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# An Intersectional Analysis of Male Student-Athletes' Meaning-Making About Masculinity

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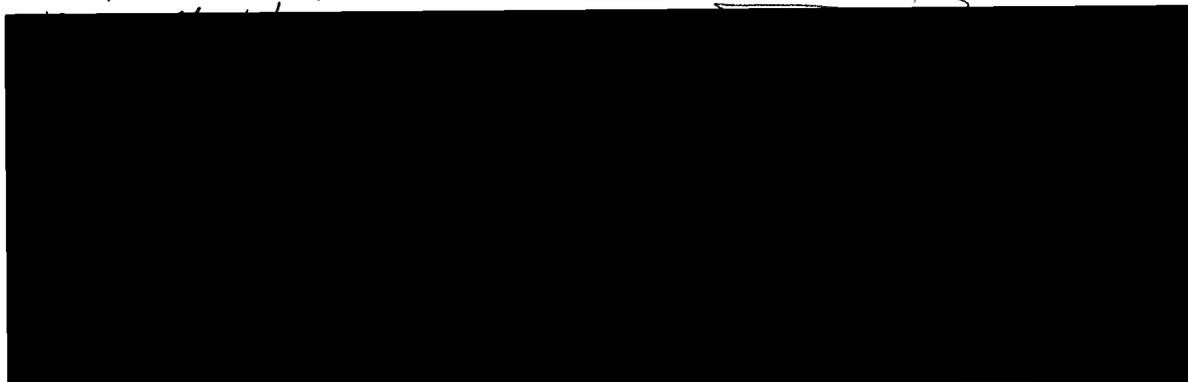
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An Intersectional Analysis of Male Student-Athletes' Meaning-

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Making About Masculinity

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(TITLE)

BY

Michelle Lisack

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**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

**Master of Science in College Student Affairs**

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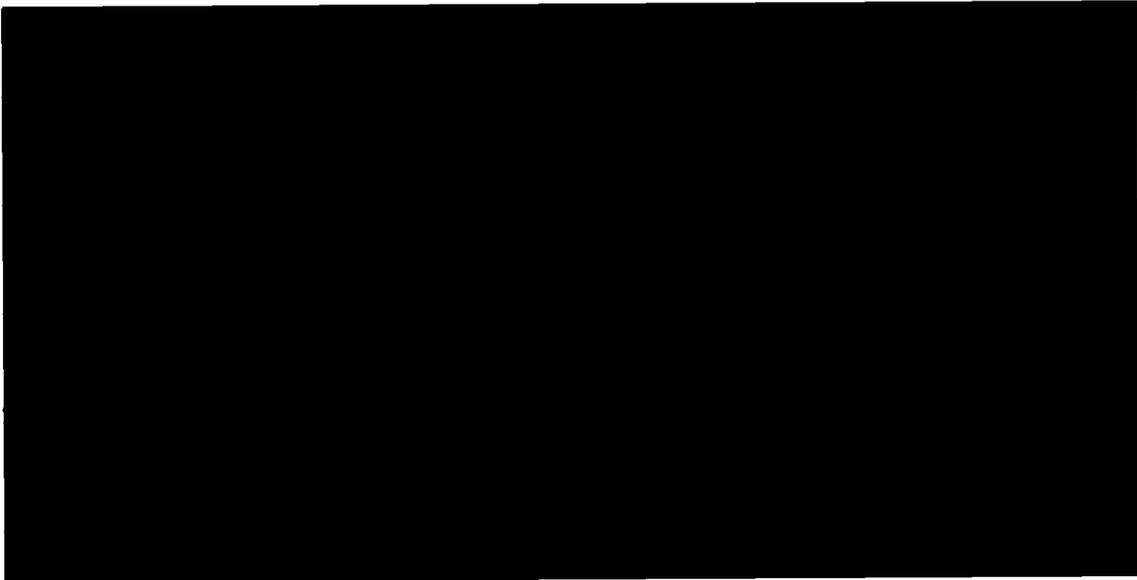
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## ABSTRACT

Men's athletics is often viewed as an environment where hegemonic masculinity is perpetuated, though some believe this environment provides a safe space for men to break away from hegemonic masculinity. This study was designed to gain an understanding of how male student-athletes experience masculinity and how the context of athletics influences meaning-making about masculinity. Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher interviewed five male student-athletes and observed the practice sessions of two different teams. The participants were student-athletes of junior or senior status from the following sports: tennis, soccer, swimming, baseball, and basketball. Results showed that male student-athletes found it challenging to think about and discuss masculinity. Participants discussed the value they placed on their relationships with their teammates and coaches, and participants also discussed rejecting certain aspects of traditional masculinity while accepting other aspects.

*Keywords:* masculinity, student-athletes, intersectionality, hegemonic masculinity

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis, as well as my whole graduate school experience, has been full of ups and downs, and at times I never thought I would make it to this point. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, who has always been there to support and encourage me from day one. Your love and support helped me accomplish something I once thought impossible. Thank you for everything you do.

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This whole thesis endeavor was challenging for me, and I would like to acknowledge all the people who inspired me to keep moving forward. Dr. Richard Roberts, thank you for being my thesis advisor and for supporting and pushing me through the process. Another thank you goes to Dr. Dena Kniess and Dr. Jill Owen for supporting me as members of my thesis committee. I would also like to acknowledge my supervisor, Liz Wenger, for always being there for me and never letting me get away with falling behind on my thesis work. In addition, thank you to my friends and family who have supported me through this entire process. Lastly, thank you to the student-athletes who participated in my study – this thesis could not have been done without you.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

When football athlete Michael Sam became the first openly gay, professional football player before the National Football League draft in 2014, many current and former athletes showed support for Sam (Bishop & Thamel, 2014). There were also people who responded in the opposite way, with some athletes and officials voicing concerns about the impact a gay man would have on the environment of the locker room (Bruni, 2014). The diverse reactions to Sam's sexuality illustrate different theories of masculinity: Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity and Anderson's (2011) inclusive masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that has been "widely used in recent years as a way of understanding the formation, practices, and meanings of masculinity within a range of contexts" (Moller, 2007, p. 263). According to Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinity is comprised of the gendered actions and behaviors that ensure male dominance in society. Levant, Rankin, Williams, Hasan, and Smalley (2010) described hegemonic masculinity as having several characteristics, including fear of femininity and homophobia. Homophobia was evident in some of the responses to Michael Sam's "coming out" announcement, illustrating that hegemonic masculinity may be present within the realm of men's athletics. Anderson (2011), however, described the concept of inclusive masculinity after observing male, college-level soccer athletes who held accepting views of gay men. Sam's college teammates embody this concept, shown by their public support of Sam's public announcement of his sexuality.

The environment of athletics can affect the attitudes and behavior of male athletes. Different sports are perceived as masculine, feminine, or gender-neutral, with contact sports such as boxing and football considered to be highly masculine (Koivula, 2001). Athletics, particularly contact sports, can be considered a medium through which masculinity expectations are transmitted. Several studies have found that involvement in athletics perpetuates sexism, homophobia, and violent behavior (Enck-Wanzer, 2009; Harvey, 1999; Messner, 1994; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2007). Studies by Messner et al. (2007) and Enck-Wanzer (2009) discussed how ideas such as “aggression on the field should be applauded” and “athletes are naturally violent” are affected by the media and by the language used to describe athletic activity. Furthermore, Messner (1994) found that sexist comments made in the locker room helped male athletes bond as a team, while Harvey (1999) found that male athletes valued the gender segregation of sports because it provided men with the opportunity to form relationships with other men. The value placed on friendships and relationship-building by male student-athletes is reflected in other studies by Armstrong and Oomen-Early (2009), Schrack-Walters, O’Donnell, and Wardlow (2009), and Anderson (2011).

College men represent another area of masculinity research that is relevant to the current study. Research has found that college men embody both stereotypical hypermasculinity and a more self-defined idea of masculinity. A study by Davis (2002) found that college men believed they did not receive adequate support services to help them succeed in college. This feeling of inadequate support could be part of the reason more male college students than female college students violate university policies and receive sanctions for their disruptive behavior (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005).

Furthermore, some male college students engage in hypermasculine activities such as excessive drinking or objectifying women in order to communicate their masculinity to others (Harris, 2010). Edwards and Jones (2009) described the hypermasculine behaviors of college men as a performance; college men wear a mask that hides their true selves in order to live up to society's expectations for men.

The hypermasculine performance described by Edwards and Jones (2009) may be a manifestation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell (2005), men who do not exhibit socially acceptable masculine traits are perceived as subordinate to men who do exhibit those traits. The concept of hegemonic masculinity leaves a fairly narrow definition of what it means to be a man. O'Neil (1981) described the effects of having characteristics or interests that differ from what is socially expected of each gender. This phenomenon is gender role conflict. Men who do not fulfill Connell's hegemonic masculinity standard may feel gender role conflict because their traits do not align with the traits endorsed by hegemonic masculinity. Because college is a time of self-discovery for many people, gender role conflict may affect the personal development of college men.

College student-athletes have a college experience that is very different from non-athlete college students. In addition to the traditional college challenges of leaving home and adjusting to the college lifestyle, student-athletes must also face the challenge of living with the athletic stigma on campus. Student-athletes have reported hearing negative comments about the academic ability of student-athletes from non-athlete students and, to a lesser extent, faculty (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007). A more recent study found that college student-athletes who were prompted to think about

their athletic identity performed worse on a test than student-athletes who had not been prompted, which showed the impact the athletic stigma can have on academic performance (Dee, 2014). At the same time, student-athletes have reported a greater sense of attachment to their university than non-athletes (Melendez, 2006).

While much research has been conducted on topics of masculinity and college-level athletics, there is very little literature that focuses strictly on male student-athletes and their perceptions of masculinity. An intersectionality framework will be used to frame how male, college student-athletes make meaning of their masculinity. This study, therefore, will examine the intersection of athletics and masculinity in a college setting.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to interpretively analyze how male student-athletes define, experience, and express masculinity. The objective is to explore male student-athletes' thoughts, experiences, and ways of meaning-making about masculinity. Though individuals think about masculinity differently, the experience of participating in athletics at the college level may influence student-athletes' gendered ideas and behaviors.

### **Research Questions**

Collegiate-level, male student-athletes have a different college experience than male non-athletes. The following questions will guide this study to determine how different student-athletes conceptualize masculinity.

1. How do male student-athletes construct meaning about masculinity?
2. In what ways do male student-athletes experience and perform masculinity?

3. How does athletic involvement influence the process of meaning-making about masculinity?
4. In what ways do student-athletes' interpretations of context influence different aspects of masculinity?

### **Significance of the Study**

Intercollegiate athletics are a large part of many universities in the United States, as they provide revenue and are a source of entertainment for students, staff, faculty, and community members. Many Division I athletic departments have some autonomy within the university and can focus on earning high revenues through athletic events. At the same time, many members of the university community – particularly faculty – view athletics as inferior to academic or artistic pursuits, especially because of issues of academic dishonesty or underperformance among student-athletes (Brand, 2006).

This study may help faculty and staff better understand the development of student-athletes, particularly in regards to gender. Male student-athletes tend to be perceived more negatively by students and faculty than female student-athletes (Simons et al., 2007), so this study may help illuminate some of the stigma surrounding male student-athletes. Furthermore, this study may give insight into the multi-layered experiences of male student-athletes. University faculty and staff can then provide support services that better support male student-athletes to be successful in college.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of the study is the applicability of its findings to other institutions. The study took place at a midsized, public university that participates in Division I of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Therefore, the findings may not be

applicable to the male student-athlete population at different institutions. It is also important to note that men define and experience masculinity differently. Factors such as race, sexual orientation, and life experiences can affect individuals' understanding of their own gender. For instance, the experience of an African-American tennis player at a predominately White institution would be different than the experience of that same tennis player at a historically Black institution.

Additionally, the subject matter of the study was a limitation. Participants may not fully understand or even be cognizant of the people, environments, and other sources that influence their personal interpretations of masculinity. Data collection was also affected by the gender of the researcher. As noted by Sallee and Harris (2011), male participants in masculinity studies use different language to talk about women, sex, and masculinity when interacting with a female researcher as opposed to a male researcher. This could have affected the data obtained from this study, as the participants may have been reluctant to discuss their true feelings about certain topics with the female researcher.

### **Definitions**

**Coming out.** "To recognize one's sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex identity, and to be open about it with oneself and with others" (University of California Berkeley Gender Equity Resource Center, 2014).

**Gender role conflict.** A phenomenon in which social gender roles have a negative psychological impact on individuals who do not fit into those gender roles (O'Neil, 1981).

**Hegemonic masculinity.** Culturally accepted masculine traits and behaviors that maintain the social dominance of men (Connell, 2005). These traits include self-reliance, aggression, and homophobia (Levant et al., 2010).

**Inclusive masculinity.** An alternative theory of masculinity that characterizes men as being accepting of different definitions and expressions of masculinity (Anderson, 2009).

**Intersectionality.** The concept that multiple social identities influence an individual's experiences and perceptions of gender (Shields, 2008).

**Masculinity.** The self-identified concept of what it means to be a man (Hoffman, Hattie, & Borders, 2005).

**National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I.** Universities in Division I have larger student populations, maintain large athletics budgets, and offer more athletic scholarships to students (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.).

**Undergraduate student-athlete.** A student enrolled full-time in undergraduate courses, age 18-24, who participates in any one of the intercollegiate sports offered at the university.

## **Summary**

Many college men undergo personal development during their college careers, and some of that development is about finding a personal definition of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, inclusive masculinity, gender role conflict, and intersectionality are concepts that provide a foundation for analyzing men's individual conceptualizations of masculinity. Male student-athletes undergo development in college as well, yet their development is influenced by the additional context of being involved in athletics.

Furthermore, while there is much existing research on student-athletes, college men, and masculinity, there is very little research that seeks to understand how those three factors intersect. This study seeks to understand how individual male student-athletes experience masculinity, how they make meaning of masculinity, and how athletic involvement affects their conceptions of masculinity.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

This section explores existing research on the topics of masculinity and athletics. The researcher reviewed hegemonic masculinity, college men, masculinity in athletics, and gender role conflict in order to develop a context for the current study.

#### **Masculinity**

**Hegemonic masculinity.** Connell (2005) defined hegemonic masculinity as an ideology that embodies “currently accepted” (p. 77) masculine traits and behaviors that guarantee the continued dominant social position of men in society. Kimmel (1994) defined hegemonic masculinity as the masculinity that applies to White, middle-class, young, heterosexual, college-educated men. This definition leaves out many men. Connell noted that very few men fully embody the characteristics endorsed by hegemonic masculinity, but many benefit from its existence. This means that men who have been traditionally viewed as being lower on the order of masculinity, such as gay men and men of color, still benefit from the social system created by hegemonic masculinity. Connell’s research on hegemonic masculinity has been cited in thousands of articles and has had an extensive impact on masculinity research (Wedgwood, 2009).

Levant et al. (2010) identified seven dimensions of hegemonic masculinity in their development of a scale measuring adherence to traditional masculine attitudes. The dimensions are homophobia, self-reliance, aggression, dominance, non-relational sexuality, restrictive emotionality, and avoidance of femininity. These masculinity dimensions, or traits, have been observed and described by other researchers as well, most notably homophobia and the avoidance of femininity. O’Neil (1981) theorized that

men are socialized to fear femininity, and that produces other behaviors that fall under the category of hegemonic masculinity, such as homophobia and the need for social dominance. This fear of femininity was also found in another study of college men. These men were afraid to behave in ways that could remotely be constructed as feminine, because they generally equated femininity with being gay (Davis, 2002). This particular study illustrates how homophobia and the avoidance of femininity are linked concepts within the minds of some men.

Kimmel (1994) stated that homophobia “is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood” (p. 131). Though Kimmel wrote this over twenty years ago, it still holds true in some contexts. In a more recent study, it was found that male, college-level student-athletes held more negative attitudes toward gay men than female, college-level student-athletes (Roper & Halloran, 2007). This shows that homophobia continues to be seen as a masculine trait, particularly within the realm of athletics. Conversely, another study found male, college-level student-athletes to be very accepting of gay men (Anderson, 2011). These two studies are one example of the complexity of the concepts of gender and masculinity. What is socially acceptable in one context may not be acceptable in another. In addition, race, age, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics and demographic factors impact how men perceive and define masculinity.

While the concept has been influential in masculinity research, hegemonic masculinity is not without its critics. Whitehead (1999) argued that this concept cannot fully explain the complexities of masculinity. Wedgwood (2005) stated that hegemonic masculinity has been overused within masculinity research. More recently, Moller (2007)

argued that the concept of hegemonic masculinity causes researchers to limit how they think about masculinity and power. Moller also argued that the concept prevents researchers from being able to fully understand the experiences of men. None of these critics believe that hegemonic masculinity is a completely faulty concept, nor do they criticize its importance to the field of masculinity studies. However, all of these criticisms are based on the belief that hegemonic masculinity simplifies both the study of masculinity and the way masculinity is constructed by different people. Therefore, hegemonic masculinity, while useful in guiding research and understanding the construction of gender, is limited.

In response to a number of such criticisms, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) proposed a reformulation of several parts of the hegemonic masculinity theory. They discussed the importance of analyzing masculinity at local, regional, and global levels, as gendered institutions on the global scale can affect local and regional ideas about gender and gender hierarchies. Furthermore, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) acknowledged the complexity of masculinity and discussed how a specific person's perceptions of masculinity can change over time. This evaluation of hegemonic masculinity expands the definition of hegemonic masculinity by taking into account the complexities of gender construction; therefore, it can be applied to situations in which traditional ideas of masculinity may not be present.

In contrast to hegemonic masculinity, Anderson (2009) has formulated a theory of inclusive masculinities. In this theory, during a cultural decline in homophobia, two forms of masculinity exist: orthodox masculinity, which includes many of the same characteristics as hegemonic masculinity, and inclusive masculinity, in which men

display emotion and physical affection, have low homophobia, and are accepting of multiple definitions of masculinity. Little research has been done on Anderson's theory, but the theory is important to consider nonetheless, as it offers a different perspective on how men define and perform masculinity. In all, hegemonic masculinity is a concept that is important to consider in a study about masculinity. It is also important, however, to consider other theories of masculinity, such as Anderson's (2009) theory of inclusive masculinities, in order to more completely understand how men conceptualize and experience masculinity.

**College men.** Men develop their gender identity in college through their interactions with social expectations of masculinity. These social expectations include being competitive, controlling or restricting emotions, being responsible, and not being gay or feminine (Edwards & Jones, 2009). Edwards and Jones (2009) found that college men would often behave in ways that went against their personality or values in order to meet the social expectations of manhood. The participants in the study described themselves as wearing a mask in order to prove to others that they were men. In a related study, college men acted in ways that did not align with their personal conceptualizations of masculinity. These men described masculinity as being respectful and showing integrity. Yet, they used negative language to describe women and would mock men who maintained long-term romantic relationships (Harris, 2008). These studies illustrate that there is a certain level of gender performance that exists among men attending college. Men want to prove their masculinity to other men, and to do that, men sometimes must go against their personal values and act in stereotypically masculine ways.

Foste, Edwards, and Davis (2012) found that college men underwent a trial and error method when developing their gender identity. Preconceived notions about college life, such as the easy availability of alcohol and women, affect the experiences and identity development of college men, especially when reality does not live up to their expectations. Furthermore, even after college, men become comfortable with their personal definition of masculinity, and they often do not challenge other men who behave in ways that perpetuate hegemonic masculinity (Foste et al., 2012). The results of this study show how it is difficult for some college men to be comfortable with their masculinity, especially around other men.

Interestingly, in studies by Davis (2002), Edwards and Jones (2009), and Foste et al. (2012), men shared that they were more comfortable expressing themselves and relaxing their masculinity performance around women. Around men, however, the male participants felt they had to prove their masculinity and could not engage in any emotional or expressive behaviors for fear of being perceived as unmasculine. These findings also illustrate how masculinity performance is prevalent among college men. Their fear of being perceived as feminine surfaces around other men. In order to be accepted as a man by other men, college men feel pressured to adjust their behaviors in different situations.

In another study, college men developed their gender identity in an environment in which masculine norms were established by fraternity members and student-athletes. Being tough and physically powerful, traits expressed by many student-athletes, therefore became the standard against which other men were evaluated (Harris & Struve, 2009). Though the cultures of individual universities differ, the influence of male student-

athletes on the masculinity development of other male college students is important to consider. It is also important to consider how the relative visibility of male student-athletes on a college campus can affect how those student-athletes express their masculinity.

In general, men are exposed to different definitions of masculinity in college, which allows them to broaden their understanding of their own definition of masculinity (Harris & Struve, 2009). A college campus provides an environment where diverse ideas and perceptions of masculinity can be expressed and exchanged; this environment causes male college students to develop a more complex understanding of the concept of masculinity (Harris, 2010).

### **Masculinity in Athletics**

**Social connections, friendship, and emotions.** Participation in athletics has a generally positive impact on athletes in terms of emotional expression and friendship, but it may negatively affect athletes in certain contexts. One study found that student-athletes reported higher levels of social connectedness than their non-athlete peers (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009). Armstrong and Oomen-Early's (2009) study supported the theory that "social networks are the foundation of most athletic teams" (p. 524). Social connections are an essential part of an athletic team, and athletes place great value on the friendships and support they share with their teammates.

One study found that male athletes place high importance on their friendships with their teammates and often view their teammates as family (Schrack-Walters et al., 2009), while another study revealed that male athletes described their current and former teammates as brothers (Harvey, 1999). Participants in both studies noted that they formed

close bonds due to having a common purpose and goal. The success of the team was dependent on the participants' ability to work with one another. These studies indicated that men develop strong friendships with their teammates and value those friendships which had been formed in order to reach a shared goal. These close relationships are important for both team cohesion and the personal wellbeing of the athletes.

In another study, Anderson (2011) found that male, college-level soccer athletes viewed sports as a safe space for men to express their emotions and their affection for other men. This finding is interesting, as it highlights an aspect of athletics that does not align with traditional standards of hegemonic masculinity. The men on this particular team believed it was acceptable to show emotion to one another though the public display of emotion is considered to be unmasculine. Furthermore, the men on the team frequently used physical touch to communicate their feelings of friendship; they would lean against one another for support, for example. Anderson (2011) concluded that this particular athletic team displays a culture of inclusive masculinity and asserts that inclusive masculinity is becoming more common in athletics. The results of this study show that it is erroneous to assume all male athletics programs teach athletes to embrace standards of hegemonic masculinity.

Steinfeldt, Wong, Hagan, Hoag, and Steinfeldt (2011b) investigated gender role conflict among college football players and determined one aspect of gender role conflict – showing affection for other men – affected participants' life satisfaction levels. Men who were less restricted in regards to showing their emotions to their teammates had higher life satisfaction levels. The researchers suggested football provided the participants an environment where it was acceptable to be affectionate and emotional

towards other men. However, the participants may have been restricted by societal norms from expressing emotion, as the participants talked of emotion in terms of energy or intensity. The results of this study illustrated a characteristic that may be common in other men's sports: it is acceptable to be emotional, as long as those emotions are within socially-prescribed boundaries of masculinity. In this instance, emotion is associated with the acts of playing football and supporting the team; the sport mediates the relationship between masculinity and expressing emotion.

The environment that allows men to form intimate relationships and feel free to express emotion also provides a space to reinforce more traditional characteristics of masculinity. For example, in one study, male athletes described physical activity as a way to deal with difficult emotions (Lilleaas, 2007). If this is a common idea among male athletes, then it may point to the prevalence of excessive violence on and off the field. These athletes may see physical aggression as an appropriate way to let out their negative emotions. Furthermore, Harvey (1999) concluded that male sports teams provide an exclusive environment that women and some men are prohibited from entering. This reinforces ideas of hegemonic masculinity, as people who are perceived to be less masculine are barred from the male athletic team.

College athletes may also have difficulties connecting with the larger campus community as a result of being a student-athlete. Athletes are a stigmatized group on campuses; many have reported hearing negative comments by peers in regards to their intelligence, motivation, and special treatment (Simons et al., 2007). Collegiate athletes have also reported negative comments by professors, though professors tended to have a

more positive view of college athletes. The stigma of being a student-athlete may cause athletes to feel less connected to their non-athlete peers and to their university as a whole.

**Sexism and homophobia.** Messner (1994) found that male athletes participated in sexist and homophobic locker room banter, even if they personally did not like it, in order to bond appropriately with teammates and help them be successful athletes. Messner (1994) asserted that this banter is mostly rhetorical but does impact how male athletes interact with women. In a more recent study, participants who had higher levels of sexism were more likely to prefer a man as a head athletic coach (Aicher & Sagas, 2010). Taken together, these studies indicate that male athletes are part of a culture that values traditional masculine characteristics. However, in a study of heterosexual, male college cheerleaders, participants displayed less sexist and misogynistic views of women due to their close relationship with their female teammates (Anderson, 2008). Anderson (2008) suggests that participants' views of women changed because they witnessed firsthand their female teammates' athletic ability and leadership skills; they developed close friendships with their female teammates, which were missing from the participants' previous experience playing all-male sports.

Homophobic language and behavior is perpetuated by athletes and coaches alike, creating a discriminatory environment and reinforcing the inferiority of women (Sabo, 1994). This homophobic environment can make male athletics an unwelcoming place for gay male athletes, though the experiences of gay athletes are not universal. Anderson (2002) found that most gay male athletes who had revealed their sexuality to their teammates were generally pleased with the experience, as their teammates reacted more positively than expected. However, those participants described a "culture of silence" (p.

874) around their sexuality. Their teammates avoided discussing their sexuality and would often use homophobic language, even after the participants had openly revealed their sexual orientation. While the teammates were not outwardly discriminatory, their silence regarding the participants' sexuality conveyed the message that homosexuality is not welcome in male athletics. Furthermore, some athletes face much more overt discrimination after coming out. For example, a high school football player whose sexuality was exposed without his consent, faced discrimination and bullying from friends, teammates, and even coaches (Anderson, 2002). A more recent study of a college soccer team found that most of the team's players did not hold overtly homophobic views (Anderson, 2011), suggesting that the male athletics environment is becoming less homophobic and more welcoming of athletes with diverse sexual orientations. A prominent example of the mixed reactions gay athletes receive after coming out is football player Michael Sam, the first openly gay man to be drafted to the NFL. When Sam kissed his then boyfriend after being drafted, some individuals, including current and former NFL players, reacted negatively on social media. Many showed support for Sam, illustrating how gay male athletes face both homophobia and acceptance (Yan & Alsup, 2014).

**Power and violence.** Male athletes in contact sports use violence on the field to prove their status as a man within the arena of athletics. Athletic violence is also used to show the superiority of men over women; physical strength and violence is seen by some men as the last arena in which men are unquestionably superior to women (Messner, 2007). A study of former hockey players found that the culture surrounding the sport, including fans, other players, and officials, encouraged violence and aggression in

athletes, both within and outside of an athletic context. The hockey players used aggression in order to prove to others that they were men (Pappas, McKenry, & Catlett, 2004).

Sports and news media affect how power and violence are viewed in the context of male athlete masculinity. Enck-Wanzer (2009) asserted that the media perpetuates the idea that male athletes are naturally violent, and their violence on the field results in violence and abuse in their personal lives. Enck-Wanzer (2009) stated that this is especially detrimental to Black male athletes, as they are more likely to be portrayed and viewed as excessively violent. Furthermore, sports commentators applaud aggressive athletes and use language associated with war in order to describe what is happening on the field, further contributing to the idea that male athletes should be physically powerful and violent (Messner et al., 2007). These studies show how the media plays a role in shaping attitudes towards men's athletics. Language and coverage provide cues about what a male athlete should be like – violent and physically powerful – and language and media coverage affect the expectations others have for male athletes. There is pressure to be rough and aggressive in order to be considered a successful athlete.

Violent language is used not only in sports commentary but also during games and matches. A study of a British soccer team found that coaches used language that could be categorized as either masculinity-establishing discourse or masculinity-challenging discourse (Adams, Anderson, & McCormack, 2010). Masculinity-establishing discourse was used to communicate that soccer was a men's sport; references to war and violence, as well as homophobic and misogynistic language, were used by coaches towards their players. Masculinity-challenging discourse was used by both

coaches and athletes to berate men who were performing poorly. However, Adams et al. (2010) found that the athletes in the study did not use this type of language off the field, nor did they act in homophobic, sexist, or violent ways, and the researchers suggested that hypermasculine language was a “sporting technique” (p. 293) rather than a deeply ingrained attitude. The researchers also suggested that the complicity with which athletes listened to sexist, homophobic, and violent language contributed to the prevalence of hypermasculinity in soccer. This study highlights an interesting question in the world of sports: is it possible to separate a sport’s emphasis on power and violence from the behaviors and attitudes of athletes off the field?

**Athletes in college.** Male student-athletes are considered to be some of the most visible men on a college campus and, as such, set the standards for masculinity norms for other men in college (Harris & Struve, 2009; Harris, 2010). Non-athlete men may look at their athlete peers as role models and imitate their behaviors and actions. Additionally, athletes who participate in center sports – sports that are an important source of money and tradition for an institution – are more likely to be sexually aggressive and possess hypermasculine traits and attitudes than athletes who participate in marginal sports. Marginal sports often do not bring in any money for the institution, and nonrevenue athletes do not have as much visibility on campus. Therefore, marginal athletes tend to be similar to non-athletes in terms of masculinity attitudes (Gage, 2008). Gage’s study supports the idea that masculinity is flexible; masculine behaviors and ideas that are considered acceptable in one setting may not be acceptable in other settings. The results of this study may also imply that hypermasculinity is affected by men’s perceived visibility to other men.

Student-athletes tend to be viewed negatively by their peers and by faculty members, specifically in regards to their academic motivation and ability (Simons et al., 2007). A study of faculty at a Division II school found that some faculty perceived that academically unqualified male student-athletes benefited from special admissions provisions (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). That same study found that faculty also had negative perceptions of the additional academic support services provided to male student-athletes. While not all faculty hold such views, there are some who do subscribe to the stereotype that male student-athletes are less intelligent or academically inclined than other students. This perception can affect the relationship between male student-athletes and their professors, the confidence male student-athletes have in their academic abilities, and the overall college experience of male student-athletes.

Male athletes view their coaches as sources of attitudes towards masculinity. In Foste et al.'s (2012) study of masculinity development, the participant discussed his high school football coaches and how they conveyed messages about what it means to be masculine. In another study, college football coaches were found to value the masculine traits of accountability and responsibility. Coaches also valued their role as a mentor to their teams (Steinfeldt et al., 2011a). Both studies illustrated how athletic coaches can greatly influence the concepts of masculinity held by their players.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Intersectionality.** Not all men conceptualize masculinity in the same way; different parts of a man's identity affect his ideas about masculinity. For instance, spirituality plays an important role in African American college men's masculinity development (Dancy, 2011). Spirituality may play a less significant role in the

masculinity development of men of different races. The concept of intersectionality explains why each individual defines masculinity in a different way. Gopaldas (2013) defined intersectionality as “the interactivity of social identity structures such as race, class, and gender in fostering life experiences, especially experiences of privilege and oppression” (p. 90).

Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) described intersectionality through their reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity. In this model, social context is filtered through an individual’s meaning-making capacity. An individual’s interpretation of context influences their perception of multiple aspects of their identity, such as race, gender, and social class. Furthermore, the importance of each aspect of identity changes throughout time. This model explains how masculinity will be perceived differently by every individual.

To illustrate this model of intersectionality, consider a first-year, 18-year-old college student who perceives his identity as consistent with cultural expectations. This particular student’s meaning-making filter would allow a large amount of social context to influence his perception of his gender, racial, and other cultural identities. According to Abes et al. (2007), these individuals possess formulaic meaning-making, and they rarely perceive there to be relationships among the different parts of their identity. To these individuals, their gender is separate from their sexual orientation, their race, and any other cultural identity they hold. Individuals who possess foundational meaning-making, however, are better able to filter cultural expectations and create a personal and consistent identity. These individuals are also more able to perceive how the different parts of their identity are intertwined.

**Gender role conflict.** O'Neil (1981) defined gender role conflict as “a psychological state in which gender roles have negative consequences or impact on the person or others” (p. 203). O'Neil (2013) later specified gender role conflict in men, which “represents the negative consequences of conforming to, deviating from, or violating the gender role norms of masculinity ideology” (p. 490). Gender role conflict occurs when our personalities are restricted by learned gender roles; that is, the difference between our true selves and the expectations prescribed to our gender. Men are socialized to fear femininity, which causes them to restrict their emotions, limit their intimacy, act competitive, and be homophobic (O'Neil, 1981). When men feel that these socialized expectations do not align with their personal characteristics, gender role conflict occurs. Gender role conflict is an important concept to understand because literature on masculinity stresses how men feel they must act a certain way to be perceived as masculine.

College men who experienced gender role conflict in the areas of expressing emotion and balancing work and family life were more likely to show feelings of shame (Thompkins & Rando, 2002). This study illustrates how gender role conflict can create negativity in a person's life. The concept of gender role conflict was also noted in a study of White, traditional-age college men by Davis (2002). The participants reported that while self-expression was important to them, they found it easier to express themselves around women than around other men. The participants also discussed the perceived connection between acting feminine and being gay. Davis concluded that the men in the study were afraid that others would perceive them as gay or feminine, causing them to restrict certain activities like emotional expression. The results illustrate gender role

conflict in action; the participants thought emotional expression was valuable, yet they controlled their emotional expression around their male peers in order to establish their masculinity.

Edwards and Jones (2009) discussed gender role conflict related to gender identity development of college men. The participants talked about performing masculinity; by performing, these men were able to disguise the parts of their true selves that did not live up to masculine standards. The participants often acted in ways that did not align with their personal values, all for the sake of proving their masculinity to their male peers. Furthermore, the participants felt that their relationships with others were negatively affected by their performance of masculinity. They also believed that this performance caused them to deny a part of themselves (Edwards & Jones, 2009). Edwards and Jones's (2009) study shows how men are aware that gender role conflict negatively interferes with their relationships with others and with their inner self.

There is a lack of literature on the effects of gender role conflict within an athletic environment. In a recent study about male, college-level football players, it was found that participants did not report different levels of gender role conflict within and outside of the football environment (Steinfeldt et al., 2011b). However, the study also found that the participants reported higher life satisfaction levels when they were able to freely express their emotions on the football field. The results of this study suggest that athletic environments are no more restrictive in their masculinity expectations than non-athletic environments. Furthermore, the study also shows how an emotionally-open athletic environment can have positive effects on men's lives.

In describing the concept of “doing gender,” West and Zimmerman (1987) argued that gender is not defined by innate characteristics of each individual, but it is defined by the social interactions we have with those around us. Actions and interactions have been categorized as male or female in our culture, and when we perform those actions, we communicate our gender to others. Gender role conflict comes into the picture when an individual wants to act a certain way, for example, due to their personality or inherent characteristics, but to do so would openly conflict with the actions that are socially prescribed to that individual’s gender.

Overall, gender role conflict provides a solid theoretical framework for understanding male student-athletes’ conceptualizations of masculinity. Gender role conflict has been found to affect men of various races, ethnicities, and ages, and it has been correlated with holding sexist and homophobic beliefs (O’Neil, 2013). Gender role conflict and the idea of gender performance, therefore, may help explain the thoughts and feelings student-athletes have about themselves, their masculinity, and how their masculinity is expressed.

### **Summary**

There are many theories on gender identity and masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is one of the most well-known, but other theories such as gender role conflict, inclusive masculinity, and intersectionality are relevant to the discussion of masculinity. Existing literature on male athletes shows how athletics can promote hegemonic masculinity through sexism, homophobia, and violence, but the literature also shows how men’s athletics can promote an inclusive environment built on friendship and emotional connectedness.

## CHAPTER III

### Methods

#### Design of the Study

The researcher studied male student-athletes, their experiences as men, and how they made meaning about their masculinity. Therefore, this study was phenomenological in nature, which provided the researcher with the meaning individuals give to their experiences (Creswell, 1998). Individual interviews with student-athletes were conducted, and the practice sessions of several men's athletic teams were observed. To gain access to the target population, the researcher contacted several staff members of the academic support center within the athletics department with information about the study. The staff invited the researcher to talk about her study at a Student Athlete Advisory Council (SAAC) meeting; the researcher recruited two participants from SAAC. The researcher also asked the athletic support center staff to provide names of student-athletes who fit the criteria for the study. The researcher contacted these individuals via email to describe the study, and two participants were recruited this way. The final participant was recruited in person by one of the academic center staff members. In addition, the researcher attended a men's tennis practice session and a football practice session in the middle of the fall 2015 semester to conduct observations. The researcher emailed the head coach of both teams to setup an observation date; the researcher also emailed an assistant coach of the men's basketball team to set up an observation but never heard a response.

### **Trustworthiness and Reliability**

In order to ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of this study, several strategies described by Maxwell (2005) were used. The researcher used respondent validation, in which the researcher solicits feedback from participants regarding their interviews, to ensure the researcher correctly understood what the participants wanted to communicate (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher sent transcribed interviews to the participants so each participant could validate what was said in his interview. Only one participant responded after the researcher sent out the transcripts. The researcher also used triangulation, in which data is collected from several different sources in order to increase the validity and limit the bias of the researcher's conclusions (Maxwell, 2005). This was done by interviewing five participants and by observing one session each of men's tennis practice and men's football practice.

### **Participants**

Five male student-athletes from the same university were interviewed for this study. All participants had 60 or more credit hours and identified themselves as either juniors or seniors in college. The researcher chose to focus on junior and senior students because they have had more experiences as a college athlete than a first-year or second-year student. Student-athletes in their early twenties may be able to better reflect on their experiences than student-athletes recently out of high school. Each participant was on a different men's athletic team at the institution. A summary of the participants' demographic information is included in Table 1.

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Information*

Participant	Age	Classification	Race	Sport
Participant 1	21	Senior	White/Caucasian	Tennis
Participant 2	21	Senior	White/Caucasian	Soccer
Participant 3	21	Junior	White/Caucasian	Swimming
Participant 4	21	Senior	White/Caucasian	Baseball
Participant 5	20	Junior Transfer	Black/African American	Basketball

**Site**

This study was conducted at a midsized, public, predominately White institution located in the rural Midwest. The institution participates in NCAA Division I athletics and has nine male intercollegiate athletic teams. The men's sports offered at the institution are baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, soccer, swimming, tennis, and track and field. Over 250 students participate in men's athletics at the institution.

**Researcher as the Instrument**

Because this is a qualitative study, it is important to consider how the researcher's background and experiences may affect the interpretation of data. The researcher is a White, female graduate student who has no personal experience as a college athlete. In addition, the researcher initially became interested in this research study due to extensive media coverage of professional male athletes engaging in violent behavior. Therefore, she perceived male athletes to experience masculinity through violence and aggression. After reading current literature on the topics of masculinity and athletics, however, the researcher developed a more neutral view of male athletes and masculinity.

## **Data Collection**

Data was collected through individual, semi-structured interviews with the participants. An interview protocol, found in Appendix A, was developed to guide the interviews; the protocol was not intended to be a rigid set of questions but rather a mental framework of open-ended questions that guided the researcher in collecting data (Yin, 2011). Using the protocol as a framework allowed the researcher and participants to engage in conversation, rather than a structured question-and-answer session.

In addition, observations of practice sessions were systematic in nature (Yin, 2011). Appendix B includes a guideline of items the researcher noted during each observation session. After recording observations in a field journal, the researcher transcribed those notes into a document that was organized by the observation protocol.

## **Treatment of the Data**

Interviews were video-recorded, and video files were kept on an external hard drive that was only accessible to the researcher and the thesis advisor. To maintain confidentiality, no identifying information was kept on the hard drive, and identifying information that appears in the interview was removed from the interview transcripts. Signed informed consent forms were stored separately from the transcripts and audio files to maintain confidentiality as well. Observations were recorded in a journal that was accessible to only the researcher and thesis advisor. All data and video recordings will be deleted after three years, in compliance with the institution's IRB policy.

## **Data Analysis**

Interview recordings were transcribed after all five interviews had been completed, and the transcribed interviews were used for coding of the data. Coding of the transcripts

was done in accordance with Yin's (2011) guidelines for coding; data was first assigned open codes, which describe each piece of data specifically. These open codes were then grouped into categories through the development of category codes. Once the data was coded at this level, the data was reassembled in a hierarchical format in order for the researcher to identify themes that describe the participants' experiences with masculinity. Field observations were organized into a more consistent form, and any inconsistent terminology used by the researcher was addressed, as suggested by Yin (2011). The observation notes were then coded in the same manner as the data gathered from individual interviews in order to identify any patterns or themes present in the researcher's observations.

### **Summary**

Through both observation and five individual interviews, the researcher intended to gain an understanding of the way male student-athletes experience and express masculinity. The researcher also intended to understand how male student-athletes make meaning about masculinity and how athletic participation affects their meaning-making. By using two different methods of data collection, the researcher increased the level of reliability and trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn from the data.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

The aim of this study was to gain insight on the how individual male student-athletes experience and make meaning of masculinity. Five one-on-one interviews, lasting from 30 to 60 minutes, were facilitated by the researcher. From these interviews, the researcher identified several themes which were grouped into three overarching categories: interpretations of masculinity, relationships with others, and the importance of athletics. The researcher used these themes to answer the study's guiding research questions.

#### **Interpretations of Masculinity**

During the interviews, the researcher asked the participants about social expectations of men; what masculinity means to the participants; how often the participants thought about their gender; and how the participants developed their view of masculinity. From their responses, several themes emerged. This section provides insight on research questions 1 and 2.

1. How do male student-athletes construct meaning about masculinity?
2. In what ways do male student-athletes experience and perform masculinity?

**Challenges thinking about masculinity.** Four participants struggled to discuss masculinity. Participant 1, for example, said "I knew [the study] was about masculinity, but I didn't really think through what masculinity is." The same participant also mentioned lacking the vocabulary to describe some of his thoughts about masculinity. Participants 4 and 5 asked the researcher for clarification after the researcher asked them to talk about characteristics of masculinity.

When the participants were asked how often they think about their gender, all responded that they never or rarely thought about their gender. Participant 4 said that it would be easier for him to think about being female than thinking about his own gender. “I’m just a guy. I don’t sit there and think about being a guy... If you said to me, ‘Think about being a *girl*,’ I might be able to answer that. But I’d probably be able to answer it better than if you said, ‘Think about being a guy.’”

Participant 2 said that he didn’t think “gender... has that significant of a role in life... I don’t really think it affects who I am or who I should be.” Participant 2 acknowledged that society as a whole views gender as an important characteristic, but the participant said he tried to look at and treat everyone equally. Participant 1 was more reflective than the other participants; he discussed thinking about how he could have been a different person and had a different perspective on masculinity had he been exposed to a different team culture during his tenure as a college student-athlete. The challenges the participants had thinking about masculinity may be a result of the participants being unable to recognize their gender privilege and, therefore, think critically about their masculinity. This idea of gender privilege is discussed in more depth in chapter 5.

**Rejecting social norms.** All participants verbalized that they did not agree with some of the social norms that were expected of men. Participant 1 described the cultural idea of masculinity as “the big, strong, dominant male that kind of suppresses women.” Participant 1 also mentioned aggressiveness and physical fighting as other aspects of masculinity that are expected of men. Participant 1 also discussed feeling dissatisfied with his experience as a high school soccer player because the aggressiveness of the sport did not align with his personality or his natural ability at the sport. Participant 5 was more

ambivalent about the concept of aggressiveness; he said that men should be more aggressive than women, but also stated, “To be manly, I don’t think they [men] have to be aggressive at all.”

The idea that men cannot cry was brought up by Participant 3, who said, “When you cry, it doesn’t mean you’re less strong than another person. I feel that makes you more human.” This participant rejected the notion that tears make a person less masculine. Similarly, being tough, rugged, and daring were characteristics Participant 4 believed society expects of men. He summarized these characteristics as “being a badass.” However, the participant rejected the idea that there was a strict context in which a man could exhibit these characteristics. “A substitute teacher: It’s a part-time job, but if you’re good at it, and the students respect you, I mean that makes you a badass as well.” Participant 4 believed any man could fulfill this particular social expectation, as long as they were successful in their own way.

Physical appearance and body image were discussed by Participants 2 and 3 as part of what society expects from men. Participant 2 said “Strength, size, and overall appearance is something that happens to go hand in hand with masculinity, in my opinion, in most social norms.” He continued to explain that each sport requires different physical skills, so the physical appearance of athletes varies from sport to sport. Participant 3 discussed the ideal male body image that is presented in advertisements and other media. He said that he believes men “should be comfortable within [their] own body” and therefore rejected the idea that all men should have one type of body.

**Accepting social norms.** Despite talking about rejecting social norms, the participants sometimes embraced those norms or felt pressured by them. Participant 5, for example, said that he felt pressured by the expectation that men are aggressive:

Yeah, sometimes, you'll be with your boys and somebody, like, says something to you – you gonna let them say that to you like that? And you have to say something back so you won't look like a punk or something.

Participant 1 echoed this sentiment of feeling pressured to conform, and used an example from his days playing high school soccer:

I would identify that [cultural expectations] in my life being more prevalent when I played high school soccer because, at the time, I didn't really have an identity, and you come in, you're a freshman, and you're playing with these older guys... if the group is this kind of superior, masculine... if they're emitting that, then you kind of feel obligated to be like them and make the same jokes and see things the way they see them.

Likewise, Participant 3 described feeling pressured to obtain the male body image that is portrayed in popular media as a young teenager. Although this participant now believes the prevalence of this body type is harmful and that men should be comfortable with their body type, he was influenced by the ideal male body image presented in the media earlier in his life.

An interesting comment was made by Participant 2, who said that “throughout history, men have always been looked at as a dominant role. And I think if you're in a dominant role, you should be supportive of anyone and everyone.” This statement reflects an acceptance of the belief that men are the dominant gender; at the same time, this

statement digresses from the idea that men should be tough and unemotional by asserting that men should be supportive of others.

The men in this study expressed two views of masculinity: they felt compelled to reject certain aspects of traditional masculinity but also felt compelled to accept other aspects. Gender is a complex part of a person's identity, and that is exhibited in this study, where the participants described how they rejected aspects of society's expectations while embracing, albeit reluctantly, some of those expectations.

**The role of maturity.** A few of the participants discussed how maturity played an important role in how they viewed themselves as men and how much they conformed to the social norms prescribed to men. Participant 1 described his desire to leave home and come to college in order to "establish an identity a little bit more." Participant 1 said he was impulsive and emotional in high school, so he really valued having the ability to "figure out who I was" in college. Participant 3 talked about putting less pressure on himself to be perfect at swimming as he became older. The same participant also talked about not being bullied in high school for being a swimmer, which he attributed to people maturing and being less apt to stereotype and label others. Maturity was mentioned several times in Participant 2's interview; he discussed the growth in maturity between the first year of college and the last year and how maturity affects athletic performance. In general, the participants seemed to equate maturity with self-growth. The participants considered themselves to be mature individuals, which may be why the participants explicitly stated that they did not agree with some of society's expectations for men. Their maturity meant they could be comfortable with themselves even if they were not exactly what society expected them to be. Participant 1 summed up his time in college as

“having alone time and finding out who you are.” The participants recognized how college has played a role in their personal growth and maturity.

**Perceptions of different sports.** The participants talked about their sport being unique in comparison to other sports. Football was cited by Participants 1 and 2 as a very “macho” sport that embodied cultural expectations of masculinity. The physical appearance of a football player – tall, muscular, and heavy – was described by Participant 2. Participant 1 described the aggressiveness of football by talking about his observations of the football team’s practice sessions, which happened at the same time as the tennis team’s practices. The participant discussed how he heard profanity being used during football practice, such as “Get your ass on the ground!” The researcher noted aggressiveness during observation of football practice as well. At the beginning of the practice, for example, the coach had the team circle up and participate in a face-off exercise. The coach selected two players to face off against each other, and the object of the exercise was to knock the other player down. The rest of the team shouted while they watched the two players compete.

Participants 1 and 3 were student-athletes who competed in the more individualized sports of tennis and swimming. Both participants described the differences between being on a traditional athletic team and being on a more individualized athletic team. Participant 3 mentioned that he felt pressured to perform well as a relay swimmer when he first started swimming; although swimming is individualized, his performance had an impact on overall team success. Participant 1 described how college-level tennis is scored differently than tennis at other levels, making it less individualized, and how he is frustrated that some of his teammates have never had a team-sport experience:

I know that some of the guys here haven't every played on a team, so they don't really understand the accountability that is required to play on a team because they've just played tennis their whole lives, and it's always been individual. So I think having other team experiences really benefited me and I kind of wish other people would have gotten that experience.

This quote provides some insight toward the influence of context on meaning-making. Student-athletes who have always played an individualized sport may not recognize how their actions affect the team as a whole, unlike student-athletes who have experience playing on traditional teams. This can cause frustration between teammates, as shown by the quote above, because the men on the team have different expectations about what it means to be an effective teammate.

### **Relationships with Others**

The participants were asked questions about their relationships with their teammates and coaches during the interview. Several participants also discussed changing dynamics in the team environment and how that has affected their experiences as student-athletes. Some participants also discussed their relationships with women in their lives and their perceptions of women around them. This section provides insight to research questions 2 and 4.

2. In what ways do male student-athletes experience and perform masculinity?
4. In what ways do student-athletes' interpretations of context influence different aspects of masculinity?

**Teammates as family.** All the participants described their relationship with teammates positively, using words like family and best friends to describe their

relationship. Participant 3 said he loves being able to talk to his teammates and hear about what is going on in their lives. He considers his teammates to be his “family away from my actual home.” Participant 4 also referred to his teammates as “having a family here.”

Participant 1 described his friendship with others on the tennis team:

I came in with two other freshmen, so I really identified with them. We were a good group of friends... we're best friends, at this point... we're all really interested in school and education and, you know, we like to talk about concepts and stuff like that, and it's not necessarily, like, we like to go get drunk together. We can just enjoy having conversations with each other, and I think that's what's really allowed our relationship to flourish.

Participant 2 also had much to say about his relationships with his teammates:

My relationship with them is everything to me. Those six relationships are why I came to [school], they're why I chose to be a Division I athlete, they're why I chose to go to college... I'll have the best men and groomsmen in my wedding. I'll have the uncles to my kids. It's unlike anything you could ever create, I don't think, as a general student... you don't build the bond that you do competing and really grinding for four years that you do with a fellow student-athlete.

Furthermore, using physical touch to show support and affirmation for teammates was common in both the men's tennis practice and men's football practice. In football, the researcher observed the players touching arms, helmets, and shoulders, as well as giving high fives, to show support for teammates. In tennis, high fives and verbal affirmations, such as “Let's go guys!” were used to show support.

**Coach as a leader.** All of the participants had experienced coaching changes throughout their collegiate career, and the coach played a critical role in team dynamics, the individual satisfaction of the athletes, and the types of characteristics that the participants admired. Participants described coaches they admired and respected as having a positive attitude, possessing knowledge about the sport, having the ability to personally connect with their players, encouraging personal growth and accountability, and being a skilled communicator. Coaches that the participants did not like were described as personally or emotionally distant, lacking knowledge of the sport, having bad communication skills, and not showing respect towards their players.

Qualities that may typically be associated with hegemonic masculinity – aggressiveness, restricted emotions, dominance – were not among the qualities the participants admired about their coaches. In fact, participants disliked coaches who were unable to connect with other people and admired coaches who were able to connect with the team on a personal level. Participant 2, for example, said that he did not have a close relationship with a former coach and the coach “wasn’t the type of coach to connect at a personal level with his athletes or his players.” Participant 1 said a previous coach was “not capable of empathizing with people.” These responses show how hegemonic masculinity may not be communicated by coaches or even desired in coaches.

Participant 3 had the unique experience of having a female coach, while the rest of the participants had male coaches. He described the sometimes tense relationship between the coach and the male swimmers on the team and discussed how some of the swimmers have negative opinions of their coach. This negative relationship has affected the team dynamic and been the source of some conflict. The tense relationship between

the coach and swimmers does not seem to be due to an explicit gender bias on the part of the swimmers; Participant 3 alluded to the coach's high expectations, difficult practice sets, and difficulty communicating as sources of the tension between her and the swimmers. However, it is unknown if a male coach with similar characteristics would be perceived negatively to the same degree.

Not all of the student-athletes interviewed had negative experiences with their current coaches. Participant 1 talked about getting a new coach this year and how much the new coach has turned the tennis team around. "His knowledge of tennis is very expansive and it's refreshing to hear different opinions every single day and... every day's a little different. And it's always a really positive environment." This sentiment was reflected in the researcher's observations of tennis practice, where the coach would frequently offer verbal encouragement to the players. Participant 5 also had positive comments about his coaches; he described how they hold him accountable for his actions and prepare him for the "real world."

**Perceptions of women.** The participants had differing views of the women in their lives. Participant 3, for example, discussed how his mother was important to him.

The biggest influence on my life was actually my mother. So my dad, even though he was my coach in basketball – I have a strained relationship with him. But my mom, she was always someone I could come to, open up to, and speak with. And, you know, she didn't show me how to be a man, but she taught me how to be a gentleman... my mother was probably my biggest influence on how to become the man that I want to be.

Participant 5 also spoke of the important role his mother played in his life.

She raised me and my brothers and sister... two other kids used to come over to our house all the time, and their mother was going through some things, so they used to stay with us... [my mother] was always willing to help out... I don't feel scared or not confident enough to do something. What she did, it's nothing compared to what she did, so I might as well do it.

However, other participants made generalizations about women based on previous experiences. Participant 4, for example, talked about the difference between being in classes that were dominated by men versus dominated by women. Classes with mostly women were perceived by Participant 4 to be more formal than classes with mostly men. In addition, when the researcher asked Participant 5 about how he addresses a conflict with a woman, he said, "She can't do [anything] to hurt me, so why am I really arguing? I'm a man, she's a female, so I can just walk away. There's really nothing she can do to hurt me."

### **Athletic Experiences**

The researcher asked the participants about their athletic experience throughout their life, from birth to the present day. The researcher used questions about past and current athletic involvement, the decision to pursue athletics in college, and the participants' views of other sports. This section addresses research questions 3 and 4.

3. How does athletic involvement influence the process of meaning-making about masculinity?
4. In what ways do student-athletes' interpretations of context influence different aspects of masculinity?

**Pressure to perform.** Feeling pressure to perform well in youth sports as well as college sports was brought up by some participants. Participant 3 talked about feeling pressure as a nationally-ranked youth basketball player.

There was a lot of pressure because my dad... pushed me really hard in basketball. I felt a lot of pressure to perform at such a high level at all times. And when I wasn't at my A-game, I felt terrible... I'd go to practices with the team, and I was there for probably two hours. But then I'd come back home and my dad would maybe make me practice about another three or four.

The pressure to excel in basketball left Participant 3 feeling "burnt out" and pushed him to pursue swimming instead of basketball in high school. Other participants felt similar pressure to excel at their sport due to a lack of natural talent or being involved in competitive youth leagues.

Participant 4 was a bit different than the other participants; as an eight-year-old, he played baseball on a team of 12- and 13-year-old boys. Though this made his youth baseball career more competitive, the participant did not feel much pressure to perform well. "I might have to run a little farther or [throw] it or [hit] it a little bit harder," he said of playing with older kids, "but to me, it didn't make that much of a deal." Participant 2 played in a competitive soccer club as a child and teenager, but acknowledged that he was the underdog when it came to competing and being recruited for college soccer. "All of these big schools that were watching us... they were watching the other players and not me... I'm not flashy or super athletic."

**Facing challenges as athletes.** Throughout their athletic careers, the participants faced challenges that frustrated them. Participants 1 and 2 found it difficult to be

recruited to play sports in college; both men reached out to dozens of schools and only received interest from a few. Participant 2 in particular discussed his experience being offered only one opportunity to play college-level soccer at his current institution. “I had to muscle my way in and just be given a shot.”

Some participants brought up how professors or other students perceived them in negative ways. Participant 5 described how he has only heard negative perceptions of athletes from non-athletes, who view athletes as cocky and arrogant. He felt that female and male athletes were perceived differently. “I don’t think women’s sports are too much like that – I don’t think they get that same kind of treatment.” Furthermore, Participant 4 described how some professors viewed him negatively because of his status as a student-athlete. “They’re just like subtle jabs, you know, in class. If I show up late because we have lifting or something, they’re like, ‘Oh, so we’re on your time now.’” He also described frustration with other students who believe all athletes receive scholarships to attend college. The frustration participants felt when others judged them negatively based on their status as male student-athletes shows how there is a general expectation that male student-athletes behave in a certain way. Characteristics of hegemonic masculinity have been and continue to be associated with men’s athletics, and that has frustrated some of the participants, who view themselves and men’s athletics in a different way.

**The gentleman’s sport.** Two of the participants used the word “gentleman” to describe their sport. Participant 1 said “Tennis is generally the gentleman’s game... people don’t really take kindly when you see tennis players, you know, yelling and fist-pumping and everything.” Participant 1 compared the gentle nature of tennis to football, which he believed “promotes aggressiveness.” The participant also mentioned basketball,

wrestling, and soccer as other sports that are more aggressive than tennis. Participant 4, the baseball player, said that “baseball teaches you how to be a gentleman if it’s done right.” He highlighted the various acts of community service the baseball team engages in, such as visiting children’s hospitals and hosting camps for children. In addition, the participant talked about the positive contributions athletes make to society and how they are overlooked, while athletes who cheat or make a negative impact on their sport are heard about more often.

Though other participants did not refer to their sport using the word “gentleman,” they perceived that their sport was very different from all other men’s sports. Participant 2, for instance, stated that soccer is different than football, basketball, baseball, and swimming; he said that each soccer game is completely different, whereas the aforementioned sports were more repetitive. The participants believed that their sport was somehow set apart from other sports. In the words of Participant 4:

[Baseball] is something that is part of me, you know? When you do something for so long it becomes a lifestyle, so everything that I do as well as my teammates is something that betters us or is an activity we can do together as a baseball team... that’s what separates us from other organizations.

The participants felt their involvement in collegiate athletics has influenced them to be good men. However, they did not always view male student-athletes in other sports in the same way. Interestingly, some participants were frustrated when non-athletes made judgments about them, yet some participants made judgments about men who played other sports besides their own.

**Changing the culture.** Many of the participants discussed how the culture of their sport at their university changed from the time they were first-year students to the present. Participant 1 talked about the culture of the tennis team when he was a freshman:

We [freshmen] came in and the culture was still kind of this, “Oh, let’s go get fucked up and get laid,” and everything like that... we were freshmen and I don’t think any of us really wanted to do that, like, that wasn’t our primary goal.

Meanwhile, the seniors and juniors, they were... all about that... it was kind of like a disconnect between us.

Participant 1 went on to describe how he and the other freshmen on the team contributed to a change in the team’s culture by not adhering to the mindset of the older players on the team. As those players graduated, the team culture became more defined by

Participant 1 and the younger players on the team:

A change in team culture was also discussed by Participant 4, who talked about bringing in a large class of new baseball players for the upcoming season and focusing on recruiting players who are good students.

We didn’t have a great year at all last year. We’re trying to keep the name reputable and then turn it around... Instead of just having guys who are good at baseball but terrible students, we’re kind of bringing in good students who might not be as good as some of the other guys, but they’re really, really close, almost similar, so if there’s a guy who’s really good and a guy who’s just below him, we’re gonna take the guy who’s a better student, just because you’re coming to school for a degree, not for a sport.

Participants embraced a changing team culture that moved them away from the stereotype of male student-athletes being bad students or being preoccupied with drinking and sex. This may be an indication that male student-athletes and coaches of men's athletic teams want to embrace a different type of masculinity within the context of athletics.

**Sexist and homophobic language.** The participants described a few instances of sexist and homophobic language being used around their participation in sports; the researcher also observed sexist language when observing both the tennis and football practices. One example is when the researcher observed a football player yelling, "You throw like a girl!" when another football player threw the ball short of its target. Furthermore, Participant 1 talked about his high school soccer coaches yelling "Be a man!" to him on the field. When asked what he thought his coaches meant by that statement, he responded:

Maybe they're kind of provoking something inside of you or emotions that you don't want to have come up. Like, if they say "Be a man" and they're implying that you're not being a man at the moment, then I guess they're implying that you're being a woman. And if you're a guy on the high school soccer team, maybe you don't want to be a woman, or be the woman of the team. I mean, that sounds really sexist but I think that's what it is.

During the tennis practice observation, the researcher noted a men's tennis player shouting "Don't compare us to the girls!" after the coach noted how the women's tennis team responded to his call for verbal encouragement, but his own team did not.

Homophobic language was brought up by Participant 3, who said that swimmers are perceived to be “less masculine... and [they are] typically labeled gay,” more so than other male athletes. He acknowledged that outsider perceptions of male swimmers has changed since the massive success of Michael Phelps, but when he was a young teenager in middle school, he felt inclined to stay away from swimming due to the negative labels surrounding it: “I thought, you know, if I swam, that’s how I’m gonna be labeled, and I’m gonna be less masculine, so stay away from there.”

### **Summary**

By analyzing the participants’ experiences and thoughts about masculinity, the researcher was able to gain a better understanding of how male student-athletes experience masculinity and how they make meaning of their experiences. The participants acknowledged the existence of social norms for men and rejected those norms, but the participants also acknowledged feeling pressured to conform at some point in their lives. In addition, the participants described the close relationships they have with their teammates and coaches, and they described how they thought their own sport was unique from other sports. Overall, however, the participants found it challenging to talk about masculinity and how they experience masculinity. Chapter 5 will discuss how the results of this study connect to existing literature. Chapter 5 will also provide recommendations for student affairs professionals and suggestions for future research on this topic.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

This chapter will examine how the results of this study relate to prior literature about masculinity, college men, and men's athletics. In addition, this chapter provides recommendations for student affairs professionals working with this population of students as well as suggestions for future research.

#### Significance of Findings

**Interpretations of masculinity.** In general, the participants did not usually think about their masculinity, nor did they reflect on what masculinity means to them before participating in this study. This lack of reflection and thought about gender supports the notion that privileged groups often do not see their privileged identity, therefore making it more difficult for them to think about and discuss that identity.

Participant 5's comment about feeling pressured to act tough in front of his male friends reflects the findings of the study by Edward and Jones (2009), in which men described a performance element to their masculinity. The participant in the current study felt pressured to live up to the expectation to be aggressive, so he would act more aggressive in front of his friends, even though he did not personally feel aggression was a necessary part of masculinity. The pressure to perform masculinity was also discussed by Participant 1, who talked about feeling pressured to act the same way as the boys on his soccer team in high school. Participant 1 also mentioned how not performing masculinity in an adequate manner could result in being the woman of the team – the most insulting consequence of not performing masculinity. The performance of masculinity may be related to the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity in a given environment. Aggression

and avoidance of femininity are two characteristics of hegemonic masculinity described by Levant et al. (2010). In addition, this supports O'Neil's (1981) theory that a fear of femininity is socialized in men; Participant 1's high school soccer story is a clear example of this socialization.

The participants described several characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity to describe how men are expected to behave. The participants acknowledged that men could possess different characteristics and still be considered masculine. Participant 4, for example, had described the idea that men are expected to be "daring, adventurous... a badass." However, the participant went on to explain that "anyone can be a badass," including a businessman and a substitute teacher. In addition, Participant 3 said that men "should be able to be comfortable within [their] own body," showing acceptance for diverse body types and a rejection of the ideal male body image. These examples reflect the theory of inclusive masculinities proposed by Anderson (2009). At the same time, the discussion about body image and physicality by Participants 2 and 3 is consistent with Harris and Struve's (2009) study of student-athletes, whose body type became the ideal male body type. Some participants in this study, despite being student-athletes themselves, still felt pressure to conform to a specific body type, even if it was not practical for their sport.

**Relationships with others.** The men in this study talked about the close relationships they had with the other men on their respective athletic teams. This theme is consistent with the prior literature about men's friendships with their teammates; the student-athletes in this study, for instance, referred to their teammates as family or best friends, similar to how teammates were described in studies by Schrack-Walters et al.

(2009) and Harvey (1999). The participants' descriptions of their friendships with their teammates is also consistent with Armstrong and Oomen-Early's (2009) study, which found that student-athletes felt more socially connected than general students. In addition, the use of touch to convey support for teammates in the observed tennis and football practices, such as high-fives or touching arms, shoulders, and helmets, is consistent with Anderson's (2011) study, in which he concluded that collegiate-level men's athletes found soccer to be a safe space to express emotions and affection for others. The student-athletes observed for this study felt that their sport was a safe context in which they could touch one another, but they likely would not engage in that sort of interaction in a different context.

The student-athletes in this study described both positive and negative relationships with their coaches, and many of the negative relationships were because the coaches were unable to connect and empathize with players on the team. Taking into account studies by Foste et al. (2012) and Steinfeldt et al. (2011a), the coach often can influence the masculine norms of the team. Though those previous studies looked only at football coaches, it can reasonably be expected that coaches for other sports teams would have a great influence over the team culture. Statements made by the participants in the current study show that coaches who connected with and cared for the athletes were perceived more positively and created a more supportive team environment. Coaches who could not connect with players created a team environment that was perceived more negatively by the athletes. The results from the current study refute the idea that men's sports perpetuate hegemonic masculinity; the participants valued emotional connections with their coaches and peers.

**Importance of athletics.** Athletics played a central role in the lives of all five participants who had been involved in sports since childhood. Three participants played different sports than their current sport as children; the two that played the same sport for their whole life played in highly competitive youth leagues. Participant 3 was the one student-athlete who did not follow this trend. As a child, he played basketball in a competitive league, but now he swims at the collegiate level. Athletic involvement has been a large part of the participants' lives, so coaches, teammates, and the athletic environment have likely made a significant impact on how the participants perceive and make meaning about masculinity.

Participants 4 and 5 discussed the stigma and negative perceptions of student-athletes by professors and other students. Participant 5 believed other students perceived basketball players to be cocky and arrogant, and Participant 4 experienced subtle negative comments directed at him by professors due to his status as a student-athlete; these findings align with the research of Simons et al. (2007) which found that college student-athletes heard negative comments from others on-campus as a result of being an athlete.

The use of homophobic and sexist language, though it did not occur often in the researcher's observations or interviews, still occurred within the context of athletics. When reviewing the transcribed interviews, the researcher also noted that the participants frequently referred to female college students or female teammates as girls rather than women; while this is not outright sexist or violent language, it may indicate an unconscious tendency to view adult women as more immature than adult men or to diminish the presence of women.

Only one participant described hearing homophobic language, and the homophobic language came from outsiders who had a specific perception of the sport of swimming. The participant revealed that as he got older, he did not hear the homophobic language as frequently. This change may be due to outsiders becoming more familiar with swimming after the high-profile success of Michael Phelps, but this may also be due to shifting cultural attitudes about sexual orientation. Our culture is slowly becoming more welcoming to people with gender and sexually diverse identities, and that change may be reflected within the realm of men's athletics.

**Theoretical framework.** The theoretical framework guiding this study consisted of the ideas of intersectionality and gender role conflict. Intersectionality, which is based on the idea that a person's individual experiences and identities affect how they perceive the world, appeared in the comments made by participants. Parents, for instance, played a significant role in the participants' development of personal masculinity. Participant 3 discussed having a "strained relationship" with his father but a positive relationship with his mother. His mother showed him "how to be a gentleman." Therefore, Participant 3 made meaning about his own masculinity by what he was taught by his mother. There may be qualities in Participant 3's mother that the participant tries to emulate due to his positive relationship with her; conversely, there may be qualities in his father that the participant tries to avoid, due to their tense relationship.

Different parts of the participants' social identities, such as race and sexual orientation, did not come up in the interviews. Though race undoubtedly affects an individual's experiences, it was not brought up beyond the racial identification demographic question. One reason for this may be that four of the participants identify as

White – as with gender, their racial privilege allows them to ignore how their race affects their perceptions and experiences. They may perceive race to be inconsequential to their lives, similar to Participant 2’s perception of gender: “I don’t really think [gender] affects who I am or who I should be.” Because the participants live in a society that was constructed for White men, their racial and gender identities are almost invisible to them. Participant 5, who is Black, did not discuss his race during the interview either; however, that may be due to the race of the researcher, who is White. Participant 5 may have felt uncomfortable speaking about race to an unfamiliar individual who did not share the same race.

The participants in this study did not appear to be affected by gender role conflict to a great degree. Though men did experience pressure to perform masculinity at times, they seemed to feel comfortable being themselves around their teammates. For example, Participant 2, when describing his relationship with the teammates to which he is closest, said “We all act completely different, we all have different personalities, different hobbies, so it was crazy that we all got put together and I would say we’re seven of the closest people you’ll meet.” The participant talked about one teammate in particular with whom he regularly disagreed; despite their disagreements, the teammate “shows his appreciation and his kindness and his caring for [Participant 2] as a person.” This indicates that Participant 2 is able to be true to himself around his teammates and does not suffer any social consequences as a result. Gender role conflict may be *less* apt to occur among male student-athletes because of the nature of the team environment. The participants in this study trusted their teammates and felt like their teammates were a family. This level of trust may minimize the effects of gender role conflict. At the same

time, the participants likely experience gender role conflict on some level, but they may not have discussed it within the context of their interview with the researcher.

### **Recommendations**

**Challenge men to think about gender.** One of the most notable results from this study is how the participants found it challenging to talk about masculinity and their experiences as men. Therefore, student affairs professionals who work with male student-athletes should facilitate conversations about masculinity and being a man in order to help student-athletes explore and reflect on their gender identity. These discussions about masculinity could be done through one-on-one conversations where student affairs practitioners ask male student-athletes reflective questions about their experiences as men. Furthermore, larger-scale programming geared towards men and masculinity could be implemented by athletics staff, residence life staff, or counseling center staff. This programming would challenge male student-athletes to think more consciously about their gender, how they experience masculinity, and their role in a social system that perpetuates male privilege and dominance. Creating men's support groups, where men are able to work through challenges with the support of other men, may also be an avenue for encouraging men to think about gender.

Encouraging and challenging male student-athletes to explore their masculinity cannot be accomplished in one conversation or program. Ongoing discussions and programs would need to be implemented for men to regularly reflect and derive meaning from their experiences as men. These programs and conversations would begin with an introduction to the topic of masculinity and slowly progress towards deeper reflection about individuals' masculinity and gender identity. First, men must be made aware of

their masculinity and their gender privilege, and once that has been accomplished, they will be able to reflect on their experiences as men more critically.

**Enlist the help of coaches and older teammates.** Coaches and teammates are essential to the experience of male student-athletes; therefore, it is important to utilize these people to act as teachers and role models to first-year male student-athletes. Participant 1 discussed not fitting in with the culture of the tennis team as a freshman in college and feeling grateful that the culture moved away from being focused on sex and drinking alcohol. The same participant discussed how male student-athletes in sports that had *not* seen a culture change changed to fit the culture of the team. Therefore, it is essential that coaches set the tone for the team and create an environment that is encouraging, supportive, and inclusive of male student-athletes as they develop their identities. Furthermore, the older members of the team are critical to implementing a positive and supportive environment, as younger student-athletes look to those older teammates for cues on how to act and how to fit into the team culture.

**Provide resources for men to support their gender identity development.** The men in this study talked about feeling pressured to live up to expectations prescribed by society. Some participants indicated feeling obligated to fulfill these social expectations, particularly when other men were around them. Edward and Jones (2009) discussed the performance of masculinity in their study as well. Male student-athletes and non-athlete college men would benefit from having more resources available to them as they mature and develop their adult identities in college. Providing a safe space for men to reflect on masculinity, as well as providing tangible print and online resources, are some of the ways in which student affairs practitioners could provide more resources about

masculinity. Resources could include videos, blogs, and articles highlighting the diverse experiences of college-age men as well as diverse perspectives about masculinity and gender identity.

**Overcoming obstacles.** It may be challenging for student affairs professionals and others to implement these suggestions. Male student-athletes (and college men in general) may become frustrated if asked to reflect on masculinity, as they may never have had to do so before. In addition, conversations about male privilege and hegemonic masculinity could be derailed if the men participating in those conversations become angry or defensive, as many people do when introduced to the idea that they possess some form of privilege. Though masculinity expectations have become less rigid in recent years, men are still socialized to adhere to the seven characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. Restricting emotion and being self-reliant (Levant et al., 2010) are two such characteristics that may impede honest conversations among men about masculinity.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

In the future, a larger variety of student-athletes should be interviewed. The researcher interviewed athletes from five different sports, but there are athletes from other sports who will have different interpretations of their experiences than the participants in this study. Furthermore, the student-athletes interviewed for this study were from the same institution. Though the institution is a Division I school, it is not well-known for its athletics. Therefore, the student-athletes who attend the institution may, in general, possess different characteristics than student-athletes at universities with large, well-known athletic programs. Future research should take into account student-

athletes from these larger programs as well as student-athletes who play at the Division II and Division III levels.

It is also suggested that more observations be taken of student-athletes, both in an athletic context and in a non-athletic context. The current study used only observations from team practices, but richer data could be gathered from observing male student-athletes outside of their athletic environment. Observations of behavior and interactions in the classroom and in a casual setting with friends may provide more insight into how student-athletes make meaning about masculinity. Lastly, future research should delve deeper into the role race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, and other social identities affect how male student-athletes understand their experiences and their masculinity.

### **Summary**

To the participants, involvement in organized athletics in college and in childhood was important to their individual development. Participants described their experiences as athletes; their relationships with their teammates and coaches; and how they interpret and understand masculinity. Male student-athletes and male college students in general would benefit from being challenged to think about their masculinity in a structured setting. Because men possess gender privilege, they are able to undergo personal development without thinking critically about their masculinity and how it is influenced by their individual experiences. The setting of an athletic team provides a safe space for men to explore their masculinity, as the team environment creates trust between the men on the team. The athletic environment can be a supportive arena in which men can develop their understanding of masculinity and become inclusive of diverse definitions of masculinity.

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**Appendix A**  
**Interview Protocol**

### **Demographic Questions**

1. Age and year in school
2. Major/minor
3. Race
4. Gender
5. Athletic involvement

**Research Question 1:** How do male student-athletes construct meaning about masculinity?

1. How do you describe masculinity?
2. What are some cultural expectations of you as a man? How do you feel about those?
3. What is your personal definition of masculinity? How did you develop this definition? Who are some people that influenced your ideas about masculinity?
4. Here is a list of men, all of whom are the same age: car mechanic, honors student, fraternity member, student-athlete, community college student, professional athlete. Who is the most masculine? The least? Why?

**Research Question 2:** In what ways do male student-athletes experience and perform masculinity?

1. How often do you think about your gender/being a man?
2. In what situations do you think about your gender/being a man?
3. How do you show your masculinity to other people?
  - a. For example, clothing.

**Research Question 3:** How does athletic involvement influence the process of meaning-making about masculinity?

1. What has the participant's athletic experience looked like, both in college and before college?
2. Are there any parts of your definition of masculinity that have been affected by your involvement in sports?
3. Can you describe a time where your involvement in sports caused you to grow as a person?
4. How would you describe your relationships with your teammates?
  - a. Positive and challenging aspects
  - b. What do they expect of you?
5. How would you describe your relationships with your coaches?
  - a. Positive and challenging aspects
  - b. What do they expect of you?

**Research Question 4:** In what ways do student-athletes' interpretations of context influence different aspects of masculinity?

1. Describe a typical session of practice.
  - a. What do you do during practice?
  - b. What do you talk about with your teammates and coaches?
  - c. What does a good practice look like? A bad one?

2. Describe a typical time hanging out with your friends.
  - a. What do you like to do?
  - b. What do you talk about with your friends?
  - c. Are there any differences between hanging out with your athlete friends versus your non-athlete friends?
  - d. Are there any differences between hanging out with friends of different genders?

**Appendix B**  
**Observation Protocol**

At each athletic practice session, the researcher will focus on recording observations about the following topics.

1. Interaction between student-athletes.
  - a. What do they say to each other?
  - b. How do athletes respond to comments made by their teammates?
  - c. What does their nonverbal communication look like?
  
2. Interaction between student-athletes and coaches.
  - a. What do the athletes say to the coaches? What do the coaches say to the athletes?
  - b. How do athletes respond to comments made by their coaches?
  - c. What does their nonverbal communication look like?

## **Appendix C**

### **Sample Email to Participants**

Hello,

You are invited to participate in a study of male student-athletes and their perceptions about masculinity. You have been invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as a male student-athlete of junior or senior status (60 or more credit hours). This study is being conducted by Michelle Lisack, a graduate student in the College Student Affairs program, and is being advised by Dr. Richard Roberts of the Counseling and Student Development department.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you are interested in participating, please contact Michelle Lisack at [mmlisack@eiu.edu](mailto:mmlisack@eiu.edu) or 217-581-7694 to schedule an interview time between now and the end of the fall semester. Interviews will last for approximately 1 hour. All participants will be entered into a drawing to win one of two \$15 bookstore gift cards. Any questions about the study can be directed to me.

Thank you!

**Michelle Lisack**

Associate Resident Director - Lincoln Hall

Eastern Illinois University

Email: [mmlisack@eiu.edu](mailto:mmlisack@eiu.edu)

Office: (217) 581-7694

## **Appendix D**

### **Consent to Participate in Research**

## **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

### **An Intersectional Analysis of Male Student-Athletes' Meaning-Making about Masculinity**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Michelle Lisack and Dr. Richard Roberts (faculty sponsor) from the Counseling and Student Development department at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you identify as a male student-athlete with 60 or more credit hours.

#### **• PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to analyze how male student-athletes make meaning about masculinity. A secondary purpose of the research is to understand the role athletics has in how male student-athletes conceptualize masculinity.

#### **• PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher that will last approximately one hour. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences and your perceptions of masculinity. Your interview will be audio and video recorded and stored on the researcher's computer. The interviews will be audio and video recorded for transcription purposes.

#### **• POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts that will arise from participating in this study.

#### **• POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Participants may benefit from being able to reflect on their athletic experiences and their experiences as men.

This study may also benefit universities and athletic departments; data collected from the study may give these institutions more insight on the experiences and thoughts of their male student-athletes on masculinity.

#### **• INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION**

Participants in this study will be entered in a drawing for \$15 bookstore gift cards. Two participants will win the gift cards. The gift cards will be distributed after all interviews have been completed. The researcher will contact the winners via email and have them pick up the gift cards at her office.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by removing identifying information, particularly names, from the interview transcripts. Participant names will not be present on any transcript materials, nor will they be in the final research report. Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to transcripts and audio/video recorded interviews. The audio and video recording files of the interviews will be kept for 3 years and then destroyed, as required by the IRB.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Michelle Lisack, Principal Investigator  
217-581-7694  
mmlisack@eiu.edu

Dr. Richard Roberts, Faculty Advisor  
217-581-2400  
rlroberts@eiu.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board  
Eastern Illinois University  
600 Lincoln Ave.  
Charleston, IL 61920  
Telephone: (217) 581-8576  
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

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I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date