"Sup Bro": Constructions and Perceptions of Masculinity and Gender Identity Among Division III Student-Athlete Men

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ABSTRACT

“SUP, BRO?”: CONSTRUCTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF MASCULINITY AND GENDER IDENTITY AMONG DIVISION III STUDENT-ATHLETE MEN

Mark Carbonara, EdD
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Northern Illinois University, 2021
Dr. Katy Jaekel, Director

Patriarchal systems of power, privilege, and oppression are reinforced by college men every day, but there are certain populations of college men who wield a stronger ability to influence change. Student-athlete men at NCAA Division III institutions are often viewed as “culture creators” on their campuses. Moreover, many of these programs reside at smaller institutions, where the impact of toxic masculinity has potential to be more concentrated. Student-athlete men are often seen as representing hegemonic forms of masculinity, thereby having influence in setting norms of what is expected of men on campus. This critical narrative inquiry study explored how participating in athletics and becoming a member of an NCAA Division III collegiate athletic team shaped the construction and perception of masculinity within college student-athlete men. Findings from this study discuss how these men learned masculinity, feeling added pressures as student-athletes, and viewed being a man in today’s society. Recommendations from this study include interventions to support student-athlete men in creating a healthy construction of their gender identity.
“SUP, BRO?”: CONSTRUCTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF MASCULINITY AND
GENDER IDENTITY AMONG DIVISION III STUDENT-ATHLETE MEN

BY
MARK CARBONARA
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Doctoral Director:
Katy Jaekel
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Thank you to my friends and family who have supported me throughout this entire dissertation process and doctoral journey. Balancing an intensive doctoral program, full-time employment during a global pandemic, and attempting to remain grounded with some semblance of a personal life was by far the most difficult part of this entire process. I would like to specifically thank my parents, who still do not fully understand what I do for a living or what I study but continue to believe that I am a hard worker and that I am doing good in the world. Next, I would thank my cohort, without whom I would have never survived this process. This journey would not have been the same without them, but especially Valronica, my partner in crime, and Lisa, my go-to for questions of all kinds.

Thank you to all of the student-athletes whom I have mentored over the years. From my first Division III football team, the Seager Boys, who showed me that the men who present as the toughest on campus are also the most emotional, to the best Division III men’s volleyball team, DUMVB, who allowed me to come alongside them, mentor and build them, and travel with them to numerous national tournaments. A special thank you goes to Coach Dan Ames, who has always believed in my work and the power of mentoring young student-athlete men.

Lastly, I would never have believed in myself as a scholar if it had not been for the initial support of Dr. Tracy Davis in my master’s program and then the continued support of my amazing dissertation advisor, Dr. Katy Jaekel, and outstanding professor, Dr. Gudrun Nyunt, in my doctoral program. I am here today because of your challenge and support. Thank you always.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother who passed away one month before my final defense. She always wanted to see me become a doctor, and now she is able to get her wish.
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CHAPTER I
DISSERTATION OF PRACTICE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Introduction

My journey into the world of men and masculinities studies started long before I ever realized. I was never considered an athletic child, but I grew up adhering to many other traditionally accepted gender performances of being a boy. I was always running around, getting hurt, eating dirt, and breaking something on accident. As I went through my early teenage years, I realized that I was incongruent with the traditional depiction of a young man. I didn’t play sports, I was extremely skinny, and I had started caring more about relationships and friendships than anything else. Interestingly enough, all of my closest friends once I got to high school were the spitting image of what I was not, a socially accepted version of how a boy/man should act, look, and dress. I found myself living in a world where I did not fully belong, but I had to learn to navigate. Through the power of authentic relationships and being able to be real with each other, many of my friends began to talk to me about the pressures they felt regarding being a man. They mentioned the need to look a certain way, to like certain sports, to be funny and smart at the same time, and to have a girlfriend in order to be accepted. At this early stage of my life, I began helping other young men figure out that they were allowed to be themselves no matter what restrictions and expectations society put on them.
Throughout my time in higher education, both as a college student and as a professional, I have witnessed the continuation of men on campus struggling to be authentic and be accepted for who they truly are. In college, I became a resident assistant in a first-year student building. The majority of the men on my floor were student-athletes and struggled immensely throughout their first year to navigate how to be a man on a small campus while balancing their school, sport, and social lives. They frequently acted out, got in trouble with campus security, and found themselves needing to reflect on the decisions they had made. It was interesting that almost all of them somehow came to the conclusion that they felt as though their actions were expected of them by their peers and the greater community.

When I started my first professional role in higher education, I worked at a small private liberal arts institution as a hall director overseeing first-year housing. The building where I lived was home to approximately 250 first-year men, and 80% of them were involved with the college’s athletic department. I immediately began seeing aspects of toxic masculinity, men performing traditional masculine norms to fit in, and students mirroring each other’s negative behavior. This is when I first realized that there was a real problem of performative masculinity among men in college, and especially student-athlete men.

Throughout all of my years working with college men, both student-athletes and non-student-athletes, I have witnessed very similar themes present themselves. Men are conditioned at some point in their lives to believe they need to look and act in a certain way to be considered “real men”. Anecdotally, many of my student-athletes displayed a greater struggle with this as they were not only expected to look and act a specific way, but were also constantly in the spotlight among peers, faculty, and administration. The pressure of being held to a standard
which they may never have been properly taught was discouraging for many of my students. The questions continuously emerging in my mind were, “Where do men learn the need to act this way?” and “What structures within being a student-athlete reinforce this type of masculinity?” My hope is that this study provides a baseline understanding of where college student-athlete men learn how to act as men, what pressure they experience along the way, and who or what reinforces positive and negative versions of masculinity on their journeys.

**Research Problem**

Toxic and hegemonic masculinity have been identified as key factors in college men participating in destructive decision making such as excessive drinking (Capraro, 2000; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019), risky sexual behavior (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2008; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 2013; Orenstein, 2020; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019), and lowered academic interest (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Musser et al., 2017). The presence of toxic masculinity on today’s college campuses aids in the reinforcement of men holding social dominance over women, people of color, and other marginalized populations. Patriarchal systems of power and oppression are consciously and unconsciously reinforced by college men every day, but there are certain populations of college men who wield a stronger ability to influence change. College student-athlete men are often viewed as “cool kids” and “culture creators” on today’s college campuses (Harris & Struve, 2009; Hill et al., 2001; Kimmel, 2008; Messner, 1992; Pascoe, 2003; Wechsler et al., 1997). While most college men experience and perpetuate varying levels of toxic
masculinity, college student-athletes are often situated within an environment that perpetuates these types of toxic actions (Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Leichliter et al., 1998; Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Pascoe, 2003; Wechsler et al., 1997).

Previous studies on student-athlete men have predominantly been situated within Division I institutions that have resources for supports such as team mentors and sports psychologists (Harris & Struve, 2009; Leichliter et al., 1998). Student-athlete men at lower division schools (Division II/Division III) may not have these support systems. At these institutions, coaches are often looked at as the main point of contact for student-athletes, but many coaches do not have the educational background or training to handle psychosocial development regarding the constructing and perceiving of one’s own masculinity during the formative years in college. Moreover, many NCAA Division III programs reside at small to mid-sized institutions, so the impact of toxic masculinity has the potential to be more concentrated within these communities. Men who participate in athletics are very visible and are seen as representing hegemonic forms of masculinity; therefore, they have immense influence in setting norms of what is expected of other men on campus (Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Messner, 1992; Pascoe, 2003; Wechsler et al., 1997). A ripple effect may therefore exist in the impact that athletic involvement has on the wider campus’s perception and construction of masculinity, particularly at smaller institutions.
Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to examine how the lived experience of NCAA Division III student-athlete men shapes their construction and perception of masculinity and gender construction. Specifically, this study will answer the following research questions:

1. How, if at all, does growing up participating in athletics and becoming a member of an NCAA Division III collegiate athletic team shape the construction of masculinity within college student-athlete men?

2. How, if at all, does growing up participating in athletics and becoming a student-athlete on a NCAA Division III college campus shape students’ perceptions of their own masculinity?

Literature Review: Men and Masculinities in College

The study of men and masculinities is a relatively new area of study amid the academy and within empirical research. Originally birthed from within women’s studies (Weber, 1998), the concept of looking at gender as a social construct and viewing men as gendered beings is a newer perspective that has been developed over the past few decades. Pro-feminist men began examining their own lives through a gendered prism and applying such a filter to participants within their own research (Kimmel & Messner, 2013). Though almost all original psychological and social science research utilized men as subjects, these individuals were not viewed through the lens of having a gender identity and, as a result, did not consider how gender might interact
with other variables being studied (Davis, 2002). That is, similar to other privileged identities that are too often considered normative by default, many studies were performed using men as participants but never really looking at men in terms of their gender development. Most prominently adopted by the fields of psychology and sociology, the works of O’Neil (*Men’s Gender Role Conflict*), Kimmel (*Guyland*), and Connell (hegemonic masculinity) paved the way for others to understand men as gendered beings and challenge the ways in which men are often pushed to act within a society that relentlessly polices gender. Gender policing refers to the regulation and enforcement of gender norms that target an individual who is perceived as transgressing normative rules (Davis & Klobassa, 2017).

Men in American society today sit in a position of unearned privilege due to their gender identity but simultaneously battle overarching systems of power and oppression including racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2013; Davis & Klobassa, 2017; Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 2017; Tillapaugh & McGowan, 2019; Weber, 1998). Whether conscious or unconscious of how they enact their gender identity, today’s society is filled with men living in a state of confusion and fear of not being “man enough” (Kimmel, 2008; O’Neil, 2013). The following review of literature will cover a myriad of important studies and discoveries related to men and masculinities research.

**Gender Role Conflict**

Gender role conflict is a regularly identified state within psychology that occurs when the actions and roles of someone’s gender performance produce negative consequences or undue
stress on oneself or others (O’Neil et al., 1986). The concept of gender role conflict rose to the
surface in both popular and professional literature in the late 1970s and early 1980s but was a
difficult theory to empirically measure as there was not a universally accepted definition or
model to follow. The prevalent commonalities throughout gender role conflict were men’s
extreme fear of femininity, stereotypical feminine behaviors, and the performance of gender in a
more effeminate way (O’Neil, 2015; O’Neil et al., 1986). Scholars initially believed that this fear
of the effeminate was based on a perceived loss of power, social conditioning to restrict
emotions, traditional masculinity as sexual prowess, and overt fear of homosexuality (O’Neil et
al., 1986). Throughout the years, further research has been performed and the aforementioned
initial foundations of gender role conflict still remain pillars of the current model.

O’Neil (2015) compiled the previous research on gender role conflict and created what is
now known as the Gender Role Conflict Scale. This scientific tool was proven valid and reliable
within the psychological community and identifies patterns of gender role conflict within men
and provides context for much of what men feel when they are experiencing this state of
divergence. In response to criticism that the model did not consider differences between micro-
context, macro-context, and developmental stages of life, O’Neil (2015) later created an updated
conceptual module of gender role conflict. The new model includes aspects of the original model
such as the four interconnected and overlying levels of gender role conflict (cognitive,
emotional, behavioral, and unconscious) as well as the four situational contexts in which gender
role conflict is likely to occur (within the man, expressed towards others, experienced from
others, and during gender role transitions; O’Neil, 2015).
The new parts of the model add the intersections of performative gender socialization, traditional gender role conflict, and interpersonal experiences that uniquely impact individuals differently (O’Neil, 2015). This model centers the gendered experience of men (micro-context) within systemic forces of pressure in society, including patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, sexism, and homophobia (macro-context), all while considering where a man falls in his life cycle and psychological development (O’Neil, 2015). This new module takes a critical and intersectional view on gender role conflict and creates a method of constructing healthy and positive masculinity within the lives of today’s growingly diverse men.

Guyland

Focusing less on psychological or individual-level aspects of masculinity, Dr. Michael Kimmel (2008) took a sociological dive into the contexts in which men learn gender in one of the most pivotal pieces for understanding the lived experiences of young men in the United States, “Guyland.” Kimmel (2008) interviewed young men between the ages of 16-26 all over the country from high schools and colleges, within rural, urban, and suburban neighborhoods, and those holding a multitude of personal identities. These men, while living outwardly privileged lives, were found to be afraid of making mistakes, seeming effeminate in front of their peers, being too nice, and not being “man enough” in their lives (Kimmel, 2008). The common theme among all these quips is that men feel as though they need to seem “okay” on the outside and never risk that outer false appearance being broken by emotions of weakness.
Kimmel’s (2008) research discusses where men are taught to “act like a man,” how educational systems reinforce these parameters, and how and why risky behaviors exist within Guyland. More specifically, Kimmel (2008) addresses how sex and sexuality are deeply engrained in the culture of Guyland and how sports serve as a release for men to bond without risking weakness or seemingly desiring an emotional connection. *Guyland* unearthed truths about why college men feel the need to drink excessively in order to prove their worthiness to other men and why many college-going men subject themselves to embarrassment and hazing in order to fit in. Kimmel (2008) made sure to talk to his subjects about topics that are rarely spoken about among men, such as hooking up, why men do it, and how they feel afterwards. Kimmel’s (2008) subjects nearly unanimously agreed that there existed excessive social pressure to hook up with multiple women in order to be considered a true man. Lastly, an important connection that was made throughout *Guyland* was how and why men connect to sports. Kimmel (2008) posits that men use sports as a competitive means to show emotions without restriction, bond with other men (both family members and friends), and even allow themselves to cry as long as it relates to a deep connection to a specific team.

**College Men as Gendered Beings**

Davis (2002) wrote a piece, titled “Voices of Gender Role Conflict: The Social Construction of College Men’s Identity,” which was one of the earliest empirical studies that viewed college men as gendered beings. There had been a selection of works on this topic throughout various academic disciplines, but a dearth of scholarship existed within higher
education literature. Davis (2002) placed in the forefront of his article the critical importance of the movement to represent voices of women and gender identity throughout higher education and developmental theory but suggested that even though men were the majority of participants in these studies, they were never viewed through a similar lens of gender. Davis’s (2002) work set out to prove that there was a high-level social construction involved within all gender identities, including men, and that a critical inquiry was needed to discover how men learn to “be a man” and the powers which influence and reinforce masculinities within the college setting. This study provided five phenomenological themes of what these men felt when asked to view their lives through a gendered lens. The five outputs from the study include men feeling the inability to express themselves fully, identifying ways in which men feel limited in their communication, the deeply engrained fear of men being seen as feminine, a general confusion about what masculinity really is, and men feeling many challenges in their lives but not receiving necessary support (Davis, 2002). This study challenged and pushed higher education research and scholarship to begin critically examining college men through a similar gendered lens in studies and campus programs.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Masculinity can be healthy or unhealthy relative to the way it is enacted by an individual. The term “hegemonic masculinity,” or toxic masculinity, is commonly synonymous with the negative aspects of being and acting like a man. The word “hegemony” is defined as the “social, cultural, and ideological dominance of one way of being and doing” (Catalano et al., 2018, p. 15)
and positions one specific way of acting or existing over all others. The term “hegemonic masculinity” was coined by R.W. Connell. Connell (2013) defined hegemonic masculinity as needing to occur in relation to women and others socially deemed as subordinate. Hegemonic masculinity is the cultural manifestation that reinforces the patriarchy, stratifies gender, and consciously and unconsciously rewards men for buying into it (Catalano et al., 2018; Connell, 2013). Hegemonic masculinity has everything to do with power and dominance in order to protect the ego, emotions, and social positioning of men in today’s society.

Discussions concerning hegemonic masculinity have been prevalent throughout the scholarship on college men and masculinities (Beatty & Tillapaugh, 2017; Catalano et al., 2018; Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Foste & Davis, 2018; Harper & Harris, 2010; Harris, 2010; Laker & Davis, 2011; O’Neil, 2015; Reneau, 2019; Tillapaugh & McGowan, 2019). Young men and boys who adhere to society’s normative views on masculinity are more likely to act out, restrict emotions, be violent, abuse alcohol and drugs, engage in risky sexual activity, and perpetuate dominance over women and other men with marginalized identities (Catalano et al., 2018; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; O’Neil, 2015; Reneau, 2019). Men are generally unconscious to their adherence and learning of toxic masculinity as it is so deeply engrained in culture that one specific way of being or acting is deemed “correct,” leaving all others to be “inferior or unnatural” (Foste & Davis, 2018, p. 21). Helping young men become aware of what hegemonic masculinity is, how they personally buy into it without knowing, and what those who do not adhere to normative gender performance look like is a proven successful method for raising awareness and inclusivity among college men (Catalano et al., 2018). Overall, hegemonic and toxic masculinity are the driving forces behind many negative performances in
men and can be the root of what leads to most of the risky and harmful experiences of young men in today’s society.

Racial Differences Within Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is based solely on what society deems normative and proper for how men look and act, so there is a clear differentiation of how men in nondominant racial identity groups experience their own masculinity. Much of the recent literature on college men and intersectionality has focused on how men of color and those in nondominant racial/ethnic groups navigate masculinity in today’s world (Harris, 2008, 2010; Liu, 2002; Naylor et al., 2015; Weber, 1998). For example, Liu’s (2002) study proved that Asian American college men struggle deeply with the demands of balancing school, work, and family as well as living up to academic expectations placed on them by society. These men have an increased pressure to be academically successful and continue their education past the baccalaureate level; pressure of this nature caused men in the study to neglect personal activities and traditional “college fun” that others may experience (Liu, 2002). Black men, as described in the literature (Harper & Harris, 2010; Harris, 2008, 2010; Naylor et al., 2015; Weber, 1998), experience layers of hegemonic masculinity, compounded by other negative social systems such as racism and often classism. The men in these studies often had lower graduation and success rates in college without the presence of intervention programs and mentoring opportunities that allowed them to gain necessary equity to be successful in college as men (Harris, 2008, 2010; Naylor et al., 2015). Generally, men outside of the societally dominant racial identity group have increased
struggles enacting healthy masculinity due to battling additional factors regarding their race and additional expectations society has put on them.

**Critical Views of Masculinities**

Throughout recent years, scholars have continued to expand writing, research, and knowledge sharing around gender, men, and masculinities (Catalano et al., 2018; Davis & Klobassa, 2017; Foste & Davis, 2018; Tillapaugh & McGowan, 2019; Wagner et al., 2018). The term “men” is used to indicate gender as a socially constructed identity as opposed to the usage of the word “male,” which refers specifically to biological sex assigned at birth (Foste & Davis, 2018; Wagner et al., 2018). The term “masculinities” is used intentionally in a pluralized form because “linguistically and symbolically [it] resists the assertion that there is one kind of masculinity and is a way of pushing back on ideas that normalize gender” (Catalano et al., 2018, p. 12). Much of the current literature on men and masculinities has expanded to purposely include LGBTQIA+ men and trans* men, who have historically been left out of the conversation surrounding gender and masculinities (Catalano et al., 2018; Davis & Klobassa, 2017; Foste & Davis, 2018; Tillapaugh & McGowan, 2019; Wagner et al., 2018). Expanding the once narrow and monolithic view of men and masculinities allows for all those who are masculine identified or self-identified as men to be included in research, writing, and scholarship.

Intersectionality brings a transformative understanding to the work of men and masculinities and continues to expand the once-rigid understanding of what it means to be a man. Once viewed in the aggregate of “all men” being a privileged group, the presence of
intersectionality recognizes that contingent on a person’s multiple identities, a man can go from a privileged social group to an oppressed social group depending on the context (Jones & Abes, 2013; Naylor et al., 2015; Tillapaugh & McGowan, 2019; Wagner et al., 2018; Weber, 1998). Depending on physical position within the world, societal context, and other ever-shifting parameters, privileged and oppressed identities are categorized differently; overarchingly, men of color, low-income men, LGBTQIA+ men, and men with disabilities are found to be among the more commonly oppressed identities (Jones & Abes, 2013; Naylor et al., 2015; Wagner et al., 2018; Weber, 1998). Other intersections, such as Whiteness, cisgender, higher socio-economic status, and athletic participation can automatically thrust men into more privileged spaces within most societies (Catalano et al., 2018; Jones & Abes, 2013; Kimmel, 2008; Messner, 1992; Tillapaugh & McGowan, 2019; Wagner et al., 2018). Understanding the saliency of multiple identities for men, specifically as they relate to power, privilege, and oppression, continues to expand the wealth of knowledge within the study of men, masculinities, and gender.

**How College Men Are Struggling**

College men are struggling to find their true selves, fit in with each other, successfully complete their degrees, and get through their college years unscathed and in a healthy mindset (Capraro, 2000; Davis & Klobassa, 2017; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Edwards, 2010; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Musser et al., 2017; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019). There are a multitude of challenges facing college men today, including enacting risky behavior, increased academic struggle, and a resistance to seeking help. Research has demonstrated
throughout multiple studies that many men’s actions and inactions are due to feeling a pressure of adherence to traditional masculine norms and to not seem “othered” in comparison to their peers (Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Musser et al., 2017). Scholars have taken a multitude of perspectives and approaches to seek an understanding of why men feel the need to act out and resist help, and the overarching themes connect back to hegemonic and toxic masculinity. A deeper look into each of the areas of struggle for most college men may provide a better understanding of the lived experiences of the different studies’ participants.

**Dangerous Behavior**

Dangerous behavior among college men is commonly discussed throughout men and masculinities research (Capraro, 2000; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2008; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 2013; Orenstein, 2020; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019). A specific focus tends to surround the collegiate and gendered cultures of drinking (Capraro, 2000; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Kimmel, 2008) and risky sexual behaviors and sexual domination of women (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2008; Kimmel, 2008; Orenstein, 2020).

**Culture of drinking.** College men understand drinking as a way of being or a common practice during one’s time in college (Capraro, 2000; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019); it is what Capraro (2000) calls the “male domain” within the social stratosphere of college campuses. College men believe that they drink as much as their other gender counterparts, but it is proven that men are more likely to engage in alcohol abuse,
alcoholism, judicial incidents involving alcohol, getting drunk, and binge drinking (Capraro, 2000). Drinking is a large part of masculine culture and men often drink for sport in a competitive nature to prove dominance over each other (Harris & Struve, 2009). The pervasiveness of competitive drinking culture among men begins as early as high school, and binge drinking within that age range has significantly risen over recent years (Kimmel, 2008). Drinking is often seen as a bonding activity in which men can push their limits, compete against each other, and have a good time, but it actually acts as a way for men to create relationships, lower inhibitions, and allow for emotionality without repercussion (Capraro, 2000; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019). Two additional themes surrounding college men and drinking include the correlation between men and cultures that actively fear femininity and the amount of alcohol consumed in excess and that men who have higher misogynistic and male domination-oriented views were proven to drink at higher levels and engage in risky sexual activity more commonly than their nonrelative counterparts (Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019).

**Risky sexual activity.** One of the most common ways that men feel as though they can prove their masculinity and position among other men is through the objectification of women and having sex with multiple partners (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2008; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 2013; Orenstein, 2020; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019). Many college men may not fully agree or support the way other men act with women but believe that it is part of the way men naturally are and that it is normal for men to act misogynistically towards women (Harris, 2008; Kimmel, 2008; Orenstein, 2020; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019). Studies have shown that men with the most toxic and hegemonic belief systems tend to be the
same men who use risky sexual behavior or perpetrate sexual assaults to prove their power and domination over women (Harris, 2008; Kimmel, 2008; Orenstein, 2020). Participants in multiple studies (Harris, 2008; Kimmel, 2008; Orenstein, 2020; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019) have proved a relationship between quantity of sexual partners and level of perceived masculinity achieved.

College men commonly use the term “hook up” when talking about sexual activity, though the term does not have a universally accepted definition. Research has shown that young men utilize purposeful vagueness with the phrase “hook up” so that they can lift their social position by alluding to sexual intercourse with women when the actual sexual experiences may not have been as intimate (Kimmel, 2008). Continued research confirms that hooking up is becoming far more common in college circles and that there is a pressure and intentional vagueness to the term “hooking up” (Orenstein, 2020). Hook-up culture, misogyny, and the need to use women to climb a social ladder are all deeply connected to hegemonic masculinity and an ingrained adherence to patriarchy.

Academic Struggles

Academic struggle for men in college is significantly higher than for their other-gender counterparts, but many college men also believe academic struggles to be in line with “being a man” (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Musser et al., 2017). There are mixed findings in the literature on how men view academic struggle and success. Most studies show that participants feel pressured to make social and academic choices that are in line
with their hegemonic views of how a man should act and what he should prioritize (Musser et al., 2017). These men choose parties and girls over homework, not wanting to seem too smart and not asking for help when needed. On the contrary, some men believe that they can be both perceived as masculine by their peers and academically successful (Harris, 2008). These men consider themselves “well rounded,” since they were able to master multiple areas of college, social life and academics.

**Lack of Support Seeking**

Much of the literature on college men indicates that men are generally struggling and are in crisis in a multitude of areas. With colleges offering numerous support services for students of all genders, it is often questioned why men are not utilizing these services more frequently. The general lack of support seeking can be tied to men not wanting to appear weak, thereby decreasing their masculinity and being further aligned with feminine gender roles (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Capraro, 2000; Harris, 2010; Harris & Struve, 2009; Musser et al., 2017). This topic is discussed across disciplines such as psychology, counseling, sociology, and anthropology. In recent decades, studies in psychology have found that men seek counseling, visit their doctor, and ask clarifying questions far less than their other-gender counterparts (Addis & Mahalik, 2003).

Men often suffer the same level of mental health issues as women but are far less likely to seek services or professionally equip themselves with tools to battle their mental health struggles (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). One of the reasons that men may struggle with academics is
untreated mental health issues that men are often aware of but have not done anything to treat (Musser et al., 2017). The most common of these struggles are depression, ADHD, and social/test anxiety; the combination of these struggles and a lack of help seeking adds to the academic failure and personal struggle many men feel (Musser et al., 2017). There are ways to engage men in help-seeking behaviors and allow for comfort when men are needing to connect with others in order to heal. Studies have shown that creating a safe space, allowing for open and vulnerable dialogue, suspending judgment, and allowing for comfort to form naturally with men is the most effective way for men to seek help and begin to deal with their issues (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Laker & Davis, 2011; Musser et al., 2017; O’Neil, 2015; Reneau, 2019).

The Student-Athlete Intersection

Many of the previously discussed struggles of men in college are exacerbated by the intersection of masculinity and a student-athlete identity, commonly referred to as “jock culture” (Harris & Struve, 2009; Hill et al., 2001; Kimmel, 2008; Messner, 1992; Pascoe, 2003; Weber, 1998). Men on college athletics teams often feel increased pressure to perform as overly masculine, engage in excessive drinking, use women as sexual commodities, and focus their attention on their sport instead of their academics (Harris & Struve, 2009; Hill et al., 2001; Kimmel, 2008; Musser et al., 2017; Pascoe, 2003). Jocks, or student-athletes on the college level, are placed on a social pedestal that puts them in a fishbowl for other students, faculty, staff, and administrators to critique and judge (Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Pascoe, 2003). These men are often ill-equipped to handle this level of pressure, have never been trained to act
at the level to which they are expected, and do not know how to deal with failure or struggle, so they either act out and make destructive decisions or turn inward and risk their own mental health (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Harris & Struve, 2009; Hill et al., 2001; Kimmel, 2008; Musser et al., 2017; Pascoe, 2003).

The issues surrounding gender construction, performance, and identity among college men expand far beyond the physical limits of the field or the court. College football players have been proven to be hyper-focused on their appearance and muscularity as a means to prove their manliness (Steinfeldt et al., 2011). Student-athlete men are overly critical of themselves publicly displaying emotions unless it is deemed “acceptable” at times, such losing a big game or winning a championship, but are more accepting of it when viewing other men do so (MacArthur & Shields, 2015; Wong et al., 2011). Collegiate athlete men are also constantly policed on how much they can drink and with how many women they engage in sexual activity as a measurement of their worth and success (Capraro, 2000; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2008; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 2013; Orenstein, 2020; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019). Overall, the experiences of student-athlete men show a myriad of ways in which these students are struggling but also are the students least likely to seek supports from the micro- and macro-cultural standpoint.

How to “Act Like A Man”

There are a multitude of spaces where men are taught to “act like a man” throughout their lives and numerous people who play an important part in their gender socialization. A myriad of
studies spanning multiple academic disciplines have focused on where men learn what they later enact and how men construct gendered identities throughout their lives.

Where Men Learn Gender Identity Performance

Humans begin to experience passive learning of performative gender identity from the moment they are born; this is reinforced, actively and passively, throughout their entire lives (Connell, 2013; Kimmel, 2008; O’Neil, 2015; Pascoe, 2003). Men learn about the expected portrayals of manhood and masculinity from their elders, their peers, the media, and unspoken rules of society (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 2008, 2017; Kimmel & Messner, 2013; O’Neil, 2015; Pascoe, 2003). The most prominent places where men learn about their gender performance expectations are within their home life and their school life (Kimmel, 2008; O’Neil, 2015; O’Neil et al., 1986). Peer interaction through means of gender policing has been identified by numerous scholars as one of the most harmful and widespread ways in which men feel trapped in toxic and hegemonic modes of masculinity (Davis & Klobassa, 2017; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 2008; Orenstein, 2020; Pascoe, 2003). Gender policing is the practice in which peers monitor each other and employ retaliatory action against those not following hegemonic or restrictive gender roles (Davis & Klobassa, 2017; Pascoe, 2003). Men enter college with years of fear and trauma from being policed by friends, family members, teachers, coaches, mentors, pastors, and random passersby. These young men have not only begun to believe the way in which they are taught to act is correct, they also begin to
enforce it with younger boys and men, continuing the cycle of toxicity and hegemony (Kimmel, 2008; Pascoe, 2003).

How Men Enact Gender Identity

Men express their gender identity in a multitude of ways within everyday life. College men feel pressures, consciously and unconsciously, regarding the way they walk, talk, dress, laugh, play sports, answer questions in class, and lead organizations (Beatty & Tillapaugh, 2017; Davis & Klobassa, 2017; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Foste & Davis, 2018; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Pascoe, 2003; Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016). Men frequently perform hegemonic masculinity by drinking excessively, engaging in risky sex, competing against others formally/informally, and restricting emotions (Capraro, 2000; Davis & Klobassa, 2017; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; O’Neil, 2015; Orenstein, 2020; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019). Many college men also perform toxic forms of masculinity through the ways in which they lead student organizations, fraternities, and athletic teams (Beatty & Tillapaugh, 2017; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Reneau, 2019; Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016). No matter where men find themselves within their lives, they are regularly surrounded by examples, models, and reinforcements of negative gender stereotypes in which they have been conditioned to be compliant. Men frequently do not recognize how they are acting or understand the reasoning behind their actions until engaging in reflective questioning and discussions regarding gender performance and identity (Beatty & Tillapaugh, 2017; Davis;
Gaps in the Literature

Gaps exist within the literature surrounding college men’s multiple prominent identities. Limited scholarship is available on student-athletes in college, but specifically a dearth of literature exists in the Division III system. Most literature covering men and college athletics involves players from larger Division I programs, which have a vastly different lived experience for students (Hill et al., 2001; Kimmel, 2008; Messner; 1992; Weber, 1998). Along with the missed focus on Division III institutions, these programs are frequently present within small to mid-sized collegiate institutions. The college experience may vary significantly between larger public university systems and smaller private colleges. Lastly, there is a drastic need for critical narrative inquiry studies that allow men to reflect on the construction of their own stories regarding their masculinity and gender identity through the lens of being a student-athlete. Understanding the lived experiences of men identifying as student-athletes at small to mid-sized Divisions III institutions through their own personal stories and experiences will add a great deal to the current body of literature on men and masculinities in college.
Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the intersectional model of multiple dimensions of identity (I-MMDI; Jones & Abes, 2013). Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) originally coined “intersectionality” when studying violence experienced by women of color. Intersectionality is defined as the various ways in which an individual’s identities shape the multiple dimensions of their lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1993). Crenshaw used this term to describe her experiences as a Black woman and explain how her multiple identities interacted within society, thereby making her not only Black nor only a woman but an interconnected product of both. Jones and Abes (2013), as they created the I-MMDI, utilized Crenshaw’s (1993) work as well the four theoretical tenets of intersectionality, developed by Dill and Zambrana (2009). The four tenets Dill and Zambrana (2009) established are “centering the experiences of people of color, complicating identity, unveiling power, and promoting social justice to social change” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 156). Jones and Abes (2013) used these two studies to revise previous versions of the model of multiple dimensions of identity to include an intersectional lens.

The aspects of the I-MMDI include the original MMDI model (micro-analysis), a meaning-making lens which was brought into the reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identities (R-MMDI), and a macro-level analysis that views overarching systems of power, privilege, and oppression within society. The original MMDI consisted of three main components to describe how the multiplicity of identities interact; these components are the core, multiple identity salience, and the contextual influences that shape one’s self-perception of identity. The model is represented as an atom with the core being the nucleus, the multiple
identities represented as electrons moving around the core depending on saliency, and an outer circle around the atom serving as the conditions for which it is situated. The MMDI showed that where someone is, who they are surrounded by, and what they are doing can influence the identities which are most salient (Jones & Abes, 2013). In this original version of the model, the core was thought to be stable and constant.

The second aspect of the I-MMDI is the lens of meaning making, which was created considering research by Kegan and Baxter Magolda on identity, self-authorship, and meaning making, which all have a direct impact on saliency of identities (Jones & Abes, 2013). The lens of meaning making expresses that, depending on how much self-development a person has gone through, there is a direct influence on how much of an impact external context has on their identity (Jones & Abes, 2013). If an individual has gone through a deep developmental journey into who they truly are, there would likely not be as much of an impact by external context. If someone is extremely impacted by their environment and those around them, the external context would impact their perception of identity saliency more significantly. The lens of meaning making introduces personal development and individual meaning-making journeys into the model, making it stronger given the complexity of identity development within individuals’ lives.

The final aspect of the I-MMDI is the macro-level analysis that incorporates systems of power, privilege, and oppression into identity development. This macro-analysis allows for researchers to not only view the individual’s identities and their meaning-making development but also the context in which they live (Jones & Abes, 2013). Societal systems such as sexism, classism, homophobia, and toxic masculinity are all considered within the I-MMDI as they have
the potential to directly influence meaning making and identity salience (Jones & Abes, 2013). Utilizing a critical view on identity salience allows for participants to be viewed in a holistic and authentic manner while taking into consideration societal structures and individual experiences and meaning making, focusing on how identity is personally experienced and publicly presented (Jones & Abes, 2013). This final aspect of the model makes it increasingly more crucial to the development of identity and meaning making within our lives (Jones & Abes, 2013).

The I-MMDI fits as a theoretical framework for this study for a number of reasons. Within this study, the depth of description gained by recording participants’ stories regarding their masculinity requires a lens through which to build and formulate questions as well as interpret findings. This study is framed through the lens of an intersectional model that recognizes and values each social identity an individual holds and aids in the navigation of these identities. All participants will identify as men, but the intersecting identities of race, social class, family dynamics, faith, etc., may all play a part in participants’ construction of masculinity. The I-MMDI will be used as a guiding tool to shape interview questions that will help elicit reflection from participants regarding how their personal stories are situated within larger systems of power and privilege. After interviews are completed and data is collected, the I-MMDI will help view participants’ stories through an intersectional lens and also guide interpretation of participants’ stories through overarching systems that often dictate how gender is expressed within society. Throughout this study, participants’ individualized stories, themes, and commonalities are sought to be identified as a way to more fully understand the experiences of men who identify as student-athletes on Division III college campuses.
Throughout this study, the I-MMDI will frame a micro-analysis of individuals (the participants) and interpret experiences through a lens of personal meaning making (displaying their identities as men and student-athletes), and view it all through overarching, intersecting systems of sexism, classism, racism, homophobia, and specifically, toxic and hegemonic masculinity. Depending on each participant’s identity salience, personal lived experiences, and structures of power from which they benefit, each man in this study will have a unique and individualized perception and construction of gender identity. This model has not been used widely to study majority individuals who traditionally hold power such as men and student-athletes on college campuses, but the importance of viewing gender construction and perception through the lens of oppressive systems existing in society will add a new level of understanding to the work of college men and masculinities. The intersectional nature of the I-MMDI focuses less on only viewing marginalized identities within participants, and more as a way to holistically view participants as individuals holding numerous identities, some of which may be privileged and others which may be oppressed, all within grander societal systems. For these reasons, the I-MMDI will add to the richness and comprehensiveness of the narrative inquiry study at hand and will be utilized throughout this study to guide data analysis throughout multiple stages.

Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology. The process of situating a study is used in qualitative research to address overarching structures and the complex nature of the study (Jones et al., 2014). The following section will provide an overview of theoretical underpinnings, the
researcher’s ways of knowing, review of the chosen methodological approach, overview of the research site and participants, review of data collection and analysis procedures, criteria for quality, and researcher positionality. This information is an attempt to anchor the present study both in sound ways of knowing and a transparent design of research.

**Theoretical Underpinnings**

Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) defined epistemology as a way in which researchers express “philosophical assumptions about what constitutes knowledge” (p. 9). I often view epistemology as figuring out how it is that I know what I know, or simply, how knowledge is acquired. This study is rooted in a constructivist epistemology, which is often used interchangeably with “social constructivism” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Constructivist epistemology emphasizes that knowledge is attained and developed through individual lived experiences, personal surroundings and environments, and socially constructed ways of the world (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Jones et al., 2014). Constructivists believe that participants acquire “subjective meanings of their experiences” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8), which allows the researcher to gather a multitude of ways of knowing and not narrow truth to one specific idea. Constructivism also believes that there is no one singular truth and that truth is therefore constructed by individuals, their experiences, and their surroundings (Jones et al., 2014). The overarching belief that constructivism posits is that knowledge is socially constructed and not universally known. This study’s ontology, or how reality truly exists, is also based in constructivism and the concept of lived experiences.
In addition to epistemology, there are a number of other theoretical underpinnings which are germane to the present study. The theoretical perspective guiding this study is rooted in interpretivism. Crotty (1998) defined theoretical perspective as “the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria” (p. 3). Interpretivism considers that the meaning which people create is in fact truth to that individual, as truth and knowledge are socially constructed (Jones et al., 2014). Crotty (1998) believes that people are able to go beyond surface knowledge and uncover new aspects of experiences when viewing their lives through interpretivism. It is my hope that through this interpretivist theoretical perspective, participants will be able to view their own experiences as truth and help to share their socially constructed worldview.

Methodological Approach

The adoption of a specific methodological approach in qualitative research not only adds structure to a study and serves as a way to organize data, but it also grounds the study in scholarly literature (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The present study has been structured utilizing the qualitative research approach of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is described as “an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 17). As humans, we live complex lives full of stories that make up who we are, what we know, and how we act; narrative inquirers listen to these stories, organize and re-story them chronologically, and conclude with the creation of a narrative which displays a participant’s truth (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell &
Poth, 2016). Narrative inquiry is understood both as a phenomenon being studied as well as the method in which a study is based (Clandinin, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2016). The present study employs both iterations of narrative inquiry as it is the method in which the study is structured, but it is also focused on the “narrativity composed phenomenon” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 16) of constructing masculinity and gender identity as a student-athlete man.

Narrative inquiry is seen as a relational methodology (Clandinin, 2016) because the researcher often comes alongside participants as they share their stories and construct their own truth. Narrative inquirers frequently become part of their participants’ lives and therefore part of their stories (Clandinin, 2016; Daiute, 2013; Mertova & Webster, 2020; Riessman, 1993). Researchers within this methodology allow participants to reflect on their lives, tell their story through their lived experience, and use that to create order and meaning within a specific context (Riessman, 1993). Interpretation by the researcher is a core tenet of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016; Riessman, 1993), which leads to an increased ethnical responsibility when collecting and crafting participant stories. Researchers become stewards of their participants’ stories and experiences and therefore have a moral and ethical responsibility to accurately represent the participants within their study (Clandinin, 2016).

Within narrative inquiry, there are implications for a study’s research design that adhere to the essence of the methodology. Narrative inquirers collect stories from their participants often through interviews, documents (journals/reflections), and group conversations, among other methods (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Researchers aid participants in telling their stories by co-constructing the story and asking probing questions regarding participants’ previous experiences (Clandinin, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Riessman, 1993). Through this co-constructing of a
participant’s story, the researcher does not objectively reconstruct the story but rather creates a “rendition of how life is perceived” (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 3). Additionally, when participants are retelling their stories, context and temporality are key to accurately interpreting individual stories (Clandinin, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Daiute, 2013; Mertova & Webster, 2020; Riessman, 1993). The contextual specifics of each situation, including, but not limited to, physical feelings, space descriptions, emotionality, and social environment, are key to a sound and rich data collection. Lastly, narrative inquirers analyze collected data thematically and structurally to construct a new narrative with participants.

Research Site

The research site for this study is a mid-sized private liberal arts university located in the Midwest. The research site has roughly 3,500 total students and is home to 14 NCAA Division III athletics teams. The student body at the research site is roughly 70% women and 30% men, with a 24% residential population and a 76% commuter population. The university is located in a suburban setting just outside a large metropolitan area. Approximately half the undergraduate students are first-generation college students and are federally designated as low income (PELL eligible). Student-athletes make up roughly 10% of the total undergraduate population at the research site.
Participants and Participant Recruitment

To be eligible to participate in this study, individuals have sophomore, junior, or senior standing, be enrolled at the research site, and be presently listed as a student-athlete on the official men’s athletic team roster of a selected team. All participants must also personally self-identify as a man as their lived/expressed gender identity. First-year students have been excluded from this study due to the COVID-19 pandemic and these students not having fully experienced life on campus as NCAA Division III athletes.

To recruit participants into the study, I will use purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used when participants must meet certain criteria and have pre-existing information/experience on the topic being studied (Jones et al., 2014). I will solicit participants using the team’s official GroupMe chat app, all team email solicitations, as well as individual asks to potential participants. Individual asks will be completed through email communication, phone calls, and personal meetings with potential participants to further explain the study, the requirements, and gauge interest in participation. I am seeking to have between six and twelve student-athlete men participate from one selected athletic team at the research site. Utilizing purposeful sampling and a pre-interview questionnaire (Appendix B), all interested participants meeting the aforementioned criteria will be selected for the study.

Participants may likely have previous interaction or an existing professional relationship with me as the researcher as I have a role on campus that interacts with many students. Though an existing relationship with participants may exist, the dynamic of the relationship I might have with them is not one where they, as participants, would feel pressured to answer questions in a
specific way or even feel pressured to participate. I hold no supervisory or advisory power over students in the study. To ensure confidentiality of participants, the use of participant-selected pseudonyms will be employed throughout all aspects of the study. Participants’ real names will be stored in a single electronic file that will be password protected and stored on a secure server. Interviews with participants will be held as a private meeting in a closed office at the research site. Recordings and transcripts of interviews, as well as documents collected, will be stored in a secured electronic location with password protection.

Data Collection

As is common in narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Czarniawska, 2004; Jones et al., 2014; Riessman, 1993), data collection for this research study will be gathered through semi-structured individual interviews as well as document analyses of participant journals and researcher observation notes. Within the realm of narrative research, interviews and documents collected are often referred to as “field notes” and are “composed, or co-composed, by researchers and participants” collaboratively (Clandinin, 2016, p. 46). The term “field notes” is intentionally utilized by Clandinin (2016) due to the stories shared, whether through interviews or documents, being “experiential, intersubjective texts rather than objective texts” (p. 46). The benefit of viewing data as field notes and allowing for reflective analysis of the stories told is that this allows the researcher to make significant meaning from the participants’ stories and re-tell stories in a more cohesive and impactful manner (Clandinin, 2016).
Each of the participants in the study will partake in two 60- to 90-minute interviews throughout a one-semester time frame. The aim is to interview half the participants in month one and half in month two for the initial interview and then re-interview the first half of the participants in month three and the second half of the participants in month four of the semester. Semi-structured interviews will allow for flexibility in question asking and for interviews to be more conversational (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 1993). The semi-structured interview protocol for Interview 1 can be found in Appendix C; additionally, the semi-structured interview protocol for Interview 2 can be found in Appendix F. Document analysis will include reviewing participant journals and researcher observation notes. Participants will be asked to complete an online reflection journal between Interview 1 and Interview 2 (Appendix E), whereas the researcher will complete an interviewer observation tool after each of the interviews (Appendix D).

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis will be completed through a number of different methods. Narrative inquiry does not have a set model for analysis that works for every study (Jones et al., 2014), but there are certain analysis methods that are more common. For this study, all participant interviews will be recorded using digital technology that utilizes a transcription service. Transcripts of all interviews will be reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy. Within transcription, all pauses, white space, and fillers will be recorded to confirm the most accurate story is being portrayed.
(Clandinin, 2016). Participant journals and researcher observation notes will be recorded electronically, so no additional transcription will be required for these field texts.

After the conclusion of the first round of participant interviews, all transcriptions will be reviewed, and initial themes will be identified through a process of narrative coding (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Each participant interview will be reviewed individually without comparison to others’ interviews at this stage of analysis. Participants’ stories will be revisited, un-storied, and re-storied during this phase of analysis. This process involves taking stories told throughout interviews; pulling out feelings, themes, and commonalities; and then reconstructing the story to be a more complete depiction of the memory. This will be done to create deeper meaning and connection as the researcher utilizes re-storying and interpretation to co-construct stories alongside participants (Clandinin, 2016; Jones et al., 2014). Once individual interviews are reviewed and key stories or persistent topics are identified, an initial chronology (or timetable of events) will be formed for each participant (Clandinin, 2016; Jones et al., 2014); creating a chronology for each participant organizes the participant’s story in order of occurrence and allows for turning points to be identified. Once each participant’s story has been individually deconstructed and reconstructed for accuracy, identifying key moments and themes coded, and an initial chronology created, then a comparative analysis of experiences, stories, and themes will be used to review all participants’ stories collectively.

At the point when comparative analysis occurs, the I-MMDI theoretical framework will be applied as a lens for understanding nuances in participants’ stories. This will involve going back to each individual’s story and reviewing through an intersectional lens to see how intersecting identities have shaped participant experiences. Once that has been identified, all
participants’ stories can be compared based on similar or differing identities. Throughout the previously mentioned comparative analysis of all participants’ stories and experiences, the process will include re-reading each of the participants’ narratives, comparing emerging themes, and examining similar themes in relation to participants’ previous stories and experiences. Overarching themes will be identified through multiple rounds of coding that will include line-by-line general coding, formed into broad themes, and then refined as core themes emerge. This will conclude the first wave of analysis for the initial interviews.

Second interviews and participant journals will go through the same process as the first interviews as they are completed. This process will include duplicating the analysis of each participant’s second interview and utilizing the same coding structure for participant journals. Once both rounds of interviews conclude and participant journals are collected and analyzed, a final story will be created for each participant. This final story will be a combination of both interviews, journal reflections, and researcher observation notes. At the point when all participants have a final story created, a concluding round of comparative analysis will take place between all participants’ stories. This final analysis will continue to utilize the I-MMDI as a lens through which to view stories, themes, and experiences.

Criteria for Quality and Trustworthiness

Criteria for quality and trustworthiness within qualitative research are linked to the method in which a study is based as well as the researcher’s theoretical underpinnings. The traditional terms of validity and reliability are more suited for quantitative research than
qualitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Jones et al., 2014; Mertova & Webster, 2020). Qualitative validity serves to check the accuracy of the study’s findings as well as of the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), so this study will use “quality” in place of traditional “validity.” Qualitative reliability often represents the consistency between data collection tools in order to yield similar results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), but it is not expected that results from narrative analysis produce the same outcomes between participants (Mertova & Webster, 2020). For this study, “reliability” will be seen as “trustworthiness” and accuracy of the data collected and storied throughout the research process. To ensure quality and trustworthiness in this study, the following multifaceted approach will be applied.

Triangulation will be used when comparing individual participants’ two interviews and journal reflections in order to create the aforementioned final story. When themes are identified in multiple sources (such as interviews, reflections, and researcher observation notes), the quality and trustworthiness of the story is further confirmed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). During Interview 2, participants will be asked to check the accuracy of themes identified from their first interview. This aspect of member checking allows for participants to not only uncover themes they may not have previously realized but also to confirm the researcher is re-storying interviews accurately (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). An identical member checking process will be completed at the conclusion of the study when final chronologies are created and key themes are identified. Each participant will be emailed their final re-storied narrative and given the opportunity to confirm its accuracy via email or to set up a meeting in order to discuss any changes.
In addition to the triangulation and member checking, thick and rich descriptions and quotes from participants’ interviews and reflective journals will be used to further provide perspective and quality to the final outcomes of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, a researcher positionality statement is provided to ensure transparency between the researcher and the study. Positionality statements are used to illuminate any biases that may exist on the part of the researcher and create “open and honest narrative” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200) for readers to digest. Additionally, members from ACPA’s (College Student Educators International) Coalition on Men and Masculinities will serve as peer debriefers to enrich the accuracy of the study as scholars in the field of collegiate men and masculinity studies.

Moreover, consistency throughout the narrative analysis and coding of field texts will be used to ensure quality and trustworthiness between each participant’s stories and the re-storying by the researcher. This specific method applies to terms and words being used in the same way throughout all analysis as to not cause confusion to later readers of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Lastly, in a fervent attempt to prove this study trustworthy, a focus on the individual stories of participants (particularity) will be valued higher than the generalizability of the data collected. As stated in Creswell and Creswell (2018), “Particularity rather than generalizability is the hallmark of good qualitative research” (p. 202).

**Researcher Positionality**

As a higher education professional who has been working with men on college campuses for over a decade, I have had numerous opportunities to work and live with college men, and
more specifically student-athlete men. My connection to men and masculinities work in higher education is rooted in the work that can be done with the most socially dominant populations on campus who hold a large amount of social and cultural power; I have found this group to be the student-athlete men on the small to mid-sized liberal arts universities in which I have worked. I have never been a collegiate student-athlete and have no experience from which to personally cloud my understanding of being a student-athlete, but I have observed many student-athletes in my own life and professional practice. I am not someone who has invested much time or energy into athletics or organized sports throughout my life (either playing or observing), but I am more focused on the individuals who engage in college athletics, the power they are given on campus, and how others perceive them.

Having served as an athletic team mentor for numerous years, I have observed college student-athlete men tell stories of their own struggles with masculinity and discovering their gender identity, the pressures put on them as student-athletes, and the expectations they feel are put on them by their teammates, coaches, and peers. Going into this study, I have certain assumptions around how student-athlete men have been conditioned to suppress their emotions, how winning and having power over others have been rewarded, and how coaches and older players are looked at as role models for younger men. In my previous experiences working with student-athlete men, I have worked to build rapport with them by allowing these men to authentically tell their stories in a nonjudgmental space. The men I have met with have often told me that they feel comfortable opening up to me because I am seeking to know them better instead of trying to tell them what to think or why they are wrong. I work diligently to make these men feel as though they can be their true selves, since many of the men I have encountered
put up initial barriers due to negative previous experiences (people faking investment in them for personal gain). I have successfully had these barriers lowered by empathic and honest conversations, getting to know these men as individuals, and asking pointed open-ended questions to understand them better. As a White, cisgender man who was raised in an upper middle-class environment, I may hold many of the same identities as my participants and therefore connect with them on a more personal level.

Significance Statement

While there has been a progressive shift in the understanding of toxic masculinity within college men (Beatty & Tillapaugh, 2017; Catalano et al., 2018; Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Foste & Davis, 2018; Harper & Harris, 2010; Harris, 2010; Harris & Struve, 2009; Laker & Davis, 2011; O’Neil, 2015; Reneau, 2019; Tillapaugh & McGowan, 2019), a dearth of research exists that views toxic masculinity through the lens of student-athletes. A number of studies have shown the relationship between college student-athletes and overall gender perception and construction (Harris & Struve, 2009; Leichliter et al., 1998; Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Wechsler et al., 1997), but few have been viewed through the lived experiences of student-athlete men and their individual stories. A deeper look into the lived experiences of student-athlete men at small to mid-sized colleges and universities will both fill a gap in men and masculinities and identity-based research and also provide important practical implications for student affairs and athletics department staffs.
A gap in the literature also appears in how Division III student-athlete men view their own gender perceptions and construction within the context of their student-athlete identity. When combining the need to explore how these men construct and perceive their gender identity and looking within institutions that may not provide resources for holistic identity development, the need for this research emerges. As scholars continue to explore and uncover nuances surrounding the multiplicity of identities within college-going men, this subsection of men remains virtually unexplored.

In addition, since student-athlete men hold significant social power on most college campuses, there exists potential for these men to act as change agents if conditioned properly and held to appropriate standards (Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Pascoe, 2003). Practical implications of this research will provide student affairs professionals and athletic department staffs a greater understanding of their students’ experiences within gender performance and intersecting identities. Student affairs staff may be able to design and implement developmental workshops and/or student success programs to better allow student-athlete men to discuss their gender perceptions and constructions openly and without trepidation. Coaches and other athletic department staff may further understand their players and have the ability to connect with them on a deeper, more personal level if they are to be more knowledgeable about gender identity, performative masculinity, and intersecting identities.
CHAPTER II

“SUP, BRO?”: CONSTRUCTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF MASCULINITY AND GENDER IDENTITY AMONG DIVISION III STUDENT-ATHLETE MEN

Abstract

Patriarchal systems of power and oppression are reinforced by college men every day, but there are certain populations of college men who wield a stronger ability to influence change. Student-athlete men at NCAA Division III institutions are often viewed as “culture creators” on their campuses. Moreover, many of these programs reside at smaller institutions, where the impact of toxic masculinity has potential to be more concentrated. Student-athlete men are often seen as representing hegemonic forms of masculinity, thereby having influence in setting norms of what is expected of men on campus. This critical narrative inquiry study explored how participating in athletics and becoming a member of an NCAA Division III collegiate athletic team shaped the construction and perception of masculinity within college student-athlete men. Findings from this study discuss how these men learned masculinity, felt added pressures as student-athletes, and viewed being a man in today’s society. Recommendations from this study include interventions to support student-athlete men in creating a healthy construction of their gender identity.

Keywords: college men, student-athletes, gender identity development, men and masculinities
Introduction

Toxic and hegemonic masculinities are identified throughout higher education literature as key factors as to why many college men partake in negative and destructive actions. These actions may include excessive drinking (Capraro, 2000; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019), risky sexual behavior (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2008; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 2013; Orenstein, 2020; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019), and lowered academic interest (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Musser et al., 2017). Here, hegemonic masculinity is understood as the cultural manifestation that reinforces patriarchy, stratifies gender, and consciously and unconsciously rewards men for enacting its beliefs (Catalano et al., 2018; Connell, 2013). Hegemonic masculinity has everything to do with power and dominance in order to protect the ego, emotions, and social positioning of men in today’s society.

Toxic masculinity is displayed through adhering consciously and unconsciously to externally defined hegemonic standards of domination among men. Toxic masculinity is often displayed in performative manners such as binge drinking, using women as a commodity, fear of asking for help, and enacting other risky behaviors, all done without critical integration into the self and the ability to separate action from impact (Kimmel, 2008). I will use the terms “toxic masculinities” and “hegemonic masculinities” intentionally throughout this article, noting that “hegemonic masculinity” is the expression of a man’s gender (often subconscious) in order to position himself above others, whereas “toxic masculinity” is the performance of the aforementioned hegemony.
Both toxic and hegemonic masculinities, especially on today’s college campuses, contribute to the reification and reinforcement of men holding positions of power and dominance over people of color, women, and others from marginalized and disenfranchised backgrounds. College men reinforce systems of patriarchy, such as power and privilege, every day on today’s college and university campuses, but there are specific populations of men on campus who have a more prominent identity and ability to enact change. Student-athlete men are frequently seen as “cool kids” and “culture creators” on today’s college campuses (Harris & Struve, 2009; Hill et al., 2001; Kimmel, 2008; Messner, 1992; Pascoe, 2003; Wechsler et al., 1997). While nearly all men on college campuses benefit from and propagate aspects of toxic masculinities, student-athlete men are frequently positioned in departments and social circles where these types of behaviors are more present and often rewarded (Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Leichliter et al., 1998; Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Pascoe, 2003; Wechsler et al., 1997).

Much of the existing literature on student-athlete men in college has been researched utilizing Division I student-athletes, who receive a number of resources and supports such as player operation directors and team sports psychologists (Harris & Struve, 2009; Leichliter et al., 1998); these supports provide means for these players to become developed by those other than their coaches (who hold the potential for punitive power). This level of athletics comes with additional attention and status that is not necessarily felt on the Division III level. The men in Division I programs often have supports in place to aid them in their success throughout college. Division III student-athlete men do not traditionally have these types of support systems available to them, thus leaving them to fend for themselves as they grapple with issues off the court or field. At Division III institutions, head and assistant coaches serve as the main point of
contact for their players, but many of these individuals do not have educational training to handle the psychosocial development needed when student-athletes are constructing their own masculinity and/or perceiving others’ gender identities throughout the formative years of college.

Many NCAA Division III athletic programs are found within small to mid-sized colleges and universities; therefore, the effects of toxic and hegemonic masculinities have the potential to be more pervasive and impactful within these often smaller communities. Student-athlete men are frequently well known on campuses and are more visible than non-student-athlete men, thus having a larger scope of influence in setting campus norms of what other men can and cannot do (Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Messner, 1992; Pascoe, 2003; Wechsler et al., 1997). Student-athlete men are frequently seen as demonstrating hegemonic forms of masculinities, potentially influencing the rest of the campus community. A ripple effect may exist, particularly at smaller institutions, in which student-athlete men have a larger impact on a campus’s overall perception and construction of masculinity.

Throughout this article, I will intentionally use the term “men,” which is used as an identifier of gender as a socially constructed identity, whereas “male” refers to biological sex of an individual assigned at birth (Foste & Davis, 2018; Wagner et al., 2018). I will frequently use the term “masculinities” in a pluralized form because “linguistically and symbolically [it] resists the assertion that there is one kind of masculinity and is a way of pushing back on ideas that normalize gender” (Catalano et al., 2018, p. 12). Much of the emergent literature on men and masculinities, especially those in college, have intentionally included LGBTQIA+ men and trans* men, who have almost completely been absent from conversations on gender and masculinities (Catalano et al., 2018; Davis & Klobassa, 2017; Foste & Davis, 2018; Tillapaugh
& McGowan, 2019; Wagner et al., 2018). Increasing and developing this once monolithic view of men and masculinities allow for individuals who identify as masculine or consider themselves to be men to be included in research and scholarship moving forward.

The purpose of this critical narrative inquiry study is to examine how the lived experience of NCAA Division III student-athlete men shapes their construction and perception of masculinities and gender identity. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) How, if at all, does growing up participating in athletics and becoming a member of an NCAA Division III collegiate athletic team shape the construction of masculinity within college student-athlete men? and (b) How, if at all, does growing up participating in athletics and becoming a student-athlete on a NCAA Division III college campus shape students’ perceptions of their own masculinity?

Review of Relevant Literature

The study of men and masculinities emerged in the latter half of the 1900s from women’s studies (Weber, 1998). Prior to this, men were not viewed as gendered beings and gender was not viewed as a social construction. Disciplines such as psychology and sociology began to investigate men through a gendered lens after years of utilizing men as participants with little or no attention paid to how gender influenced findings (Davis, 2002; Kimmel & Messner, 2013). Once gender identity of men was raised to higher research significance, the works of O’Neil (2015) on gender role conflict, Kimmel’s (2008) Guyland, and Connell’s (2013) research on hegemonic masculinity created opportunities for others to challenge the way that men often act
and the fact that men are constantly policing the gender enactment of others. Gender policing refers to the regulation and enforcement of gender norms that target an individual who is perceived as transgressing normative rules (Davis & Klobassa, 2017). Overall, men in today’s society are in a position of unearned power and privilege due to their gender identity as men, but they still concurrently experience overarching systems of power and oppression including racism, classism, homophobia, and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2013; Davis & Klobassa, 2017; Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 2017; Tillapaugh & McGowan, 2019; Weber, 1998). Regardless of whether these men are or are not aware of their privilege or how they enact their identities as men, today’s men are living in a state of confusion and are often worried about not being “man enough” in front of others (Kimmel, 2008; O’Neil, 2015).

**How College Men Are Struggling**

Men in college today are experiencing struggle as it pertains to finding themselves, fitting in with other men, and completing their college degrees in a timely manner (Capraro, 2000; Davis & Klobassa, 2017; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Edwards, 2010; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Musser et al., 2017; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019). The primary challenges that most men face, as defined by the literature, include engaging in destructive behaviors (such as excessive drinking and risky sexual experiences), struggling academically, and a resistance to seeking help when needed. These have been proven by a multitude of studies to occur due to men feeling the need to adhere to traditional masculine norms and to not act in a
way that is outside what is expected of them, societally, as a man (Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Musser et al., 2017).

Alcohol on today’s college campuses is almost always present and most college men believe that they consume alcohol at the same rate as their other-gender counterparts, but it has been shown that college men are often more likely to struggle with alcohol abuse, get in trouble for alcohol-related situations, and engage in binge drinking (Capraro, 2000). Drinking as a way of proving one’s masculinity and dominance over others is a large part of hegemonically masculine culture in college (Harris & Struve, 2009). Kimmel (2008) discovered that competitive drinking culture, especially within student-athlete men, begins as early as high school and continues on into college. Another way in which men attempt to prove their masculinity is through using women, often multiple women, as sexual commodities (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2008; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 2013; Orenstein, 2020; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019). Many college men do not believe this practice is appropriate but that it is normal for men to act in a misogynistic manner towards women (Harris, 2008; Kimmel, 2008; Orenstein, 2020; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019). Lastly, many studies have shown that struggling academically in college is congruent with “being a man” (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Musser et al., 2017).

**The Student-Athlete Intersection**

College student-athlete men live within what is commonly referred to as “jock culture” and experience intensified experiences with the previously discussed struggles of excessive
drinking, risky sexual behavior, and lowered academic performance (Harris & Struve, 2009; Hill et al., 2001; Kimmel, 2008; Messner, 1992; Pascoe, 2003; Weber, 1998). These men have been shown throughout the literature to feel the need to perform as overtly masculine, drink as a way of competition, engage in sexual activities with multiple partners, and dedicate themselves to their sport instead of their studies (Harris & Struve, 2009; Hill et al., 2001; Kimmel, 2008; Musser et al., 2017; Pascoe, 2003). Being higher profile on most campuses, student-athlete men are often placed on an elevated social pedestal for faculty, staff, administrators, and other students to openly judge and critique (Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Pascoe, 2003). This pressure is something that college student-athlete men are often not equipped to handle, so they may turn to acting out and making destructive decisions or turn inward and negatively impact their own mental health (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Harris & Struve, 2009; Hill et al., 2001; Kimmel, 2008; Musser et al., 2017; Pascoe, 2003).

The pressures that college student-athlete men experience expand far beyond interactions with teammates or performance on the field/court. College football players were proven to be hyper-focused on their musculature and physical appearance as a way to prove their masculinity and dominance over others (Steinfeldt et al., 2011). These men, and others, have been shown throughout the literature to be overly critical of themselves as it relates to displaying emotions, unless the emotion is believed to be socially acceptable, such as when winning a championship game or losing after a long season (MacArthur & Shields, 2015; Wong et al., 2011). College student-athlete men are regularly policed on areas of their lives, including how often and how much they drink as well as how many women with which they engage in sexual activities (Capraro, 2000; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2008; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008;
Kimmel & Messner, 2013; Orenstein, 2020; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2019). These studies, and many others, prove that college student-athlete men struggle in a myriad of ways, but are also often the students who reach out for support the least, on both micro and macro cultural levels.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the intersectional model of multiple dimensions of identity (I-MMDI; Jones & Abes, 2013). Intersectionality, originally coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993), is defined as the multiple ways an individual’s identities can shape the dimensions of their lived experience. Jones and Abes (2013) created the I-MMDI while utilizing Crenshaw’s (1993) work as well as the tenets of intersectionality created by Dill and Zambrana (2009). The I-MMDI utilizes aspects of its two previous iterations (MMDI and R-MMDI) and incorporates an intersectional perspective and lens of power and privilege. The I-MMDI includes a micro-analysis, a meaning-making lens, and a macro-level analysis that integrates overarching systems of power and oppression within society (Jones & Abes, 2013). The I-MMDI fits within this study because throughout data collection participants were asked to reflect on their experiences living within overarching societal systems of toxic and hegemonic masculinities.

Utilizing a critical theoretical framework within a study based in a constructivist epistemology, I have found myself existing in a place often referred to as the theoretical borderlands (Abes, 2009). Undergirded by Kincheloe’s (2008) work on critical constructivism, this article frames men and masculinities research within a critical perspective. Kincheloe (2008)
notes that “critical constructivists are particularly interested in the ways these processes help privilege some people and marginalize others” (p. 3). Abes (2009) notes that individuals engaging in student development research must use a multiplicity of paradigms and epistemologies because it is necessary to view both privileged and oppressed identities through a lens of power inequity and search for how that inequity impacts students as they develop and grow in college. Through the use of a critical constructivist lens, in this case a constructivist epistemology with a critical theoretical framework, this study resides on the theoretical borderlands pulling from both constructivist and critical ways of knowing and producing knowledge.

Methodology

This study utilizes the research design of narrative inquiry as “an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 17). Humans are full of complex stories, and narrative inquirers collect these stories as truth, re-story them, and create a narrative that shows the participant’s true lived experience more holistically (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell & Poth, 2016). This study utilizes narrative inquiry as both the method on which the study is built as well as the phenomenon that exists within constructing masculinities as a student-athlete man (Clandinin, 2016). As a narrative inquirer, I adhered to the essence of the methodology by collecting participants’ complete stories through interviews and journal reflections (Creswell & Poth, 2016) while aiding participants by co-constructing their stories and asking questions that
would elicit their previous experiences (Clandinin, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Riessman, 1993). Throughout this process, I did not objectively reconstruct participants’ stories but rather came alongside participants to create a “rendition of how life is perceived” (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 3). Lastly, in narrative inquiry studies, temporality and context are key to properly stewarding participants’ stories and co-constructing a new narrative alongside participants (Clandinin, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Daiute, 2013; Mertova & Webster, 2020; Riessman, 1993).

Research Site and Participants

The site of this research study is a mid-sized private religiously affiliated liberal arts university in the Midwest, located outside a major metropolitan area. The institution has nearly 3,000 total students and sponsors 14 NCAA Division III teams. The student body is roughly 70% women and 30% men and approximately 10% of the student population participates in athletics. To be eligible for this study, I selected one men’s team and required participants to be sophomores, juniors, or seniors, enrolled at the research site, and listed as a student-athlete on the team’s official roster. First-year students were excluded from the study due to the COVID-19 pandemic causing these students to have a different college experience in their first year. I utilized purposeful sampling to recruit participants, which is when participants must meet certain criteria or have pre-existing identities or experiences to qualify for the study (Jones et al., 2014). I solicited participants through the team’s official GroupMe chat app and was able to secure ten eligible student-athletes for the study (Table 1).
Table 1

Student Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Status</th>
<th>Faith Identity</th>
<th>Major/Minor</th>
<th>Residential Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Axel</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Upper middle class</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>Health &amp; Wellness and Marketing</td>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brennan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Upper middle class</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Finance and Management</td>
<td>Commuter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Health &amp; Wellness</td>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chip</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Upper middle class</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Commuter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Corporate Communication and Black World Studies</td>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Upper class</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Behavioral Neuroscience</td>
<td>Resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffery</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Lower middle class</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>Marketing and Management</td>
<td>Commuter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luigi</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Upper middle class</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phynn</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Currently Exploring</td>
<td>Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, and Theology</td>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews as well as participant reflection journals and researcher observation notes, as is common for narrative inquiry studies (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Czarniawska, 2004; Jones et al., 2014; Riessman, 1993). Participants completed two 60-minute interviews within a one semester timeframe and completed a reflection between Interviews 1 and 2. Semi-structured interviews were used in order to create a more conversational and flexible interview experience for participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 1993). All interviews were recorded and transcribed using digital technology; transcripts were reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy. Coding of both interviews utilized “in vivo” and “process” coding (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, Saldaña, 2016) to represent both observable and conceptual actions (Saldaña, 2016) that I found relevant and applicable to the study of college men and gender development. After participants’ stories were un-storied and chronologically re-storied, the I-MMDI framework was applied to understand systemic nuances in each participant’s story. Emergent themes were identified from data analysis and final findings were created.

Quality and Trustworthiness

Quality and trustworthiness were achieved throughout this study by a number of proven methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I used triangulation of participants’ two interviews and journal reflections in order to craft a final story; additionally, participants engaged in member
checking of transcripts and themes to ensure accuracy. Thick and rich descriptions and quotes are used throughout the findings to further prove accuracy and quality of the emergent themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Lastly, I prioritized consistency throughout the coding process, with all participants’ stories, to ensure quality and trustworthiness as I co-constructed and re-storied as the researcher.

**Researcher Positionality**

As a higher education professional, I have worked with many college men, including student-athlete men, for over a decade. I have a personally rooted interest in college men and masculinities work as I believe that by examining and understanding the most socially dominant populations on campus, through a critical lens, power dynamics can be shifted and further equity can be achieved. I have never been a collegiate athlete myself and have no personal experience to cloud my understanding of this specific population. I am not particularly interested in athletics within my own life but focus more on those who play sports in college and the unearned power which they are given on campus. As a White, cisgender man who was raised in an upper middle-class environment, I hold many of the same identities as my participants and therefore may connect with them on a more familiar level.
Findings

Participants in this study all shared unique stories regarding their journey to becoming a collegiate student-athlete, the pressures felt while in college, the supports utilized along the way, and intersections they experienced with their different identities. Emerging from the research are three overarching findings that a majority of the men in the study experienced or shared throughout their interviews. Participants shared commonalities on where and how they learned masculinities and gender construction throughout their lives and the multitude of additional pressures student-athletes feel while being on campus, and a new definition of being man emerged that is counter to the dominant narrative within existing literature. These three findings will be further explored and then followed by tangible implications which also arose from the research.

Learning Masculinities

Participants in the study reflected on a number of places from which they constructed how to act as men and as student-athletes throughout their lives. Most prevalently, these men learned lessons and traits from their coaches, both positive and negative, and realized how individual identities impacted their expectations and definition of masculinities. Traditional hegemonic and toxic displays were pushed on some participants at an early age. For example, Jerry reflected on his travel baseball coach in sixth grade who modeled much of what he now knows is not healthy masculinity:
He would just crack jokes about women...He was just kind of like that douchey guy that you could just tell did not treat his wife well. But I looked up to him almost because he was my coach, you know, he's a good baseball player, and we were honestly a really good team...but he would make jokes and be like, “why are you such a pussy?” “you can't cry”, just like stuff like that.

Jerry noted that he knew his coach was engaging in problematic behavior; however, he still looked up to him because of his athletic ability and status as his coach.

Jackson shared a story about his club volleyball coach in high school, who had a lasting negative impact on his self-esteem as a man:

He was about as military style of the coach as you can get. He definitely destroyed my self-esteem. Incredibly. He was very, “you need to do this and if you don't do it, you're useless to me” kind of way and it really tied my self-worth into how I was doing and how it was playing... It really reinforced the idea that I need to be doing something good to be valued and that's the only way I could get on the court, be praised, or do anything, so it really made that a stress in what I was doing.

Notably, Jackson discovered that this coach had lasting impacts on how Jackson viewed himself as a man and how he perceived his overall self-esteem.

Davis shared an experience with a coach in high school who taught him that his physical strength was directly tied to his ability to be a man:

I had a strength and conditioning coach throughout high school, and he used to say things like, “you're not a man if you can't bench 135 by age 15”... to the guys because we're not in there lifting as hard as we needed to be at that age. He kind of just questioned if you were a man. If like you had an injury and you weren't allowed to participate in gym, he would call you a sissy for not lifting in his class.

Like other participants, Davis noted that his coach also modeled toxic masculinity in ways that had a lasting impact on his construction of gender.

Other participants shared stories of coaches who taught them valuable life lessons that they keep with them today. Jeffery learned timeliness from his coach in high school:
He said, “early is on time, on time is late, and late is unacceptable”, and that was probably my first realization that responsibility is now an identification of being a man. So, since then… I just absolutely hate being late to anything. So, I'm always early, AKA on time.

Jeffrey believed himself to be a more responsible man in his college life because of the lessons taught to him by his coach.

Similarly, Phynn was taught important lessons from his coach. For example, Phynn shared that he learned the importance of respecting women and being held accountable by his high school volleyball coach:

It's freshman year, I started flirting with this girl that was our volleyball team manager, like we made out after a game, and I “led her on” before just kind of moving on, because I was a bit of an emotionally detached person… she actually then quit the team. At that point, my coach actually pulled me aside and was like “what are you doing? This isn't how you start high school.”

This specific interaction with Phynn’s coach was the first time that he had ever been called out and held accountable for his actions off the court by a coach.

The research site has an extremely culturally diverse student population (almost 70% non-White students), so a number of participants reflected on how they realized that identities can be directly tied to expectations of being a man. Jackson spoke about the large Latinx community on campus and how much that has changed his views:

It's been great to learn about [Latinx] culture and how they think about manliness, because it definitely was different than when I grew up. My high school was mostly Asian, so it was very “academic reward based” and it was very interesting to see here that it was a lot more emotional and empathic toward men.

Davis realized that as a Black man there were certain things that were expected of him regarding his masculine gender expression due to his race:

In high school, I dealt with a big identity issue, because I was Black, but I wasn't Black enough… I didn't go to a Black school until I was in seventh grade, so, you know, I was
with a bunch of White kids up until then in church…but being a normal Black person versus being a Black church person, those are different ideas. I guess that when I got to high school, I tried to put on this front. But I didn't have the means to do so because I didn't know what style was, I wore a uniform for the first six years of my life and my parents dressed me every other year, so when I first got to high school, people thought I dressed funny.

Both Jackson and Davis, and others throughout the study, noted that they began to realize how their specific identities, or the identities of others, directly related to their experiences of learning how to be a man and viewing masculinities in other men. Overall, learning how to become a man as a student-athlete and discovering what was expected of participants growing up was a prevalent theme that arose through the interviews. These men were acutely aware of the societal and institutional expectations put on them by their coaches and teammates growing up and how differing identities intersected with those expectations.

**Additional Pressures as a Student-Athlete**

All participants in the study spoke of the increased pressures they felt growing up playing sports and being a student-athlete man on a mid-sized campus, due to both their gender identity and their student-athlete status. Additional pressures were regularly noted in the interviews such as needing to perform well academically, feeling pressure to play a sport at an early age, pressure to be a “good guy,” pressure to look and act a certain way as a student-athlete man, pressure to always represent their team, and pressure around drinking, partying, and having regular sexual experiences. The men in this study were very clear that they all felt as though they had far more pressure put on them to be perceived as masculine than their non-student-athlete counterparts
and, also, to always be their best selves due to the close watch over them from their coaching staff and the rest of the student body.

In relation to academic expectations performance, one of the most surprising themes from participants in this study was that not only did participants feel additional pressures to perform well in the classroom, they also directly tied being academically successful to their perception of being a man in college. This specific characteristic surrounding academic success and masculine perception in college is counter to the dominant narrative in the existing literature (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Musser et al., 2017). Jackson stated that being a NCAA Division III athlete, he felt that being smart, academically, played in his favor as a man on campus:

I think being DIII, it's a little bit different because we're not here on scholarship, or have more time to devote to studies, so I think it's more of a priority to be academically smart it's a positive thing that can play into being a man here.

Chip reflected that being academically successful in high school was viewed differently since he had arrived in college, specifically as it related to his perception of being a man:

If you were like a dumb jock in high school, like people viewed you as like a “boy man”, like you're more boyish, not really manly-ish. In college, I'd say like, if you aren't doing good in school, you're like a degenerate; like girls and other guys are going be like “you are less of a man than me, because like I'm doing good in school”. So, I think…the better you do in school like the more manly people will view you.

Axel shared that his aspirations for being seen as a man included getting good grades in college, stating that a man is “someone who gets all their work done and gets good grades. That gets respect from me…That's probably like a dude I'd want to be in a nutshell, that's masculinity, right there,” whereas Phynn and Luigi felt additional pressures to perform well academically from their coaching staff and non-student-athlete classmates, respectively. Phynn disclosed:
I think it commands a different level of respect, especially being on an athletic team, you know we have a lot of individuals who are academically there… I think being the one on the team that is expected to have the 4.0 [GPA], to be the smart one, I mean my team and my coaches call me “Doc,” that is an added pressure.

Luigi noted:

I think being a student-athlete in the classroom, from an outside perspective, I feel like there's the random people in my class, I feel like they look at me like “that's a student-athlete, so he's got to act a certain way”, and whether I care to act that way or not is up to me, but I definitely feel that pressure. I will admit, I do think I'm a man because… I play a sport, I'm athletic…I have pretty decent grades, which shows I'm still reliable. I think that's what makes me feel like I'm a man.

Overall, the participants in this study highly valued academic success as an identifier of being a man both within themselves and other men they observed.

Numerous participants mentioned feeling external pressures to participate in athletics growing up both from their families and their friends. Brennan recalled being a young boy and feeling the need to be involved in sports:

As a younger boy, it's kind of said to you that you should play sport, honestly, I think a lot of parents drive that...I don't blame [my parents] because I like sports, but I feel like some people are put into that situation, so I played the classic boy sports growing up: baseball, football, basketball.

Chad mentioned the pressure he felt to participate in sports because he felt that men who did not play sports were viewed differently than those who did:

I feel like men or boys that don't play sports are already at a disadvantage because sports can be looked at as a way of masculinity. So, I feel like men that don't play sports or aren't involved in sports, or don't work out, can already…get some backlash.

The pressure to play sports at a young age did not necessarily impact participants in a negative way since they all enjoyed playing sports, but the overall pressure to be noted for playing sports at a young age was directly tied to being a man.
Jerry reflected on the additional pressure he feels being a student-athlete on a small to mid-sized campus and feeling as though everyone on campus is aware of what he does within the rumor mill or social circles:

Everybody knows your business as an athlete and everybody's always on your case as an athlete. So, granted, it's only DIII… but going to a smaller school, everybody knows your business, so basically if you have sex with somebody, most people are going to find out within a week.

Chip mentioned the pressure he and his teammates feel to be the best guys on campus, athletically and personally, because they are known as having a winning program and have a historically positive reputation on campus:

We kind of have this thing, we talk about it sometimes, but it's almost just an unwritten rule that we kind of want to be the best team on campus or like “you see how those guys are acting, let's not act like that; let's be better” and we try to build relationships with people that will help us later in life, or right now in life. We can get things by just being nice respectful human beings.

Axel noted that he always feels the need to follow the rules as a student-athlete since he feels like he is always being monitored and told what to do by his coaches and his athletic department:

I feel like I have to be a complete rule follower all the time. I feel kind of autonomous sometimes being a student-athlete. I just have to do what I'm told… I can't post anything on social media of me hanging out my friends, I can't post anything at a party. I can't really post anything of me with my friends like having a good time. If we're at a party or something, whether or not I was drinking.

Almost all of the participants mentioned additional pressures to represent their team, on and off the court, and feeling the need to adhere to societal standards of masculinity because they are student-athletes. Luigi simply said, “Men are typically not that accepting of people outside the norms, and as a student-athlete, you're expected to act a certain way.” Brennan reflected on feeling the need to act like a man as one of the team’s co-captains:
Specifically, to me, being like the captain of the team. I think there is more pressure on myself; like if I'm having a bad day like I'm quiet or something, teammates notice and teammates recognize… me and my other fellow captain, [we] are kind of the two people that get looked up to the most at this point, and I feel like if we're in a game or practice and people see either of us freaking out, it's more likely that the whole team will freak out, so me and him kind of have to mask our emotions, even if we are upset or pissed off, we kind of push that aside and just show that we are good at all times.

Jeffrey noted the pressures he feels to conform to societal standards and always be a role model due to his student-athlete status:

I think being a student-athlete, it kind of puts me on a higher pedestal, in a way where I would have more responsibilities. I would have more eyes watching me than normal. So, I would have to be that positive example, be that that role model in a way for others to see… You have to go above and beyond the regular student.

Overall, the pressure of feeling like you are always in the spotlight, that your actions carry the weight of the entire team, and the need to adhere to rules more fervently than others were key pressures felt by many of the participants in this study.

Lastly, most participants pointed out that they feel extreme pressures to consume alcohol, party more, and have sexual encounters with more partners being a student-athlete man on campus. This was specifically found to be more prevalent in the first two years of college and less in the later years. Davis spoke to both partying and pressures to be with multiple partners:

I guess being a man is actually a lot harder than you think because if you allow yourself to fall into the ideas of what a man is supposed to look like, you actually get looked down upon. So, a lot of my time in college, I spent being a player or… a serial dater… I think that's part of what people think being a man is, yet in reality, I got frowned upon for it… I [also] think parties are a huge showing of what it is to be a man, because I think that those who go out every weekend and get plastered and neglect people and are rude, get into bar fights, things of that nature, aren't men, because they're still acting from a place of child.

Brennan noted that in the first couple years of college, partying and drinking were viewed as the thing to do, but as he got older, he has learned to enjoy them more responsibly:
I think it was at one point, like freshman/sophomore year, just something to do, a social thing, like, you get drunk. And now it's more of a thing to do for enjoyment, like you have fun with your friends. So, I think in those ways I've just become better and more on like the path of being a man… [but] being on a sports team in college and like having majority of the people drink, smoke, vape, whatever you're definitely more pressured.

Almost every participant in this study noted at least one significant pressure felt as it pertained to alcohol consumption, drug use, or sexual activity that they believe was exacerbated due to their student-athlete status on campus.

Overall, additional pressures to act in accordance with hegemonic views of masculinity and to perform toxically masculine actions was the most prevalent narrative told throughout this study. The student-athlete men in this study felt an extreme amount of added pressure to perform traditional masculine norms at the start of their collegiate journey, but they often found a way to reconcile that pressure and began to act like their true selves by the end of their time in college.

**New Definition of Being a Man**

Throughout this study, a new definition of being a man emerged from the reflections and narratives of the participants. These Division III student-athlete men discussed aspects of what they believed to be a man that are emergent and unlike the definition found in most prevalent men and masculinities literature. These men named that being accepting of others and being a “good guy” was a key part of achieving real masculinity; being academically focused/strong, as previously discussed; being their true selves regardless of societal gender standards; talking more openly about mental health and talking about what it means to be a man in college with other college men; and understanding and correcting harmful and toxic language. This new definition
may be due to a generational shift to Gen Z college men, or it may be localized to these men’s experiences, but regardless, it shows growth and progression in how men are being socialized to view masculinities and gender identity in college.

Chad spoke on how being accepting, especially for him and his teammates, was directly tied to being a man in college: “In my mindset, being a man is being accepting, more accepting. [Men] are super diverse…I feel like it's more manly to be accepting of stuff rather than looking away or disagreeing with it.” Chip, speaking as a senior and as team captain, spoke to treating people with respect and being a “good guy” as a basic rule of achieving healthy masculinity within his team:

Treating [others] with respect is definitely number one, like not being like a douchebag around campus. Just literally being a smart, respectful, person… I came into a team where like that was one of the number one goals… Just don't be a dumb ass.

These men truly viewed being accepting of others, regardless of identities or student-athlete status, and the need to be perceived as “good” by others as core indicators of what it means to be a man in today’s society. This represents a shift in how men may view themselves and their actions in relation to others’ perceptions.

Being academically successful and having a pathway to graduation was mentioned by all ten of the participants, in some capacity, as it related to being a man in college and garnering respect from other men. Jeffery, who relates being a man to getting a good job and being able to support a family, noted that there is a chain of events that occurs if one is not performing well academically in college as it relates to gender performance:

If you have good grades, then you are considered a man. Because if you get good grades, then you'll get a good job, you'll get lots of money, you'll be able to provide… If you don't get good grades, who knows what will happen. If you don't have good grades, then you just kind of a failure [as a man].
For many of these men, being success later in life was about having a good job, having the means to support a family, and having a reputation that you were driven and competent. These participants related this directly to how they performed in college and how others perceived them academically.

Numerous participants mentioned that being a man in their worldview today included being themselves, regardless of societal or hegemonic standards of being a man. Brennan, a junior and co-captain of the team, said the following when asked to describe what it means to be a man in society today:

After thinking about it and perceiving it in different ways, I think being a man is just being. I don't think it comes down to a gender, almost, I feel like it just comes down to who you are, like, just be yourself and I think it’s cliche thing to say, but it's like if you're flamboyant, like, dude, just go with it! Do what makes you happy at the end of the day; you shouldn't fake who you are to fit gender norms or societal norms. You should just be who you want to be.

The multiplicity of acceptable masculinities discussed by participants in this study shows that the monolithic view of what it means to be a man, especially in circles such as student-athletes, is shifting to a more inclusive and accepting view.

Mental health was a common topic that came up throughout the study as multiple men in the study had dealt with, or were dealing with, mental health struggles such as depression and anxiety. Participants noted that being able to talk more openly about mental health struggles and being able to talk with their teammates about the pressures of being a man in college would be helpful for their development. Davis spoke to the need to prioritize mental health and a deeper understanding on oneself in order to truly be a man:

I think that the first step of being a man is to understand your mental health…. I believe that, on your way to being a man, you need to know who you are as a man, as a person,
how you operate, and your heart. Once you learn how to do those things, then you can understand how to do taxes and get a job and things of that nature, but a lot of those things shape who you are. And once you figure that out, the rest will come.

These men were not afraid to speak about their mental health throughout the interviews and many mentioned that they had spoken openly with teammates and coaches about mental health as well. What was lacking in participants’ opinion was a systemic understanding of mental health and an acceptance of asking for help.

Lastly, men throughout the study mentioned that being a man in college today is to become more aware of harmful language and to even correct others when things are said that can be offensive to other people. Brennan described an interaction with his roommate where a commonly offensive phrase was used in jest and an accountability conversation ensued:

I was having a conversation with my roommate and I said [something offensive] to him and he was like “wow, you have used that two times in the past like 30 minutes” … I feel like we became more conscious of it… it's kind of wild, but we should probably stop [saying it] now.

Participants believed that language can be harmful and that using derogatory or offensive language no longer made someone sound “cool” as a man. Being able to stand up for what you know is right and being aware of your impact on others was prioritized in how they viewed real masculinity.

Discussion

The overall findings from this study, varying from how these men learned masculinities, the additional pressures felt throughout their lives, and an emerging new definition of what it means to be a man in today’s society, were critically analyzed through the I-MMDI theoretical
framework. Each of these findings fit within either the macro- or micro-contexts of society as it pertains to identity development. How these participants learned how to be a man growing up is directly tied to their other identities as well as their experiences and activities growing up as young boys. The additional pressures felt by participants are unwillingly placed on men in today’s society by overarching systems of power, privilege, and oppression such as toxic and hegemonic masculinities. Lastly, the new definition of being a man is directly related to not only the individual participants’ identities but specifically to their lens of meaning making and how they perceive themselves and others throughout their lives. Each of these findings relates to the literature in some way, whether adhering to or diverging from commonly accepted norms of how college men act and feel. The research site being within a small to mid-sized institution likely had an influence on the findings as students on these types of campuses are often rooted in relationships and may feel less like a number than at a larger school. The participants in this study were also overwhelmingly from privileged social identities and may have been influenced by unconscious benefits of their own privilege throughout their gender construction.

Learning from Coaches

Learning from coaches, both positively and negatively, is expected when looking at how boys and men are known to model off older men, especially as it pertains to how they should act and what is perceived to be manly (Foste & Davis, 2018; Kimmel, 2008; Orenstein, 2020). What is new within the literature is how impactful and sustained these memories are for the student-athlete men in this study and how they were so easily able to tie certain remarks or experiences
with coaches directly back to how they were conditioned to be a man growing up and how they had to work to break negative or toxic lessons from their understanding of masculinity when growing up. Positive lessons taught by older men, in this case coaches and older players, is supported by the literature (Harris & Edwards, 2010; Kimmel, 2008), but since these student-athletes remained in the world of athletics from childhood to college, they had a yearly shift in getting positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement depending on the coach for whom they played.

Masculinity, as it relates to identity, has been discussed within the literature (Foste & Davis, 2018; Harris, 2010), so to know that the men in this study were acutely aware of how their identities, or the identities of others, impacted their construction and perception of masculinity further supports that masculinity, and how it is enacted, is regularly tied to other identities. What is outside of the current body of literature is how early some of these men realized that things such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and especially social class had an impact of how they viewed themselves and others as boys and men. This shows that overarching systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia, are being understood by young boys at an earlier age and they are able to discern how these systems either benefit or oppress them depending on their individual identities.

**Feeling Additional Pressures**

The men in this study were very clear about the additional levels of pressure they felt being student-athletes on their college campus and also noted these pressures were present as far
back as grade school. Pressures emerged such as needing to perform well academically, participate in sports growing up, always representing their team, needing to adhere to societal standards of masculinity, and pressures to consume alcohol and engage in increased sexual activity. A number of these are in line with dominant literature (pressure to participate in sports growing up, needing to adhere to societal standards of masculinity, and pressures to consume alcohol and engage in increased sexual activity), but a couple diverge from the prevailing narrative (such as needing to perform well academically and needing to always represent their team). These pressures, whether congruent or incongruent with current literature, were strongly felt by almost all men throughout this study. Each of these pressures is influenced by systems of power and privilege such as hegemonic masculinity and the need for these men to be something that others expect of them rather than be their authentic selves.

For the pressures noted that are in line with the dominant narrative, these add and support the notion that men often feel the need to participate in sports (Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Messner, 1992; Pascoe, 2003), that men feel the need to adhere to hegemonic standards of gender expression (Capraro, 2000; Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Harris & Struve, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon; 2019), and that men experience societal pressure to consume alcohol at higher levels and engage in increased sexual activity (Capraro, 2000; Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Harris & Struve, 2009; Hill et al., 2001: Kimmel, 2008; Leichliter et al., 1998; Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Radimer & Rowan-Kenyon; 2019; Wechsler et al., 1997). These pressures are displayed by both the micro-analysis of the I-MMDI (the participants’ identity as student-athletes) and the macro-analysis of the I-
The pressures that are counter to the dominant narrative, including the need to perform well academically and always represent your team, create a new understanding of how student-athlete men may view their experiences in college both academically and socially. Current studies highlight that men are often conditioned to disengage with academics and view being academically successful as less manly (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Musser et al., 2017), but all ten participants in this study, throughout their interviews, provided clear examples of academic success being directly tied to success as a man. Additionally, the pressure to always represent your team and be seen as a good person is not noted in the current literature, especially as it relates to student-athlete men. There are some studies that note men wanting to be perceived as good people (Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 2008), but there is not any present literature that shows student-athlete men specifically feeling pressure to be good for a cause larger than themselves (i.e., their team’s reputation).

New Definition of Being a Man

The new definition of being a man in today’s society, as described by participants in this study, is emergent as it goes beyond, and often contradicts, the presently supported narrative of how college men define themselves. The student-athlete men in this study were clear about men needing to be accepting of others, especially those who are outside of the hegemonically masculine traits to which men are traditionally held, and to authentically be themselves to be
seen as men. Participants noted that masculinity was being comfortable with others as well as themselves, regardless of whether they were traditional stoic and not emotional or flamboyant and highly emotional; regardless of expression of gender, being a man is being exactly who you truly are. As previously mentioned, the expectation that men are academically strong and have a plan towards graduation is contradictory to most literature on men and academics (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Musser et al., 2017). There were some participants in Harris’s (2010) study who felt that being academically sound made them “well rounded” (p. 310), but all other dominant literature posits that it is counter-masculine to be academically strong. This finding adds to the growing body of literature that men are now beginning to tie academic success and planning to what they understand it means to be a man in today’s world.

Understanding emotions and mental health of men has been noted throughout literature (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; MacArthur & Shields, 2015), but college student-athlete men specifically asking for open spaces in which to discuss their struggles and to engage in further trainings for student-athlete men to deal with the increased pressures of college has not been noted in the research. These men, when discussing their struggles, were clear to note that their coaching staffs and athletic administrators were ill-equipped to handle their mental health concerns and that additional resources and training would be well received by the participants. Lastly, viewing masculinity as calling out harmful and toxic language has not emerged in the literature up until now. Men have been noted to specifically use harmful language as a means to prove their masculinity or dominance over women (Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 2008; Pascoe, 2003), but previously there have not been any studies that demonstrate that men believe calling out this
type of language is a sign of being a man on today’s college campuses. Emerging from this study is a new definition of being a man, specifically a student-athlete man, in college within this new generation and population of students.

Limitations and Future Research

There are a number of limitations within this study that are to be noted. All of the participants identified as heterosexual men and all but one identified as White. Though the research was done through a theoretical lens of the I-MMDI, there may be increased value in the findings from a more diverse participant pool as it relates to individuals’ identities. Another limitation of this study is that the research took place over a one-semester time period, so future researchers should consider a longer participant observation period to be able to track growth and reflection more fully. Lastly, research completed for this study was done in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic and that itself may have impacted students’ feelings, reflections, and mental states. Additionally, a deeper dive into the impact of coaches and their background/training as it relates to their students’ perceptions and constructions of masculinity would fill an existing gap in the literature.

Conclusion

Overall, this critical narrative inquiry study showed that participants shared common experiences as they pertained to where and how they constructed their gender identity as men and the influence, both positive and negative, that coaches and older teammates have on the
construction of gender. Also found throughout this study was narrative data to support that the student-athlete men at this particular NCAA Division III institution felt an extreme amount of additional pressure on them due to their student-athlete status. These pressures ranged from pressure to perform better in the class, pressure to act in traditionally hegemonic or toxic ways, pressure to not make mistakes in fear of everyone knowing or letting down their team and, lastly, an increased pressure to engage in risky behaviors such as drinking, partying, and sexual encounters. The last finding, and potentially the most counter to the dominant narrative of college men, is that these men viewed masculinity in an emerging and unique way. Participants in this study viewed things such as being accepting of others, being a “good guy,” being academically focused, staying true to oneself, openly talking about mental health and other struggles, and calling out and correcting harmful language as key indicators of being a man. This new definition of being a man showed growth grounded in social change and a new generation reaching adulthood.

Finally, participants laid out clear supports that institutions can offer them to help construct a healthy version of masculinity. Programs such as increased training on sexual assault and mental health for all student-athletes, forums for student-athlete men to be able to discuss pressures they feel, coaches receiving additional training to be better prepared to handle the psycho-social aspects of their players, and the implementation of team mentors to serve as a resource for students working alongside the coach. These implications supported by the previously discussed findings in this study may create a new frontier for student-athlete men on Division III campuses and the administrators who serve them.
CHAPTER III
SCHOLARLY REFLECTION

Introduction

This dissertation journey has been something I never thought I would be able to accomplish, but I was able to do so by compiling and utilizing all of the skills I have acquired throughout my life. A dissertation is a daunting task that seems nearly impossible prior to starting. I came into this doctoral program with a research and dissertation topic in mind and I believe that was one of the most helpful parts of my story. I have studied college men and masculinities work since I was in graduate school over a decade ago and have involved myself in numerous professional organizations and circles that engage in this topic. Throughout my personal experiences working with student-athletes at small to mid-sized institutions, I lived within a gap in the literature. I found myself having a real passion for working at smaller private, universities where I was able to connect with students on a deeper and more developmental level. At the time I began my doctoral journey, I had worked at two different institutions and served as a mentor to a men’s athletic team at both (one football and one volleyball, both nationally ranked). I learned that the men whom I mentored were vastly different than what I was reading about in the literature on men in college, and that left me in a place of confusion. Almost everything I read about student-athlete men in college was based on large public institutions or
high-profile athletics programs with immense amount of support for their players and a keen focus on winning, not developing young men. This is what truly spurred me to research the stories and lived experiences of student-athlete men in college, how they got to understand their gender identity growing up, and what external forces may have played a role in that development.

The Beginning

My initial aim for this dissertation was to do a grounded theory study looking at the impact of mentoring on the gender identity development of student-athlete men at Division III institutions. As I began my research over the past three years in my courses, I realized that there was a dearth of knowledge on how this population of men learns how to be a man in general. This made me realize that in order to properly study the impact that mentoring has on college student-athlete men, I first needed to learn how these men were conditioned to become who they were within their teams, institutions, and society as a whole. I shifted my research focus from a grounded theory study to a bounded case study utilizing one athletic team on campus, Men’s Volleyball. I first read about narrative inquiry in one of my qualitative research courses but did not focus too much on it as a methodology since I had not read many narrative inquiry studies on men and masculinities at that time. When first meeting with my dissertation advisor, I explained my hopes and dreams for my study and she said, very clearly, “It seems as though you really want to tell these participants’ stories and get to know who they are and where they came from.” I remember smiling big and saying “Yes, exactly, I feel as though these men need to be heard
and have their experiences brought to life as it relates to how they learned to be a man and why they do the things they do in their lives today.” She laughed and then said, “Sounds like you are a narrative inquirer!” That was when I first truly learned what narrative inquiry was and how it so deeply related to my way of connecting with students in my professional life.

In my journey to becoming the narrative inquirer that I am today, I had to truly figure out why telling stories of participants was so important to me. I dug deep into who I was as both a person and a professional as well as what I was hoping to get out of my research as a scholar-practitioner. Personally, I know that I am someone who has always been fascinated by people’s stories and have always listened to others with an intent to understand and support them. In my professional life, I am the person on campus whom students come to when they need to talk about problems or need a listening ear. With that all known, I realized that as a researcher I wanted to know more. I wanted to go beyond what college men were feeling in the moment and instead help them explore the how and the why of their stories. The aforementioned gap in the literature in which I found myself had the potential to be addressed through a narrative inquiry study, as this type of methodology focuses on below the surface meaning, how and why people do what they do, and connects the past with the present and the present with the future. This is what energized me to redesign my study and follow a narrative pathway of qualitative exploration. There are not many narrative inquiry studies involving men in college and I was not able to find any specifically involving student-athlete men in college, so I was excited to breach a new frontier in college men and masculinities research.
What Happened Next

Once the conversation with my dissertation advisor happened, everything changed. I then began to outline my current study, using a narrative lens, and focused more on the holistic developmental stories of my future participants and less on how they developed only within college. I began to read every book I could get my hands on that discussed narrative inquiry as a methodology and dove deep into how to become a good steward of others’ stories throughout my research. I found a wealth of information, both within higher education research and within general qualitative studies, that spoke directly to how I wanted to lead my research. I started by crafting a one-page proposal that laid out my study, my methodology, and my goals for the research. This process helped me put pen to paper as it related to the direction I was hoping to go with my study. With all of that out of my head and on paper, I was able to start working on getting my study approved and then begin the fun part, research!

After working on my literature review for an entire summer and reading a myriad of books and articles, I felt very confident in my knowledge of the study of men and masculinities. I spent that next fall organizing my study, reading and researching theoretical frameworks, and digging into who I was as a researcher. I watched lectures and read articles about epistemologies, ontologies, and more to figure out what I believed, how I believed it, and what type of knowledge I was searching to uncover in my upcoming study. Once I felt comfortable in that, I began to feel like a legitimate qualitative researcher. I defended my proposal at the start of winter and went into a new calendar year at full speed with my study.
What Went Well

Once I had received IRB approval from my home institution, I had to then file for IRB approval at my research site to use their students as participants. That was one of the first things that went very smoothly and helped propel my study forward. I submitted my approved IRB application to my research site, and they approved it within two days due to my home institution being classified as a “high-research” institution through the Carnegie Classification system. This allowed me to begin recruiting participants within a week of my initial IRB approval. For my recruitment, I sent a message to my potential participants via their official team GroupMe text thread and sent individualized emails to potential participants. There were twelve potential participants eligible for my study given my parameters and I had hopes for at least six participants with a personal goal of ten. After sending out my initial request for participants via the team’s GroupMe thread, I received eight participants agreeing to be part of the study within the first two hours. The next day, I received two more participants agreeing to be part of my study and the remaining two said they were not interested; with that I had met my goal of ten participants. Participant recruitment was one of the easiest parts of this entire dissertation process and I am aware at how lucky I am to be able to say that.

Something else that went very well throughout my study was how excited, responsive, and authentic my participants were throughout the entire process. When I sent out my pre-interview survey, request for participants to sign up for interviews (both 1 and 2), and participant reflection journals, I almost immediately began to receive responses and had no participants miss deadlines or interviews. A few needed to reschedule due to practice, class, and family conflicts,
but they always did so days in advance so that alternative plans could be made. I was expecting that getting a group of ten college student-athlete men to read their emails and complete tasks was going to be a challenge, but it ended up going very well. Overall, working with my participants, from recruitment to completion of data collection, was the easiest and most rewarding part of my entire dissertation process.

Next, when reflecting on what went well throughout this process, I believe that the use of technology throughout my study was extremely helpful for me as a researcher in organizing and maintaining all of my data. I began looking into technologies such as transcription software, cloud backup storage sites, and qualitative coding software in order to expedite my research. I found Otter.ai as a great transcription software that had a very affordable student yearly rate that allowed for more than enough services for what I needed. I ended up using my existing iCloud storage account that linked to all of my devices so that I could always pull up my documents no matter where I was. Then, lastly, I purchased MAXQDA coding software, at an affordable student rate, which allowed me to organize my code book, sort by codes, and analyze my data without much struggle due to how user-friendly and organized the software is. Overall, technology was something that truly aided me throughout my study and went extremely well from the beginning of my study to the end.

Lastly, one of the most rewarding, and surprising, things that came out of this experience happened after I had completed my data collection and began my narrative coding. There are many different types of coding methods from which to choose, but most of the traditional coding systems did not seem to fit my study as well as I had hoped. I began to read Saldaña’s (2016) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* to see if there were other types of coding
systems that I had not yet explored. I came across “process coding,” which was a new type of coding method for me. Process coding uses codes as gerunds (“ing” words) to represent both observable and conceptual actions (Saldaña, 2016), which I found relevant and applicable to the study of college men and gender development and my study specifically. My participants used action-orientated words throughout all of my interviews, and I found myself drawn to words and phrases such as “feeling,” “drinking,” “working out,” “being,” “accepting,” “learning,” and “performing.” These words and phrases seemed to connect actions with the stories of my participants that emerged from the data as supported by the methodology of narrative inquiry. This was truly one of the most exciting aspects of my coding journey and I hope to continue exploring how process coding connects with gender identity development in college.

What Would I Do Differently?

If I had the opportunity to go through this dissertation process again, I would do a couple very minor things differently, but overall, I would keep the process of my study the same. The main thing that I would do differently is get more prepared earlier in the process. I had heard that the dissertation process is a fairly autonomous journey, with guidance from your dissertation chair, but I did not realize how much I did not know before going into this process. Everything from timelines and deadlines to styles and requirements of the Graduate School, there were so many things that I did not even think to ask about until later in the process. I wish I would have known about the summer schedule and how early the final dissertation needed to be completed in order to finish my degree in August so that I would have done a backwards design and been
more aggressive with my timeline, research, and writing. I have been able to successfully navigate the process by regularly asking my dissertation chair questions and trying to get on a call every month or two to make sure I was staying on track.

The second thing that I would have done differently is that I would have tried to find a more diverse group of participants for this study. Since the theoretical framework I utilized was the I-MMDI, I wish I would have found a team with more students of color, more variety of students within the LGBTQIA+ community, and other identities. I really loved working with my participants and will likely feel a connection with them for the rest of my career, but when I realized that most were of solely dominant identities, I was a little disheartened. While I do not think that this fact takes away from the importance of my findings, this might be a core priority if I were to redo this study with a different group of students to see if themes presented in a new study support or go against the findings in my present study. Other than the two aforementioned concerns, I remain very happy with how the process turned out.

Application to Professional Practice

Throughout this dissertation process, I have found myself changing the way I do things in a myriad of areas within my job. Most importantly, I feel the need to support almost all of my claims, specifically when working with faculty, with peer-reviewed sources and supporting literature. This has helped me gain immense buy-in with first-year seminar faculty members at my institution. My colleagues and I have launched a fully embedded First-Year Experience curriculum inside of our existing First-Year Seminar program, so we needed faculty buy-in to
make the program work well. By providing lots of data and research on best practices, student
development theory, and college transition theory, faculty were much more open to working the
content into their courses when realizing it wasn’t simply “fluff.” This practice really helped to
further legitimize the work that we do in our roles supporting students holistically.

As it relates to the findings I uncovered in my study, the information learned has really
aided in my practice of mentoring student-athlete men in college. With the emergent themes
from my study, I have a much better understanding of how some Division III student-athlete men
are feeling, how they may have learned their version of “being a man,” and by knowing that, I
can help them uncover and unlearn any negative or harmful habits they have picked up along the
way. For example, this past semester, I was hired by another university to serve as a team mentor
and leadership consultant for an up-and-coming collegiate volleyball team. I used much of what I
was learning from my dissertation study interviews to focus less on the recent actions of the guys
on the team and spend more time getting to know each young man, learning about his life, and
asking about his own personal version of what it means to be a man. This allowed me to build
closer bonds with the players, get to know them on a more personal level, and use what they
disclosed to me to help them grow in ways that would not have been possible if I would not have
gotten to know their full story. This entire dissertation process has shown me that the
construction and perception of gender identity, specifically within men, is fully intertwined
throughout the lives and actions of most college men. If you cannot get to know the story behind
how these young men learn to be men, then you cannot properly guide or mentor them to
success.
Lastly, with a new definition of being a man defined by my participants, I have begun to challenge more men within my institution to unapologetically be themselves, to feel comfortable calling other men out if they do something wrong, and to identify the expectations that they believe are being unfairly placed on them by society. I have the opportunity in my role to work with many types of students, including student-athlete men, so I have been having more targeted one-on-one conversations with these men, asking about why they do what they do, and engaging them to critically analyze their thoughts and actions and see how they relate to their goals and aspirations. I truly believe that this strategy of working with these young men in such a real and authentic manner will model what it means to be yourself, to have a healthy perception of masculinities, and to truly be the man that you want to be in today’s society. I was encouraged to see that the men in my study really did want to learn more about their own gender identity and see how it impacts their words and actions. I was also impressed that these men broke the current dominant narrative that student-athlete men are not accepting of others, that they are perpetuators of toxically masculine actions, and that they prioritize athletics over academics. I really believe that this study and my findings breathed a new life into me as it comes to working with college men and specifically college student-athlete men.

Application to Research

The process of writing a journal article was extremely intimidating at first because I still battle regular imposter syndrome as a scholar-practitioner. I started my process by thinking about which journal would best steward my participants’ voices and which lined up with my topic and
findings. I looked back on all of the articles I had read for my study and tried to see if any common journals emerged. I noticed that many came from the *Journal of College Student Development* (JCSD), which also happened to be the journal that I read most frequently and a top-tier journal in the field of higher education. I researched requirements for JCSD articles and determined that it was the best journal for me to submit my research in order to reach a more diverse audience.

When I began writing my journal article, I struggled a lot with having to condense so much of my full literature review and methodology into a few pages. I want my reader to know everything and be as knowledgeable as I am within this topic, but there is just not enough room to make that happen. The process of figuring out what information would actually be needed for my reader to understand the study and article at hand, not the entire body of literature on men and masculinities, was challenging to say the least. The same issue occurred when I was writing the findings section of my article. I wanted to include so many thick and rich quotes from my participants that served as prime examples and supports of my findings, but there was simply not enough room for them all and I did not want to overwhelm the reader with too much information. I feel the need to publish an entire book of my study in order to dig deeper into each finding, each participant, and the larger implications of what was found. I now know that doing research and trying to publish it to a larger community is something that interests me greatly.

I definitely look at research very differently now having gone through this dissertation process. I understand the nuances of conducting a study, the challenges of working with human participants, and how factors throughout the entire process can influence the outcome so easily. I learned that I really enjoy interviewing participants in a narrative manner, speaking to others
about their stories, and reading deeply into their stories to find things that they had not realized connected or related throughout their journey. I also learned the importance of looking at your epistemology and theoretic framework to make sure they are congruent or else you have to explore the “theoretical borderlands” (Abes, 2009) of working within multiple paradigms simultaneously. Additionally, this entire process excited me as it allowed me to feel as though I was finally adding to a community of scholars whom I have looked up to for so long as well as to tell the stories of my participants to many others in order to hopefully help their own students. With all that said, I don’t know if I am ready to call myself a true narrative inquirer, but I am very much looking forward to continuing to fine-tune this skill and conduct more narrative inquiry studies in the future.

Lastly, I am very excited to use my research throughout my career moving forward in a multitude of ways. I plan to expand my student-athlete mentoring work and offer my services to local universities in order to continue to develop healthy young men and also bring in additional income. I plan to write more and continue studying this topic more fully. I want to redo my study already with another group of participants at a different institution to see if the results are congruent or contradictory to my present study. I have one university that is already willing to allow me to use their students as participants if I choose to move forward with another study. I also plan to work with my own institution’s athletic department to see if there are programs or sessions that I can help implement to use the recommendations of my participants to create more spaces for student-athlete men to discuss the pressures they often feel, to create trainings and programs to help these men more fully integrate into the campus community, and to collaborate with wellness professionals to more directly gain access for student-athletes to discuss mental
and physical health. Research has become such an integral part of my professional practice now that I have begun stacking up articles to read, books to peruse, and conferences to present my findings in order to have them seen by a larger audience. I plan to dive into research more fully when this process in completed and continue to do so throughout my career.

Conclusion

My dissertation process has been a truly transformational experience for me. I am a new person, both personally and professionally, and I have been able to grow my knowledge and understanding of critical skills within research and higher education. I also had the opportunity to greatly expand my network through my cohort experience and working with amazing faculty members. Attending my doctoral program and getting to work alongside so many motivated and talented individuals have pushed me to be my best self, to find my voice as a scholar and researcher, and to continue to change the landscape of higher education in the future to be a more critical, inclusive, and supportive environment. My aspirations are to one day become a university president, so this understanding, knowledge, and experience will allow me not only to talk the talk of higher education and critical research but also to walk the walk when in conversations with faculty, staff, and other administrators. In closing, I am forever grateful for my experience throughout this process, and I am a better person and professional because of it.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

IRB CONSENT
Approval Notice

05-Jan-2021

TO: Mark Carbonara (01857661) Counseling, Adult and Higher Education

Initial Review

RE: Protocol # HS21-0185 "Constructions and Perceptions of Masculinity and Gender Identity Among Division III Athletes"

In a preliminary review, the Initial Submission of the above named research protocol was determined to meet the definition of human subjects research according to the federal regulations. The submission was then reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board through the expedited review process under Member Review procedures on 05-Jan-2021.

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Protocol Approval period: 05-Jan-2021 - 04-Jan-2022

It is important for you to note that as an investigator conducting research that involves human participants, you are responsible for ensuring that this project has current IRB approval at all times. If your project will continue beyond the above date, or if you intend to make modifications to the study, you will need additional approval and should contact the Office of Research Compliance, Integrity, and Safety for assistance. In addition, you are required to promptly report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems or risks to subjects or others.

Please note that the IRB has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Informed Consent:

Unless you have been approved for a waiver of the written signature of informed consent, this notice includes a date-stamped copy of the approved consent form for your use. NIU policy requires that informed consent documents given to subjects participating in non-exempt research bear the approval stamp of the NIU IRB. This
stamped document is the only consent form that may be photocopied for distribution to study participants.

If consent for the study is being given by proxy (guardian, etc.), it is your responsibility to document the authority of that person to consent for the subject. Also, the committee recommends that you include an acknowledgment by the subject, or the subject's representative, that he or she has received a copy of the consent form.

You are responsible for retaining the signed consent forms obtained from your subjects for a minimum of three years after the study is concluded.

Continuing Review:

Continuing review of the project, conducted at least annually, will be necessary until data collection is complete and you no longer retain any identifiers that could link the subjects to the data collected. Please remember to use your protocol number (HS21-0185) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

Closing the Study:

Please note that a final report submission should be created in the record in lieu of an annual continuation form if data collection has ended and the data are free of identifiers. The final report is a separate submission form in the list of options in the InfoEd record, and it may be submitted prior to the annual review deadline.

With all of this said, the IRB extends best wishes for success in your research endeavors!

Please see the RIPS website for guidance on the impact of COVID-19 on research (including face-to-face data collection)
https://www.niu.edu/divresearch/covid/index.shtml

Patty Wallace
Compliance Coordinator
Office of Research Compliance & Integrity Northern Illinois University
APPENDIX B

PRE-INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY
Pre-Interview Demographic Survey

Pre-interview questionnaire will be sent to students one week (7 days) prior to first interview.

Pre-Interview survey will be completed using an electronics Qualtrics survey:

https://dom.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6LshgEty2Jkr8Hz

I. Participant’s first and last name

II. Participant’s selected pseudonym

III. Age

IV. Race/ethnicity

V. Sexual orientation

VI. Desired course of study (major/minor)?

VII. Sport which involved?

VIII. Residential or commuter student?

IX. Hometown (city/state)

X. Other involvement on campus
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol – Interview 1

The following will be a guide for the interviewer to remain consistent with the main questions asked during the interviews and ensure that the structure is nearly the same for each participant. The interviewer will ask follow-up questions to further learn about the story in question and the individual participant’s experiences.

I. Introduction, Overview of Study, Confidentiality, and Selection of Pseudonym

1. **Interviewer**: “Hi. Thanks for agreeing to be a participant in my research study.

   As we talked about in our initial conversation, I am hoping to conduct two interviews through this semester to more fully understand your story, how you see yourself as a man, and how your involvement in athletics here on campus impacts, if at all, your construction and perception of masculinity. Interviews will be recorded, as previously mentioned, and all of your responses will be kept confidential. Do you have any questions about this research study or the consent process?

   We had spoken about you choosing a pseudonym to be used in place of your real name. Can you tell me the name that you have chosen?”

   **Participant**: (Answers with pseudonym)

   **Interviewer**: “Thanks. Let’s get started with the interview. You are still okay with this being recorded, correct? If at any point you would like to stop the recording or stop the interview, please just let me know.”
II. Low-Risk Introduction Questions

1. Start by telling me a little about yourself. Who is (insert participant’s pseudonym name)?

2. What are you some things you like to do outside of athletics (other interests and hobbies)?

3. Thinking back to when you first got involved in playing sports, tell me about your early experiences with athletics?

4. Tell me about some of the men you looked up to, if any, growing up?

5. What does it mean to you, personally, to be a man?
   
   ° How do you believe, if at all, your specific identities have influenced what it means for you to be a man? *

III. Questions Regarding Masculinity Perceptions Prior To College

1. Talk to me about how you were throughout grade school.
   
   ° Can you recall any stories from your grade school years, if any, where you were told or taught what it means to be a man? *

2. Throughout your life, what places do you remember learning how to act as a man?

   ° What were you told growing up, if anything, that a man cannot do or say? *

   ° How do you believe, if at all, your specific identities have influenced learning what was expected of you regarding acting a man? *

3. Tell me about how you were in your high school years.
○ Thinking specifically about your high school years, what pressures, if any, did you feel when it came to the need to act like a man? *

○ Did you feel like you were someone who other people would consider to be “manly”, if so, why? If not, why not? *

○ How do you believe, if at all, your specific identities influenced your high school years? *

4. Growing up, was there ever an experience where you realized that you had a gender identity as a man; where things were expected of you just because of your gender? If so, please explain.

5. Up until college, what role did your friends and family play in your understanding of what it means to be a man?

○ Are there any specific times with your friends or family that you remember violating what it means to be a man and getting corrected/called out? *

IV. Questions Regarding Masculinity Perceptions in College

1. Since arriving at college and becoming part of the campus community, what ideas or rules of being a man have you experienced being reinforced, either to you or to those around you?

○ Have you subscribed to any new ideas, actions, or opinions about how a man should act or feel since being in college? *

○ How do you believe, if at all, your specific identities have influenced your college experience? *
2. Do you feel like you currently act in accordance with how a “real man” should act?
   □ Have you had your view of what a man should be challenged since being in college? *

3. How do your experiences with social life, dating relationships, and academic success relate, if at all, to your belief of what it means to be a man?
   □ How do you believe drinking/partying culture is related to being a man, if at all? *
   □ How do you see dating/intimate relationships in relation to what you believe it means to be a man? *

V. Questions Regarding Masculinity Perceptions Within Your Team

1. What do you think your team would say if they were asked to describe what a man should be like?
   □ What terms or phrases do your teammates use, if any, to describe someone who does not fit the traditional mold of a college man? *
   □ How do you believe, if at all, specific identities, other than being a man, are viewed by your teammates? *

2. In what ways or spaces, if any, do you feel a difference in pressure to act like a man since you are a student-athlete?
   □ Are there times when you display yourself differently when around your teammates as opposed to non-student-athlete friends? If so, explain. *
3. What things would you normally do, if any, that you do not feel comfortable doing around your teammates in fear of not being seen as a “real man”? 

° Can you think of any of your teammates of student-athlete friends who do things that might be considered not in line with what a “real man” should do? If so, explain. *

*Denotes optional follow up question
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW OBSERVATION TOOL
## Interview Observation Tool

**Participant Pseudonym:** ______________________  
**Date:** _______________

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low-Risk Introduction Questions</th>
<th>Topics that seemed most developed/comfortable</th>
<th>Topics that seemed least developed/comfortable</th>
<th>Common language used throughout interview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions Regarding Masculinity Perceptions Prior To College</td>
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<td>Questions Regarding Masculinity Perceptions in College</td>
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<td>Questions Regarding Masculinity Perceptions Within Your Team</td>
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## POST-INTERVIEW

<table>
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<th>Core Stories told by participant that modeled gender perception and construction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Themes surfaces that were expected to arise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Themes surfaced that were not expected to arise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Areas of follow up or confusion</td>
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APPENDIX E

POST-INTERVIEW REFLECTION JOURNAL
Post-Interview Reflection Journal

Journals will be sent to participants approximately four weeks after the initial interview and will be due one week prior to second interview. Journal reflections will be completed using an electronic Qualtrics link: https://dom.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4YeSNAlxjs6xMgZ

I. Participant’s Chosen Pseudonym

II. What emotions, reflections, or feelings do you have when you think back on our initial interview? How did that process of telling your story feel?

III. Are there aspects of gender perception and construction (your own or others) that you have been made more aware since our initial interview? If so, what are they?

IV. Since our initial meeting, please briefly describe a situation (without using others’ names) where you have found yourself with your friends/teammates and thought about their construction, perception, or enactment of gender identity. (If you have not experienced this, please indicate that).

V. Since our initial meeting, have you found yourself subscribing or enacting any new ideas, actions, or opinions about how a man should act or feel? Does your student-athlete identity interact with that at all, and if so, how?
APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – INTERVIEW 2
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol – Interview 2

The following will be a guide for the interviewer to remain consistent with the main questions asked during the interviews and ensure that the structure is nearly the same for each participant. The interviewer will ask follow-up questions to further learn about the story in question and the individual participant’s experiences.

I. Interview Introduction

1. Thank you for completing your participant reflection journal. I had read over your submission and want to talk through some of that today. Also, I provided you the written transcript of your first interview. I hope you had the chance to read that over as instructed so that we can talk through your thoughts on it, any additional themes or stories that may have surfaced, etc. Let’s get started

II. First Interview Transcript Review

1. Where you able to review the transcript from your first interview?

2. Do you believe that the transcript is an accurate record of our previous conversation?

3. Where there any parts of the first interview that stood out to you as you read the transcript? If so, what were they?

4. What additional stories did you think about, if any, after our interview that were resurfaced as you read the transcript?

5. Is there anything else you would like to add about your first interview?

III. Participant Reflection Journal Review
1. In your reflection journal, I asked you to reflect on what you were feeling and what you were thinking about after our first interview. How was the process of reflecting on our interview for you? (discuss themes emerged through journals and stories/comments noted during initial review)

° What emotions, reflections, or feelings do you have when you think back on our initial interview? How did that process of telling your story feel?

° Are there aspects of gender perception and construction (your own or others) that you have been made more aware since our initial interview? If so, what are they?

° Since our initial meeting, please briefly describe a situation (without using others’ names) where you have found yourself with your friends/teammates and thought about their construction, perception, or enactment of gender identity. (If you have not experienced this, please indicate that).

° Since our initial meeting, have you found yourself subscribing or enacting any new ideas, actions, or opinions about how a man should act or feel? Does your student-athlete identity interact with that at all, and if so, how?

IV. Final Questions

1. After going through this process, how would you now describe what it means to be a man?
2. How do you believe, if at all, that being a student-athlete impacts your construction and perception of being a man in college?

3. Is there anything that can be done, personally or institutionally, that you would find helpful as you continue on your journey of figuring out what it means to be a collegiate student-athlete man?

4. Lastly, as we conclude this journey together, I want to revisit a question I asked you at the start of our first interview. What does it mean to you, personally, to be a man?
   
   ° How do you believe, if at all, your specific identities have influenced what it means for you to be a man? *

*Denotes optional follow up question