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Get in the Box: The Impact of Male Socialization and its Relation to Conformity Among College Football Players

Vet A. Smelko

University of Dayton, stander@udayton.edu

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Abstract
Masculinity is a social construct that allows men to use their manliness as status symbol. Often times, men who have a narrow definition of masculinity will see it as a competition where they must conform to societal norms of traditional manliness in order to prove their worth among their peers, teammates, or other men in general. In turn, this does not allow many men to develop a genuine and authentic sense of self. The level of conformity is based upon a player’s prior socialization experiences, athletic identity, and their ability to make meaning within a college environment. The data represented shows that as a whole, college football players at the division one non-scholarship level have a high rate of conformity in regards to traditional forms of masculinity. Specifically the data shows the highest ratings of conformity among college football players who have a defensive position, and are first or second year student-athletes.

Research Questions
1.) How do college football players at non-scholarship, religiously affiliated institutions define masculinity?
2.) Are underclassmen (Freshman and Sophomore’s) more susceptible to conforming to traditional forms of masculinity?
3.) Are those who play the defensive position more prone to conforming to the masculine norms of violence and power over women?

Methods
This research was compiled quantitatively by using an abbreviated version of the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (Parent & Moradi, 2009). The was a 33-question survey distributed electronically via email to the entire University of Dayton Varsity Football Team which consisted of 96 men ranging from 19-22 years of age. The survey used Likert-style questions to measure an individuals conformity to the traditional masculine norms of Winning, Playboy, Self Reliance, Violence, Heterosexual Self Presentation, Risk Taking, Primacy of Work, Power Over Women, and Emotional Control. Using an independent sample T-Test I measured the players year of graduation and position and was able to calculate and compare the differences in conformity.

Conclusion
College football creates an environment that not only accepts traditional forms of masculinity but also expects them. Those who chose not to identify with these specific traits are often ostracized and looked down upon socially within the context of their peers and organizations. Research shows that there is a correlation between college men who conform to traditional forms of masculinity and lower academic performances as well as a higher chance of participating in high-risk behaviors (Steinfeldt et al., 2011b). The research showed that the rate of conformity was most often based upon ones grade level rather than the position they played in regards to offense of defense. Once a player gets older there is a greater chance that they will not feel the need to conform to traditional standards of masculinity.

Implications
The research identified how a college football players age and position can have a positive or negative influence on their personal development of healthy masculine behaviors. “Men’s peer groups attempt to mirror society’s expectations of manhood and ostracize those who do not act and behave within the socially constructed hegemony” (Shepard, 2015, p. 103). Learning about the various ways that college football players have been socialized in various environments will allow readers to understand that the conformity to masculine norms is vast, complex and often times seen as an obligation.

Selected references

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The “man box” is a rigid set of expectations that men are expected to conform to

Act like a “Man”...

Breaking Rules, Being Disruptive, Drinking to Excess, Party ing Get Turnt: Life of the Party, Easy, Being “Tough”, Stoic, Abuser Confident, Dominant, supreme, Manwhore, Competitive, Heterosexual, Hooking up, drugs, Fighting, Getting Girls/Sex, NO HOMO, whiskey bent hell bound Play Sports, Athletic, Winning is Everything, Unemotional, F.B.G.M.

Because if you don’t...

False sense of identity, Loss of friends Self doubt, Self harm Retaliation, drug abuse, Alcoholism, suicide, poor grades, loss of interest, criminal convictions, verbal altercations, vandalism, dropping out, mental health issues, depression, anxiety, sickness, hatred, school shootings, prejudice, sexual conquest, enhanced, loss of faith

Or they will treat you like this.

Don’t be a Bi*tch Pu*ssy, F*ck, queer, Girl, vagina, homa, douche, dick, retard, sissy, pansey, gay

Winning

• As a whole, upper classman had a stronger ranking of conformity to this subscale of masculinity than underclassman
• In regards to a players position, both offensive and defensive players had a high rate of conformity to this subscale

Playboy

• Underclassman were more likely to confirm to this subscale
• Defensive players had a higher ranking of conforming to this particular subscale

Violence

• Underclassman were more susceptible to acts of violence than those older than them
• Those who played an offensive position had a greater rate of conformity than those who play defense

Risk Taking

• Both under and upper classman had high rates of conformity to this traditional form of masculinity.
• Defensive players scored a higher ranking of conformity than those who played an offensive position

Power Over Women

• Both upper and underclassman had a low rates of conformity to this standard
• As a whole, both offensive and defensive players had low ratings of this subscale but defensive players did rate higher.

Emotional Control

• Both upper and lower classman did not enjoy seeking help for problems
• Offensive players were more likely to talk openly about their feelings