

THE POWER PARADOX: INTIMACY AND MASCULINITY IN AMERICAN FOOTBALL

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines how intimacy—both physical and emotional—in American football affects masculinity. This research is important because it questions the role of masculinity in a sport considered the most popular in terms of participation, attendance at games, and broadcast viewership (Miaschi, 2017). Hegemonic masculinity theory and inclusive masculinity theory are used to explain how masculinity is constructed through football. Using naturalistic observation, interviews with seven Michigan State University (MSU) football players, and an analysis of photographs, I found that football players achieve more intimate relationships with other players on their team when compared to relationships they have with other men outside their sport. A few surprises I found during interviews include injury during football is not treated as harshly as it once was, being emotional is an important part of being a man, and more. I visually present the intimate and masculine aspects of football I witnessed in photographs I created as an employee of Big Ten Network during MSU football games during the 2017 and 2018 seasons, and I offer my analysis of intimacy and masculinity in this sport, which includes and explains the meaning behind the power paradox.

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INTRODUCTION

In American culture, public displays of intimacy between men are not as common when compared to those of women, but when men play sports, particularly American football, intimacy may be a norm, which is what I investigate in this thesis. Football requires physical contact, which is intimate, e.g. some players must tackle others to the ground to stop the ball from advancing or to grab the ball. This intimate violence is an example of masculinity within football (Intimate).

Why is emotionally and physically intimate behavior that is not typically viewed as masculine by Americans in everyday life viewed as masculine when it happens on the football field? Sports culture is surrounded by homophobia, so it is interesting that the athletes are able to be so intimate with each other within this context (Anderson, 2011, April). In my research I discover why perceived intimate behaviors—like becoming emotionally close with each other and constantly touching each other—are accepted as masculine only when displayed on a sports field. I use the information I have collected from various articles and books and from being on the sidelines of the MSU football games to present how intimacy in American football affects masculinity.

This project has three components: The use of data from literature and journals, interviews I conducted with MSU football players, and an analysis of photographs of intimate behaviors I created of MSU football players during home games. Similar research has been conducted from the 1990s to the 2010s by sociologists and masculinity theorists including Michael Messner, Donald Sabo, Ross Runfola, Eric Anderson, and others, but their research does not include photographs that display the hyper-masculine—an amplification of male features and behavior—and intimate behaviors that have been discussed. My research is significant because it

builds on previous studies, when gender was viewed as more of a strict binary, and updates masculinity and sports psychology research by using photographs, interviews of college-aged football players, and observations made while working in Spartan Stadium during 2017 and 2018.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFINITIONS

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, “intimate” is defined as, “marked by a warm friendship developing through long association” or “engaged in, involving, or marked by sex or sexual relations” (Intimate). According to the *English Oxford Dictionary*, “masculine” is defined as, “having qualities or appearances traditionally associated with a man,” such as robust, brave, and strong, while “feminine” is defined as, “having qualities or appearances traditionally associated with a female,” such as gentle, empathetic, and petite (*English Oxford Dictionary*). According to Sabo & Runfolo (1980), “masculinity is defined largely in terms of power,” in a capitalistic society (p. 80). In the media, women and femininity are constantly shown as inferior through mediated sports while men and masculinity are shown as superior (McKay, 2000).

GENDER DIVISION

Gender has been separated into a binary of male and female. Females are viewed as graceful, empathetic, compassionate, and nurturing while males are viewed as strong, courageous, aggressive, and protective. When Simone de Beauvoir (1989) claims, “one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman,” she is stating that one can “become” a gender through the repetition of gendered acts. Through this she points out that gender is not a stable identity, but

rather a dynamic identity instituted through norms and accepted behaviors during a specific time (Butler, 1988). In the sense that one “becomes a woman,” one may also become a man. To do this, one starts conforming to their perceived gender by repeating the behavior that is deemed acceptable by their gender. Because of these gendered behaviors, the connections between same sex friendships are different between men and women. According to Messner (1992):

An interesting consensus has emerged among those who have studied gender and friendship in the United States: Women have deep, intimate, meaningful, and lasting friendships, while men have a number of shallow, superficial, and unsatisfying “acquaintances.” Several commentators have concluded that men’s relationships are shallow because men have been taught to be highly homophobic, emotionally inexpressive, and competitive “success objects” (p. 91).

According to Sociologist Lillian Rubin (1990), men are more likely to distance themselves from other men in friendships by participating in activities that are “external” to themselves such as sports (p. 135). Because American men grow up in a culture where intimate relationships between men are not as accepted as intimate relationships between women, men are more likely to view intimate behaviors as homosexual, so men are more likely to “do something” like play video games with friends rather than sit around and discuss the personal aspects of their lives. Due to American cultural norms, men may feel like they cannot participate in the expression of “homosocial intimacy, sadness, or love of their friends” (Anderson, 2011, April, p. 569). Heterosexual men have been denied the ability to express these emotions in everyday life due to the fear of being viewed as homosexual or feminine in American culture.

From an early age, girls’ and boys’ games are separated based on interaction. According to Wood & Inman (1993), boys’ games such as baseball and football are made up of “external

rules, definite goals, and competitive principles, which teach boys to assert themselves, gain and hold attention, and vie for status in hierarchical relationships,” while girls’ games such as house and school “are emergently organized by communication, emphasize process over results, and require cooperation, all of which incline girls toward verbal, collaborative, responsive interaction” (p. 282). The difference in these gendered games are the building blocks of how communication between men and women are viewed and how the genders themselves are viewed. According to McKay (2000), these gender differences lead to hegemonic masculinity, a practice that legitimizes men’s dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of women. These differences may also be a contribution to athletes participating in “sexually aggressive locker room talk, violence against women, violence against other men, and has contributed to difficulty in having lasting intimate relationships with women” (p. 50). Young boys are typically coaxed into playing sports such as football, basketball, soccer, etc. so they can express the behavior that coincides to their gender by letting out aggression, shaping their masculine body, and forming male relationships. According to Messner (1992):

In the past, the key to maintaining the male bond was the denial of the erotic. Organized sport, as it arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was based in part on a Victorian antisexual ethic. First, it was believed that homosocial institutions such as sport would masculinize young males in an otherwise feminized culture... (p. 95).

While growing up in this “feminized culture,” young boys begin to use words such as, “girl,” “pansy,” “woman,” and “fag,” as interchangeable insults that are used both on and off a sports field for men that exhibit “feminine behaviors” such as giving in to an injury, becoming tired, or becoming upset. Masculinity is constructed through these insults by degrading people who are feminine and/or homosexual by placing them in a non-male category (Messner, 1992). Using

these words as insults degrades males who perform poorly on a sports field by placing them in the female or homosexual subordinate group.

GENDER IN SPORTS

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and onward, sports became a vital part of middle- and upper-middle-class men's education across Europe. According to Besnier (2018), people advocated for sports as a way of "training men for capitalism, colonialism, and militarism." This can be seen by the representation of the fit male body, which is inspired by "reinterpretations of ancient Greek ideals into the emerging ideologies of nationalism, bolstered by religion in the form of muscular Christianity." Women were excluded from the rise of the international sports system, and according to French educator and historian Pierre de Coubertin, the "true Olympic hero is, in my view, the adult male individual" (p. 144).

Sports became, from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, a "male preserve" that strengthened gender differences. Around this time, public displays of physical violence became less acceptable for men in the elite and middle class because of the expansion of white-collar occupations where aggression was viewed as counterproductive. Urbanization and industrialization led men to become more comfortable with the idea of a nuclear family, but they feared the intimate association with women and domesticity would "feminize" them (Besnier, 2018, p.144-5).

According to Sabo & Runfola (1980), following World War II sports became "one of the major psychological reference points for American men," through journalistic promotion and television coverage and one of the most popular leisurely activities (p. 30). Between the 1930s and 1960s, women began to integrate into the work force, and while the female athlete

population rose there were demands for gender equality in sports. Compared to women, men are more likely to die young, do not express their emotions as well, are less likely to take care of their bodies, and are more likely to engage in dangerous or unhealthy behaviors—like smoking, drinking, or driving recklessly. Because of these factors, men are viewed as the superior gender in the “competitive and insecure world of sport careers” (Messner, 1992, p. 75).

The sports world is a “gendered institution” in that it is a social institution created by men for men as a response to their fear of women rising to power. This can be seen through the dominant structures and values within sports, such as power, masculinity, and dominance, which “reflect the fears and needs of a threatened masculinity” (Messner, 1992, p. 16). According to Theberge (1981), many feminist scholars report that the sports world is “a fundamentally sexist institution that is male dominated and masculine in orientation” (p. 342).

The ideological support for the privileged upper- and middle-class, white male stems from the social Darwinist belief that natural hierarchy is the result of competition. Due to this belief, sport’s structure, value, and ideology is “deeply gendered,” meaning boys are experiencing a “gendering process” when participating in sports. While dominating another team in a sports game, men are simultaneously learning how to dominate women in everyday life (Messner, 1992, p. 19).

Sports are based on the infatuation of masculinity and the male body and the degradation of females and femininity. The expected amount of violence and aggressiveness a male or female should exhibit is a primary barrier between the two genders. Boys are encouraged to roughhouse and fight, but only with other men. Girls are taught to be lady-like and reserved while boys learn about “manhood” through heroic violence in wars, gangs, video games, sports, and fraternity

hazing. All of these manhood rituals prove that one must “be tough and ready to inflict pain in order to get ahead and become a man” (Sabo, 1980, p. 113).

AMERICAN FOOTBALL

American football developed from association football—also known as soccer—and rugby. Around the early 1880s, Yale football player, Walter Camp began to establish rules that helped football take shape. In the early 1900s football became much more violent, especially because of plays where every member on a side would move together in hopes of scoring. There was a need for reform due to the 149 reported serious injuries and 18 deaths during 1905, which resulted in the creation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States. Four years later this group changed their name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which is the group that controls college sports in the United States today. Camp hoped to reduce the number of injuries and deaths by making the game more about speed and skill instead of strength and force (Smith, 2010).

Today, both college and professional football are very popular across the United States. In 2019 the base salary for a rookie in the National Football League is \$480,000, which ends up being around \$30,000 per game during a 16-game season (Renzulli, 2019). The large sums of money professional football players receive represent the power that is given to those that play football.

A MALE RITUAL

Many studies on American football suggest that the game is a male initiation ritual where one can be immersed in the “physical and cultural values of masculinity” (Dundes, 1978, p. 76).

This may be due to the fact that while growing up, men tend to be judged by their ability—or lack of ability—in competitive sports. Many men even say that playing sports is “natural,” and they may say this because of the praise and recognition they receive from performing well. As stated earlier, when men hang out, they are more likely to “do” something, and this goes for father-son bonding as well. It may be hard for fathers to directly express love for their children, so fathers may show their love by working to raise money for their family or playing sports with their son. This results in men completing tasks and accomplishments to show and receive affection. While boys are learning these athletic skills from their fathers, they are also learning that success in the athletic world is a key to their father’s emotional attachment. A son may fear that failure to perform well may lead to a weak bond with his father (Messner, 1992).

According to Messner (1992) those who excel in the sports world create an “intense commitment” with the sports they play through daily practices, workouts, conditioning, and more. This is “best explained as a process of developing masculine identity and status in relation to male peers” through playing sports (p. 30). Football in particular demonstrates American society’s dominant and traditional masculine culture in a clear and magnified way. Because of football’s role as a “key masculinity-affirming ritual,” the sport itself demonstrates the relationship between the male individual and the society, which pushes these values (Sabo, 1980, p. 52). Thus performing well as an athlete is strongly tied to the passage from boyhood to manhood and fulfilling the “traditional male role” in America (Sabo, 1980, p. 53).

THE MALE BODY

An important part of masculine identity is the body itself. Gender is understood in a frame in which gestures, movements, and enactments create an allusion of a conforming

gendered self (Butler, 1988). To conform to their masculine gender, athletes must push their bodies to resemble one of a man—muscular, large, and husky. Football players show their masculine body by wearing skintight uniforms that emphasize certain parts of their body.

According to Dundes (1978):

[Anthropologist William] Arens points out that the equipment worn “accents the male physique” through the enlarged head and shoulders coupled with a narrowed waist. With the lower torso “poured into skintight pants accented only by a metal codpiece,” Arens contends that the result “is not an expression but an exaggeration of maleness...Dressed in this manner, the players can engage in hand holding, hugging, and bottom patting, which would be disapproved of in any other context, but which is accepted on the [football field] without a second thought” (p. 77).

The uniforms football players wear are a form of hyper-masculinity by exaggerating and outlining their male body parts. If an athlete is to be viewed as successful, he must be able to “ignore fears, anxieties, or any other inconvenient emotions, while mentally controlling his body to perform its prescribed tasks” (Messner, 1992, p. 64).

POWER THROUGH SPORTS

Although many athletes say that playing sports comes to them “naturally,” sports are nowhere close to “an expression of some biological need” (Messner, 1992, p. 7). The sports world can be seen as an escape from the struggles of everyday life both through participating and observing, which hides the fact that sports are closely connected with “dominant social values, power relations, and conflicts between groups and nations,” which in turn, results in it being a social institution (Messner, 1992, p. 9-10).

From a young age, boys are not only learning how to be successful in throwing, catching, and hitting a ball, but they are also learning to rise to the top of the social hierarchy. The British created and constructed sports within their public schools in hopes of preparing boys to one day rule the Empire. Team sports are based on dominance over others and respect and compliance with authority. Men also learn initiative, self-reliance, loyalty, and obedience while playing sports. As a result, the British were able to teach boys to reach a certain kind of manliness, whose primary goal was to dominate over nonwhite, colonized people. Those who hold power created sports in hopes of raising more powerful, white men. Men playing sports not only hope to gain the emotional friendships they have been craving, but they must also succeed and rise to power against the other team (Messner, 1992).

The sports world works as a part of the powerful society in American culture. “The institution of sports functions in part to preserve the unequal distribution of wealth, power, opportunity, and authority between men and women found in the major, social, political, and economic institutions of American society” (Sabo, 1980, p. 7). An example of this can be seen in the Super Bowl. Every year, millions of dollars are spent on a football game—not only on the performances and the players, but around \$400 million are spent on the ads that are shown during the game (Calfas, 2019). The female cheerleaders on the sideline wear short skirts and cheer on the aggressive men that must fight for the ultimate power in the stadium. According to Sabo & Runfola (1980), “the Super Bowl’s first appeal to the viewers is patriotism and power” (p. 20). With money comes power, and both of these elements are important aspects of football and masculinity.

Sports thrive on the values of male superiority, competition, work, and success. These values coincide with the values of a capitalistic, American society, so through sports, men learn

an American lifestyle built on male dominance, money, and power. “Sports act as a mirror of the dominant culture and a link between sexist institutions” (Sabo, 1980, p. xi). Sports are one of the main ways men are brought together today, which leads to them networking with each other to create a dominant society (Sabo, 1980).

VIOLENCE IN SPORTS

Masculinity and American nationalism are closely tied to football, which means football tends to normalize a version of masculinity that values playing through pain to display toughness (Sanderson, 2016). Sports that include a battle between individuals or a team allow men to engage in “ritualized and controlled physical violence in a socially acceptable way” (Besnier, 2018, p. 145). The football field itself allows for such violence to take place because it is the setting of a combat. The “young, muscle-bound, and willing to commit violence to himself and others” reputation of football players allows for this extreme type of masculinity to be placed at the top of the hierarchy of men in the United States (Anderson, 2012).

Violence is defined as “the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy” by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (Violence). In sports culture, violence is viewed as an act of masculinity instead of an act of danger. Some players are even celebrated in the media for being violent. For example, former Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver Hines Ward is famous for being violent toward other players on the field. In 2008 Wards hit Cincinnati Bengals linebacker Keith Rivers so hard that he broke his jaw, which resulted in an end to the season for this 245-pound rookie. Ward was voted the NFL’s “Dirtiest Player” in a poll *Sports Illustrated* conducted, and Ward is constantly referred to as one of the toughest players in NFL history (Anderson, 2012).

Hurting others and getting hurt is just a part of the game for athletes who have been playing football their whole life. Those who are violent are viewed as the best players and receive validation and praise from peers, coaches, and the general public (Messner, 1992). Aggression is not defined as “violent” as long as it happens within a rule-governed game instead of it being a result of anger (Lyman, 1987). This violence is a gateway for men to preserve their dominance over women. Their male body is viewed as superior “through the use (or threat) of violence,” and according to journalist Susan Brownmiller, men’s control over women “rests on violence” (Messner, 1992, p. 15).

INJURY IN SPORTS

Due to the extreme violence in football, it is likely that a player will have a sports-related injury at some point in their life (Sanderson, 2016). What is perplexing though, is why some athletes chose to play through their injury instead of sitting on the sidelines. The normalizing of pain is very common within sports culture, and this can be seen with the establishment of the pain principle, “a patriarchal, cultural belief that contends pain is inevitable and that enduring pain, rather than giving in to it, is a vital step in one’s character development and worth” (Sanderson, 2016, p. 6). Men go the extra mile to be seen as anything less than this hegemonic ideal by doing things like playing through injuries or using phrases such as, “man up,” or “no pain, no gain” to fight through pain and be seen as masculine.

An example of normalizing pain comes from the case of Derek Sheely, a division III football player who was experiencing bleeding after going through full-contact practice drills during August 2011. Sheely told his coach about his headache, but the coach told him to “Stop your bitching and moaning and quit acting like a pussy and get back out there” (Sanderson, 2016,

p. 7). Moments after this, Sheely collapsed and ended up dying later that week from brain trauma.

Another reason one may play while hurt is because of the fear of backlash from coaches, teammates, the media, and the general public. It is not viewed as manly to give in to pain or acknowledge it (Sabo, 1980). Media tends to praise athletes who play through their injuries, which results in moving them up in the hierarchy. The 2009 NFL segment titled “The top 10 gutsiest performances” is an example of media that congratulates athletes for playing through their injuries. This segment highlighted athletes who continued to play even though they had amputated thumbs, broken legs, or a separated shoulder (Top 10 gutsiest performances of all-time, 2009). Sports journalists celebrate these players to promote their masculine capital to their audience (Sanderson, 2016).

JOURNALISTIC FRAMING

Framing allows the media to influence public knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of readers. It is the process where mass media organizations report on specific situations in specific ways to shape the public’s view on a story. This may allow journalists to choose certain aspects of a story and make them relevant or irrelevant in the media, which results in molding the public’s opinions. According to Sanderson (2016), “...given how much affinity football holds in American culture, journalists might frame injuries in ways that minimize their seriousness or in ways that mitigate the NFL’s liability” (p. 8).

Men who try to put their health before their teams do not only receive backlash from the media and their audience, but from their coaches as well. When this happens, the results can be detrimental. Jordan McNair was a football player for the University of Maryland who ended up

dying during June 2018 due to his head coach, DJ Durkin, forcing him to play through his pain. McNair collapsed during a team workout on a hot, summer day. He died two weeks later due to heatstroke. McNair was experiencing muscle cramps during the workout, which resulted in one of his athletic trainers yelling something along the lines of “drag his ass across the field,” when he noticed McNair struggling (Kirshner, 2018, p. 17). It took 34 minutes for McNair to be removed from the field after showing symptoms, 67 minutes to call an ambulance, and 99 minutes until the ambulance was on the way to the hospital. Most of the media covering this story framed McNair as the victim and shifted the blame to Durkin (Kirshner, 2018).

SPORTS NORMALIZING MALE INTIMACY

Sports are a gateway for men to have intimate connections with each other. Men are allowed to enjoy being around other men—maybe even become close—without having to worry about damaging their “firm ego boundaries” and “their fragile masculine identities,” while playing sports (Messner, 1992, p. 91). In this context, men are not afraid to become intimate with each other because physical contact seems to “magically” lose all homosexual meaning when it happens within a sports game (Reiner, 2017, p. 9). Even though men can indulge in homosexual or feminine behavior while on a football field, it is still viewed as an extremely masculine sport. Some of the touching that happens within football tends to be very intimate and sometimes sexual like slapping each other’s bottoms, tackling each other to the ground, and the three-point stance—the stance used by the linemen and running backs where they are crouched down with one hand on the ground before a play.

Sports teams who are intimate with each other tend to do better on the field. Research shows that good sports teams tend to be touchier, and that the star-athlete on a team tends to be touchier as well. According to Carey (2010):

 Momentary touches, they say—whether an exuberant high five, a warm hand on the shoulder, or a creepy touch to the arm—can communicate an even wider range of emotion than gestures or expressions, and sometimes do so more quickly and accurately than words (p. 2)

Because physical touch can reduce stress, a high five, a pat on the back, or a hug can release oxytocin, “a hormone that helps create a sensation of trust,” which will result in a better sports team (Carey, 2010, p. 12). And to succeed in team sports such as football, a team must be able to trust each other and cooperate.

Emotional intimacy is embedded in football. While growing up, boys and girls tend to have different relationships with their mothers based on their gender. Males tend to separate a bit more from their mother, which results in a “positional” identity with a fear of intimacy while females become more attached to their mother, which results in a “relational” identity with a fear of separation (Messner, 1992, p. 20). A masculine identity arises from the construction of a “positional identity,” which is “where a sense of self is solidified through separation from others” (Messner, 1992, p. 32). Because of this, some men fear that intimate relationships with others may result in a loss of their own identity. According to Messner (1992):

 For the boy who both seeks and fears closeness, the rule-bound structure of organized sport promises to be a safe place in which to seek attachment with others, but it is an attachment in which clear boundaries, distance, and separation from others are maintained (p. 32-33).

Through sports, male athletes are able to receive praise and attention for performing well, which is an example of an “emotionally distant” connection between people (Messner, 1992, p. 49). But nonetheless, male athletes are still able to find a close connection between other male athletes, which may be harder to achieve between males in everyday life.

HOMOPHOBIA IN SPORTS

Homophobia can create a barrier to the male intimacy that can be achieved through sports. Athletes are constantly perceived as “cultural symbols of masculine heterosexual virility,” so homophobia then creates a “narrow cultural definition of masculinity,” which keeps men from having intimate relationships with each other (Messner, 1992, p. 24, 36).

Why is behavior that is considered homosexual and feminine allowed within sports culture, which tends to be highly homophobic and male-dominated? According to Anderson, (2011, April):

In 1994, I became America’s first (or at least the first publicly recognized) openly gay high school coach. Although I received tremendous support from the high school runners that I coached, I was maligned by the administration. Worse, my athletes were victimized by many members of the high school’s football team, assumed gay through a guilt-by-association process (p. 566).

For so long, gay athletes were afraid to embrace their sexuality because of “queer bashing,” which happens within locker room talk (Messner, 1992, p. 35). In 1975, former professional running back David Kopay became one of the first professional athletes to come out as homosexual. Kopay relates his extra drive to perform well in football to black athletes who came from lower-class neighborhoods to perform well in professional sports. While the black athletes

proved that they were not inferior because of their race, Kopay proved that he was not any less of a man because he was homosexual (Kopay, 1977). He was able to use his aggression on the football field “as an outlet for suppressed sexual drives” (Sabo, 1980, p. 43).

THEORY

I use the work of researchers to create a sociological and cultural anthropological framework for my analysis. I focus on the work of the following researchers to develop my theoretical perspective: Michael Messner, an American Sociologist who wrote multiple books on the topic of sports, Eric Anderson, an American sociologist and sexologist who specializes in adolescent men’s gender and sexualities, Donald Sabo, a sociologist who researches sports and male identity, Jimmy Sanderson, who studies communication and sports, and others. These four scholars have written books and multiple journal articles on this topic, and I also read other journals that touch on the topics of sports, gender, masculinity, and sexuality.

Two theories I use throughout my research are hegemonic masculinity theory and inclusive masculinity theory. Hegemonic masculinity theory legitimizes men’s dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of women (McKay, 2000). According to Anderson (2011, April), inclusive masculinity theory, a fear of being thought of as homosexual due to expressing gender atypical behavior, overrides hegemonic masculinity to explain the separation of men based on their social dynamics during times of lower homophobia. Through this, “heterosexual boys are permitted to engage in an increasing range of behaviors that once led to homosexual suspicion, all without threat to their publicly perceived heterosexual identities” (Anderson, 2011, April, p. 571).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: When interviewing football players about intimacy and masculinity within football, which themes dominated?

RQ2: During my experience of observing football games from the sidelines and in an analysis of my photographs, which behaviors dominated that exhibit masculinity and intimacy?

RQ3: Using hegemonic and inclusive masculinity theory, why is intimate behavior that would not be seen as masculine in everyday life be viewed as masculine when displayed on a football field?

METHODS

PHOTOJOURNALISM ETHNOGRAPHY

A photojournalism ethnographic analysis included immersing myself into the natural settings where this phenomenon occurs to better understand the situation (Berg, 2012). The photographs are a way to inform both the researcher and viewers of further explanations and social understandings related to the research.

I spent my time on the Spartan Stadium football field analyzing behavior between football players while creating photographs. I used a naturalistic observation method, and I split the game up into three different sectors: the pregame, the game, and the postgame. The pregame is the hour before the football game begins where athletes stretch, warm up, and dance together to the music that is blasting throughout the stadium. Lots of joking, touching, and smiling happens between the football players during this time, and I can always feel the excitement buzzing throughout the stadium. The game begins after all the MSU football players run out of the tunnel onto the field with their coaches and MSU's mascot, Sparty. The players' demeanor is

much more serious than in the pregame, and while they play I can hear fans shouting things such as, “you are my hero,” from the stands while the game is in action. The postgame begins once the game ends. Players huddle together in a huge circle in prayer right after the timer ends, and if they win they rush to the student section to sing the fight song. If MSU loses, the players sadly make their way off the field through the tunnel.

I used an ethnographic analysis, which will use my newly developed ways of organized data into four behavioral groups to relate the images to my theoretical research of the intimate behaviors found in football and show their importance by creating relationships between the photographs and the research. I spent the 2017 and 2018 football seasons on the sidelines of Spartan Stadium during 11 MSU home games. During those two football seasons I created a total of 4,453 photographs of college football players. During 2017 I created 1,876 and during 2018 I created 2,577. These photos were all taken during the pregame, the game, or the postgame.

INTERVIEWS

During spring and summer 2019 I emailed all 120 of the MSU football players from the 2018 season, and I was able to conduct in-person interviews with seven of them. These interviews consisted of 17 questions about football, masculinity, intimacy, and other related topics (See Appendix A). All interviews were conducted and recorded in a private room on MSU’s campus after the interviewees signed a form giving their consent to be interviewed and have their data published in my research (see Appendix B).

I interviewed offensive lineman Matt Allen, punter Bryce Baringer, full back Reid Burton, linebacker Peter Fisk, quarterback Brian Lewerke, linebacker Terry O’Connor, and running back Noah Sargent (2018 Football Roster). All seven of these football players identified

as heterosexual males between the ages of 19 and 22. The interviews were conducted between April 1, 2019 and July 17, 2019 with the shortest interview 11 minutes and the longest interview 23 minutes.

RESULTS

MSU FOOTBALL PLAYER INTERVIEWS

In regard to my RQ1, there were seven dominant themes including: Shaping Identity, A Brotherhood, The Father Figure, Physical Intimacy, Injury, Masculinity, and Performance. All seven of the football players touched on these topics during their interviews.

Shaping Identity

All seven of the players began playing football before they were teenagers—four of them in elementary school and three of them in middle school. Each player said their family was extremely supportive and involved by pushing them to play football, going to all their games, or holding the high school football coach position. Four of the players had siblings that were athletic as well, which also influenced them to join team sports at a young age.

Allen (2019) began playing football when he was six years old, but he did not really enjoy the sport until he played and watched it for a year.

I had two older brothers that played football [at MSU]. I would just watch them like the entire time I was growing up playing football, and it was just kind of like monkey see monkey do. And I always kind of wanted to do what they were doing, so that was a huge reason why I kind of got involved with it. And eventually I just started loving it myself

and having them being able to help me advance my skills and stuff like that. It was just kind of easier for me than other stuff (Allen, 2019).

Playing football for so long resulted in shaping all seven of these players' identities. Three out of the seven football players agree that football defines them, is part of who they are, has made them a tougher person, and is a huge part of their life. Two of the seven agree that football has made it easier for them to deal with conflicts and people in general. Playing football for so long has also taught them how to be a leader, create character, and allowed them to exist in a space with like-minded people. According to O'Connor (2019):

I definitely think [playing football] has made me more of a tenacious person—just the whole hard work mentality. I always kind of liked working hard but I think playing football and being surrounded by people like coaches and players and everyone who's kind of like me has made me more of a hard worker.

A Brotherhood

Four out of the seven football players described their relationship with their teammates as “good.” Three out of the seven said that they know and are close to everyone on the team, while two said that they are closer to some players than others.

Most of the players agreed that playing football fits within the first definition of intimacy, “marked by a warm friendship developing through long association” (Intimate). Without intimacy, it may be impossible for a sports team to become close with each other and perform well on the field. “With football everyone has to do their job to have a good team. You can't just have one star-player and be good. Usually you have to have a unit of good players that know what they're doing” (Sargent, 2019).

Football players are with their team every day, much like nuclear American families are together every day while their kids are growing up. The players do everything together such as going to tutors, working out, hanging out, and practicing (Burton, 2019).

You have your friends away from football, and your relationship with them is totally different because you're not going through as tough as a task usually with your friends off the field as you are with your teammates, so it's a different relationship (Fisk, 2019). The MSU football team has a very welcoming atmosphere. According to Baringer, who walked on the team after the second game during the 2018 season, all the guys on the team were so welcoming because of how MSU football coach Mark Dantonio built the program—like an accepting family (Baringer, 2019).

...We are all fighting for the same goal. We're all here for the same reasons. We want a national championship. We want a Big Ten championship. We want to succeed. But we want to succeed also off the field. So, we all have that common goal, and when you strive for a common goal, there's always that sense of brotherhood that comes out, and so I believe that is what makes the sport intimate. [It] is because we are all so supportive, extremely supportive, of one another. So, we will refer to each other as brothers (Baringer, 2019).

Lewerke, who came to MSU from Arizona, found comfort in the football team, and he thinks it was easier for him to make friends compared to other out-of-state students due to the welcoming atmosphere. Lewerke finds constant support from both his teammates and coaches.

I wouldn't say [football] is the classic definition of intimate, but I would say you are definitely around guys a lot, you shower in the same thirty [people] shower room, you're

with these guys...all the time, you see them all the time, you interact and hang out all the time (Lewerke, 2019).

Everyone on the team is close with one another, even though they all come from different backgrounds. Multiple football players referred to their team as a brotherhood or family and that the people on their team are “lifelong friends.” According to Burton (2019):

I love being with the guys and the team and I love playing [football]. It’s fun, it’s physical, you know, it’s good. But really, the best aspect of it is the relationships I made through football. I really, really enjoy my teammates and being around the guys and being a part of something that’s greater than myself.

Because everyone on the team has a common goal of succeeding it is easier to become more intimate with each other. According to Burton (2019), when you have the same goal as everyone else on your team, your work towards that goal is like you’re striving for the person next to you too, which builds a deeper relationship between the players.

There are 120 players on the MSU football team and “when it’s all said and done and the season is about to start, you know every single person’s name,” (Fisk, 2019). One of the best parts about playing football is the camaraderie. The players achieve an intimate bond with each other that is hard to reach in everyday life for a relationship between men (Baringer, 2019).

Because the team is constantly hanging out with each other, they are aware of what each other is going through, so it is easier to connect with them than other male friends that live a completely different life (Allen, 2019).

The Father Figure

If a football team is a brotherhood, then that makes the coaches the fathers that guide their team to success. The players obey the coaches' demands in hopes of making them proud, much like a son hopes to make his father proud as he achieves goals throughout his lifetime. Much like fathers, coaches are constantly giving their players advice about both football and life in general. These coaches are mentors who are always available for the athletes to talk to if needed. According to Burton (2019):

Coach [Dantonio] is always talking about being a light to others...A lot of the lessons he tells us he always tries to translate it to outside of football. So say if we're in a practice, he'll be like, "okay we're [going to] sudden change. Assess, adjust, attack through," and then he'll be like, "that's just not in football, that's in your life. You know, because something is going to go wrong and you're [going to] have to adjust to it and figure out the solution to it."

Dantonio gives his players advice that can be applied to both football and everyday life. He even has a list of team rules that include do your best, take the high road, respect women, etc. (Baringer, 2019).

The coaches really care for the well-being of their players. According to Allen (2019), if one of the players goes down, the coaches are there for them. If they end up having to get surgery, the coaches will be waiting in their hotel room to make sure everything is okay and to make sure their parents are traveling safely into town. Even if the coaches do get a little intense during practices, they are always trying to do what is best for their players, as a father would do for his son (O'Connor, 2019).

All seven of the football players agree that they have a good relationship with their coaches. Four of them referred to their coaches as their mentors who are always there if you need help or advice. The players also said their coaches have the best intentions, try to shape you into a good person by teaching you things outside of football, and want you to succeed.

Physical Intimacy

Physical intimacy is another strong component of football, and it is very normal when it happens on the field. Some of the positive physical intimate behaviors I observed on the field includes slapping each other's bottoms, patting each other on the back, hugging, and jumping in the air and embracing. All of these physical intimacies are positive reinforcement touches. A smack on the bottom means "hey good job," while jumping in the air and hugging after a touchdown is "a feeling of celebration" (Baringer, 2019). This type of touching can get the players hyped up and they tend to have "a lot of adrenaline going [be]cause something good happened" (O'Connor, 2019). When these moments happen the players feel a sense of intimacy, which results in embracing each other physically.

While the positive reinforcement touching happens in response to a good play, there is also negative violent touching exhibited on the football field. This includes grabbing, tackling, or hitting. This type of behavior can be seen when opposing teams are fighting for the football. When this type of physical contact happens, it can result in anger (O'Connor, 2019). Even when the MSU team is practicing against each other, they know they have to get negatively physical with each other. With the turn of the switch, the team prepares to be aggressive toward each other so they can prepare for the real game.

Violence is so heavily embedded into football that it is viewed as natural. “That’s how the game is. It’s a violent game, so you have to strike. You have to hit people...It’s just natural” (Burton, 2019). According to Baringer (2019), the violent grabbing just represents wanting the win more than the other person.

All seven of the football players agree that the physical contact in the game does not make them uncomfortable. All of this behavior that is completely normal on the football field would be strange if it was displayed off the field. For example, Fisk (2019) explains that if he were to tap his roommate on the butt at home, “it would be a little weirder,” than doing it to one of his teammates. Playing football allows for these athletes to participate in physically intimate behaviors that would be strange or not as accepted if displayed in everyday life.

Injury

Out of the seven football players I interviewed, four have been injured while playing a game. Three of the four said that their teammates, coaches, and the general public were sympathetic and supportive of their injury, and one said he did not notice any different treatment. According to O’Connor (2019):

All my teammates and my coaches were super supportive [during my injury], and it kind of sucked because I felt isolated, obviously, because I wasn’t participating...But I still tried to help out and the coaches took notice of that, and they did let me know that they saw that, so it was kind of nice that I got the appreciation for that. But yeah it was definitely a little weird not being able to do what all my friends are doing.

Even though the extreme violence makes it difficult to avoid an injury, athletes are still devastated when they are faced with one. And even though the coaches must continue to focus

on the game with the athletes who are able, they still check in on those players who were injured to make sure they were doing well (Allen, 2019).

Masculinity

The most common answer when asked what being a man meant to the football players was making their family feel safe. Three out of the seven football players answered this way. Whether they meant their future family with a wife and kids or the family they grew up with, providing for and protecting their family is an important part of being a man to these athletes. Through football, players are able to learn how to work hard so they can become a leader, which is a huge factor of manhood. Both O'Connor (2019) and Burton (2019) believe that a man should put other people before themselves, "because if you're able bodied and able to help out other people then you should..." (O'Connor, 2019). O'Connor (2019) even believes that showing emotions is important to being a man, which goes against many male gender roles:

... Being a man is being able to show your emotions, because I feel like a lot of times men are kind of assumed to not show a lot of emotion or affection or anything like that. But I think that if you're really a man you wouldn't care about that and you wouldn't be scared to show your emotions, which I try to do a lot because that's something I believe in.

Baringer (2019) also pointed out that being a man isn't always being "big, buff, and strong," but instead someone who is considerate and listens to those around him. "Being a man is being whoever you want to be" (Baringer, 2019).

Performance

How the players perform is one of the most important aspects of football. Winning isn't always everything, but it does affect the players' mood, the coaches' mood, and how they are treated by fans. Lewerke (2019) noticed a difference in treatment based on how well he performed during football seasons:

I had a good season two years ago. I had a bad season last year. So I can definitely see how a person is treated differently depending on how they play. I've seen guys that have been a non-star I guess, and then kind of risen up the next year. And they get treated completely differently the year that they play well—obviously in a better way.

Fisk (2019) says it only takes one person to point out that you aren't playing well to “get in your own head” and overthink your performance during a game. He even becomes more confident when people notice he played a good game as well (Fisk, 2019). Not playing well not only affects how fans view you, but it also affects your mood in everyday life (Lewerke, 2019). Some may even feel antisocial after a bad game, and this can last for a few days (O'Connor, 2019).

PHOTOGRAPH ANALYSIS

Out of the 4,453 images I created during two seasons of football games at Spartan Stadium I chose 54 photographs that show two or more players clearly demonstrating at least one of the four behaviors I have witnessed countless times on the field.

Regarding RQ2, the four behaviors that dominated the photographs based on my experience and analysis include intimate contact (IC), violent touching (VT), positive reinforcement (PR), and positive embracing (PE). Reasons photographs I created are not included in the final set for this analysis are as follows: cannot clearly see at least one of the four

behaviors because there is too much going on in the photograph, contains motion blur, the photograph is out of focus, only clearly shows one player, or shows multiple players that are not touching. All 54 of the photos demonstrates touching between at least two players, and I found that intimate contact is seen the most out of the four behaviors.

Intimate contact includes one or more of the following behaviors: (1) touching of intimate areas such as the groin, buttocks, or hips, (2) faces being less than arm's length away from each other while facing one another, or (3) two or more players laying on top of each other. Out of the 54 photographs, 49 include intimate contact.

Violent touching includes one or more of the following behaviors: (1) contact that could lead to injury such as tackling, grabbing, or shoving or (2) displays the pain principle of one or more players playing through their pain. This can be seen in 23 of the photographs.

Positive reinforcement shows touching that includes, but is not limited to, pats on the back, slaps on the buttocks, grabbing of the shoulders or arms, etc. These touches can be used as nonverbal communication to tell another player "good job." There are four photographs that display positive reinforcement.

Positive embracing includes behavior that is similar to positive reinforcement but more exuberant such as hugging or jumping in the air and touching. This can be seen in ten out of the 54 photographs.

Below are all 54 photographs with their corresponding labels to the behavior they are demonstrating. To view an online version of this photograph analysis please visit:

<http://bit.ly/2zCceHt>.



Figure 1: IC, PE



Figure 2: IC



Figure 3: IC, VT



Figure 4: IC



Figure 5: IC, PE



Figure 6: PE



Figure 7: IC



Figure 8: IC



Figure 9: IC



Figure 10: VT



Figure 11: IC, VT



Figure 12: IC



Figure 13: IC, VT



Figure 14: IC



Figure 15: IC, PE



Figure 16: IC, VT



Figure 17: IC, PE



Figure 18: IC, PE



Figure 19: IC, PE



Figure 20: IC, PR



Figure 21: IC, VT



Figure 22: IC



Figure 23: IC, VT



Figure 24: IC, VT



Figure 25: VT



Figure 26: IC, PE



Figure 27: IC



Figure 28: IC, VT



Figure 29: IC



Figure 30: IC



Figure 31: IC, VT



Figure 32: IC, VT



Figure 33: IC, VT



Figure 34: IC, VT



Figure 35: IC, VT



Figure 36: VT



Figure 37: IC



Figure 38: IC



Figure 39: IC



Figure 40: IC



Figure 41: IC, VT



Figure 42: IC



Figure 43: IC



Figure 44: IC, VT



Figure 45: IC, PR



Figure 46: IC, PE



Figure 47: IC, PE



Figure 48: IC, VT



Figure 49: IC, VT



Figure 50: IC, VT



Figure 51: IC, VT



Figure 52: IC, VT



Figure 53: IC, PR



Figure 54: IC, PR

Below I discuss the four different categories of behavior and how they affect intimacy and masculinity in football. While photographing the MSU football games, my goal was to capture the intimate behaviors I wanted to explore in my research. All of the behaviors I photographed were observed over and over again on the football field. The purpose of this visual ethnography is to support the research I have conducted thus far.

Intimate Contact (IC)

The 49 photos that exhibit intimate contact are labeled with “IC.” Intimate contact is seen in 91% of the photos I am analyzing, which means it is the most common behavior that I witnessed on the field. Intimate contact includes, but is not limited to, the following behaviors: (1) touching of intimate areas such as the groin, buttocks, or hips, (2) facing each other less than an arms-length away, and (3) laying on top of each other. These are the three categories that make up the intimate contact behavior. All of these images show behavior that was seen over and over again on the field, which results in it being the most popular category out of the four.

Most of the photos that exhibit the first behavior of intimate contact show one or more players touching another player in an intimate area while trying to retrieve the ball. This can be seen in photographs 4, 13, 27, 29, 30, 35, 50, and 51.

Photographs that show the second behavior display players embracing or players fighting. When the players are hugging it is a positive intimate contact, which can strengthen their emotional bond. This can be seen in photographs 1, 5, 15, 18, 19, 20, 26, 46, and 53. When the players are fighting arms-length away from each other this results in a negative intimate contact. Although the players are becoming physically intimate with each other, this type of contact is not creating a positive intimate bond between the two players. This behavior can be seen in photographs 2, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 21, 31, 34, 37, and 42.

The photographs that display the third behavior most likely show a tackle or players falling on top of each other. This is a type of violent intimate contact that players use in hope of stopping the player with the ball from moving any further towards the goal. This type of behavior is not forming any sort of positive intimate connection between the players, but instead

is used to retrieve the ball and potentially bring pain or injury to the person who has the ball. This can be seen in photographs 3, 16, 22, 24, and 41.

The three-point stance is an example of contact that is extremely intimate. This can be seen in photograph 4. The three-point stance is used at the beginning of every play. The center squats in the stance where one hand is on the ground and the other is holding the ball to pass through his legs to the quarterback, who slides his hand right beneath the center's bottom. This is an extremely intimate touch that the quarterback does to the center repeatedly during a game while waiting for the center to snap the ball to him.

According to Dundes (1978), this position is very similar to the position primates take when they want to mate with each other:

The so-called three-point stance involves bending over in a distinct stooped position with one's rear end exposed. It is an unusual position (in terms of normal life activities) and it does make one especially vulnerable to attack from behind, that is, vulnerable to a homosexual attack. In some ways, the posture might be likened to what is termed "presenting" among nonhuman primates. Presenting refers to a subordinate animal's turning its rump towards a higher ranking or dominant one. The center thus presents to the quarterback—just as linemen do to the backs in general. [Sports Journalist] George Plimpton has described how the quarterback's "hand, the top of it, rests up against the center's backside as he bends over the ball—medically, against the perineum the pelvic floor." We know that some dominant nonhuman primates will sometimes reach out to touch a presenting subordinate in similar fashion (p. 81).

It is interesting that primates, the order human beings evolved from, use the same stance when hoping to engage in sex as football players use to start a play.

Many of the photographs above show intimate grabs, including 11, 13, 32, 33, 44, 48, 49, and 50. These types of grabs in the groin or buttocks area may be viewed as homosexual if exhibited in everyday life, but in this context, it is seen as manly because the player that is doing the grabbing is most likely going through pain to retrieve the ball in hopes of winning. According to Lewerke (2019) he has never been “creeped out” by any type of the physical contact that happens while on the field.

[The physical contact] is part of the game. That’s just something you kind of learn when you play football, you know. I’ll smack a guy on the butt, and it doesn’t mean anything weird. It’s just how the game works (Lewerke, 2019).

To be a football player, one must understand that this type of grabbing, that would be inappropriate in everyday life, is something that is very common on the field.

Violent Touching (VT)

There are the 23 photos that display violent touching, making up 43% of the sample, which makes it the second most popular category. The photos in this set heavily overlap the photos in the intimate contact category, but unlike intimate contact, the photographs that display violent touching only show negative intimate contact instead of both positive and negative.

Violent touching includes one or more of the following behaviors: (1) contact that could lead to injury such as tackling, grabbing, or shoving or (2) displays the pain principle of one or more players playing through their pain.

Behavior one demonstrates the violent plays that are used in football often, such as tackling. Tackling is used when hoping to bring a player with the ball to the ground by grabbing him, pulling him down, and putting one’s body on top of the player. The tackle represents a

behavior that is both intimate and violent, and can be seen in photographs 3, 11, 13, 16, 23, 24, 25, 31, 32, 33, 35, 41, 48, and 52. This violent action is very intimate because the players are right on top of each other and their faces are close enough where they could kiss each other. The tackle is a form of hyper-masculinity because players are expected to tackle each other as hard as they can. According to Kopay (1977), if you don't tackle hard enough you were insulted by terms that degrade females. "During football games, masculinity is defined, in part, by how hard one player can hit and tackle another. As part of the game, football players take physical risks that are potentially life-threatening," (Kimmel, 2004, p. 310). All of these men are piling on top of each other to prove their masculinity.

The second behavior, which shows the pain principle, can be seen in photographs 10, 13, 32, 33, and 44. Photograph 44 displays Ohio State University (OSU) linebacker Pete Werner grabbing Lewerke in the groin in hopes of retrieving the ball. Even though it is obvious that the Werner is in pain by the expression on his face, he is still fighting through the pain in hopes of grabbing the ball. This is a visual example of the pain principle, where feeling pain instead of submitting to it is a part of one's development as a man.

Positive Reinforcement (PR)

Four out of the 54 photographs display positive reinforcement. These photographs make up 7% of the sample making it the least popular out of the four categories. Positive reinforcement is touching that includes but is not limited to pats on the backs, slaps on the buttocks, grabbing of the shoulders or arms, etc. All of these positive reinforcement touches are nonverbal communication to tell another player "good job."

In photograph 54 there is a pat on the back exchanged between two MSU tight end Chase Gianacakos and defensive tackle Gerald Owens after their win against Rutgers on November 24, 2018. The game was a close one with a final score of 14-10, and this behavior happened during the postgame. When the MSU football team wins a game at Spartan Stadium, they all get down on their knees in a circle before racing over to the student section to sing the fight song. This photo was taken after all of that commotion while the players were heading off the field and into the locker room.

Although in this context, the pat on the back is a positive reinforcement touch, I also witnessed pats similar to this one when a team lost or there was a bad play. A pat on the back can be either a positive reinforcement tap or a comforting tap when a player messed up. No matter the context, this type of touch is meant to communicate the intimate connection teammates have with one another and tells the player, “I’m here for you.”

Photograph 45 shows a pat on the back between opposing players during the MSU vs. OSU game. OSU tight end Luke Farrell is giving the MSU defensive lineman Drew Beesley a pat on the back, which could be telling him that he did a good job, or it could be a form of nonverbal communication that the Farrell is using to show his superiority to the Beesley, much like when an elder puts a hand on a younger person’s back when talking to them.

Positive Embracing (PE)

Ten photographs show positive embracing, which makes up 19% of the sample. The photographs show behavior that is similar to positive reinforcement but more exuberant such as hugging or jumping in the air and touching.

Photograph one shows a hugging embrace between players after a touchdown was scored. Because the players' adrenaline was pumping after the play, they met in the air right after the touchdown was scored. This photo was taken on Sept. 2, 2017 during the MSU vs. Bowling Green game, which was the first game of the season. It was taken after the first touchdown scored by MSU running back Madre London. According to Baringer (2019), touchdowns are a big deal, which is why many of the players meet in a hug to celebrate this play. Because this was the first touchdown of the season, the players were probably more excited than usual about this victory. All three of these players met in the air while clutching on to each other in celebration of their first touchdown of the season. "When celebrating a touchdown, it's more like you're just having fun with friends. It's just a lot more relaxed and you're happy that you accomplished your goal" (Allen, 2019).

This embrace is an example of a positive reinforcement touch. All the players are ecstatic that a touchdown was scored, so they all meet to touch each other in a friendly way. "As a symbol of just how much sexuality has been subordinated to the demands of the production ethic, the only time one player is allowed to touch another in a friendly way is when he has just scored a touchdown" (Sabo, 15). This embrace is one of the few examples in football that is extremely friendly where a lot of the other touching is violent.

All of the other photographs in this category show hugging or embracing that is similar to the hug in photograph one. All of these photographs were created after a good play such as a touchdown except for photograph 46, which shows MSU linebacker Antjuan Simmons hugging OSU safety Brendon White during the postgame. Even though these two players are on opposing teams, they are most likely friends that came together in a hug to celebrate reuniting while competing against each other during a football game.

DISCUSSION

For two years I spent time in the field, created photographs, and read books and articles covering topics such as intimacy, masculinity, sexuality, and sports. Because I am a female I will never be able to fully understand the need to be masculine to fit into America's societal norms of being a male. Because I am nonathletic I have never participated in a game of football, so while I was watching the games on the sideline I wasn't so much paying attention to the plays but instead how the football players were acting around and treating each other.

Interviewing the football players allowed me to have one-on-one conversations about football, masculinity, sexuality, and other concepts I researched. Here I was able to take what I learned from other scholars and inquire if those findings were true or not. It was interesting to see the similarities and differences between what the scholars had researched versus what the football players told me. For example, the family-like intimacy between a football team that Messner (1992), Sabo & Runfola (1980), and others wrote about was very similar to what the football players described their relationship with their teammates to be.

One huge difference I found between the literature and the interviews was how the athletes were treated when they were injured. All the athletes I interviewed who had been injured before said they received nothing but support from everyone around them, while scholars like Sanderson (2016) and Sabo & Runfola (1980) made it seem like players were often pushed to play through their injuries. Because I was only able to interview four football players who had been injured, my results may not be as accurate as Sanderson (2016), who used hundreds of articles to analyze how football player's injuries were framed in the media, or Sabo & Runfola (1980) who interviewed many athletes who had been injured. These four football players could

be outliers in the topic of treatment during injury, so I hope in the future I will be able to interview more players in hope of creating a more accurate representation for this research.

One of the most interesting responses in an interview was when O'Connor (2019) said being able to express one's emotions was an important part of being a man. This pretty much goes against everything I had researched on masculinity norms, which shows how much gender norms are changing in present day. Football is a form of symbolism for how intense masculine norms are in the American society, but at the same time football allows for an intimate bond between men that can be hard to achieve in everyday life.

There have also been multiple studies that show the changing environment of homosexuality and homophobia in sport. For example, Wertheim (2005) conducted a poll about homosexuality in sports of 979 people, where 86 percent answered that they support gay male athletes. Anderson (2011) conducted interviews of 26 openly gay athletes and he found that being homosexual is much more accepted in 2011 than when Anderson did similar interviews in 2002. The results of these two studies suggest that the sports environment is becoming much more inclusive to homosexual men in America (Cashmore, 2012).

CONCLUSION

As discussed, both physical and emotional intimacies are an important aspect of football. But why are these behaviors, which are not typically viewed as masculine, allowed within the male-dominated, homophobic sports culture? According to Butler (1988):

...Gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who reproduced as reality once again. The complex components that go into an act

must be distinguished in order to understand the kind of acting in concert and acting in accord which acting one's gender invariably is (p. 526).

Butler (1988) theorizes that gender is just an act within historical context and does not really mean anything to one's own body. This means that one is able to fake their gender if they rehearse an act enough.

In the theatre, one can say, "this is just an act," and de-realize the act, make acting into something quite distinct from what is real. Because of this distinction, one can maintain one's sense of reality in the face of this temporary challenge to our existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements; the various conventions which announce that "this is only a play" allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life (Butler, 1988, p. 527).

In this context, if the football field is set as a theatre that means the acts of intimacy may be a fake rehearsal or a show put on for an audience. "This is only a play," or in sports context, "this is only a game," allows the audience to draw that line between performance and real life. Does this mean that all the hugging, patting, and other touching is just fake intimacy rehearsed for the entertainment of the audience? I do not think so. All the intimacy football players are feeling and displaying on the field is very real, but the "this is only a play" theory allows for these football players to engage in this intimacy on a stage surrounded by an audience without being criticized about their masculinity. Once the football game ends, the players will most likely return to their everyday life where they can continue to be viewed as masculine individuals without having to worry about threatening that masculinity with the intimacy that is demonstrated on the sports field.

Because the male and female genders are constantly compared to one another, it is unfair to judge men's relationships based on the intimacy that is found in women's relationships. Since the industrial revolution, love and intimacy has become "feminized," which can make it difficult for men to feel comfortable engaging in these social conceptions. According to Sociologist Scott Swain (1989), "negative views of 'male bonding' are distorted and unfair," so in our culture sports must be used as a gateway for men to bond and create these connections with each other that are not given to them in everyday life (p. 71, 86).

Regarding RQ3, intimacy between men can be viewed differently on a football field by using hegemonic and inclusive masculinity theory. Hegemonic masculinity could explain why football players feel like they are a part of a familial, patriarchal structure where the coaches act as father figures and the teammates are a brotherhood. This structure creates a hierarchy between coaches and players within a football team. Inclusive masculinity theory shows how gender norms are changing through men not being so afraid to express gender atypical behavior such as intimacy between other men on the football field. Football players are able to become both emotionally and physically intimate with each other because these behaviors are exhibited while playing a game that is embedded in hyper-masculinity.

The power paradox within American football allows for football players to engage in intimate behaviors without having to worry about damaging their masculinity. The emotional and physical intimate behaviors, which tend to be viewed as feminine qualities in everyday life, are used between football players so they can connect with each other in hopes to beat the opposing team thus rising to power.

LIMITATIONS

The first limitation to my study is my positionality as a nonathletic female. Because I do not play sports or do not have to live up to societal norms of masculinity, I will never truly understand what it is like to be a male living in the United States. I tried as best as I could to use others' research to construct the view of masculinity in the United States today and what it is like to live up to those norms.

Although I did meet my goal of interviewing a minimum of five MSU football players, I wish I were able to interview more of them. I was able to learn a lot from the seven I interviewed, so I cannot even imagine how much more I would have gained if I would have interviewed more of them. As I continue this research in the future, I hope I am able to interview more football players.

A lot of similar research done on this topic was conducted 10–30 years ago, which results in some dated data. I hope my research will be able to inspire others to look more into this topic and rethink societal norms of masculinity. There are so many more sections within this topic that I hope to cover more in depth in the future including: framing in sports media, race in football, sexual assault in sports, and money as power in sports. There's so much masculine symbolism in football that can be applied to how we live our everyday lives in the white-dominated, capitalistic United States.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

Athlete Interview Questions

By Riley James

Interview Start Time:

Interview End Time:

Name:

Contact:

Position:

Age:

Gender:

Sexual Orientation:

Ethnicity:

1. Tell me about how you first began playing football.
 - a. Where did you grow up?
 - b. Was your family involved in your football playing? How so?
2. What are your favorite aspects about playing football? Least favorite?
3. How has football shaped who you are?
4. How would you describe your relationship with your teammates?
5. Does your relationship with your teammates differ from the other male friendships you have?
How so?
6. How would you describe your relationship with your coaches?
7. Do you think you have been treated differently as a football player throughout your life? How so?

8. Have you ever been injured during a game? If so how were you treated by your coaches and teammates during this? How did the general public treat you?

9. What does it mean to be a man to you?

10. How has football affected how you view/interact with women?

11. Do you think playing football has affected your sexual orientation at all? How so?

12. How do you think the way you perform during games affects your persona on and off the field?

a. Does the way you perform affect your behavior/attitude?

b. Do you notice a change off the field with the way you interact with men?

13. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, “intimate” is defined as, “marked by a warm friendship developing through long associates” or “engaged in, involving, or marked by sex or sexual relations.” Do you view football as an intimate sport? How so?

14. Do you ever find yourself uncomfortable by the amount of physical contact that happens within the game? Why or why not?

15. How does different physical contact on the field affect you? I.e. violent grabbing vs. hugging embraces

16. Is there anything else you would like me to know that I didn’t cover?

17. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX B: Consent Form

Informed Consent for Research Interview

Title: Intimacy and Masculinity in American Football

Author: Riley James

Institution: Michigan State University

Department: College of Communication Arts and Science

Information

You are invited to participate in a thesis study about intimacy and masculinity in American football. Your participation in this interview will include being asked a series of questions about the topic. This interview session will be audio recorded to ensure I transcribe correct quotes and will happen in a one-on-one style. This interview session will not take any longer than an hour.

Purpose of Research

While photographing the MSU football games, Riley noticed how emotionally and physically intimate the players are with each other while out on the field. It seems strange that behavior such as jumping in the air and hugging, butt slapping, etc. is accepted during such a masculine sport. The purpose of this research is to understand why intimate behavior is viewed as masculine on the football field. This research intends to contribute to a better understanding of gender/gender roles, intimacy, and sports within American culture. The goal for this research is to understand and break down the stereotype that men need to be aggressive, violent, and courageous to be accepted in American society.

Potential Risks

There are extremely little, if any, psychological or social risks associated with this research study. The main risk associated with this study is discomfort. Some of the questions asked during the interview on the topics of intimacy and masculinity may be a bit personal. If any question creates discomfort, you may ask to skip the question. Your participation is requested in the interest of science and will be of educational value.

Potential Benefits

Participating in this research allows you to be a part of something that does not have a lot of previous, recent research on the topic. Your insight will be helpful for direct understanding of intimacy and masculinity in football because you are a part of the sport and its culture. Even though you may not benefit personally from being a part of this study, we hope that in the future other people might benefit from this study by gaining and understanding knowledge about the culture of gender division and sports in America.

Confidentiality

The content of this interview will be reported in my thesis research paper along with photographs I have taken during the MSU football games. I would like to include your name with your quotes that I transcribe from this interview in my paper. Before my research is published on the ProQuest website, I will share what quotes I decide to use with you to minimize risk.

Contact

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher, Riley James at 269-930-0646 or rileyjamesphoto@gmail.com.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

Participation

Your participation is voluntary, which means you can decline to answer any of the questions I ask during the interview session without penalty or consequence.

Consent

I have read this information. I am 18 years of age or older. By signing below I have indicated my consent and voluntary agreement to participate in this interview.

Documentation of Informed Consent

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in the research of this study.

Print

Date

Signature

Date

- If subjects will be identified, specific permission for identification must be obtained.
 - I agree to allow my identity to be disclosed in reports and presentations.
☐ Yes ☐ No Initials _____
- Inform subjects if they are being audiotaped or videotaped – indicate if this is required to be in the project, if not required, a separate check box with signature or initials is appropriate.
 - I agree to allow audiotaping/videotaping of the interview.
☐ Yes ☐ No Initials _____

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

APPENDIX C: IRB Exempt Letter

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

EXEMPT DETERMINATION Revised Common Rule

March 29, 2019

To: Geraldine Marie Zeldes

Re: **MSU Study ID:** STUDY00002208
Principal Investigator: Geraldine Marie Zeldes
Category: Exempt 2ii
Exempt Determination Date: 3/29/2019
Limited IRB Review: Not Required.

Title: Intimacy and Masculinity in American Football

This study has been determined to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d) 2ii.

Principal Investigator (PI) Responsibilities: The PI assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects in this study as outlined in Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) Manual Section 8-1, Exemptions.



**Office of
Regulatory
Affairs
Human Research
Protection Program**

4000 Collins Road
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Lansing, MI 48910

517-355-2180
Fax: 517-432-4503
Email: irb@msu.edu
www.hrpp.msu.edu

Continuing Review: Exempt studies do not need to be renewed.

Modifications: In general, investigators are not required to submit changes to the Michigan State University (MSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) once a research study is designated as exempt as long as those changes do not affect the exempt category or criteria for exempt determination (changing from exempt status to expedited or full review, changing exempt category) or that may substantially change the focus of the research study such as a change in hypothesis or study design. See HRPP Manual Section 8-1, Exemptions, for examples. If the study is modified to add additional sites for the research, please note that you may not begin the research at those sites until you receive the appropriate approvals/permissions from the sites.

Please contact the HRPP office if you have any questions about whether a change must be submitted for IRB review and approval.

New Funding: If new external funding is obtained for an active study that had been determined exempt, a new initial IRB submission will be required, with limited exceptions. If you are unsure if a new initial IRB submission is required, contact the HRPP office. IRB review of the new submission must be completed before new funds can be spent on human research activities, as the new funding source may have additional or different requirements.

Reportable Events: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems that may involve risks to subjects or others, or any

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