off the lake.*

Corey's description of his cloak, or blanket (significant spiritually and ceremonially in First Nations communities) is beautifully described in harmonious terms. I appreciate that he mentions the three things he loves in nature.

I asked, “is there anything about your masculinity that’s in transition that you want to change or new things to acquire”? Corey answered: *In consultations I often don’t say anything. I wait and often only speak when asked. There are ways to be present and not assertive in a negative way. I think confidence, I know what should be done and needs to be done inside. But acting on it is not always the best, I second guess myself all the time [and am reluctant] to make decisions even when I know the answer*. There is a large space between over confidence and second guessing oneself. The new masculinity seems to encourage finding a confident but selfless vulnerability.

I asked, what are important things to convey from a father to a son about masculinity? Corey said: *The only example I’ve ever had is my dad. If I ever have a son, having gone through everything I’ve gone through and learned what I’ve learned, I don’t know if I would police as much, as I had when I was a kid. I would allow exploration, for ideas and concepts to develop in my own son’s mind and foster a relationship with my son, that he would be comfortable talking about those concepts, helping him foster his own sense of masculinity. And hopefully learning more about myself by that time that he has another example to look to as well, maybe feel that sense of security that I am more open to feminine aspects in myself and I hope that contributes to his life allows him to be a better friend, father, husband himself*. I didn’t ask this question of everyone but I’m glad I did with Corey especially knowing his father is in the study. He gives a thoughtful response talking about less gender policing and openness to the feminine in raising a son.

On his *PhotoSophia* portrait Corey has a single photograph in the center. He writes in capital letters: *I PUT UP WALLS. IT’S A SHAME THAT WE DON’T THINK ABOUT HOW HARD THEY’LL BE TO TAKE DOWN LATER.* Again, in capital letters: *AM I STUCK BEING? OR CAN I STILL BECOME?*; *being a boy was hard … being a man is harder*. He draws a wooden sign hanging by a string from a nail that reads: *KEEP OUT*. He writes in large capital block letters: *TOUGH AS THE BARK OF A TREE. FRAGILE AS A LEAF*. Below this he draws an open door with a door frame with what appears as darkness inside and a shadow extending forward. Corey’s writing and drawing inscribing his *PhotoSophia* portrait are simple and profound. They are clearly expressed without fear of being vulnerable, one of the significant findings of the study.

In addition to the two portraits additional portraits I took of Corey, one by his apartment on the Red River and the other holding up his phone with a photo of his father Jordan, Corey displayed three Photovoice photographs for the exhibit. One caption reads as follows: *Ribbon Shirt: When in one I feel connected to my culture, my father and grandfather*. Another reads *Music: I used to write country music, but I always felt inadequate compared to the gender roles men played in mainstream country. What do I write now? What is acceptable as a male songwriter?* And the final caption reads: *Facial Hair: This is the extent of what I can grow. I wear it with pride. (I hope my future partner doesn't make me shave it off someday).*

The combination of Corey's *PhotoSophia* portrait and inscription along with his photovoice images and captions give us a picture of where he is now and where he wants to be. In so many ways this work is much more than just about masculinity, it provides a glimpse of his wholeness and personhood in the present moment.

**Narrative ten, Jordan**

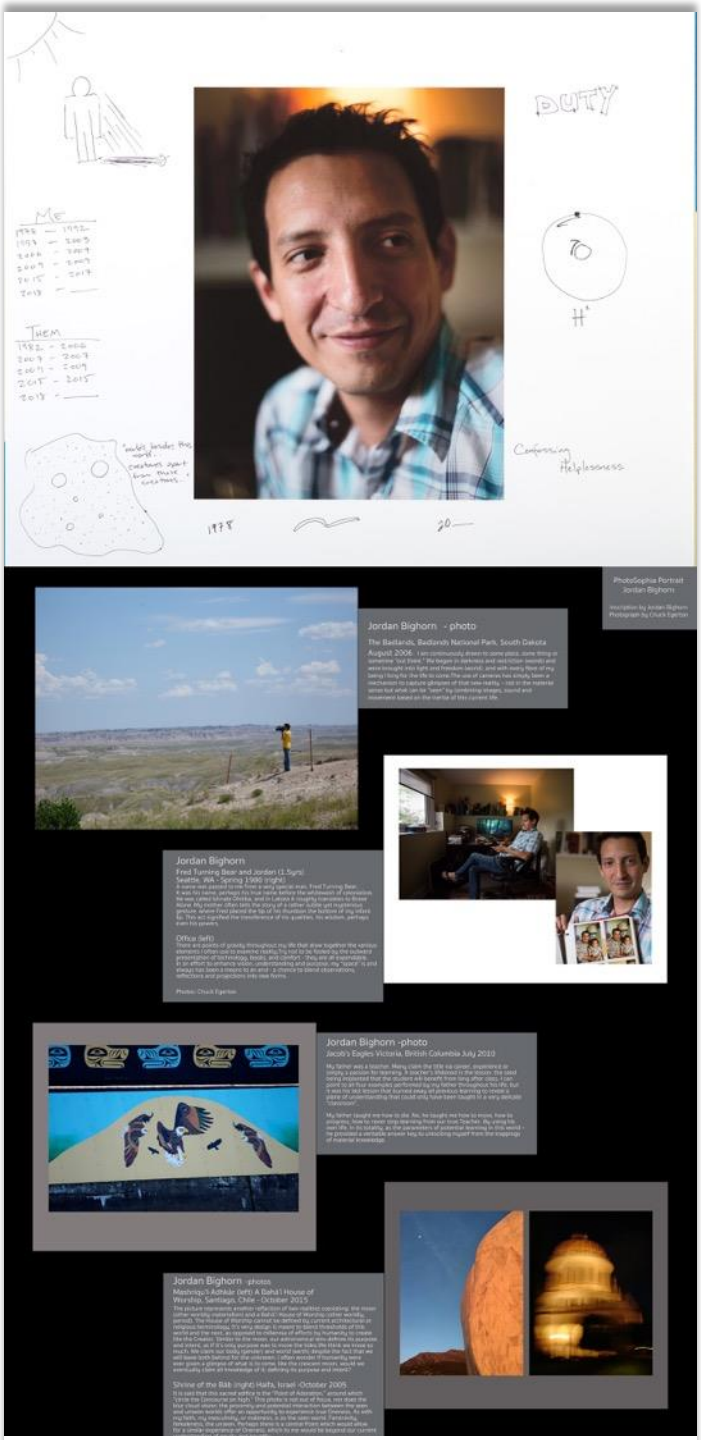



*Figure 19, Photographs displayed in exhibit at University of Manitoba. © 2019 Chuck Egerton and Jordan Bighorn.*

**Jordan Bighorn**

**Interview, 25 August 2018**

Jordan (Figure 19) was my last interview. His children were actively playing in the house, and I was kindly asked if I'd like some coffee. We did the interview in Jordan's small office with a large window looking out on the backyard at ground level. Jordan had co-produced a film commissioned by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, in conjunction with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, portraying the resilience of Indian Residential School survivors and Canada's efforts towards reconciliation. Attending a first screening at Winnipeg Thunderbird House, a round building whose roof rises like an eagle's head into the sky, I heard his Lakota drum and shrill prayer that penetrated my heart. His answers to the questions were deeply introspective and philosophical.

During the summer before our interview, while on a trip to the West Coast, I thought of Jordan and sent a text message and photo as I stood on the

edge of the Custer Monument in Montana. He responded with surprise that I was there, and said that is where his ancestors are from.

***1. Jordan - Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

To tell the story of his name he said: *My name is Jordan Bighorn. I will be 40 in October. [With] Four children soon* […] *To me I've always been a Bahá'í, Bahá'ís are the return of all the believers of Messages revealed before. I declared my belief in my teens. When I was twenty-three, I could see a change. A shift rather than a new discovery. I was raised as a Bahá'í and in the church. Beliefs became reality, beliefs don't matter, its actions. Is it that you discover, or that you always believed them?*

Jordan first talked about his English name and then his given name. *My father Jacob Bighorn, named me Jordan, he was member of the church at the time, Dakota Presbytery. My name is from the River Jordan (in the Bible), he was mystic, poet, true educator. This goes back to letting loose the two seas*[39]*, it was a barrier and it was a baptism. It connected things, divided things (also was a means of travel) He wrote a poem about Bighorn origins in Montana area and the battle of Little Big Horn. At eighteen I was given my adult name Ishnala Ohitika which means Brave Alone. It has an element of a scout on the frontier, you are out there at risk. It was passed down from a man, Fred Turning Bear, that was his name. He would knock on the door and say, "I've come to see my greatest teacher," and hang out with me as a baby. When my parents left Seattle area, there was a transference, he placed his thumb on my lip, to signify he was passing on his qualities and power. For Lakota people it's a spiritual name, it has a bit of a flavor to be in contrast to colonialism, of bit of an element of resistance, birth certificates had anglicized Christian names. Ceremonies and practices were outlawed so these names were not always known.*

Relating to the quotation (#9) that the "*past has been ruled by force*" Jordan said: [It is] *what has dominated history, and civilization in general […] We are still anchored in our violent history but we are not wired to be that way. The soul has no gender, we are going to lose our*

[39] A Bahá'í marriage prayer contains this verse from the Qur'an: "He hath let loose the two seas, that they meet each other: Between them is a barrier which they overpass not. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny? From each He bringeth up greater and lesser pearls." Qur'an 55:19–22.

*body. We were cave people but are now educated. Before we were a body, we were cells, before we were cells, we were spirit. My point of origin has no gender […] it is inevitable, that we will die. The male body is [of] less value than the female body. The uterus is more important that the male gut. You value your eyeball more than your hand. What functionality do men have without women?* Jordan very aptly traces the roots of gender from before it existed to when it will vanish and along the way places what is valuable and what is not. He offers a spiritual perspective, a long view from the lens of the soul.

*My grandfather was being given an award at the University of Oregon. He was the "Indian Cowboy," sharing the wisdom of how he got to where he is. [He made the statement] "But fellas the woman needs us for one night, that's all, she can do all the rest herself." He was a true native elder, he represents the individuals in every family that bridge eras, more than generations. He purified the genes of history. In a nonbinary society how do you reference equality then?* This statement his grandfather made to other men is profound, because it is a reality check that strikes fear into men who believe they are superior to women and that a man's role is more important.

When asked what his strongest masculine qualities Jordan are replied: *to define masculinity first, I couch it in confidence, not projected confidence but anchored confidence, so there is not a need to project it. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was like an ocean because he could take anything. He had the confidence to bear a certain weight, a charm how he would invite the world around him to experience that charm, the twinkle in the eye. He also had insight. If that wall*[40]*, if your partner is looking one way you can provide the other. Your confidence and skill to go out there and see and describe what you see. It comes back to the photograph and that phenomenon of seeing yourself, a projection of yourself* […] *the stereotypical fear or tribal idea that it captures the soul. The thinking behind that, expression is a verb, if it's captured it's stopped.* Jordan cites the power of photography to mirror self and explains the tribal idea (held by Hopi and other Nations) that photography because it can stop time visually can capture and stop the expression of the soul. He counters that idea and continues describing his masculinity looking at his portrait: *I see unending expression here as opposed to not being able to see beyond your nose. Chiseled, straight lines. Oh boy, so I think if there is an acceptance of role, gendered or not, the masculine*

[40] See footnote #39

*role I find the most complementary with the feminine soul would be how to engage with the female. When I was dating it was that I didn't want to marry. I married because I didn't want to date any more. There is a role to play in attracting, like the peacock.* From this I distill that Jordan sees masculinity existing in a complementary relationship to femininity, having each other's back. He also mentions 'Abdu'l-Bahá as an example of capacity, confidence and charm.

***2. Jordan - Stories and experiences with masculine social identity***

Jordan speaks of his first inklings of the masculine role: *It's like being in a pool and being weighted by your own history. Grades Four-Five-Six you got a girlfriend for the first time. Feeling like a man all of a sudden. Getting off the bus and my buddy had brokered this relationship, she said 'yes.' Growing sense of masculinity* […] *Ninth grade, my buddy told me I had to have a girlfriend.*

Speaking of the inheritance a father passes to his son even unconsciously Jordan said: *It's a western male fear of becoming your father. I grabbed my son [who was misbehaving] and felt it was my father reaching through me. That's not really you. It was an emotional reaction. I know and understand where my father was coming from. Authority and punishment. [Jordan's wife] said that's something she wouldn't do. My dad never presented his decisions in the context of choice, it was reactionary, not in control and choice. What is fit for the fire and what will produce fruits? What are the actions, what does 'shoulder to shoulder'*[41] *mean? I have a younger sister and older brother. There was a subtle cultural respect, my sister always had her own space. They were less physical with her. The two seas,*[42] *each had unique abilities. My mom's a counsellor and was always able to speak.* Here Jordan expresses many layers of understanding manhood, fatherhood and husband-hood. It is interesting he points out the 'right or wrong' simplistic binary many fathers wield, as opposed to what is best for the relationship in the big picture, a more feminine perspective.

When asked "what would you say is different about a man who believes in equality in a world where many do not"? Jordan replied: *It's a mechanism. I have an inevitability tool. There are two kinds (a binary) of tests; those we create for ourselves and those that are divinely in place, those that cause us to progress. If a fellow [man] begins to present himself in that way*

[41] "In the final analysis, it is not enough to create space in the current social order for women to play their rightful role. Rather, the goal is for women and men to work shoulder-to-shoulder, each as the helpmate of the other." (Bahá'í International Community, 2015, p. 7)

[42] "the two seas" is a reference to the marriage prayer in note #39. In this case Jordan is referring to his parents.

*[with inequality]. [One could ask] how do you know, where is your knowledge being generated from? Because more often than not, similar to our earlier discussion on what is humanity's shared history, it is born out of conflict and born out of a place of inequality, born out of the irony of the inevitability [that] it will take time, and a woman to fix for you. [One could say to him] this is not even your belief, this in fact has been produced for you, you have simply submitted to it, adopted it. More often than not that is the case. I could appreciate their constant effort, throwing logs onto the fire. The analysis for me is more: What have you suffered, theorized, and practiced? Honestly, the closure of that mechanism, that wholeheartedly and inherently expressed equality, is in deeds with zero need to express it in words. A person who has never described their position on equality [in words], [compared] to those who are presenting equality in words, are [those] less likely working it with deeds.* Jordan unpacks the mechanism of the social construction of hegemonic masculinity and how men bear it but suffer from it by not knowing themselves and questioning it. He posits that the genuine performance of equality does not come in words but in effort and action. This rings of the "workshop not art gallery" concept.

When asked what his strongest feminine qualities Jordan are framed his answer in his relationship with his wife and women's role as life-giver. He said: *I would absolutely defer to my wife's characterization [of me] of being soft, from my skin to my demeanor, like water. It's the function of the man again is to submit to the female form. [What I] dread with [having a] daughter is the "no man's land." Intuition, you cannot divorce life from the pain of [birth's] labor. It rips her in two. What does that look like for to a man, are we lost, is there a parallel? My desire for inner pain, men don't have that built into their reality. [I have a] sense of respect and trust for woman. It's not wanting to be like women, but I have to be man in order to exercise my respect for women. Forgiveness can look superficial if we use the standards used out there. It's contained in this softness, the desire to so engage with the world around me that I find that so typically female in the Gaia form, the nature, Mother Nature that continuously gives, infinite forms of texture, that's what I enjoy*. Jordan's expressions of respect and trust for women is supported by his summoning *Mother Nature* and *Gaia*. It is also uniquely found in his *dread* of being the father of a daughter [in utero at the time], which is telling when he describes it as a *no man's land,* explained further in section three. He also couches these relationships by coupling the terms *softness* and *forgiveness*.

I ask, what would you like to change about your masculinity, what would you like to leave behind? Jordan replied*: I think it's kind of a chip on my shoulder to have to deal with patriarchy. No shame in using it when it can be used for productive means, but I am bound by it. So, it's a challenge looking forward, to not account or be wary of, or apologize for it, and to clean up their mess, [but] not get a chance to fully explore masculinity free from that. I can be very competitive, aggressively competitive, I don't play basketball anymore because of that.*

Jordan's comments on being *bound* by patriarchy, competition and aggression are revealing of what men face in the process of freeing from and resisting them, and to *clean up the mess.*

***3. Jordan -Practices of a new equality: navigating a masculine/feminine balance***

To the question what is *difficult* about being a man Jordan replied: *Finally having a daughter (she was born after this interview), being a father to a daughter. Start with extremes, black and white and move to the middle, investigating reality. I have my sons, I get that, I know that so well. A daughter on the other hand* […] *I had personally wanted to have a daughter earlier. From a physical standpoint, a daughter would represent quite literally stepping into the lens of the other gender. This is the flesh of my flesh. I would be looking at myself. Allow my biology to be the force. But it is absolutely not me, it is a female.*

*This girl is, to me going to be a waking dream for me to completely re-envision myself as a man in its recreative form. To the point where* […] *what if I see her and drop dead there? So profound in its possibility. It's how to operationalize our expendability, to the point of — all I'm here for is the seed?*

*The challenge and the difficulty are that there are very few ways that I've seen to exorcize masculinity, without having to jump through hoops that have been produced by masculinity. I look forward to the hoops my daughter will place in front of me, to jump through as a means to understand more of myself, and not play this patriarchal role with a girl or a woman I'm raising* […] *but more dissolution of myself. Like I saw in my wife, a dissolution of my ability to relate to other people – we die alone, dissolution of my individuality through my union, the next threshold would be this child who would represent the final dissolution of my body. That whatever we engage with in socialization, in upbringing, and parenting, for the rest of my life, it is slowing, decreasing whatever I need to produce for myself: career, dreams etc. no need. In my*

*sons, I keep seeing myself. My eldest looks like me. This girl is not me, but I'll see flashes. My children reflect my own history, their growth and development has helped me.* Jordan digs deeply into his thoughts and feeling about having a daughter and its impact on his masculinity and identity as a man. The idea of the *dissolution of self* in both relationship with his wife and his new daughter says something more about men's need to be in relationship with women to find equality. It also addresses the resistance to patriarchy in the family and the way men bring up daughters.

Jordan repeated the next question: *What's good about being a man? Historically stereotypes, the ones to be on the front lines to be sacrificed, there is less for me to lose compared to a woman. To be sitting on the perch of patriarchy, receiving a lot of privilege, and to prove its artificiality, (like grandfather's story that men are only good for one night and women can do everything from there) at the same time drawing on the strength of masculinity, its force. Nature shows, the male impregnates the female and dies or is eaten. I'm going to be eaten, all we are good for is to procreate and die. If I see something is inevitable, I'm anxious to get there, one of those things to me quite frankly is death, the true adventure the true unknown.*

Speaking so directly, seeing parallels with nature, and acknowledging he is in a space that benefits from male privilege and the system of patriarchy, is profoundly honest. Jordan demonstrates moral courage to be vulnerable in the process of transforming into new understandings of masculinity. Speaking with deference about the male role, and so freely about death, anticipating its inevitability for the *adventure* is a deeply spiritual perspective. This also speaks to the Sacred Relationship with *all our relations* that is one of the theoretical guy-wires of this study.

### *4. Jordan - Masculine identity transformation on the path to cultures of peace*

Discussing the quotation *"Bring thyself to account each day"* and *"The Best Beloved is My sight is Justice,"*[43] *Jordan said: Equality and gender, the anatomical gender [of] female and male sets up the binary, the binary is we are born and we die. We can try to extend that, but everyone dies. [It is a] reference point. Two things we can be assured of, we are born, and we die. Don't know when we will die but that its inevitable. Women bear children, men do not,*

43 See appendix for PhotoSophia Readings document.

*difference in roles – a binary. Having our fourth child, observing labor, as a father trying to find your role: am I a squeeze toy, should I be in the room? I would choose that difference of binary men and women. We are supposed to be in the format, see it in nature. Union of the two, a barrier which they overpass not. Something that separates that binary which we can't go over [reference to a Bahá'í marriage prayer note #37]. A place of knowledge and a place of ignorance. To understand it I have to be in some relationship with someone who is not male. [Because] we know we're going to die, [that] there is an unknown, we can't be there but can place ourselves there. It is not being a woman as a man, it is looking at myself as a man through the lens of a woman. Not to use your own eyes to define someone else's perspective. But instead trying to step behind their lens to understand myself. Using the lens of my partner to see back on myself. Now every single being can see and define for themselves. False comparisons can be seen with ego. My biology is self-evident. I have a mechanism, I can't know myself [or] my masculinity without a woman in relationship, with that otherness. Relationship with mother is so important. Is the wall (in the marriage prayer) a barrier [note #37] or something to bounce off of?*

Speaking to the process of male transformation Jordan related the story of his father's death: *The culmination, it's one thing to have the lesson and gain something in the midst of it, the only way you can truly say that you've learned something is when you can say the lessons, the teaching has stopped. My father died. I was with him with my hand on his chest to feel his last heartbeat. And I tell this story. My father set such an example for me in so many ways to do better to do more. He did something in death that I don't know I can achieve. I wouldn't necessarily choose, he discontinued medical treatments, spent next four and a half days transitioning. It proved to me as a male and in this presentation of masculinity, his duty as a man, the burden. Quality vs. quantity. The death rattle, the breath. It left such an impression of what a man is supposed to do, I'll be chasing it the rest of my life. A man is supposed to die, it goes back to the biology. I had my first son by that time, he did get to see his eldest grandson. He never broke.*

*What later was revealed in a dream by my sister. The crack in his soul. His mother died when he was two with Tuberculosis. He is the only one she talked to before she died. That cracked him down the middle in his heart and soul. Like the Rumi poem that the light shines in were we are broken. My sister had a dream interacting with him, and she asked about his*

*mother. He said he is with her every day. His ultimate desire to be with his mother, reunification. These are examples of male sacrifice, that we have to hope for the conditions as the labor of our own lives, like woman's labor pain*. Jordan takes us deep into ideas and spaces seldom visited or considered.

I asked Jordan about how gender equality is related to community building in the Bahá'í faith. He replied by discussing the Bahá'í process of consultation and decision making: *The consultation mechanism. Prayer and divine guidance, these add elements that are nonbinary, otherworldly, the faith aspect of it. Current media [presents] facts and alternative facts,* [but this is] *consultation without spirituality, which has another set of facts.* [Like in the] *nonbinary representation in Trans and sexuality and the inevitability of creation trying to balance itself. How do we have a conversation between and man and a woman? – in a process that takes us away for our bodies our physicality?* [It is] *in a space* [of Bahá'í consultation] *where we know these things will have no influence*. Jordan refers back to the shoulder to shoulder reference in the BIC quotations, *even if we play traditional roles outwardly how can that not be expressing equality spiritually. I could not have produced any of that without an equally strong reflection of my partner. Like the two seas. This is physics.*

When asked to create a metaphor of his masculinity as a cloak Jordan said: *The invisibility cloak from Harry Potter, just watched it with Corey and the children. When it is off it can be seen and touched (like a curtain) not how it looks but it's functionality. When I put it on it becomes invisible. [It is] not physically invisible can be touched if found. Like Gollum and the ring [Lord of the Rings]. To put on the quality of masculinity, should render you invisible in the context of the relationship of what you contribute to the world around you. Programs in CGI (computer generated imaging) are invisible because they are doing what they are supposed to do. To wrap myself in it. I used that role to seek a partner to have children, because we don't want to be alone. Its relation to balance with women, in context of the stereotypical wife and career husband, coming home and leaving, [the] man comes home and kicks his shoes off and doesn't help his wife who is doing all the work all day. Ideally there should be an exchange of workload, man taking over the chores. Woman wants family to be together when it's off. It's absolutely the role I would play. The authoritarian punisher. Putting off the cloak. The child does something I put on the cloak, the role, the character. The role of father to explain even this*

*cloak thing. The difference of the cloak being on or off could be at some point explained to the child. That hero moment, running into the fire. Eliminating hesitancy*.

Jordan had a single *PhotoSophia* portrait inscribed with many dates, numbers and symbols. The words he wrote were: "*DUTY*" in capital letters and *Confessing Helplessness*. For the portrait I took of Jordan in his home office (were the interview took place) he writes: *Office. There are points of gravity throughout my life that draw together the various elements I often use to examine reality. Try not to be fooled by the outward presentation of technology, books, and comfort - they are all expendable. In an effort to enhance vision, understanding and purpose, my "space" is and always has been a means to an end — a chance to blend observations, reflections and projections into new forms.*

For his photograph of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Santiago Chile he wrote the caption: *The picture represents another reflection of two realities coexisting: the moon (other worldly materialism) and a Bahá'í House of Worship (other worldly, period). The House of Worship cannot be defined by current architectural or religious terminology. Its very design is meant to blend thresholds of this world and the next, as opposed to millennia of efforts by humanity to create like the Creator. Similar to the moon, our astronomical lens defines its purpose and intent, as if its only purpose was to move the tides. We think we know so much. We claim our body (gender) and world (earth) despite the fact that we will leave both behind for the unknown. I often wonder if humanity were ever given a glimpse of what is to come, like the crescent moon, would we eventually claim all knowledge of it; defining its purpose and intent?*

For the portrait of him with the picture album of showing he and his father when he was a baby Jordan wrote *Fred Turning Bear and Jordan (1.5yrs) Seattle, WA, Spring 1980. A name was passed to me from a very special man, Fred Turning Bear. It was his name, perhaps his true name before the whitewash of colonialism. He was called Ishnala Ohitika, and in Lakota it roughly translates to Brave Alone. My mother often tells the story of a rather subtle yet mysterious gesture, where Fred placed the tip of his thumb on the bottom of my infant lip. This act signified the transference of his qualities, his wisdom, perhaps even his powers.*

For the photograph of The Shrine of the Bab he wrote: *Shrine of the Báb, Haifa, Israel, October 2005. It is said that this sacred edifice is the "Point of Adoration," around which "circle the Concourse on high." This photo is not out of focus, nor does the blur cloud vision; the proximity and potential interaction between the seen and unseen worlds offer an opportunity*

*to experience true Oneness. As with my faith, my masculinity, or maleness, is as the seen world. Femininity, femaleness, the unseen. Perhaps there is a central Point which would allow for a similar experience of Oneness, which to me would be beyond our current understanding of equity and equality.*

Another photograph's captions was *Jacob's Eagles, Victoria, British Columbia. July 2010. My father was a teacher. Many claim the title via career, experience or simply a passion for learning. A teacher's lifeblood is the lesson; the seed being implanted that the student will benefit from long after class. I can point to all four examples performed by my father throughout his life, but it was his last lesson that burned away all previous learning to reveal a plane of understanding that could only have been taught in a very delicate "classroom." My father taught me how to die. No, he taught me how to move, how to progress, how to never stop learning from our true Teacher. By using his own life, in its totality, as the parameters of potential learning in this world – he provided a veritable answer key to unlocking myself from the trappings of material knowledge.*

For the photograph of Jordan standing as a small figure against the vast Badlands of South Dakota with his video camera at his eye. His caption reads: *The Badlands, Badlands National Park, South Dakota. August 2006. I am continuously drawn to some place, some thing or some time "out there." We began in darkness and restriction (womb) and were brought into the light and freedom (world) and with every fibre of my being I long for the life to come.*

In the group meeting Jordan contributed to the discussion: *I was feeling constricted to look at masculinity through a society and media lens. More freeing to look at it through a spiritual standpoint […] I am privileged as a male, may be unaware of, but I am always a step ahead. With the #metoo movement, law makers could try to force major companies to have more women on their boards, [but that is] to force equality contrasted with a place that assumes equality.* On the question, what is moral courage Jordan said: *There is a duality. It's like a vaccination, part of the courage is to accept part of the sickness out there. Acknowledging the roles you play as a male*. Jordan referenced a recent Dove Soap commercial that addressed sexism and women's view of themselves; Jordan said *[I came to the] realization of further cruelty, the more masculine you can be the better, the more feminine you are the worse you can become. Masculinity has not been correct, and there is a new understanding. [Masculinity] has influenced and oppressed femininity, are current understandings of femininity are also equally*

*untrue? This fear of femininity, this big driving force of the new understandings, as a seed of consciousness. Femininity is unknown. Masculinity is a desire to control and possess. Otherwise we are stuck in a loop of current forms.*

Jordan intimates that the whole relationship and dynamic between feminine and masculine is being redefined by Bahá'u'lláh, (*the world's equilibrium hath been upset*).[44] It all has to be rethought and recreated as something new, something we have never seen before (*We will have rolled up the world and all that is therein, and spread out a new order in its stead.).*[45]

Jordan is eloquent in his speech and deep in his philosophic and spiritual approach to these important ideas and transformational issues. He has recurring themes of "the two seas" and a long view that includes genderless existence before birth and after death. That he speaks to the fear of femininity and addresses the idea that if masculinity is misaligned with truth then femininity must be also, is a finding important to this study.

[44] "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed" (Bahá'u'lláh, 1993, p. 85).

[45] "The day is approaching when We will have rolled up the world and all that is therein, and spread out a new order in its stead. He, verily, is powerful over all things." (Bahá'u'lláh, 2014, p. 313).

## Narrative eleven – Chuck


*Figure 20. Photographs and captions from the Being and Becoming exhibit. © 2019 Chuck Egerton & Abbas Elias.*

**Chuck Egerton**

**Interview, 28 August 2018**

**(conducted by Abbas Elias)**

One evening over a cup of hot tea Abbas asked me who would take my portrait for the study. Abbas has a deep gentle voice with low tones washed in an Egyptian accent. All ten men had been photographed, and interviewed at that point, and I said, "funny you ask, I was thinking about how I could be part of the study." He generously offered to take my *PhotoSophia* portrait (figure 20) and we set a date and time.

We began my PhotoSophia interview by reading the same quotations as all the men: *"Bring thyself to account each day"* and "*the Best Beloved of all things in My sight is Justice*," before he proceeded to take my portrait. Abbas wholeheartedly engaged in this task, having to turn his brimmed hat backwards to get his eye closer to the camera's viewfinder and moving above, below, right and left like a fashion photographer with a model. I captured some of his graceful moves on video. After a while we stopped to look through the photos on the computer screen.

This had been the process with all the men, to select one as the *PhotoSophia* portrait to be used now for deep inner contemplation in the interview and to later be inscribed for the upcoming exhibit. We were both drawn to one with my eyes closed and my hand supporting my head. Abbas had asked me to include my hand (later, as the men viewed my portrait in the group meeting, there was quite a discussion about the meaning of including my hand).

The image was softly lit from the windows on the left and the shadows on the right we filled with a silver card bouncing in the same light. The background is dark but with some detail, my head is slightly tilted left but my face is square to the camera. Abbas softly and slowly asked me the *PhotoSophia* questions: describe who you see on the screen as if you don't know him, what are your strongest masculine qualities, what are your strongest feminine qualities. Describe your cloak. I could tell Abbas enjoyed the role reversal. I answered the questions I had myself laboriously created, and after having heard ten men answer them before made it more challenging. I tried to clear my mind but reading the transcript now, I know some of the themes I had heard in the interviews filtered into my answers, or did I just coincide with them?

***1. Chuck -Masculine and Self-Identity***

When Abbas asked me about my strongest masculine qualities (as I looked at my *PhotoSophia* portrait), I answered: *I think when I see myself, I know my negative masculine qualities, the toxic qualities – and my wife knows them as well. My father had a problem with anger, he was quick to anger and sometime frightening that way. I can be quick to anger and judgmental of things. I can focus on only one thing at a time. It's like a telephoto lens that sees details and not the big picture like a wide-angle lens. I've played a traditional role as the provider. When Dawn and I were married forty-two years ago we wanted to be equal in every way, but sometimes the outside world imposes itself because I was the one who got the good job and we had to have income. Being the provider is both a good and a bad masculine quality.*

Asked to describe myself as though a stranger, I said: *When I look at my portrait I see a man with a kind of roundish, full face with gray hair, wearing glasses with mustache and beard, very light pale skin, rosy in cheeks, eyes closed, eyebrows are very expressive, see gray hair in them. Wrinkles that show age and I see the hand with age.*

*Spiritually I see a man with eyes closed either in a state of prayer or a state of contemplation or thought, definitely a state of peace. I see a large brow reflecting a lot of light (laughing) don't know what it hides behind it. I can't see my soul but I see the inklings of it there.*

***2. Chuck - Stories of self-identity and the masculine experience***

In my *PhotoSophia* inscription I write *I am a product of social conditioning. I am saturated with my father's model of manhood. My soul is not gendered or sexed*. I included the word *"being"* in large cursive letters above a grey painted cloud. Circled are the words: *My father's eyebrows. As a child I thought they looked like guns* with a line leading across the photograph and pointing to the closest eyebrow. Below this is written: *I can be prone to anger* (the word anger in red). *I can revel in my unearned male/white privilege. I can be dominant, inconsiderate and selfish. I want to leave these qualities behind.*

***3. Chuck- Practices of a new equality: masculine/feminine balance***

I said to Abbas: *I was talking with one of the other men about the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He was a man without any doubt but He's the exemplar, for all of us, not just for how men should be but how all of us, men and women should be. So I wonder sometimes about His neutrality and ability to take on masculine or feminine qualities as he needed to. I think one of my feminine qualities is that I'm a good listener, again my wife might have other thoughts on that. I think I have empathy, which should be in the new masculinity but is considered more feminine. I think I'm developing and have some ability to look with the wide-angle lens. I have many things to change, anger and impatience. I have to replace those, transform them rather than eliminate them. Sometimes I feel what arises in me is rooted in my DNA and reminds me of my father. There are things I'd definitely like to put behind me. I think I'd like to be softer.*

***4. Chuck - Identity transformation and cultures of peace***

When asked by Abbas to describe my masculinity in the metaphor of a cloak I said: *What comes to my mind right now is that my cloak of masculinity would be made of green leaves. Like a thatched cloak, of leaves tied together, it would be light and green and could be tied around my neck. It would move like the wind moves the trees; it would sound like wind rustling in the trees.*

*It would smell like fresh leaves. If I were to describe my old masculine cloak it would be more military in nature, armored. I do have many different cloaks not just one.*

My *PhotoSophia* portrait sits in the middle of the page and shows me with eyes closed and hand rested against my right cheek and chin. Surrounding it is my inscription. Beginning at the upper left corner, I attached a piece of Arabic calligraphy. The caption underneath reads: *The oneness of humanity*. To the immediate right of the calligraphy is written within a green box: *certainty, known*. Below the box: *I am a product of social conditioning. I am saturated with my father's model of manhood. My soul is not gendered or sexed.* At the next level down at the left side there is the word "*being*" in large cursive letters above a painted grey cloud. To the right of this circled are the words: *My father's eyebrows. As a child I thought they looked like guns.* There is an orange line leading from these circled words across the photograph and pointing to the closest eyebrow. Below this is written: *I can be prone to anger* (the word anger in red). *I can revel in my unearned male/white privilege. I can be dominant, inconsiderate and selfish. I want to leave these qualities behind*. Below that is another attached piece of Arabic calligraphy surrounded by the words: *The Tree of Life, symbol of my faith*. An orange line points to the silver ring on my finger in the photograph, engraved with the same symbol. I attached a haiku that reads: *with a gentle arc – a Begonia flowers – dropping its' peddles 7/24/18*. Two more haiku's: *gold finch loves purple – and raging yellow flowers – flying fur feathers 7/27/18. And finally: I am not ready – to uncover new knowing - but the time has come.* At the top above the portrait I wrote another haiku: *to seek my true self – is to acquire a taste for – ambiguity*. I attached a piece of yellow ribbon that dangles several inches below the print. Written under it is *a piece of my masculine cloak*. To the right of this is my signature stamp in green with the Arabic letters B and H. Another haiku is written: *Learning and unlearning – what it is to be a man – feeling like a child*. Along the bottom border of the print I painted a landscape horizon is painted in green from left to right edge with clouds above. At the top right corner, the word "*becoming*". Two haikus: *unsorted today – uncertain and unsettled – yet I am trusting.* And: *A lamp hangs unlit – kindling awaits a match – who will dare the dark?* Along the right edge of the photograph are the words: *my mother's eyes, thank you!* And an orange painted line extends from these words pointing to the closest eye in the photograph. To the right is written: *uncertainty, unknown* (within a green painted box). Below this is written: *I am unfinished, half-baked incomplete. I fall short of my ideals; I am learning that "means" are more important than "ends." I seek to be "inwardly and*

*outwardly united." Equality and oneness meet justice as sacred tasks. I seek contentment in not-knowing but action if what I know I can transform.* Finally, in the lower right corner is another self-portrait taken in black and white (from pilot project). Around the portrait a large tree and roots have been colorfully drawn.

I included two Photovoice photographs with the captions: *Father. My father gave me his name Charles Archibald Egerton adding Jr. He was a veteran of World War II and is seen here in a white t-shirt with his Airforce crew in Texas. It performs a kind of masculinity that identifies with being a soldier at war and shows male intimacy in the presence of massive machines of war. I have not been a soldier or gone to war. Perhaps that is one reason I wear/perform my masculinity differently than my father and feel more comfortable embracing my own feminine qualities.* And: *Grandmother Still Life. Framed in the center is a photo of my grandmother Margaret Murphy Egerton. She is an icon of my own identity. Her great strength, resilience and spiritual wisdom guide me today. She is surrounded by objects of meaning: a token from a Buddhist shrine I visited in Japan, a Métis sash and a braid of sweet grass gifted by dear women in my life, and two ancient stones from Manitoba. On the right is a chunk of Tyndall stone and resting on it an emblem from my father's military uniform. All these things speak to me as a man seeking transformation, to be authentic and to know my true self, as Bahá'u'lláh (2014) wrote "he hath known God who hath known himself"(p.90).*

As I now read my words and captions through the distance of time and space, almost a year ago, I see recurring themes that echo much of what the other men said in their interviews with me. I also, in this role reversal, experienced the intimacy and vulnerability felt by having every word recorded along with every gesture and facial expression. Looking at my image and listening to my voice in the recordings is awkward but I grew to overcome that, not with ego but with normalcy. I was able to give in to the fact that this is what I look and sound like, this is how the men experience my presence.

I video recorded my inscription process in a time lapse video to give observers of this study a view of what it can be like. When I inscribed my portrait, I needed to be totally alone, and in a safe and quiet space. I gathered materials I would use and prepared myself with prayers. I had not seen any of the other men's inscribed portraits when I did mine and had no idea how they would complete the same task.

Themes that emerged are negative masculine qualities i.e. identifying toxic qualities and narrow vision. I had to accept that I was placed in the role of the provider (good and bad). I am a product of social conditioning, and of my father's model of manhood. Dominance, selfishness, being inconsiderate, angry, and impatient, are in my DNA. On the positive side, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has been an essential example, and role model of positive, feminist gender performance. Because of him, good masculine/feminine qualities have emerged in me: i.e.: being a good listener, having empathy, looking with a wide-angle view, and being softer.

Themes from my interview answers were recorded in my inscription and I note that many of the men did this in their inscriptions or in the group discussion. My poetry emerged as a finding in my inscriptions. I have an affinity for the Haiku as a way to get to the essence of a thing, which is described in my methodology chapter. These poems stand as footprints defining a particular moment in thought and existence; that I was there, that this occurred to me and that I really saw it. My painting and artwork also emerged, using the bottom of the print as a landscape extending from being to becoming. It was later that I came upon the beautiful phrase by architect and artist Isamu Noguchi: "we are the landscape of all we have seen" (Ashton, 1992, p. 241).

# PART IV

## Chapter 7

## Findings Analysis

"*True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self.*"
(Bahá'u'lláh, 1994, p. 156)

I feel like my research created something too big to see from where I stand. It is too complex and too deep to be given a cursory translation into text. Yes, that's it, the product of this work is so visual, spiritual and emotional, that text as a repository and conveyance of meaning falls short. Buckets containing text are too small, too confining, and inadequate, and so much spills out onto the floor. Thankfully we have the co-created artwork to take us in directions where the words will not go.

*PhotoSophia* functions as autobiography, self-analysis, auto-ethnography, and a visual/verbal memoir. This research or inquiry can be framed or contextualized, within the scope of a personal memoir. Each man inscribed an expression of themselves, a statement of what is most important to them, within the context of masculinity and equality with women. It was a statement of identity, a milestone on a long journey to the achievement of something distant and arduous to reach and accomplish. They are like pilgrims and on a journey to sacred space, longing for healing, wisdom and guidance in their lives.

*Being and Becoming* was supported and informed by three guy-wires of theory and method. The first is the habitus of dispositions, the second, photography's magic mirror, and third, the sacred relationship of equality, oneness and accountability to *all my relations*. Each of these guy-wires grounded and gave stability to the study practices, and to enable new knowing.

"my memory is like
a sea deep with impressions,
raging, bottomless"
(Chuck Egerton, 2019)

More than thirty-five hours of audio and video recordings, added to the photographs, inscriptions, artwork, questionnaire responses, as well as unrecorded conversations and encounters with those in and outside the group of participants, make up the sea of impressions this study has become: It is not the length, scope or the sheer size of this slice of life with ten men that is to be recorded here. It is not possible to record the enormity of this endeavor. It cannot be contained, it lived and continues to live, despite my humble efforts to capture it.

For the purpose of this study, the interviews, photographs, inscriptions, discussions, exhibition and questionnaires provide the data for evaluation, discussion and conclusions. The visual is central in this study, which may appear to be a paradox. How can a text driven dissertation be employed to contain what cannot be successfully explained in words, but requires an intimate experience with the visuality and spirituality of the study? This is my challenge as the author and interpreter of what happened, what it looked, sounded, smelled and felt like. More importantly, what was the spiritual *aftertaste*, as Basho would say, it left in those who participated in it, and those who experienced first-hand what these men created. That *aftertaste* is not concrete, neatly contained, or easily defined.

In Art-based research findings take on a different form than most research. The artwork itself, the practices and process are what I will use for my analysis. The sum of these things may not be measurable in instrumental ways. Data sources are abundant and visual data can be overwhelming (Collier, 1986, p. 10).

Leavy (2015) goes into great depth on the challenges, debates and issues surrounding Arts-based research and how determining findings, evaluating and measuring them can conform to the norms of academic research. There are many models of evaluation being floated and tested but there is not and probably cannot be a standardization of evaluation methods because the intentions, practices and output of arts-based research studies are as diverse and undefinable as art itself. Yes, art resists *usefulness* and yet evaluation often asks the artist to measure their work. She quotes Sontag “interpretation is the revenge of the intellectual upon art” (p. 266) and writes: “[t]his is messy terrain.” (p. 268). Getting to the essence of Arts-based research Knowles & Cole (2008b) write:

> The transformative potential of arts informed research speaks to the need for researchers to develop representations that address audiences in ways that do not pacify or indulge the senses but arouse them and the intellect to new heights of response and action. In

> essence, and ideally, the educative possibilities of arts-informed work are foremost in the heart, soul, and mind of the researcher from the onset of an inquiry. The possibilities of such educative endeavors, broadly defined, are near limitless; their power to inform and provoke action are only constrained by the human spirit and its energies (p. 68).

The participants experienced three or more points of contact with me, each other and with the public. There was a progressive enlargement of the circle of engagement from the two of us together in interview, to eight at a group meeting and eventually over seventy together at the exhibit reception. They also spent time alone with their *PhotoSophia* portrait to complete their inscription and taking Photovoice photographs. Analysis of findings will include data from interviews, the group meeting, questionnaires, *PhotoSophia* artwork and inscriptions and Photovoice captions.

Perhaps the best expression of the beautiful perplexity of this task if from the poet Hafiz (Shah, 1991) who writes:

> Only the bird understands the textbook of the rose: For not every reader knows the inner meaning of the page. O you who would learn the section on love from the book of knowledge – I fear that you do not know how to fathom it by research (p. 245).

**PhotoSophia as a Finding**

*Figure 21. Chuck Egerton (left) takes a PhotoSophia portrait of Rod Sasaki (right) while he watches it on the computer screen. © 2019 Chuck Egerton.*

In practice *PhotoSophia* (Figure 19) proved to be effective in tapping the depths and shedding light into areas of identity difficult to reach by other methods. The term *PhotoSophia* describes the entire process of the interview but was most applied by the questions at the end, after ninety to one hundred twenty minutes of traditional open-ended interview questions. It was in reality one interview because all that discussion lead to an intimacy and trust, making the final photographic portion more efficacious and revealing.

A helpful metaphoric or mystical construct, with which to understand the efficacy of the *PhotoSophia* method, is Zen's art of archery. As a Bahá'í, I have no conflict and find no confusion, in using an approach from an earlier religious tradition. A belief that all religions are one and originate from one Creator normalizes this practice. It parallels Sufi philosophy, the mystical element in Islam, to which Bahá'u'lláh addresses many of his writings. I have an affinity for the Zen and Sufi lenses on the world. There is a palpable oneness between many mystical and ritualized practices of Indigenous peoples and religions that merge in this work. Couched in a sacred purpose, a striving to align with the divine principle of the oneness and equality of all humankind, everything we did in this study took on a sense of the divine quest.

In Zen's art of archery, after much practice the artist/archer need not self-consciously approach the act of performance of his art. Having paced the distance to the target and prepared his tools, engagement is quick without laborious thought. In a collaborative work such as *PhotoSophia*, it is the dance of artist and participant, with the artist having set the stage and inviting the subject into the gaze of his lens. The term 'to shoot' is used both in photography and archery. The archer sends an arrow toward the intended target, and in photographer pulls rays of light from the subject onto his target, the film or sensor in his camera. In both cases the intention is death, a ceasing of that moment in taking a subject/target from animation to in-amination, from movement to stillness, from alive to dead (Barthes, 1981). The photographers subject must squeeze through the eye of a needle, the aperture to finally arrive on the target. The archer seeks to hit the smallest point of the bullseye. In both cases they must hit their mark. As described in *Zen in the Art of Archery* (Herrigel, 1971), it is not the arrow, but how the archer chooses to let it fly and where it strikes:

> Before all doing and creating, before ever he begins to devote and adjust himself to his task, the artist summons forth this presence of mind and makes sure of it through practice. But, from the time he succeeds in capturing it not merely at rare intervals but in

> having it at his fingertips in a few moments, the concentration, like the breathing, is brought into connection with archery. In order to slip the more easily into the process of drawing the bow and loosing the shot, the archer, kneeling to one side and steps up to the target and, with a deep obeisance, offers the bow and arrow like consecrated gifts, then nocks the arrow, raises the bow, draws it and waits in an attitude of supreme spiritual alertness. After the lightning release of the arrow and the tension, the archer remains in the posture adopted immediately following the shot until, after slowly expelling his breath, he is forced to draw air again. Then only does he let his arms sink, bows to the target and, if he has no more shots to discharge, steps quietly into the background. Archery thus becomes a ceremony which exemplifies the "Great Doctrine". (p. 31).

The above describes a mystical process, similar to the way participants answered the metaphoric question describing their masculine cloak.

**Cloak Findings with Analysis and Summary**

It is important to have all the cloak metaphor/descriptions in one place for comparison. I have commented on some of them in the eleven narratives for each participant, but here they are as one. They are all based on the *PhotoSophia* question: If your masculinity were a cloak, describe in a detailed metaphor what it would look like, what fabric would it be made of, what decorations and colors would it have, what would it smell like, how would you wear it?

This is the last question, while their chosen PhotoSophia portrait is up on the screen, for them to contemplate as they answer.

Abbas: *It's a shell. When you have seashell you have a beautiful pearl inside, it is made of a wound inside the body of the animal in that shell and a product of the tears and pain of that shell that makes the pearl. I believe within every person, good or bad there is a pearl and it is the intention of the Almighty that this jewel when it loses garment or its shell it will last forever in heaven. There is no such thing as paradise, beauty is heaven. Hopefully the jewel in us will be a decoration among the beautiful things that are before us in heaven.*

*When you see the shell, it is not as beautiful as the pearl itself. The cloak is the shell, the soul is the pearl. I ask: What is the spiritual purpose of us being created as men or women? The*

*hardship of life is the gift of the Almighty to mankind, so facing the cold and heat and luxury and accidents of life is to sanctify the inside of mankind to deserve to live in heaven.*

Rayan: *It would be a suit, a coat, a grey suit, medium gray, with a red tie and a black shirt. The fragrance would be the Aigner Cologne I wear, fresh not very strong, I don't know how to describe it. Personally, I don't like the strong fragrances. It's a relaxing smell, my friends compliment me on it, 90% of females like it, say it's fresh. I used to wear strong colognes.*

Jim: *It would be like a 17th or 18th century cloak you see in old movies, dark in color. It would smell like when it gets really cold and you go inside wearing wool, it's a wintery cold smell. It's like the smell of frost clinging to your cloak, a familiar comfortable smell. A coming in from the cold smell. The cloak would hang from shoulders to feet. Dark wool like a pea jacket, dark navy blue. No ornaments.*

Payam: *Now you are really pushing me Chuck! Something majestic, that covers you as a quiet strong type. […] It is a thick robe, like in game of thrones, John Snow's black thick robe, as a masculine robe. I like rose water, I know that's not very masculine, that's very feminine. Not what John Snow's robe would smell like, it would smell like buffalo hide and sweat.*

Rod*: Definitely multicolored, covered in flowers, not quite floral, vibrant, I think there would be black in it though, has to have black. I don't think it would be overly heavy, raw silk. I love raw silk. Fragrance, what fragrance would it be, something natural, not overly sweet. Like a forest or a meadow, not too perfumey. How am I wearing my new masculinity? Hanging off my limbs and shoulders, letting the breeze take it, light enough for the breeze to take it.*

Krishna: *Plain is good, don't make it so much gorgeous, white cotton, soft, no decoration, blue collar, it would smell like cotton, don't like perfumes or Camphor,*[46] *light, mild, fresh, not so hard, not irritating. That matches with your body. How would you wear it? Buttons up with collar. Wear it outside but inside it will last longer. My masculinity will not be apparent. It must match your personality.*

Jean Michel: *It would be a fabric that doesn't exist, it would be either invisible or something that doesn't exist at the time. It would be a dark color, I'll say black, but it could be dark blue. What would it smell like? I don't think it would have a smell. Like an invisibility*

[46] See footnote #31

*cloak, not to make me disappear, but to give me access to right whatever I need to see at that time. So like giving insight maybe is better, something that allows insight, like real insight.*

*Pretty much like a hoody but it would go down to my feet, so like a robe, like kind of a maid's robe (laughs), but it's light, like it doesn't sit on me, it hovers*.

Miles: *This is a great question, I love this. Something soft, cotton-ish, I think it will be blue, while I hate the blue is so associated with the male gender, it always felt more feminine to me. Standard primary blue, blue, a lighter blue. Maybe it's more wool, woven, soft, comfortable but with a bit more friction than other material. It would be thick and have a nap to it. With, bit of basic hemming at the bottom and cuffs, may have some wear and have some patching and stitching where it has torn. I think it would smell a little bit musty, earthy, not quite cut grass, a small whiff of campfire, a sense that it was a bit stale. A cross between a bathrobe and a long overcoat with a tall collar. My cloak of masculinity does not make any noise, it might billow in the wind a little bit.*

Corey: *I picture something that isn't so heavy and dense in fabric. Probably something really breathable like cotton*. [Laughs]. *I picture it Moving as being very flowy. In terms of color, I could see it being navy in color, there are not features or defining features on the "blanket" cloak. The inside of the cloak is a different color, I think it's another shade of blue another, a tad shade lighter, but not too light. The cloak is long, like it does brush along the ground. In terms of smell, I would think something like sweet grass or pine, something very earthy. I would wear it like a regular cloak, sometimes I would drape it over one shoulder. I would wear it with pride. I like that it's navy. I've always been draw to various shades of blue. I want it to reflect the things I love in nature, three things: one I like seeing light shine through a leaf; thus the fabric is light not heavy, I like seeing the wind blowing through tall grass, and finally cool breezes coming off the lake.*

Jordan: *The invisibility cloak from Harry Potter […] When it is off can be seen and touched (like a curtain) not how it looks but it's functionality When put it on becomes invisible (in matter or by sight?) They are not physically invisible can be touched if found. Like Golem and the ring [Lord of the Rings]. To put on the quality of masculinity, should render you invisible in the context of the relationship of what you contribute to the world around you. Programs in CGI are invisible because they are doing what they are supposed to do. To wrap myself in it. Used that role to seek a partner to have children because we don't want to be alone.*

*Its relation to balance with women? The struggle for men in context of stereotypical wife and career husband, coming home and leaving. Parenting, man comes home and kicks his shoes off and doesn't help his wife who is doing all the work all day. Ideally there should be an exchange of workload, man taking over the chores. Woman wants family to be together. When [the cloak is] off. It's absolutely the role I would play. The authoritarian punisher. Putting off the cloak. The child does something I put on the cloak, the role, the character. The role of father to explain even this cloak thing. The difference of [when] the cloak is on or off, could be at some point be explained to the child. That hero moment, running into the fire. Eliminating hesitancy.*

Chuck: *What comes to my mind right now is that my cloak of masculinity would be made of green leaves. Like a thatched cloak, of leaves tied together, it would be light and green and could be tied around my neck. It would move like the wind moves the trees; it would sound like wind rustling in the trees. It would smell like fresh leaves. If I were to describe my old masculine cloak it would be more military in nature, armored. I do have many different cloaks not just one.*

I am excited at the responses received from this question. I tried to avoid psychoanalyzing them in the eleven narratives above. Metaphor is one of our greatest tools in communication. In this case it gave the men a creative way to explain and describe their masculinity in the context of sight, touch and smell. I excluded sound and taste but smell, an ingredient of taste, gets us near it. Later I thought or another possible question: *I hand you a paper wrapper containing a small edible object that represents your masculinity, when you put it on your tongue what does it taste like? Describe it in terms of, bitter, sour, salty, sweet and umami (or savory) and any other flavors and textures of food*. I will have to save that for next time. Another thought that has arisen is that a "cloak workshop" could be conducted, allowing participants (with provided materials) to actually make their cloak. This of course would not help those who said it is invisible.

**Exhibit Findings and Reflection**

*Figure 22, The Being and Becoming exhibit installed in the GoSA Gallery at the University of Manitoba September 2018. © 2019 Chuck Egerton.*

I imagined the design (Figure 22) of the exhibit but left the details to the group of participants who actually installed it. Rod was the lead and Abbas second; both had great intuitive ideas on how and where to hang the photographs in the space we had been given in the Gallery of Student Art (Figure 21). It was a fishbowl, an observation tank, a glass house, across from the campus bookstore and cafeteria.

The gallery that was not a gallery but a workshop, a place for artistic, spiritual and emotional work in practice. This was a place to take *being* to *becoming*, the space between being and becoming, a symbolic pause on the long journey between being and becoming, a place between who I am now and who I shall be, a space in which I am free to transform my identity as a human being.

Who creates spaces like that? (Figure 23) They are so rare and can be perceived upon entering. They are the weightless, transparent envelope written about by Barthes (1981) that carry a profound message inside. These spaces are unknown until you are within them, wrapped in their presence, caught unaware, deeply caught in the ambience of the space. They represent the pearl whose beauty was created by the irritation

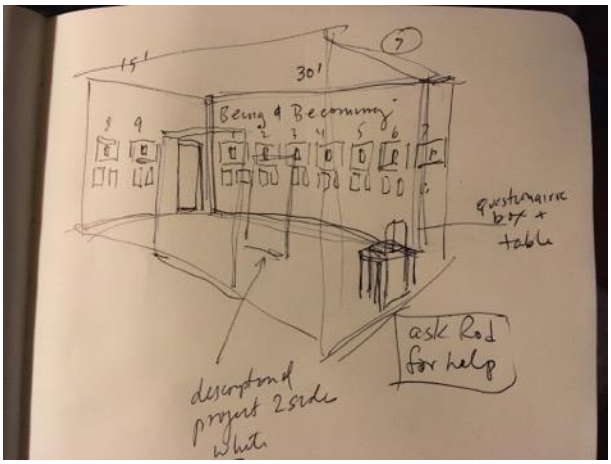



*Figure 23. Sketch of the GoSA Gallery and installation plan. © 2019 Chuck Egerton.*

of a grain of sand, or the stream whose song only comes from the stones that restrain its flow, or the broken crack that lets the light in.

It is the submission in the word Islam, the willingness to step away from the center and be guided by other forces beyond your control. It can be for a man the closest thing to a women's labor that possesses her womb, leaving her no choice but to be carried into the pain until the bairn is born. Vulnerability is that labor pang, the ache of growth, the silence between words and notes that makes them so. It is the negative and positive puzzle pieces fitting together to make the whole, to make sense of the whole, to feel free to see the whole and not only the part. Blowing along in the will of the Creator, like boulders becoming pebbles as they scrape along in the glacial Will, and the persistent surge of mighty ocean waves that turn granite mountains into sandy beaches in their own time. They say the best time to plant a tree is ten years ago, the second-best time is now. The same trees that tower over our houses giving cooling shade also threaten our lives should gravity or mighty winds choose to take them down on us, but how can we live without them? It is the conundrum of taking risks for the sake of beauty, the space of paradox, that allows us to believe two contrasting concepts simultaneously without feeling contradiction. Like two beliefs standing as pins on polar opposite sides of a globe, that are united by what is between them. Like the active and receiving forces creating life, that are different yet the same.[47] It is the extremes of love and hate we must run from, to find the space between, the decay and the growth, the standing stillness of death and the sweeping movement of life. It is the mirror of this life reflecting the next, recognizing that everything has a reflection with meaning beyond its simple existence. Like the Manifestations of God being mirrors which are the image of God (different and yet the same). It is that awkward place between adolescence and maturity.

*Figure 24. Gallery Reception Men Speaking. Contributed Photo.*

[47] "That which hath been in existence had existed before, but not in the form thou seest today. The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different." (Bahá'u'lláh, 1994, p. 140)

The gallery was transformed into a sacred space to view and read each man's deep meditation on their own masculinity. The public reaction can be felt in these words left by an anonymous woman on a study questionnaire:

> Beautiful, inspiring, earnest, full of tenderness and sweetness and an aching vulnerability. Every new portrait and the words/images displayed made me think of a man I wished could see this. This openness & vulnerability is not often made public & I wish it was (a woman standing next to me said 'I wish my sons to write these words' at one portrait). We all wish for the men in our lives to be able to open up like this & despair for those ones so enslaved by toxic masculinity that they simply cannot or unable to feel & express themselves with any degree of vulnerability" (Egerton, 2018).

The exhibit was a collective work of art created shoulder to shoulder, by co-artists and co-researchers (Figure 24) who took the risk to walk into the public square. Perhaps it was an act of humility, that together we created an expression of peacebuilding, fully knowing that as quoted above "in Art there is only one thing that counts, the thing you can't explain" Braque (2000, p. 573).

**Questionnaire Findings**

These questionnaires were collected anonymously between September 25 to 29, 2018 in the Gallery of Student Art at University of Manitoba University Centre. Of forty-four questionnaire submissions thirty-one were from women and twelve from men. The ages ranged from fourteen to seventy-three. One questionnaire declined to note gender or age.

Responders represented the following ethnicity/cultures: Canadian, Irish, Ethiopian, English, Filipino, Scottish, Egyptian, Asian, Australian, Chinese, Dutch, French, Metis, Persian, Jamaican, Swedish, German, Jatt/Punjab, Ukrainian, African, Russian, Japanese, Caribbean, Black, white, Norwegian, and Indigenous. Many noted being combinations of the above. Their religious affiliations (if any) where recorded as: Buddhist, Muslim, Seventh Day Adventist, Mennonite, Agnostic, Atheist, Satanist, Orthodox Christian, Sikh, Catholic, Roman Catholic, Christian, Unitarian, Bahá'í, Quaker, none, still unknown, and all.

The three questions were: 1) Is the purpose of the study/exhibit clearly explained? 2) Has this exhibit affected how you view masculinity? 3) Comment on your impressions of the exhibit. I split out the women's responses from the men as I analyzed the questionnaires. The reason for

this was to give emphasis to female points of view in a study dominated by data from male and masculine perspectives. It was the original intent of using the questionnaire to give female perspectives to the study exhibit. (See appendix for questionnaire text).

***Women's questionnaire responses and reflection***

The thirty-one women responding used descriptive terms. A version of the description "beautiful" occurred nine times in female responses: *Beautiful* (repeated five times), *absolutely beautiful; expressed beautifully; rare beauty; a beautiful space for us to reflect on the state of our society and our own behaviors and actor; gorgeously, profoundly*. Other expressions of feeling include *full of tenderness, sweetness, gentle/rare gentleness, emotive. Touching appears twice.* In light of my reflection above it is interesting that the gallery *"space"* was described as beautiful and as a place for reflection.

But the highest occurrence of a descriptor was the term "*vulnerably*" or versions of the word: *rare vulnerability, aching vulnerability, vulnerability is the thread that runs through them all (heart), openness and vulnerability is not often made public,* and two longer statements: *I […] despair for those one so enslaved by toxic masculinity that they simply cannot or are unable to feel & express themselves with any degree of vulnerability* and, *vulnerability and compassion, traditionally not allowed for men. Family, warmth, beauty, humanity. I am very happy to be able to see this in person.*

One woman wrote about the courage of this vulnerability: *I cried as I looked at these photos. I'm so lucky to know these men. I so appreciate their courage in being vulnerable. They each reflect such beauty in the thoughts/images they've shared. I especially appreciated they shared about parents. This connection we have to the preceding generations & the example they are setting for the "coming up."*

This recognition of vulnerability in the Being and Becoming exhibit is not framed or characterized as negative by these women's comments, on the contrary it is described as *"rare, aching, open along with terms like "beautiful, warm, tender, sweet and gentle."*

A characteristic of the conditioning of traditional or patriarchal masculinity could be the reason why "[m]en do not ask for help or directions because to ask undermines agency and is a form of helplessness. In the same vein, men do not share their problems, express their vulnerability, or ask for advice" (Chrisler & McCreary, 2010, p. 389). One study participant was

direct in writing the word "helplessness" and several others the word "vulnerability" itself on their *PhotoSophia* inscriptions. This relates to the BIC statement's prescription that men "*must find the moral courage to convey and model new understandings of masculinity*" (Bahá'í International Community, 2015, pp. 6–7) Is this what the comment "*I so appreciate their courage in being vulnerable*," is referring to? Is it possible that a form of moral courage for men is to express vulnerability, because it is so often seen as shameful? "Shame at emotional vulnerability," writes hooks (2004) "is often what men who are closed down emotionally seek to hide. Since shaming is often used to socialize boys away from their feeling selves toward the patriarchal male mask, many grown men have an internal shaming voice" (p. 146).

Another questionnaire described the work as: *a "raw" sense of the individual.* Using the term "raw" aligns with these perceptions that the men made themselves vulnerable by doing this publicly. Does being "raw" also mean to express an authenticity (another finding derived from the participant's data). Another comment coupled this vulnerability with rareness, and contrasted it's softness as different from the usual academic approach. *It has given me a viewpoint that I want to believe exists but rarely see offered. The expressions are so vulnerable and made so gently that they felt easier to understand than the more academic explanations usually offered on the subject.*

Several women expressed that they wanted other men to see the exhibit*: I want to go home – get my sons- and bring them out to see what was done. Made me think of a man I wished could see this.* Another wrote *I personally don't feel men and boys have been given the role models they need, which is why this kind of encouraging discussions […] need to continue and increase to involve more.*

A comment that expressed *the exhibit is genuinely a "tour de force" a glimpse into 11 men's soul and spirits* […] went further to note that the researcher had *the gentleness and courage to explore [his] own masculinity*. This acknowledges that the public recognized the equality and shoulder to shoulder design of the study, and that all participants including the researcher were co-researchers and co-artists. Another wrote*: It is a joy to encounter gentle – men's expressions of what has given them inspiration, challenge, support, strength and love.*

Other descriptors were: *Striking, meaningful, thought provoking (3 times), human,, wonderful, great, very good,* and: *Soft and power are all shown in the exhibit, love it!, loved the authenticity […] I was drawn to it,* and, *it is an amazing exhibit*. In contrast to the

overwhelmingly constructive and positive responses, one female commenter simply wrote: *it is a bullshit.*

A few female comments went deep into the concept, conditioning and policing of masculinity *Yes, I have always thought that there is a huge, thick, and almost an 'unbreakable' wall between the understanding of masculinity b/c the notion or the idea of 'masculinity' is presented to us on a plate, already decorated with pre-existing idea and image. It is hard for me to image all of us, especially men, tapping into their conscious and really think about their view of masculinity. But this study/exhibit helped me realize so much.* And another who wrote *Too many times we've silenced too many people just because they are 'expected' to be a certain way. "You are a man, man do not cry." "You are a man, suck it up." Knowing that this study/exhibit expresses and starts this path into individual understanding of masculinity, brings hope and joy. Thank you!* Related to this unbreakable wall one respondent wrote: *I feel like in society people don't get the opportunity to show their true selves and this exhibit has helped break that barrier.*

Some comments noted negative masculine qualities men wrote about in their *PhotoSophia* inscriptions: *I liked the expression and awareness of the damaging qualities of masculinity. But it felt like there is a desire to understand it and overcome it rather than a desire for a more violent destruction of its existence.* And this comment: *It made me realize how insecure men are even if they seem confident on the outside.*

A Bahá'í woman described her lifetime experience with many of these men as being*: a privileged and protected experience of masculinity within the Bahá'í community […]* that the men are *not perfect […]* but *striving […] in a struggle with old models of being and to be courageous in becoming that "new race" of men […] part of a shifting and yet to be realized balance.* The phrase "new race of men" comes from Bahá'í writings.[48] ("men" in this usage refers to both women and men) which is a call for Bahá'ís to be distinctive, to resist inequality and create something new based on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh which promote justice and oppose sexism, racism and prejudice of any kind.

48 "*A sharp distinction between that [Bahá'í] community and that people must be made, and resolutely and fearlessly upheld, if we wish to give due recognition to the transmuting power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, in its impact on the lives and standards of those who have chosen to enlist under His banner. Otherwise, the supreme and distinguishing function of His Revelation, which is none other than the calling into being of a new race of men, will remain wholly unrecognized and completely obscured.*" (Shoghi Effendi, 1990, p. 16)

Another Bahá'í women wrote that the exhibit changed her view of the men and their masculinity: *I grew up with most of these guys in my life, and I never would of thought of them doing an artistic project like this so seriously and thoughtfully. I guess that's part of how I interpret their masculinity.* A woman, not a Bahá'í wrote that the exhibit: *reinforced my feelings on the Baha'i faith. I know little of it other than its desire to include and provide balance. This exhibit expresses/displays that well. Perhaps that is because of its allowance of the individual to tell their stories as they wish.*

Two comments suggested that more information about the Bahá'í faith would have been helpful to gallery visitors*: would have wanted a bit more background on the Bahá'í faith as well* and*, I am curious about Bahá'í belief in the equality of Genders.*

A comment directed at the visual nature of the exhibit expressed: *I'm not a very visual person, so it was even more surprising for me to focus on the photos [more] than on the writing.* She continued to comment on the photographs of the men in environmental spaces: *One strong impression is the role of spaces in these men's lives (be it a bedroom, a study, a garden), and I am wondering how those spaces impact our perspectives on gender.* Another woman commented on the photographs: *Your sensitivity in the individual's photos with the sharp focus on a particular detail of that man's face – his eye or his cap edge or his smile. The photographic underpinning of each man's reveal was so unique of each man's journey […] photos of their mother/grandmother/father and special moments in their lives which were significant experiences, text that give them a world view that instructs, inspires, and challenges them to be fully human.* Connected to that idea of being fully human was this comment: *The emotions expressed in each piece feels soft and genuine. The thoughtfulness comes through so sincerely. The individual's struggle is felt but understood as being offered from their attempt to understand themselves as a member of a larger whole.*

One woman expressed a desire that this type of experience be available for women too: *I hope this will happen to explore femininity. Women need to explore ourselves.* Another comment echoes this and offers a suggestion supported by a criticism of both men and women's conception of what equality is*: I think another discourse that could take place – is to bring women into the circle to share what [are] the road blocks to equality – and what they need as wives and partners, in the family and work – to allow them to bring their gifts into the equation. For many – equality meant – I can work outside the house – give – give- give – then go home to*

*take on the role that my mother took – We are last in bed, first up, it's hard to keep going at times.*

A final woman's comment I will highlight, is related to the title of the study: *I haven't put much thinking into gender as a process before. "Becoming" is probably the most important word I take out of this exhibit.*

***Men's questionnaire responses and reflection***

It should be noted that significantly fewer men submitted questionnaires, only twelve. In general the men's comments took a different approach than the women, with less emotional and more introspective, inquiring and analytical responses.

A man commented on the space itself and what was done there*: I like the use of space and the stories shared,* and another wrote it*: offers an important space to view and reflect on masculinity.* Another commented*: I am an LGBTQQ man […] it got me to sit down and think.* Two comments related the exhibit to world views: *A beacon of light against the backdrop of current world events,* and another wrote that the exhibit, *allowed me to gain perspective of issues not really addressed or realized in my home country.* It's interesting that they also wrote that gallery *"space"* was beautiful and a place for reflection.

An introspective and self-analytical response, that acknowledged the vulnerability without naming it was: *The quotes made me evaluate how I see myself vs. how I stack up next to the "examples" or ideals. The ideals expressed are not obtainable with "our" upbringing but are a goal to focus on. Be willing to learn, be open personally, admit when wrong, make an effort, be patient, don't be discouraged, enjoy the process, be kind to yourself and others.*

An in-depth comment included a series of questions: *My overall impression /feelings from the exhibit are that it is overwhelmingly positive, both the exercise that was the study (it's form, method and purpose) and the thoughts and feeling and expressions by the subjects comments were about positive things (experiences/cues) in their past and hopeful view of the future through the lens of examining their own masculinity […]* Then he shapes a lingering question: *is masculinity, globally, as it is generally, construed by many/most – individually and culturally – inherently broken or disordered in the same way? Are there any redeeming qualities in traditional – for the lack of a better word – roles and perceptions of masculinity? Maybe the answer is no, but maybe it is yes. not sure.* Then another series of nested questions*: Is the goal to*

*imagine a world in which concepts of lived experiences of masculinity and femininity do not exist or at least are no longer male/female specific? But interchangeable? If masculine and feminine traits/characteristics exist, and if there are redeeming qualities in each, then is the goal to disassociate the positive qualities from their gender association?*

This comment and its questions cut deep into the heart of this study's purpose, asking what is a "new understanding of masculinity?" (Bahá'í International Community, 2015, p. 6). My discussion of this in Chapter 1, describes the *narrative rupture* of masculinity and the crisis that has resulted from the old patriarchal concepts of manhood being swept away, with more feminist expectations and identities developing and replacing them.

I like the question that asks if there are any "*redeeming qualities in traditional […] roles and perceptions of masculinity?*" I have been asked this question as a white man, are there any redeeming qualities in whiteness? To further deepen this question, as Jordan expressed in his interview narrative, if masculinity as we know it is incorrect for achieving equality, does this mean that femininity is also in need of transformation? One relies upon and is formed by the other in a reciprocal interdependent relationship of identities.

This finding is noteworthy, because it reflects a sense of needed ambiguity. Humanity's confining concept of gender roles and gender itself need to be transformed, if we are to achieve equality and build cultures of peace. This leads to the commenters question on the specific lived experience of gender. Should it become less important? Would disassociating gender from human qualities challenge the whole issue of gender essentialism, nature or nurture, and present an idea that we are in a transition toward a spiritual gender androgyny?

The men in the study expressed a struggle to grasp a standard or example of how men should or could express this new masculinity. Many named the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They noted how stories of his life show how he could easily express feminine qualities or traditionally masculine qualities as needed contextually and without worry of stigma. As in the concept of habitus, these qualities are like cloaks in the new masculinity, that can be interchanged as needed based on the spiritual and social context, and not constrained by oppressive, unequal social constructions.

The commenter with undisclosed gender identity seems to address some of the above questions (best expressed with little editing): *I was struck by a frequent use of natural and floral imagery though the exhibit, both qualities frequently associated with the feminine. I am*

*beginning to move my understanding of masculinity from singular to plural, from an entity to many […] a singular masculinity, like a monoculture soon destroys the body, the soil so that no others may grow. But in a garden of masculinities, not only is the self-awash in the infinite colors of creation, the self, the body, the soil, is given its necessary nutrients. But perhaps it is not a garden of masculinities for even then the garden is limited. Perhaps it is in the garden being man at becoming man in which we must all cultivate our masculinities and our femininities, our humanness and our divineness, our sacred and profane. And within the garden we need to cultivate those flowers that need to establish new roots, new ways of viewing ourselves. But it is perhaps with those new plants those seeds that have long lay dormant, that are, if not the most beautiful themselves, most beautifully make complete our garden at man-ness.* I appreciate this poetic and metaphoric response to the exhibit. It demonstrates the work shown inspired new ways of thinking, feeling and of artistic expression.

A final highlighted comment from one of the men is: *This should be seen, studied and understood by a much larger audience - we are in an exciting period of transformation – as they say "a tipping point" for a new generation and, every effort must be made to dispel and change false attitudes and misunderstanding of the relationship needed to create a more just and equal society. Well done - your efforts at making that change.*

**Questionnaire Summary and Reflection**

All the findings lean towards positive impressions from most of the visitors to the gallery who submitted a questionnaire. The most repeated term in the women's comments was *vulnerability*. It was not used in any of the men's comments. Vulnerability means to leave oneself open to harm, to attack. The Thesaurus lists alternatives terms as: being helpless, defenseless, powerless, impotent, weak and susceptible. The significance seems to be that women view these expressions of vulnerability in men as a form of moral courage. It is seen as courageous to admit not knowing, that you are lost, that you don't know the answer, to accept your own ignorance or weakness and defer and listen to the views of others.

"Accepting vulnerability," writes Lederach (2005), we must risk the step into unknown and unpredictable lands and seek constructive engagement with those people and things we least understand and most fear. We must take up the inevitably perilous but absolutely necessary journey that makes its way back to humanity and the building of genuine community" (p. 173).

# Chapter 8

## Findings Summary and Reflection

Findings from the artwork created and data recorded in this study have left me overwhelmed. As one reviewer in my brief presentation on this study at the Pittsburgh ACR (Association for Conflict Resolution) conference said, "you have three or four dissertations in this data." Some of the significant highlights from the *PhotoSophia* inscriptions are*: "being a boy was hard … being a man is harder;" "lurking behind a pragmatic front is an inner child ready to play", and "an impression of quiet longing —adrift on a sea of unrequited ideals;"* and in my own Haiku:

*"to seek my true self*
*is to acquire a taste for*
*ambiguity,"*

"*at this time in my life being a better man may well be about developing virtues and learning what they look like by observing the amazing people in my life;" "confessing helplessness;" "I want to find more balance in my life by accepting and understanding all traits and ideas and emotions regardless of "gender" so that I can be a more complete, whole human being."*

Arts-based research produces findings less measurable when seen through the lenses of traditional quantitative or qualitative research. But that is not to say it does not bring us to significant new knowing. The means of arts-based research are nonverbal, and therefore, its truest findings are also nonverbal. Those findings are experiential, timelessly fleeting and resonate in emotive spaces that resist being weighed down by words.


*Figure 25. Findings (VATAS) Diagram*

**Findings Analysis**

Throughout the above narratives, inscriptions, caption and questionnaire data I have noted and commented on significant and repeated terms and responses in my search for findings. The data is rich and much of it non-verbal. What the study has uncovered as new knowing can be distilled into five major headings with several sub-headings under each. These headings do not exhaust this energetic pool of data, further research and analysis many unearth more findings. *PhotoSophia* as a method is in itself a finding. I will more deeply analyze each of the following five findings (figure 25).

Vulnerability as Moral Courage
Ambiguity as learning and resisting
Need for a standard, role models
Authenticity in seeking one's true self
Sacred Spiritual Relationships in service with others

***Vulnerability as Moral Courage***

"When we were children, we used to think that when
we were grown-up we would no longer be vulnerable.
But to grow up is to accept vulnerability…
To be alive is to be vulnerable."
Madeleine L'Engle
(L'Engle, 2016, p. 190)

Vulnerability rose to the top of findings in the navigation of a masculine/feminine balance in interviews, inscriptions and questionnaires. Vulnerability could be seen as an openness and willingness to risk the blowback from breaking the male code of "be a sturdy oak" (David & Brannon, 1976, pp. 125–126). In spiritual terms it expresses a willingness to accept powerlessness, to be selfless, self-deprecating, self-sacrificing, to see others as above yourself. It is an expression of humbleness and humility, both spiritual terms alien to the traditional code of masculinity.

The obligatory prayers Bahá'ís recite daily declare this humility. As Bahá'u'lláh (1991) writes "I testify at this moment to my powerlessness and to Thy might" (p. 4), and "exalted art Thou above the description of anyone save Thyself, and the comprehension of aught else except Thee" (p.9) and "to beg of Thee all that is with Thee, that I might demonstrate my poverty […] and may declare my powerlessness, and manifest Thy power and Thy might" (p. 11).

This is expressed in the Bahá'í ideal that goes beyond the *golden rule* of loving your neighbor as yourself to "[b]lessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself" (Bahá'u'lláh, 1994, p. 71). This *platinum rule* subordinates one's own material self-interest for the benefit of others. It is expressed in spiritual terms of vulnerability as a desired state of being in the Prayer of Visitation said at the shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, (Bahá'u'lláh 1991) writes:

> Help me to be selfless at the heavenly entrance of Thy gate and aid me to be detached from all things within Thy holy precincts. Lord! Give me to drink from the chalice of selflessness; with its robe clothe me, and in its ocean immerse me. Make me as dust in the pathway of Thy loved ones and grant that I may offer up my soul for the earth ennobled by the footsteps of Thy chosen ones in Thy path" (p. 235).

This passage relates to two other findings. First, there is a need for a guide and standard for a new masculinity, in this group of Bahá'í men it was found in the life and actions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Secondly, the idea of donning a cloak, robe or mantle, as in Bourdieu's habitus, that expresses

selflessness and vulnerability is present in this passage. It also relates to the male superiority and privilege as related in the admonition from 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1969) speaking in Paris.

> All religions teach that we should love one another; that we should seek out our own shortcomings before we presume to condemn the faults of others, that we must not consider ourselves superior to our neighbors! We must be careful not to exalt ourselves (p. 152).

This also recalls the BIC (2015) statement asking men to have the "moral courage" to "challenge and question" the confining masculine roles "that society and the media have assigned to them" (pp. 6-7). Is expressing vulnerability and selflessness an act of moral courage, when done in the context of resisting traditional male codes and expectations of masculine performance? I think so.

Accepting insecurity, fear and feelings of helplessness, as expressed by some of the men in the study, is also related to vulnerability and the discussion of selflessness above. Is embracing intimacy and resisting the fear of femininity a part of this vulnerability? Jordan (2008) writes in *Valuing Vulnerability: New Definitions of Courage*: "I suggested that courage, unlike macho defiance of fear, is the capacity to act meaningfully and with integrity in the face of acknowledged vulnerability. There is no real courage where vulnerability and fear are denied" (p.211).

How can we restory the term vulnerability, which can denote a form of weakness and be demeaning to manhood through the lens of traditional masculinity? What can it mean in spiritual terms? Could it be *moral courage* expressed in selflessness, self-sacrifice, humility, humbleness and a willingness to take a risk that could position one as less than the other, especially in relationships with women?

Regarding the idea of redefining and reframing vulnerability Jordan (2010) in *The Power of Connection* writes:

> I would like to suggest that we reframe vulnerability as an experience in which we are open to the influence of others at the same time that we are open to our need for others. We feel we can bring ourselves more and more fully into relationship, … [w]hen we are vulnerable, we are capable of being "moved" by internal affective experience, as well as being affected by other people. In an empathic or compassionate milieu, we honor emotional openness and reward trust with care and respect. Sarah Lightfoot (1999) said,

> "Making oneself vulnerable is an act of trust and respect, as is receiving and honoring the vulnerability of another (pp. 206-207).

The fear of failure as well as what others will think of us often supports the myth of invulnerability, as cited above for men to appear invulnerable that must appear as "sturdy oaks," "big wheels" and avoid any association with "sissy stuff" (David & Brannon, 1976, pp. 125–126). The artist is also a site of vulnerability, stepping into the creative arena, displaying your artwork or creative writing is willful vulnerability.

### *Ambiguity as Learning and Resisting*

Ambiguity was the second finding to rise to the surface in this study. Ambiguity as a term can convey a negative meaning, especially in context of hegemonic masculinity where the appearance of absolute certainty is a matter of pride. Uncertainty expresses learning and a potential for personal growth, as is the process of transformation. Growth from birth to maturity is a time full of vulnerable uncertainties.

Ambiguity like vulnerability should be reframed and redefined within the context of the emerging, new understandings of masculinity. Here ambiguity takes on a meaning closer to *living with the question*, suspending judgement, waiting for new knowing and understanding. It is also a necessary state of being when learning something new. It is in that pause, that hesitation, when a space is allowed to open which is like an empty cup ready to be filled.

Ambiguity is also a form of resistance to the *narrow roles society and the media* have imposed on men because it is a state of questioning and refraining to take part. It is being in a state of *not knowing*, a state of humility, preparation and openness to learn new things. The pause of ambiguity offers resistance to the power of social conditioning and colonization. In this study ambiguity was often reflected in the men's answers to questions on what qualities are feminine or masculine, resisting binary and reductionist conclusions. Lederach (2005) writes, in the context of conflict that:

> [t]o suspend judgment and explore face and heart value in settings of conflict require a capacity to develop and live with a high degree of ambiguity. On the one hand, we must accept the realness of appearance, the way things appear to be. We must on the other hand explore the realness of lived experience, how perceptions and meanings have emerged and how they might point to realities

> of both what is now apparent and the invisible that lies beyond what is presented as conclusive. To suspend judgment is not to relinquish opinion or the capacity to assess. It is fundamentally a force to mobilize the imagination and lift the relationships and understandings of relationships (p.37).

Contemplating this ambiguity in the context of Bahá'í men I revisited a passage from Bahá'u'lláh (2014) below. It is a classic expression of what qualities are required to live a Bahá'í life, addressed to all humankind. I've read and reread it for nearly fifty years, but now see it with a new lens. As you read this list of qualities, ask yourself, are any of these qualities solely feminine or masculine?

> Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility (p. 285).

What I see now, that I had not seen before, is that these are the human qualifications needed to build *Cultures of Peace* and achieve the *oneness of humanity* regardless of gender. Are women and men performing the antithesis of these qualities, acting in traditional masculine or feminine rolls? Is this the reason why we are in our present conundrum, this narrative breech of gender identity? Would retelling a new human story, that detaches masculine and feminine from essential peaceful qualities, help build the sacred relationship of equality?

"When we have the courage to move beyond certainty and invulnerability," writes Jordan (2010), "we enter the world of learning, curiosity, and, dare I say, love. We risk the hope of becoming part of something larger, transcending the illusion of the separate self. We can enjoy the spaciousness of real humility or we can become paralyzed with shame, a sense of personal inadequacy" (p. 212). Ambiguity is a form of humility, and a bellwether for change.

***Need for a Standard; Role Models***

This finding was revealed mostly within interviews as these men, reflecting on vulnerability and ambiguity contemplated the road ahead. How would they forge *a new understanding of masculinity*? Where would they look for guidance and example, a bellwether, a standard, a benchmark, a touchstone (a stone used to test the purity of gold) .For Bahá'ís the answer is found in the life and example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh ,the Prophet Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá lived over 50 years of his life in prison and exile for his beliefs. As an admonition and wisdom to Bahá'ís, Shoghi Effendi (1991) writes:

> [I]f we are ever in doubt as to how we should conduct ourselves as Bahá'ís we should think of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Figure 26) and study His life and ask ourselves what would He have done, for He is our perfect example in every way. And you know how tender He was, and how His affection and kindness shone like sunlight to everyone (p. 405).

In another passage 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1928) writes:

> Look at me, follow me, be as I am; take no thought for yourselves or your lives, whether ye eat or whether ye sleep, whether ye are comfortable, whether ye are well or ill, whether ye are with friends or foes, whether ye receive praise or blame; for all these things ye must care not at all. Look at me and be as I am; ye must die to yourselves and to the world, so ye shall be born again and enter the kingdom of heaven. Behold the candle, how it gives light. It weeps its life away drop by drop in order to give forth its flame of light (pp. 502-503).

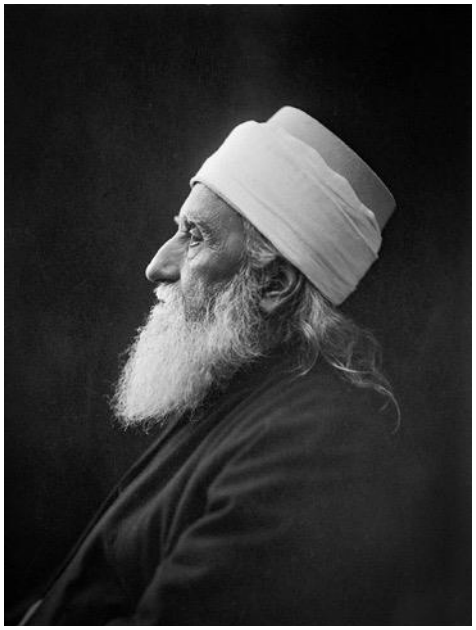


*Figure 26.'Abdu'l-Baha in Paris October 1911 © Baha'i International Community (used with permission)*

On having a standard for accountability Rod said in his interview: "*There needs to a standard to give account. If I don't know the standard, I can say I did okay, If I know the standard, I can really take account. We need to delve into that standard every day […]'Abdu'l-Bahá' [who traveled the] mystical path with practical feet."* 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life is well documented with ample writings and stories to help offer this guidance. For Bahá'ís and others 'Abdu'l-Bahá is not the only example to look to. Many of the men commented on other men that had inspired them as role models of equality and a new masculinity.

***Authenticity in Seeking One's True Self***

Becoming your true self is to live up to your potential to be fully human, to live with equality and justice and in balance with all your relations. Daniel Jordan (1968) writes:

> if God is unknowable and if we are created in His image, then we may expect something in ourselves also to be unknown. This unknown is the as-yet unexpressed potential within us — latent capacities for knowing and loving. In a very dramatic way, Bahá'u'lláh points to that vast unknown in ourselves when he quotes in the Seven Valleys the verse of a well-known Persian poet: "Dost thou reckon thyself only a puny form, when within thee the universe if folded? (p. 47)

"Authenticity is needed," writes Lederach (2005) "in the soils of shared perception about the quality and nature of the public sphere. In other words, authenticity of social change is ultimately tested in real-life relationships at the level where people have the greatest access and where they perceive they are most directly affected: in their respective communities" (p. 56).

Bahá'u'lláh (2012) writes in the context of uncovering your true self, "[t]hou art even as a finely tempered sword concealed in the darkness of its sheath and its value hidden from the artificer's knowledge. Wherefore come forth from the sheath of self and desire that thy worth may be made resplendent and manifest unto all the world" (p. 47). The finding here is that the latent potential of the true self can be released as we acquire a new understanding of our own authenticity and begin to perform a new masculinity.

***Sacred Spiritual Relationships in Service with Others***

This finding came in comments during interviews and in questionnaire statements. It relates to the BIC (2015) statement,

> In the final analysis, it is not enough to create space in the current social order for women to play their rightful role. Rather, the goal is for women and men to work shoulder-to-shoulder, each as the helpmate of the other—in the context of family, work, community, and international affairs—to construct a society which allows for the flourishing of all (p. 7).

Participants Rod Sasaki and Jordan Bighorn spoke about what they had learned about equal relationships between women and men through practicing Bahá'í consultation on Bahá'í institutions and committees like the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Winnipeg. The unique spiritual and equal process of Bahá'í consultation is explained earlier within several narratives. Jordan Bighorn expressed in his interview that the *consultation mechanism* adds spiritual elements that are *nonbinary and otherworldly […] in a process that takes us away for our bodies, our physicality […] where we know these things will have no influence*.

Relating the spiritual process of transformation from being to becoming is addressed when Daniel Jordan (1968) in *Becoming Your True Self* writes that "[f]eeling oneself becoming the best of what one can potentially be constitutes the highest joy. It promotes a sense of self-worth, obviates the need for expressing hostility, and guarantees a compassionate social conscience — all prerequisites of world unity and peace." For a Bahá'í "the "highest expression of the self is servitude. The degree to which this highest station of servitude can be achieved is commensurate with the degree to which the basic powers or capacities of the human being can be released" (p.2). This finding seems to tell us that transformation and social progress can only practically take place when women and men work together on an equal basis. This sacred relationship also extends from man to man to create new relationships of caring and love in service to each other.

**Reflections on Findings**

The findings in this study seek paths away from the constraint of strict binary performance of masculinity. This creates opportunities for men to express and demonstrate authentic vulnerability. This is combined with a rising ambiguity, a resisting of the strict binary of gender roles, seeing them rather as human qualities needed in peacebuilding. It was noted that good human qualities are not confined to being masculine or feminine. There should be no stigma for men or women to use any positive human quality, free from gender coding, in the

relational, *shoulder to shoulder* work of building authentic *Cultures of Peace*, equality and justice.

*PhotoSophia* in practice has supported my expectation that the process of self-reflection on one's own photographic image would evoke a vulnerability that would reveal the honest, authentic, unvarnished self not only to the portrayed but also (to a lesser degree) to those who view the portrait and inscription. When you place eleven of these in one room a sacred space of honesty, vulnerability and transformation is created; it is an interstitial space between masculinity and the soul, men and women, the mask and the real, the theatre and backstage, the workshop and the art gallery. It cuts through the fog of uncertainty and ambiguity and sets foot on the path to new productive, humane, unifying, humble and cooperative masculinities. It is also a space between gender essentialism and gender as socially constructed. As bell hooks (2004) writes, it is to move away from patriarchal masculinities and towards feminist masculinities. Jung (1983) intimated in his archetypes of anima and animus, and as Butler (1999) posited, that gender is different than physical sex, they are social constructed performances. The balance between essentialism and social construction must be considered. I suggest that the powerful vacuum created by the absence of gender equality, results in a serious distortion of reality. This distortion spawns a myriad work-arounds, attempts at solutions, resolutions and explanations in that unequal space. We have never seen equality; we don't yet know what it really is or how its presence will change our identities and who we are as a society. We have not removed/cleansed of our inner selves of the colonization and conditioning of inequality. As Freire (1996) writes:

> The individual is divided between an identical past and present, and a future without hope. He or she is a person who does not perceive himself or herself as becoming; hence cannot have a future to be built in unity with others. But as he or she breaks this "adhesion" and objectifies the reality from which he or she starts to emerge, the person begins to integrate […] [a]t this moment, sundering the false unity of the divided self, one becomes a true individual (p. 173).

If inequality is the disease how do we envision the health in equality? Can true equality be achieved over the resistance of those who want inequality because it advantages them? Can it be forced by rule of law? Can equality be socially constructed? Can it be engineered by a rebalancing of wealth through taxes and entitlements? Can boardrooms be forced to admit women? Can the rich be forced to give to the poor? Can the privileged be forced to give it up to

advantage the underprivileged? Everyone's human potential and agency is thwarted by inequalities: unearned and structural power, entitlement and privilege based on gender, race, nationality and wealth. What would cause men to become vulnerable and step away from their unearned privilege? I assert that the solution is in inner spiritual transformation of the individual.

That participants balked, responding with ambiguity when asked to name their own qualities as masculine or feminine, summons an important question, one asked by a male questionnaire responder:

> Is the goal to imagine a world in which concepts of lived experiences of masculinity and femininity do not exist or a least are no longer male/female specific? But interchangeable? If masculine and feminine traits/characteristics exist, and if there are redeeming qualities in each, then is the goal to disassociate the positive qualities from their gender association? (Egerton, 2018)

The study's finding is that these men love in such a way, that they were willing to express publicly and without fear of repercussions, their vulnerability and their own struggles with masculinity in the sacred quest of equality.

**Moving forward, photography's significance and agency in PACS praxis**

Since completing this research, there has been increasing interest in presentations on the *Being and Becoming* study. During the first exhibit in Winnipeg I presented to a research class at the University of Manitoba, and shortly after at the International Conflict Resolution Conference 2018 in Pittsburgh. My proposal was accepted by Association for Bahá'í Studies (ABS) Conference and presented in Ottawa in October 2019. After my presentation an ABS representative made a personal request, that I write an article about *Being and Becoming* for their journal.

Guilford College, a Quaker institution founded in 1837 in Greensboro, North Carolina (Figure 23) hosted me as a visiting artist and mounted a second exhibit of the *Being and Becoming* artwork, the first time in the United States). The exhibit remained on display for almost three months. In addition to a gallery talk, I conducted a half-day *PhotoSophia* workshop

for fifty freshmen on student and human identity. In pairs students used their cell phones to photograph each other and ask prepared questions. Their inscribed *PhotoSophia* portraits are displayed in the college library (Figure 27). I additionally gave two public group presentations at the gallery, made many personal tours of the exhibit, and two class presentations.


*Figure 27. Being and Becoming Exhibit with Student PhotoSophia photographs at Guilford College, September 2019*

I presented in October 2019 at the Peace and Conflict Studies in Anthropology (PACSA) 2019 Conference at Queens University in Belfast, Northern Ireland. It was a one-hour presentation on the *Being and Becoming* study and an interactive workshop on *PhotoSophia*. As was done at Guilford College, participants paired off to use their cell phone cameras to take portraits of each other and ask introspective questions about personal identity.

Another expression of interest in this study has been the publication of a book chapter I authored for *Expanding the Edges of Narrative Inquiry: Research from the Mauro Institute*, (Reimer, et al. 2019). The chapter is titled: *Being and Becoming: A Photographic Inquiry with Bahá'í Men into Cultures of Peace (The Essence of an Arts-Based Doctoral Dissertation).* It was released in December 2019.

I interpret this interest, as an expression of thirst for new knowing, research and practice in forms of arts-based peacebuilding in PACS. Photography has been used very successfully as an *instrumental* tool in PACS peacebuilding and research, but tapping its *integrative* power is not as common (Hunter and Page (2014). This is a new area for research and exploration in PACS. I must say photography is not the only arts-based medium that has the potential for *integrative* power, knowing dear colleagues who are researching and transforming with drama, dance and music, and creative writing. That research can itself be a vehicle for transformation in real time is one unique aspect of this study. This transformation is apparent in interviews and questionnaire responses. To co-create powerful artwork with participants that stood for public display and review is profound and worthy of reflection and further research.

**Final thoughts**

Can you breathe in the aromas, and taste the pungent tea I was served by Abbas, Rayan, Jim and Payam? Can you smell the fragrance as it steeped, floating steam past my nose and fogging my glasses? Can you see the sunlight streak across Miles face or hear the passion in Krishna's voice? Can you look directly into the eyes of Corey and Rod, or hear Jordan's children joyfully playing in the background? Who am I to have had such an experience, conversations so intimate, that go spiritually deeper than a handshake or an embrace? It was a look deep into the wordless cave, where fears and uncertainty and vulnerability hide in the dark shadows. It is the place we hide the things we all know but never say: that we feel like children forever, living in wonder and awe, suffering pain of body, soul and mind, confused, dizzied by the overwhelming forces of reality swirling around us and not knowing what is ahead but that we will die. It is the place where our shame resides, shame that we have not done more, understood more, gone beyond just learning and obeying the rules and codes, that have hopefully enabled us to navigate without collision, major conflict or sudden death. It is that place where the way we see ourselves to be, is confronted with who we really are. It is the place where our being is suddenly not enough, and it is our becoming that takes precedence. Our fear of death also resides here. Is it fear or awe? That I know I will die can never quite be accepted and reconciled with the onward, seemingly endless cinema of my life. But with it comes a sense of urgency to leave my mark.

Masculinity as social construction (apart from male embodiment), is so deeply embedded in our sense of self as men, we cannot see or know it, we do not know where it begins or ends, what is our authentic self and what is the ghost. This is the sense I get from the men who chose to join this journey to know ourselves with the noble purpose of acquiring virtues of peace that would help build cultures of peace. There is a sense of divine purpose here, of what Bahá'ís call being *firm in the Covenant*, being obedient, aligning with and being in harmony with the teachings of the Creator for the age we live in, even if it hurts. It is freedom from the dark din of the "prison of self" (Bahá'u'lláh, 2012, p. 36), freedom that allows us to attune ourselves to the harmonious chord that hums through the universe. And yet in order to align we must resist the hegemony and dominance of patriarchal masculinity, and become examples for others to follow.

The seed for this study comes from my own curiosity, to know myself as a man who believes in the sacred equality of the sexes and wants to walk the talk. As a PACS practitioner

who stands at the intersection of artist/photographer, teacher/learner, writer/researcher I have an insatiable curiosity for new ways of knowing, using the means I know and am guided by.

This study, and the PhotoSophia method, disrupts the PACS discipline because it clearly demonstrates the efficacy of using the lens of sacred oneness in transformative, action-rooted research. This oneness weaves together science and nonverbal arts-based approaches, with deeply sacred spiritual and indigenous frameworks, to blaze a trail to new ways of knowing. This inclusive and relational way of knowing has unbounded potential in future PACS research.

In conclusion, loving, like truly listening means to be willing to give up something, to be changed by those you love, to sacrifice your own comfort, be selfless, rethink firmly held concepts, change ways of being and try new lenses through which you see the world. It means to be open to vulnerability, ambiguity, and helplessness, admitting an inability to solve a problem alone, to ask for help, to live free of fear; "*to construct a society which allows for the flourishing of all*" (Bahá'í International Community, 2015, p. 7). I am truly humbled and honored to walk with my brothers in this noble process.

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# Appendix

a) Consent Agreements and Study Information Forms

b) Gallery Questionnaire

c) Bahá'í International Community Statement

d) *PhotoSophia* Readings

**Appendix A**

## Consent Agreement and Study Information

**Title of Study:** *Being and Becoming: A photographic inquiry with Bahá'í men into cultures of peace.*

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This study has been approved by Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the **Human Ethics Coordinator** at 204-474-7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. The University of Manitoba may look at research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

The researcher has a legal obligation to report any reasonable suspicion that a child is in danger of being abused.

***Being and Becoming: An Inquiry with Bahá'í men into cultures of peace*** is a doctoral research study that asks how Bahá'í men know, experience and perform their own masculinities as told through their stories and photographs. Within the spiritual context of the Bahá'í tenet of equality of the sexes it seeks new knowledge about how participants negotiate their masculinities in a process of building cultures of peace.

Using photographic art-based methods it will accompany participants in a process of introspection. What is it to be a man today and attempt to construct "a new understanding of masculinity".[1] How is this process evident in practice? What are your stories of resisting or negotiating with negative cultural norms of masculinity?

This inquiry will use three arts-based visual methods: an photographic portrait-sitting/interview followed by writing on and discussing the inscribed portrait (*PhotoSophia*); participants taking photographs based on specific questions and themes followed by discussion (Narrative Photovoice); and finally studying photographs of fathers to discuss the formation of manhood (Photo Elicitation).

This methodology is designed to provide a means for deep reflection on masculine identity formation and transformation in a context of peace and equality. The study will conclude with a public exhibit of the photographs created by the researcher and participants opening the process to public (including women's) review. Journaling and caption writing will also be utilized.

[1] *Bahá'í International Community. (2015, April 26). Toward a new discourse on religion and gender equality*

A copy of this consent/release form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

This document contains consent and release forms that require your signature to participate in this study:

1) Consent agreement and study information
2) Consent for research using video and photography
3) Audio/video and photography release
` 4) Father's photograph release
5) Consent for copyright and usage rights of audio/video/photo recordings and artwork

*The researcher/research coordinator will carefully explain each of the following criteria for participation in this study prior to the signing of this form.*

• My participation in this study should be of no risk to me and could prove beneficial in gaining a deeper self-knowledge and understanding about my masculine role in context of building cultures of peace.

• Should any personal discomfort result from participation in this study I will be provided with a list of free professional help in the Winnipeg area.

• I will receive no remuneration or payment for participation in this study.

• My personal contact information will be kept confidential.

• I understand I will be shown photographs and audio/video of me before dissemination and have the right to withdraw consent for any item specifically and at any time.

Please confirm the eligibility requirements to participate in this study:

yes no ☐ ☐ adult male 18 years or older

yes no ☐ ☐ lives in the Winnipeg area within driving distance of University of Manitoba.

yes no ☐ ☐ identify as member of the Bahá'í Faith

yes no ☐ ☐ can commit to attend four sessions in August/September totaling about 24 hours.

yes no ☐ ☐ fluent in reading and writing in English

yes no ☐ ☐ has access to a photograph of his father

Please check yes or no for each statement below:

yes no ☐ ☐ I agree to participate in this doctoral research study including four sessions over the months of August and September 2018 that will likely require a 24 hour commitment.

yes no ☐ ☐ I agree to allow dissemination of my recognizable image, voice and words in photographs, video/audio recordings and journal entries and that my identity will not be anonymous.

yes no ☐ ☐ I will allow my full real name to be used in dissemination of this study with my recognizable image, voice and words in photographs, video/audio recordings and journal entries.

**OR**

yes no ☐ ☐ In place of using my full name I would prefer only my first name, initials or a pseudonym to be used in dissemination of this study with my recognizable image, voice and words in photographs, video/audio recordings and journal entries.

yes no ☐ ☐ I agree for purposes directly related to this study to allow my full name or as checked above only my first name, initials or pseudonym to be disseminated along with my image in the ways listed in the release forms.

yes no ☐ ☐ My rights to free consent and confidentiality in the study been explained to me.

yes no ☐ ☐ I waive my right to confidentiality for purposes of this study understanding photographs of and by me and my journal entries may be shared with fellow participants in group sessions

yes no ☐ ☐ I have read and understand the tasks and responsibilities of being a participant in this study as explained in this document and the invitation letter.

Who explained the study to you? _____ _____print name

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the

study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

I, _____, (please print) have read and understand the rights, responsibilities and tasks listed above to be a participant in the study ***Being and Becoming: A photographic inquiry with Bahá'í men into cultures of peace.***

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

## Consent for Research Using Video and Photography

**Title of Study:** Being and Becoming: A photographic inquiry with Bahá'í men into cultures of peace.

**Principal Researcher:** Charles Egerton, PhD Candidate, Peace and Conflict Studies

You have consented to participate in a Research Study in which Video and Photographs of you will be used. The information contained in Video and Photographs is considered personal information as they present recorded information in which you may be identified. Please take your time to review and read this consent form carefully and any accompanying information. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask the study researcher. Although the information captured in video and photographs is non-anonymous, confidentiality can be protected by restricting access to the video/photo data.

The following is a list of tasks, responsibilities and expectations of participants in this study:

• I will meet alone with the researcher for a portrait sitting interview (*PhotoSophia*), take photographs (Photovoice), provide historic photographs, be audio/video recorded, and submit journal/caption entries for purposes of the study which will be audio and video recorded.

• group sessions and interviews will be audio/video recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

• With my consent I have waived the right to confidentiality and anonymity for purposes of this study.

• I will be asked to produce photography and journal writing or audio/video recordings for the study.

• Video and photography data will be collected by the researcher using cameras and audio recording devices and that the video/photo data I collect will be with my own recording devices.

• Raw (unedited) recordings and images will only be seen by the researcher. Versions edited and approved by the participant will be seen by other participants in the study and the general public only for purposes of this study. Participants will be given the opportunity to review, make suggestions and express approval or disapprove of the photographic and video data collected of them before it is publicly viewed, published or disseminated.

• video and photographic data collected will be under the protection and secure control of the researcher who will not disseminate it without permission from the participant depicted in the recording. Digital data will be secured on password protected hard drive.

• records, materials and video/photo recordings not disseminated in the final product of this study will be destroyed by December 2021. Participant photographs/artworks displayed in the exhibit will be securely stored by the researcher. Each participant will be offered their photographs/artworks before December 2021.

• video and photography data will be collected by the researcher using his cameras and audio recording devices and the video/photo data collected by participants will use their own recording devices such as a digital camera or cell phone camera. Use of a camera or memory card can be provided if needed.

• non-participants in the study should not be a part of video/photo gathering and if accidentally captured will be edited out and not included in study data.

yes ☐ no ☐ I have read and understand the requirements, tasks and responsibilities of being a participant in this study as explained in this document.

In signing this **Consent for Research Using Video and Photography** I freely agree to participate in a research study in which video/audio recordings, photographs and artworks by me or containing my image and/or voice may be disseminated. I agree that solely for purposes of this study photographs and audio/video recordings of and by me could be disseminated to a wide variety of audiences in the following ways: digital and print publications, articles and books; displays and exhibits, presentations; a website dedicated to the study, a video created and edited to document the study.

I authorize the use of such data and recordings only for the educational purposes specified above. My full name (or first name, initials, or pseudonym) will appear with my image in video/photo recordings and artworks published in this study. I have been advised that while all feasible precautions are being taken to restrict the use of these video/photo recordings and artworks it is not possible to fully guarantee that distributed materials, especially those distributed via the Internet, will always be used for intended purposes.

I have read this consent form. I have had the opportunity to discuss this research study with the researcher. I have had all my questions answered by them in language I understand. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I believe that I have not been unduly influenced by any study team member to participate in the research study by any statements or implied statements. Any relationship (such as employer, supervisor or family member) I may have with the study team has not affected my decision to participate and that I may choose to withdraw my consent and decline to be recorded and to participate in any activity related to this study at any time, without penalty, prejudice or consequence. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form after signing it. I authorize the inspection of any of my records that relate to this study by the University of Manitoba.

By signing this consent form, I have not waived any of the legal rights that I have as a participant in a research study and I have not released the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

Charles Egerton

Role in the study_____

**Audio/Video and Photography Release**

**Title of Study:** *Being and Becoming: A photographic inquiry with Bahá'í men into cultures of peace.*

**Principal Researcher:** Charles Egerton, PhD Candidate
Department of Peace and Conflict Studies. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice. University of Manitoba.
Address: 259 St Paul's College, 70 Dysart Rd, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2M6
Email: egertonc@myumanitoba.ca

**Purpose of Study**

***Being and Becoming: An Inquiry with Bahá'í men into cultures of peace*** is a doctoral research study that asks how Bahá'í men know, experience and perform their own masculinities as told through their stories and photographs. Within the spiritual context of the Bahá'í tenet of equality of the sexes it seeks new knowledge about how participants negotiate their masculinities in a process of building cultures of peace.

**As a participant in this study your photograph will be taken and you will be video/audio recorded. You will also take photographs for the study. We hope to use these photographs and recordings to better understand masculine identity. If you are comfortable with having your image recorded and for your photographs to be used for this study we ask that you sign the release form below.**

**If you have any questions please call us at one of the numbers listed above.**

*The researcher/research coordinator will carefully explain each of the following criteria for the release of photographs prior to the signing of this form.*

In signing this release I _____agree to the release of the photographs and audio/video recordings of me that I have taken or were taken of me for the following uses in context of this study only after my review and with my permission. I understand that my permission can be withdrawn for any reason at any time without negative repercussions.

yes ☐ no ☐ I will allow my real name to be used in dissemination of this study with my recognizable image, voice and words in photographs, video/audio recordings and journal entries.

OR

yes ☐ no ☐ In place of using my full name I would prefer only my first name, initials or a pseudonym to be used in dissemination of this study with my recognizable image, voice and words in photographs, video/audio recordings and journal entries.

Solely for purposes of this study I agree to allow photographs and audio/video recordings of and by me to be disseminated to a wide variety of audiences in the following ways:

digital and print publications, articles and books

yes no ☐ ☐ displays and exhibits, presentations

yes no ☐ ☐ a website dedicated to the study

yes no ☐ ☐ a video edited and created to document the study

I hereby authorize the release of the photographs and audio/video recordings to Charles Egerton to be used and disseminated in the manner indicated above and for analysis and sharing with study participants during group discussions.

I have received a copy of this form for my personal records.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

**Father's Photograph Release**

*The researcher/research coordinator will carefully explain each of the following criteria for the release of photographs prior to the signing of this form.*
**Being and Becoming: A photographic inquiry with Bahá'í men into cultures of peace.**

In signing this release I _____agree to the release of photographs of me for the following uses in context of this study. I understand that my permission can be withdrawn for any reason at any time without negative repercussions.

yes no ☐ ☐ I will allow my full real name to be used in dissemination of this study with my recognizable image.

OR

yes no ☐ ☐ In place of using my full name I would prefer only my first name, initials or a pseudonym to be used in dissemination of this study with my recognizable image.

I grant limited usage rights of my photograph to the researcher only for purposes of this study. Solely for purposes of this study I agree to allow this photograph of me (father) to be disseminated to a wide variety of audiences in the following ways:

digital and print publications, articles and books

yes no ☐ ☐ displays and exhibits, presentations

yes no ☐ ☐ a website dedicated to the study

yes no ☐ ☐ a video edited and created to document the study

The photograph will also be used in analysis and sharing with study participants during group discussions.
I hereby authorize the release of the photographs and audio/video recordings to Charles Egerton to be used and disseminated in the manner indicated above.

I, _____, give permission to use photographs of me for the study: **Being and Becoming: A photographic inquiry with Bahá'í men into cultures of peace.**

- ☐ My father is deceased or unavailable and I have permission to allow his photograph and full name (or first name, initials or pseudonym) to be used for all disseminations and purposes of this study listed above.

I hereby authorize the release of the photograph or photographs provided by my son:

_____ a participant in this study to Charles Egerton to be used for purposes of this study.
I will receive a copy of this form for my personal records.

Father's Signature _____ Date _____

Participant's Signature (son) _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

**Consent for Copyright and Usage Rights of Audio/Video/Photo Recordings and Artworks**

**Title of Study:** Being and Becoming: A photographic inquiry with Bahá'í men into cultures of peace.
**Principal Researcher:** Charles Egerton, PhD Candidate, Peace and Conflict Studies

*"In the simplest terms, "copyright" means "the right to copy." In general, copyright means the sole right to produce or reproduce a work or a substantial part of it in any form. It includes the right to perform the work or any substantial part of it or, in the case of a lecture, to deliver it. If the work is unpublished, copyright includes the right to publish the work or any substantial part of it."*

Canadian Intellectual Property Office. https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/cipointernet-internetopic.nsf/eng/h_wr02281.html

This consent form is designed to clarify copyright ownership of works created for this study. It is divided in three parts based on who authored the work: 1) works authored by the participant, 2) works authored by the researcher and 3) works co-authored by the participant and the researcher.

**Participant created audio/video/photo recordings and artworks**

**I agree to the following copyright terms for use of audio/video/photo recordings and artworks I create for the Being and Becoming study.**

• As author I will own the legal copyright of all audio/video/photo recordings and artworks I alone author during this study.

• I grant limited usage rights of my solely authored copyrighted audio/video/photo recordings and artworks to the researcher only for purposes of this study.

yes ☐ no ☐ I agree that solely for purposes of this study photographs and audio/video recordings I created can be disseminated to a wide variety of audiences in the following ways: digital and print publications, articles and books; displays and exhibits, presentations; a website dedicated to the study, a video created and edited to document the study.

• The following copyright notice will be included with the publication of any audio/video/photo recordings and artworks I alone author during the project. ©Participant Name, Year, and that this notice will be included with my authored video/photo recordings and artworks.

• I reserve the right to withdraw consent for usage of any of my audio/video/photo recordings and artworks upon review of it before dissemination, or at any time in the future.

• usage of my copyrighted works are granted without monetary compensation.

**Researcher created audio/video/photo recordings and artworks**

**I agree to the following copyright terms for use of audio/video/photo recordings and artworks the researcher creates for the Being and Becoming study.**

• The researcher, Charles Egerton will own the legal copyright of all audio/video/photo recordings and artworks he authors for this study including works that depict me visually and audibly.

yes ☐ no ☐ I grant Charles Egerton the rights to limited usage of all audio/video/photo recordings and artworks he creates depicting me visually. I agree that solely for purposes of this study photographs and audio/video recordings of me can be disseminated to a wide variety of audiences in the following ways: digital and print publications, articles and books; displays and exhibits, presentations; a website dedicated to the study, a video created and edited to document the study.

• The following copyright notice will be included with any audio/video/photo recordings and artworks Charles Egerton creates for the study: © Charles Egerton 2018.

• I reserve the right to withdraw consent for usage of any audio/video recordings and artworks of me before dissemination, or at any time.

• Usage of my copyrighted works are granted without monetary compensation.

**Researcher/Participant co-created audio/video/photo recordings and artworks**

**I agree to the following copyright terms for use of audio/video/photo recordings and artworks I co-create with the researcher for the Being and Becoming study.**

• The researcher, Charles Egerton and participant's name will co-own the legal copyright of all audio/video/photo recordings and artworks we co-author for this study including works that depict me visually and audibly.

yes ☐ no ☐ I grant Charles Egerton the rights to limited usage of all audio/video/photo recordings and artworks we created depicting me, my writings or artworks. I agree that solely for purposes of this study photographs and audio/video recordings we co-created can be disseminated to a wide variety of audiences in the following ways: digital and print publications, articles and books; displays and exhibits, presentations; a website dedicated to the study, a video created and edited to document the study.

• The following copyright notice will be included with any audio/video/photo recordings and artworks Charles Egerton and I create for the study: © Charles Egerton & participants name 2018.

• I reserve the right to withdraw consent for usage of any audio/video recordings and artworks of me before dissemination, or at any time.

• Usage of my copyrighted works are granted without monetary compensation.

In signing this **Consent for Copyright and Usage Rights of Video/photo Recordings and Artworks** I confirm I have read and understand my rights and responsibilities concerning the copyright and usages of video/photo recordings and artworks created or co-created of and by me for this study and consent to their uses as described above.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

Charles Egerton

These rights are based on the Canadian Copyright Act c. C-42 amended 7 November 2012. For more information: https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/cipointernet-internetopic.nsf/eng/h_wr02281.html

**Appendix B**

**Gallery Questionnaire**

***Being and Becoming***
**Exhibit Survey**

This is an anonymous survey of your responses to attending the *Being and Becoming* exhibit. Detailed information about this study and contact information is posted nearby in the exhibit space.
Please fold and place in box provided when complete.

Gender _____

Ethnicity/Culture_____

Age _____

Religious affiliation _____

Educational affiliation_____ Degree level _____

Is the purpose of the study/exhibit clearly explained?

Has this exhibit affected how you view masculinity?

Initial impressions of the exhibit?

General comments and suggestions?

If you visited the exhibit with others what was the gist of your discussion about the exhibit?

**Study information posted in exhibition space and handouts made available**

**Title of Study:** *Being and Becoming: A photographic inquiry with Bahá'í men into cultures of peace.*

**Principal Researcher:** Charles Egerton, PhD Candidate
Department of Peace and Conflict Studies. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice. University of Manitoba.
Address: 259 St Paul's College, 70 Dysart Rd, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2M6
Email: egertonc@myumanitoba.ca

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Using photographic art-based methods it will accompany participants in a process of introspection. What is it to be a man today and attempt to construct "a new understanding of masculinity".[1] How is this process evident in practice? What are your stories of resisting or negotiating with negative cultural norms of masculinity?

This inquiry will use three arts-based visual methods: an photographic portrait-sitting/interview followed by writing on and discussing the inscribed portrait (*PhotoSophia*); participants taking photographs based on specific questions and themes followed by discussion (Narrative Photovoice); and finally studying photographs of fathers to discuss the formation of manhood (Photo Elicitation).

This methodology is designed to provide a means for deep reflection on masculine identity formation and transformation in a context of peace and equality. The study will conclude with a public exhibit of the photographs created by the researcher and participants opening the process to public (including women's) review. Journaling and caption writing will also be utilized.

[1] *Bahá'í International Community. (2015, April 26). Toward a new discourse on religion and gender equality*

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122. A copy of all three parts of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

**Appendix C**

Bahá'í International Community Statement

Can be accessed and downloaded through this link:

https://www.bic.org/statements/toward-new-discourse-religion-and-gender-equality-0

**Appendix D**

***PhotoSophia* Readings**

**Being & Becoming: A Photographic Inquiry with Bahá'í Men into Cultures of Peace**

**August-September 2018, Winnipeg – compiled by Chuck Egerton**

**<egertonc@myumanitoba.ca>**

1) O SON OF BEING! Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds. Bahá'u'lláh (*The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 31)

2) O SON OF SPIRIT! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes. Bahá'u'lláh (*The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 2)

3) O CHILDREN OF MEN! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory. Bahá'u'lláh (*The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 68)

4) O MAN OF TWO VISIONS! Close one eye and open the other. Close one to the world and all that is therein, and open the other to the hallowed beauty of the Beloved. Bahá'u'lláh (*The Hidden Words*, Persian no. 12)

5) Rely upon God, thy God and the Lord of thy fathers. For the people are wandering in the paths of delusion, bereft of discernment to see God with their own eyes, or hear His Melody with their own ears. Thus have We found them, as thou also dost witness. Thus have their superstitions become veils between them and their own hearts and kept them from the path of God, the Exalted, the Great. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Ahmad)

*6) "Man in this age has learned the weight of the sun, the path of a star, the movement of an eclipse -- the advance step now is to learn the expansion of the inflexible law of matter into the subtler kingdom of spirit, which contains a finer gravitation which holds the balance of power from age to age unbroken. Blessed is that soul who knows that against all appearances, the nature of things works for truth and right forever . . . . The emancipated soul sees with the eyes of perfect faith because it knows what vast provisions are made to enable it to gain the victory over every difficulty and trial. Yet man must every remember the earth plane is a workshop, not an art gallery for the exhibits of powers This is not the plane of perfection, but earth is the crucible for refining and molding character." –'Abdu'l-Bahá*

Star of the West Vol. 16 Issue 5, p. 518, August 1925 (also quoted in Vol. 24 Issue 11 p. 350, Feb. 1934)

7) "The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment for humanity will not be realized; humanity cannot wing its way to heights of real attainment. When the two wings . . . become equivalent in strength, enjoying the same prerogatives, the flight of man will be exceedingly lofty and extraordinary."

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 375.)

8) The elimination of discrimination against women is a spiritual and moral imperative that must ultimately reshape existing legal, economic, and social arrangements. Promoting the entry of greater numbers of women into positions of prominence and authority is a necessary but not sufficient step in creating a just social order. Without fundamental changes in the attitudes and values of individuals and in the underlying ethos of social institutions, full equality between women and men cannot be achieved. A community based on partnership, a community in which aggression and the use of force are supplanted by cooperation and consultation, requires the transformation of the human heart.

(8-12 are extracts from 1997 statement "Two Wings of a Bird" by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States
http://www.bahai.org/documents/nsa-usa/two-wings-bird)

9) “The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals . . . an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Wendell Phillips Dodge, “Abdul-Baha’s Arrival in America,” in *Star of the West* 3 (April 28, 1912), no. 3, p. 4.)

10) Men have an inescapable duty to promote the equality of women. The presumption of superiority by men thwarts the ambition of women and inhibits the creation of an environment in which equality may reign. The destructive effects of inequality prevent men from maturing and developing the qualities necessary to meet the challenges of the new millennium. “As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities,” the Bahá’í Writings state, “so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs.”( ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris*

*Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911*, 12th ed. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), 40.33)

11) It is essential that men engage in a careful, deliberate examination of attitudes, feelings, and behavior deeply rooted in cultural habit, that block the equal participation of women and stifle the growth of men. The willingness of men to take responsibility for equality will create an optimum environment for progress: "When men own the equality of women there will be no need for them to struggle for their rights!" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 50.14.)

12) The long-standing and deeply rooted condition of inequality must be eliminated. To overcome such a condition requires the exercise of nothing short of "genuine love, extreme patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort." (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 40.)

**13) Role of Men and Boys**

The equality of women and men is not a condition whose effects will be limited to half of the world's population. Its operationalization will revolutionize all facets of human society—the generation of knowledge and development of intellectual life, the practice of governance, the allocation of material resources and the condition of the family, to name but a few. *Men must come to realize that under current conditions of inequality, the development of their full potential is not possible. It is they who must find the moral courage to convey and model new understandings of masculinity and who must challenge and question the narrow roles that society and the media have assigned to them.* In the final analysis, it is not enough to create space in the current social order for women to play their rightful role. Rather, the goal is for women and men to work shoulder-to-shoulder, each as the helpmate of the other—in the context of family, work, community, and international affairs—to construct a society which allows for the flourishing of all.

(Toward a New Discourse on Religion and Gender Equality The Baha'i International Community's Statement to the 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and the 20th Anniversary of the United Nations World Conference on Women 1 Feb. 1 2015, pp. 6-7