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# **Gender Formation in Childhood and Masculinities at Dickinson College**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Honors Requirements  
for the Anthropology Department  
Dickinson College

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Carlisle, Pennsylvania  
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## **Abstract**

Gendered performances of self at Dickinson College construct masculinity hierarchies within and among social groups. Masculinity hierarchies are perpetuated by perceived expectations set by those in fraternities, as well as men on the football and lacrosse teams. Men constantly question their belonging on campus and within their social group. This is due to male-on-male competition that undermines individuality, especially for men in the minority population based on political affiliation, religion, or race. Engagement and comfortability in the masculinity hierarchy is closely tied to childhood experiences with masculinity expectations set by parents, siblings, and peers which either encouraged or limited hyper-masculine or stereotypical masculine performances.

## **Introduction**

The field of anthropology has contributed greatly to scholars' knowledge about gender, gender roles, sexuality, and gender performance cross-culturally. However, in the majority of the scholarship, masculinity is defined and observed in relation to femininity, creating a binary for gender performance that does not accurately describe various gender identities and performances present in our world today. As Berry et al. suggest, this is due to the lack of positionality awareness of the researcher to situate themselves, their biases, and their findings in relation to their own identities (Berry et al 2017). Specifically, in studies of masculinity, researchers have failed to study "men as men," and rather position men as un-gendered subjects (Gutmann 1997). Masculinity must be examined as its own system to understand how it operates as a male-centric social construction and hierarchy.

My senior thesis "Gender Formation in Childhood and Masculinities at Dickinson" expands existing scholarship on masculinity and highlights male-on-male social and symbolic violence operating on the Dickinson College campus that works to maintain a masculinity hierarchy. Formations of masculinity and gender construction in childhood shape thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and actions throughout the lifetime. My research methodology is influenced by my background in Sexuality Studies. I use feminist ethical research theory to create my questions and to analyze participant responses. Questions focus on pivotal childhood experiences with gender and sexuality, attitudes about personal performance of masculinity on campus, how this compares to other men's performances, and how performance changes in different spaces on campus.

To make this argument clear, I discuss the leading scholarship of the twentieth century, which reinforced women as the gendered subject, thereby overlooking men's

experiences with gender and sexuality. This is partly due to histories of colonialism and lack of positionality among researchers that ignores power dynamics in research practices. Using this scholarship, I discuss and analyze the experiences shared with me by 13 self-identifying heterosexual men of the senior class of 2019 at Dickinson College. The participant's responses reveal intricate systems operating on campus including competitive relationships with male friends, beliefs about who creates masculine expectations, and their engagement with the masculinity hierarchy dependent on other identities and main social groups. I argue that social group stratification, as well as reluctant acceptance of a masculinity hierarchy works to reproduce harmful hyper-masculine behavior within and among social groups on campus.

### **The Female Subject as the Site for Disrupting Biological Determinism of Gender**

To situate my research, I must present an understanding on the existing well-known anthropological literature about gender performance. While their individual research spans a century, the names Malinowski, Mead, Kaberry, and Brettell are notable in the field of cultural anthropology. Their famous research on people and cultures around the world have influenced the discipline and contributed to new understandings in cultural anthropology. While progressive in some respects of their research, the study of gender, and of masculine and feminine experiences, was continually studied in comparison to western constructions of gender. Mead, Malinowski, Kaberry, and Brettell interrogate the idea of biological determinism of gender, and attempt to study the lived experiences of men and women in non-western contexts, and analyze the ways in which the field of anthropology is working to highlight a diversity of experiences. In terms of gender, the authors I put into conversation agree that performances of gender are not biologically determined, but shaped by socio-

cultural factors due the fact that gender performance varies across the world. Biological determinism is the idea that all human traits are innate and related to genetics rather than influenced by cultural factors. I argue that we can analyze how 21st century anthropological research could expand upon the literature to more accurately discuss the lived experiences of people around the world by studying people for themselves, rather than in comparison to others.

During the 20th century, anthropologists were beginning to study and understand gender outside of biological sex, and analyze the ways in which culture and socialization influenced gender performance in particular societies. Margaret Mead (1935), in her piece “Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies” discusses the gender dynamics, temperaments, and divisions of labor in the Arapesh, Mundugumor, and Tchambuli societies. Through her research, Mead saw contrasting gender performances between cultures. For example, in the Arapesh, men and women both present maternal feminine qualities, and are unaggressive and cooperative, while the Tchambuli people perform a reversal of western gender norms. Tchambuli women are dominant, impersonal, and are described as the managing partner, while men are emotional and less responsible (Mead 1935, 34). Mead concludes that if temperamental attitudes about what is traditionally feminine or masculine can be reversed in societies, then there is no basis for regarding gender performance as sex-linked (Mead 1935, 34).

Malinowski (1941) makes similar claims in his piece “Man’s Culture and Man’s Behavior,” stating that human behavior can often be removed from biological factors (Malinowski 1941, 184). In this piece Malinowski discusses research methods in anthropology that value understanding communities in the wider context of the world’s

societies. Additionally, Malinowski discusses the role and power of the researcher during a study, a concept I also grapple with during my research process. In anthropological research, understanding the culture and the factors that influence it is critical to understanding cultural phenomena such as gender roles and sexual relationships. Brettell (1993) conveys similar views as Mead and Malinowski in her own work “Equality and Inequality: The Sexual Division of Labor and Gender Stratification” that gender stratification is not natural to a society but constructed based on the political economy and social bonds of a community. Brettell argues that as women began to enter the labor force, the “naturalness” of the division of labor and women as dependent beings was challenged (Brettell 1993, 137). This is because exclusion from the labor force has historically been a tool of patriarchal societies to deem women as less powerful compared to men. Power and respect in a society is almost always linked to a person’s relationship to the political economy. Brettell suggests that the most egalitarian societies subsist on hunting and gathering, in which women’s participation is critical to survival (Brettell 1993, 138). I chose the articles by Malinowski and Brettell to demonstrate that throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropology, scholars have continuously questioned the construction of gender cross-culturally.

Political economy refers to how production and trade in a particular society influences subsistence strategies, power dynamics, and distribution of wealth. Brettell (1993) uses political economy as a specific site to interrogate gender stratification and power in societies around the world. Plainly, the more involved women are in production, the more status and power they will have in the community. Traditionally in the western world, the reproductive bodies and lives of women are often the reason provided for gender stratification and the exclusion of women from the labor force and political economy.

However, cross-culturally we do not see reproduction universally as an impediment to women's involvement in the political economy. Brettell argues that there is a diversity of gender stratification and women's roles are not a unitary experience (Brettell 1993, 142). Research focusing on the roles of women cross culturally illuminates how gender is not biologically determined, but rather is a performance constructed by women's separation from the political economy and the reproduction of norms and stereotypes which work to maintain the low status of women.

Another connection between the scholars Mead, Malinowski, Brettell, and Kaberry are the author's understandings of the benefits and limits of positioning women as the primary subject in anthropological studies on gender. Each well-known anthropologist with whom I am engaging focused on studying women to debunk theories of gendered biological determinism. This is a notable way to provide a feminist and interdisciplinary approach to research. However it is also important to study the multitude of individuals in the community to understand how gender roles and performances are socialized. As I discussed earlier, Margaret Mead looks at motherhood to understand personality traits we consider masculine and feminine including clothing, manners, and forms of head dress (Mead 1935, 34). Similarly, Brettell focuses on reproduction and kinship between women to understand the political economy and their full participation equal to men in society (Brettell 1993, 138). And, Kaberry's methods of research aim to approach the "problem of the position of women" from a positive point of view (Kaberry 1939, 210). I use these sources and their methodologies to situate my research and argue that the field of anthropology has been heavily focusing on the roles, performance, and power (or lack thereof) of women without

understanding the roles of men in the same societies and how power dynamics influence these relationships.

Because anthropologists have studied gender by engaging mainly with women as the gendered subject in communities of interest, the knowledge produced about men cross-culturally assumes they are the norm, or non-gendered subject. Margaret Mead (1935) exemplifies this limitation as she specifically studied women to understand gender stratification in the Arapesh, Mundugumor, and Tchambuli societies. Brettell (1993) uses this ideology as well when discussing women's equality to men in hunter/gatherer societies. When discussing aboriginal Australian societies, Kaberry (1939) argues that we must see women as a whole- her actions, her connections, her roles, and her impact in the community- to understand women's significance in society. I question how much we can know about women's roles in a society without studying men's roles and power simultaneously.

While I believe studying women and their roles in society using a non-western or decolonized lens is critical to the field of anthropology, making assumptions about men's roles and performance does not provide the most accurate view of gender performances. Malinowski's article "Man's Culture and Man's Behavior" initially piqued my interest in regards to my research because I assumed this piece would be a study of "men as men." However, I quickly realized that his article has no in-depth discussion of gender or sex. Rather, here Malinowski is using the term "man" as a synonym for "people." I challenge that this use of "man" referring to all people in a society cannot work to accurately understand a community because of individual lived experiences of people due to differences in gender, age, ability, race, religion, ethnicity, and sexuality, among others. We cannot make assumptions about a whole society by simply understanding them as "man," as we know

power structures and hierarchies rooted in difference make this label that is supposed to fit all people impossible.

Thus, my research aims to study “men as men” just as Kaberry, Mead, and Brettell study “women as women.” The researcher’s lens shapes and impacts the research at every step. Malinowski specifically discusses the role of the researcher in anthropology when he states that we can’t understand a community or culture in a vacuum. Instead, we must take our own biases, cultures, and positionalities into account when conducting research.

Malinowski argues that each researcher has motivations for engaging with a particular community, whatever that may be (Malinowski 1941, 184). Kaberry, for example, was motivated to study aboriginal women because most of the research on this community had been conducted by male researchers. She wanted to provide a different lens to studying this community and understand the experiences of women in their cultural context (Kaberry 1939, 25).

I agree with Malinowski that each researcher has a motivation for their study. My motivations in studying the senior men of Dickinson College are two-fold. First, I want to build off of my previous research at Dickinson in which I studied the connections between childhood sex education from school, peers, and parents with college women’s attitudes about their intimate and sexual relationships. During this research, I believe I studied the women of Dickinson *as women*, and worked to understand their lived experiences in a culturally informed way. Now, to build upon the research on college women and get a better look into the power dynamics at play, I intend to study the men of Dickinson *as men*, rather than make assumptions about their lived experiences through the stories and interviews with women I have previously conducted.

Qualitative research methods are incredibly useful in understanding the lived experience of individuals. The researcher engages with the participant in what is hopefully a safe setting, allowing the participant to share, express attitudes and emotions, and perform behavior. Furthermore, once the researcher has learned about the individual's experience, they can trace patterns between participants to unveil systems, norms, and stereotypes operating in the space under examination. The works by Malinowski, Kaberry, Brettell, and Mead provide excellent examples of cross-cultural research. I will build upon this background of gender specific anthropological research with a decolonized lens and attention to power dynamics, with the aim to study men in an individualistic way, while rejecting theories of biological determinism of gender.

### **The Impact of Colonization on the Study of “Men as Men”**

The field of anthropology aims to study the lives, cultures, and experiences of people and communities around the world. Anthropological studies are made more complex, however, by the active role of the researcher, who is inherently involved in choosing the topic of interest, framing the methods, discussing the results, and the implications of the research. The researcher is as much a part of the study as the subjects or topics of interest. Due to having control of the study, combined with the researchers' personal identities- such as academic credentials, gender, nationality, and socio-economic status- the relationships between participant and researcher can be rooted in power and hierarchy. These social hierarchies are influenced by colonization and impact the study of male subjects in 20th and 21st century anthropological research. It is with this historical and cultural context within the field of anthropology that I intend to study the fourth year college men of Dickinson College

“as men.” During interviews, participants and I grapple with what it means to be a man on this campus, who dictates the in-group and “the other,” and how performance of masculinity can shift depending on particular social and academic spaces.

Knowledge production, or the creation of new information, as a result of anthropological research has been shaped by histories of European and American colonialism and imperialism, as racialized and gendered hierarchies can never be removed from fieldwork (Berry et al. 2017, 537). Additionally, many well-known early 20th century anthropological research focused on societies deemed “primitive” compared to western culture which further problematized this relationship. To fight against hierarchies in anthropological research, the authors Berry et al. (2017) in “Toward a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field” question dominant logics in their research practice to understand “...how racialized-sexualized-gendered violence is encountered, reproduced, and analyzed by women researchers” (Berry et al. 2017, 538). Through their own experiences studying women and ethical research practices in El Salvador, Cuba, Palestine, Mexico, and Guyana, Berry et al. aim to decolonize the practice of fieldwork and the field of anthropology by interrogating their own biases and positionality as the researchers. This literature is critical to constructing best research practices in anthropology to disrupt hierarchies between researcher and participant and gather more accurate knowledge about the individual or community of interest.

Decolonizing anthropology on an individual and discipline wide basis is critical to conducting ethical research. However, while a researcher can practice decolonization in their work, I argue that objectivity in research cannot functionally exist. Linda Bell (2014), in “Ethics and Feminist Research,” argues that ideologies of power will always exist between

researcher and participant which influences one's approach to and perceptions of their research (Bell 2014, 73-74). Though systems are in place to protect human subjects and maintain ethical standards such as the Institutional Review Board, Bell suggest that intrinsic ethical research is "...rooted in genuine and legitimate concern with issues of power" (Bell 2014, 77). Simply describing the potential risks by participating in research does not actively work to disrupt unethical practices involving power and control. Power dynamics are particularly of concern when studying gender and sexuality due to western hegemonic patriarchal norms, as sexual violence is historically a pervasive issue in the field (Berry et. al 2017, 538).

Even with increasing diversity in anthropology, and the attempt of anthropologists to approach fieldwork without gender stereotypes or biases, the field's historic assumption of the researcher as an "unencumbered male subject with racial privilege" continues to shadow over the the existing scholarship (Berry et al. 2017, 539). It is critical that anthropological researchers, similar to Berry et al., acknowledge how gendered and racialized positionalities influence power dynamics during the research process. Researchers must take accountability for how this impacts the embodied experiences of the participants and influences the process of conducting research in the colonial context and the resulting production of knowledge (Berry et al., 2017, 540). Using Berry et al. and Bell's findings about ethical practices and the influence of colonialism, power dynamics, and hierarchies inherently present in research, we can analyze how anthropological studies of men cross-culturally have failed to paint a complete picture of the male experience.

The colonial nature of early anthropological research highlights the failure to study "men as men" as Gutmann (1997) explains in "Trafficking in Men: The Anthropology of

Masculinity.” Gutmann points out the ironic nature of the definition of anthropology as the “study of man,” if it never accurately interrogates men as gendered subjects. This is not to say that men were ignored in research, as we know that is not true. However, Gutmann argues that much of what has been studied and written about masculinity in anthropological research was inferred from interviews, participant observation, and fieldwork with women (Gutmann 1997, 387). When male identity and masculinity are specifically studied, it is viewed as the norm or the ungendered subject in that community. This norm is used to make comparisons or understand the differences between masculinity and femininity (Gutmann 1997, 386). Thus, women are the gendered subject who differ from and can be studied in opposition to the male norm. Ignoring men as gendered subjects in research worked to reproduce western colonial patriarchal conceptions of men as the head of household, providers, and more dominant figures in the community, and ignores the role of men in constructing and performing gender in a given society (Berry et al. 2017, 538).

Histories of colonization have not only influenced the ways in which masculinity is studied, but the ways in which masculinity is performed. Masculinity performance refers to the everyday conscious and unconscious ways that people interact with masculine norms including wearing particular clothing, using certain types of speech, participating in social interactions, and physical consumption of space, among many others. Will Roscoe, in “Mapping the Perverse,” argues that due to western societal norms influence on anthropological research, individuals are categorized based on how they perform gender and sexuality, rather than how people identify themselves (Roscoe 1996, 861). Roscoe states that gender and sexuality norms stemmed from Christian teachings and beliefs about how males and females should present themselves, the roles they performed, and how they should act.

Performances of masculinity which strayed from western conceptions of heterosexual masculine norms was viewed as a threat to Christian ideals and to the longevity of the religion. Roscoe argues that European and Western discourse, often influenced by the Christian religion, considered racial and gender differences in Native cultures as biological and essential to one's being and position in society rather than socially constructed. This directly tied to European colonial objectives to maintain pious, white-washed, and heterosexual societies. Men who performed masculinity and sexuality in non-hegemonic ways were marginalized and labeled "the other." The use of "the other" combined with the importance of Christianity in the colonial context, further engrained masculinity norms in the western world which became the acceptable way for men to perform masculinity and reinforced ideas that the western world was superior and more civilized than societies in other areas of the world.

Christian and colonial ideology, primarily in the western world, shaped and normalized a hegemonic masculinity performance. This created a hierarchy which values certain performances of masculinity and masculine identities over others. The western hierarchy of masculinity, otherwise known as hegemonic masculinity, legitimizes more assertive and powerful performing men as dominant, and justifies the subordination of other forms of masculinity. Men who do not perform in the most powerful and assertive ways, remain at the lower levels of the hierarchy and are marginalized in predominantly male spaces. While masculinity can take a multitude of forms, due to this social hierarchy and norms, there is pressure to perform masculinity within the hegemonic margins.

Masculinity is not only a performance of identity but has taken on social, political, and cultural meanings. According to Janice Boddy's "The Body Nearer the Self," the body is

a pliable medium, and because of this, implicit ideologies are ascribed onto it materially, influence its knowledge, and are continually embodied by the self (Boddy 1995, 134). The physical body, and the way ideology is embodied, creates a sense of control of self in a world where the individual is constantly influenced due to societal norms and pressures. The body can be a site of similarity or difference between individuals, which fuels claims of community and assertions of political difference. As Boddy argues, the human body has become “...the material and conceptual field on which communal battles are publically fought...” (Boddy 1995, 135). Because social, political, and cultural meaning is ascribed onto the body due to appearance and performance, normalized masculinity performance is shaped by hegemonic images of what it means to be a heterosexual man in one’s historical and cultural context (Boddy 1995, 135). The ways in which a man conforms to or deviates from hegemonic masculinity performance dictates his belonging in a variety of social, political, and cultural spaces.

### **Evolution of Feminist Anthropology**

The field of feminist anthropology emerged in the mid-1970s following the women’s liberation movement which began almost a decade earlier in the United States (Lewin 2006, 1). The primary goal of feminist anthropology was to address social injustices within the field of anthropology, which most visibly discriminated against women and people of color, and to challenge traditional research methods that focused on curiosity about “the other.” These goals demonstrated a conscious effort to move away from cultural relativism and dismissal of the importance of gender and sexuality based discrimination. Early feminist anthropology focused on the visibility of women in the field and in ethnographic studies, however the field evolved from being “an anthropology of women to an anthropology of

gender, and finally in its present form, primarily a feminist anthropology” (Lewin 2006, 2). The evolution of feminist anthropology to be more inclusive of topical issues within gender and sexuality studies, closely mimicked wider feminist movements operating in the United States at the same time, particularly the shift from second to third wave feminism in the 1980s and 1990s.

The creation of feminist anthropology was driven by women in the field who also belonged to feminist organizations and consciousness-raising groups (Lewin 2006, 2). Some of the most influential women in the field of anthropology were the wives of early anthropologists, such as Margery Wolf and Elizabeth Fernea, who took field notes and published writings from excursions (Lewin 2006, 4). These women had access to fieldwork due to their husbands’ positions as researchers. While their ethnographic research was diminished due to their gender at the time of publication in the 1960s, Wolf and Fernea were later recognized for their revolutionary work in the field of anthropology. Similarly, at the beginning of the movement, supporters pushed anthropology departments in higher education to take responsibility for discrimination against female faculty, and, in a more nuanced way, addressed issues of equity, race, colonialism, globalization, and LGBTQ rights.

With increasing respect for and publication of female anthropologists over the past four decades, feminist anthropology now consists of a diverse set of literature including books, articles, feminist journals, and mainstream anthropological publications (Lewin 2006, 3). To facilitate diversity within the field, specialized associations have formed out of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) including the Association for Feminist Anthropology (AFA). Founded in 1988, the early work of the Association for Feminist Anthropology focused on three subject matter areas: Women’s Body Control, Women and

Human Rights, and Gender and the Curriculum (AFA 2014). The AFA and AAA have worked closely together to prepare panels during annual meetings focusing on women and gender, and more generally to facilitate a discipline that promotes equity, inclusivity, and human rights. Furthermore, the Association of Feminist Anthropology created an official publication under their leadership titled VOICES. VOICES is published annually and includes work by a larger scope of individuals than solely anthropology academics including “emerging scholars, founding mothers, and activists outside of academia” and is comprised of research articles, commentaries, interviews, and personal reflection papers (AFA 2010). VOICES works to disrupt traditional conceptions of anthropological research and elevates the perspectives of marginalized communities, a staple element of feminist ideology and feminist anthropology. The evolution of feminist anthropology has facilitated and expanded an appreciation for diversity and inclusivity in the field, allowing space for new voices, research methods, and understandings of our world.

### **Popular Culture’s Discussion of Performances of Masculinity**

“Toxic masculinity” is a buzzword in popular culture’s collective consciousness. So popular, in fact, that companies like Gillette are adding their voice to the conversation with their 2019 commercial “We Believe: The Best Men Can Be.” People use “toxic masculinity” in a multitude of ways to describe people, behavior, make jokes with friends, or to discuss changing attitudes about performances of masculinity in our society. Some scholars argue that toxic masculinity’s widespread use dilutes the power behind the word, confuses its definition, and ignores the real problem in our society that the term aims to address.

The term toxic masculinity, as discussed by Michael Salter (2019) in his article “The Problem With a Fight against Toxic Masculinity,” was coined by the mythopoetic men’s

movement of the 1980s and 90s. The group aimed to promote a “masculine spirituality” in opposition to masculine stereotypes of strength and dismantle a society that refused boys and men the right to have emotional selves (Salter 2019, 2). Historically in the United States, masculinity has been defined in a singular manner, emphasizing toughness, brute strength, sexual potency, and interest in certain subject matters such as business, politics, and law. This identity is further complicated and shaped by class, race, sexuality, and culture which work to separate a “real man” from “the other” (Salter 2019, 2). Our society’s narrow definition of masculinity created unrealistic standards of how masculinity is ideally performed, and in turn creates anxiety among men and boys to live up to these standards, whether consciously or unconsciously. With this, Salter questions whether or not it is men’s fault for engaging in toxic behavior or if they are simply falling into society’s expectations for their performance.

Caroline Crosson Gilpin and Natalie Proulx (2018) agree with Salter’s evaluation of masculinity in their piece “Boys to Men: Teaching and Learning About Masculinity in an Age of Change.” Gilpin and Proulx argue that the issues plaguing boys and men have been left out of conversations about gender expectations and performance. This ignorance is not only hurting boys and men but our entire society as the consequences of toxic masculinity, including physical and sexual violence, are pervasive for victim/survivors who are overwhelmingly members of minority groups including women, people of color, and people identifying as LGBTQ (Gilpin and Proulx 2018, 7). The authors are writing mostly to an audience of teachers, whom they encourage to find ways to deconstruct definitions of masculinity in everyday school settings (Gilpin and Proulx 2018, 2). Boys are rarely allowed spaces to be vulnerable, emotional, or sensitive, which leads to social and individual pressure to act in homogeneously masculine ways. This article urges readers to understand and work

to mend the underlying reasons why boys and men learn to perform masculinity in toxic ways.

Andrew Reiner (2017) points out the nuanced ways that society limits boy's and men's emotional development in his article "Talk to Boys the Way We talk to Girls." Reiner uses research on verbal interactions between parents and children of all genders to show that boys are spoken to less and with less emotional phrases, which reproduces stereotypes that limit boy's understanding of what it means to be a man and how men perform masculinity. A 2014 Pediatrics study found that "mothers interacted more vocally with their infant daughters than they did their infant sons" (Reiner 2017, 1). Furthermore, mothers and fathers were more likely to speak to their 4 year old daughters with emotional language and phrases than with their 4 year old sons. The study also revealed that those daughters were more likely than sons to discuss their emotions with their parents (Reiner 2017, 1). Reiner's discussion of infant studies shows that parents implicitly reinforce gendered language norms that have effects on emotional development for boys and men throughout the lifespan.

Trends in behavior do not occur independently from cultural phenomena. These three mainstream news articles by Salter, Reiner, and Gilpin and Proulx highlight the importance of understanding the roots of toxic masculinity, instead of simply condemning toxic performance. As the authors note, learned unemotional response and toxic behavior begins in infancy and are influenced by interactions with parents, siblings, and peers. For this reason, I focus on the connections between childhood gender formation with current masculine behavior in a college environment. People are products of their environment, and we must understand childhood experiences and norms to address masculine performance in the current socio-political moment.

## **Research Question**

Masculinity must be examined as its own system to understand how it operates as a male-centric social construction and hierarchy in professional, academic, social, and athletic settings. My research aims to study “men as men” to illuminate how gender norms and constructions of masculinity in childhood shape college senior men’s performances of masculinity in various spaces to facilitate and reproduce the formation of masculinity hierarchies.

## **Note on Researcher’s Positionality**

My personal interest in this thesis topic stems from my background in Sexuality Studies at Dickinson College. In my sophomore year I conducted a research project titled “Parenting Styles’ Effect on Sexual Education and Attitudes Toward Intimate and Sexual Relationships” which explored the experiences of college aged women with sex education, sexual relationships, and comfortability with their sexuality based on childhood realities. The study resulted in finding that parental attitudes about childhood sexuality and access to sex education greatly impacted college-aged women’s attitudes about their intimate and sexual relationships. Authoritative parents-parents that demonstrate consistent and reasonable rule setting- who presented fairly comprehensive sexual education to their children, raised women who were more confident in relationship decision making, advocating for themselves, and had positive attitudes about their sexual and intimate lives. Conversely, women with authoritarian parents, meaning those who exert power and control through strict rule setting- who allowed their children little access to sex education, held negative attitudes about their sexual and intimate relationships, lacked confidence in themselves and their partner(s), and

did not feel comfortable talking to others about topics relating to sex and sexuality. My research with college women integrated my interest in sexuality studies with anthropological research methods. Thus, for my thesis I continue to blend these interests and study masculinity performance among heterosexual male identifying students at Dickinson College.

I am a white, socio-economically privileged, able bodied, heterosexual, cis-gender woman in the senior class of 2019 at Dickinson College. I acknowledge that the majority of these identities hold power and privilege in our society, which impacts the research process and the implication of the results. I acknowledge that the researcher-participant relationship is rooted in power and control. And I acknowledge that there will be varying levels of comfortability between me and the participants due to differing identities, power dynamics, and comfort with the subject matter. By acknowledging these often unspoken factors underlying all research, I aim to grow trust between myself and the participants and with those reading this thesis.

At every step I approached my research with positionality in mind, and made conscious decisions to deconstruct the power dynamics at play. This included my behavior during interviews that worked to make participants feel as though they had agency in the conversation; interpreting my results with a focus on how identities were impacting performances of masculinity, and discussing specific implications of the research rather than broad generalizations. Though the research process will never be devoid of biases or power dynamics, I dedicated myself to be mindful of these ethical issues discussed in feminist research practice.

## **Field Notes**

Performances of masculinity are constantly around us and inform our attitudes and beliefs about what it means to be a man. Starting in the Fall of 2018, I began writing field notes about my own experiences interacting with masculinity performances, and stories others told to me. The process of writing field notes helped shape the course of this thesis and inform the questions I was curious to ask during participant interviews. I continued writing field notes during the interview stage of the research, to refine my interest in masculinity performances and integrate new questions about masculinity that some participants had raised as important to Dickinson during interviews.

Additionally, my field notes became a place to reflect and freely write about what I was hearing and learning during interviews. Some conversations during my interviews were tough to hear, and at points it became difficult to keep my composure and status as an impartial researcher. Coming to this research with a background in domestic and sexual violence eradication movements, made keeping an impartial stance during discussions of victim blaming and harmful effects of hookup culture difficult. My field notes became the place where I discussed my thoughts about the interviews freely and became a form of self-care during the research process.

My first entry on November 19th, 2018 recounted a discussion which took place that day in a class about reproduction and family life in East Asia. The class was discussing Japanese men of retirement age who had worked tirelessly to provide for their families for decades, often while living apart from the family. When the men returned home for retirement, many of their wives described them as not self-sufficient as they did not know how to cook for themselves, clean, or make social connections with others. The men often

complained about not having friends, spent most of their time inside the home, and lacked the skills to care for themselves. In our class discussion, the male-identified students in my class overwhelmingly empathized with the retired Japanese men and felt badly that their wives were annoyed that they now had to cook, clean, and care for her husband which impeded on her own daily routine and social relationships she had built with community members. I was surprised by this empathy towards a lack of self-sufficiency of Japanese men from the the men in my class. In shock, I conversely argued that because women were denied access to the professional labor force their entire lives, they built social networks outside of the home which they were forced and coerced to give up once their husbands returned home for retirement. This seemed unfair to me as the women had been self-sufficient and providers for their children for years, and then expected to take up more domestic labor in old age when their husband's returned, further devaluing their work and lives. The men in my class believed that I was lacking empathy for the male experience and difficult transition in to retirement. This interaction made me wonder about the reason my male classmates and I had differing viewpoints on the topic. It is possible that the class discussion awoke themes of fragility in not being cared for, which is rooted in traditional gender norms. This informed the question I asked participants about gendered division of labor and social spaces among their parents during childhood.

On January 24th, 2019, my friend told me in frustration about her walk to class that same day. She described a moment where a Dickinson football player walked how she described "though her group of three" as they walked opposite ways on the academic quad. She recounted that it felt as though the college man walked through them "like air." This interaction, and many that I have personally experienced or heard about, bring up questions

about how masculinity is performed in physical space. To assert oneself in physical space, or take up a space unnecessarily, is based in entitlement. Masculine people feel more entitled to take up physical space and perform masculinity in public spaces. This is rooted in social and culture norms which encourage boys and men to assert themselves, feel confident, and make their presence known in spaces. This is in opposition to girls and women who are taught to apologize for taking up space, negate their own presence in a space, and make room for others physically, emotionally, and in academic settings. This translated into discussions with participants about where they believed (hyper)masculine performance is most visible.

The intersection of academic and social spaces continued to be an important site for understanding masculinity, which my interviews reflected. On February 7th, just as my interviews were beginning to take place, Leda Fisher a female student of color wrote an article for the Dickinsonian titled “Should White Boys Still Be Allowed to Talk?” The article called upon white men to recognize their privilege within historical contexts, to understand how their voice has always been weighed as the most important, and how that is affecting daily interactions in the classroom and in social spaces (Fisher 2019). The Dickinson senior’s article was met with hundreds of attached comments displaying outrage and disgust for marginalizing the white experience and “reverse racism.” For those who understand that reverse racism does not and cannot exist in our country due to the institutional structures that continuously and systematically discriminate against people of color, these comments were unfounded and ignored the message that white men should recognize and create spaces to listen and absorb other perspectives. However, many white men, and white people, on campus continued to be upset and felt attacked. In my interviews, when discussing racialized dynamics of masculinity and efforts to seek out friendships with those who are different than

you as a way to learn and grow, I was sure to ask participants if they had read the article and ask about their thoughts. Racialized dynamics of masculinity during the time of my interviews was an incredibly visible topic though these issues exist, invisibly to some, at all times. Thus, it is imperative that when discussing masculinity in the Dickinson context that we discuss how past and present racialized systems of oppression are at work right in front of us.

Above are a few of the entries that illuminated questions and ideas that shaped this thesis. Though masculinity is often regarded as the norm and thus accepted “as is,” looking deeply into everyday performances of masculinity may change this norm. By understanding how race, physical space, social and sexual encounters, and class discussion, among other sites, play in to masculinity we can begin to recognize where the “norm” is operating and work to create healthier performances of masculinity in these spaces.

## **Methods**

The study “Gender Formation in Childhood and Masculinities at Dickinson” aims to understand how gender norms and constructions of masculinity in childhood shape college senior men’s attitudes about healthy and toxic masculinities. For this study, I aimed to recruit male-identified heterosexual students from the Dickinson class of 2019 for semi-structured interviews. I chose to interview senior men due to the difference in maturity level and opportunity to understand constructions of masculinity between freshman and senior year of college. Interviewing senior men focused my study on the attitudes of men aged 21 to 22, which provided more consistent insights and understandings based on experience and maturity. Additionally, I chose to study men who identify as heterosexual to focus the research on a particular subset of the Dickinson College population that is most commonly

associated with forms of hyper-masculinity on campus and in wider society. Because I am also a senior, my hope was that interviewing senior men may increase the participant's comfortability when discussing their attitudes and beliefs compared to younger men.

I recruited 15 senior men from a variety of social and academic interests including men in fraternities, on sports team, studying humanities, studying science and technology, and men involved in the arts. I personally reached out to potential participants, both those that I knew and men who were recommended to me by my peers in the Senior Colloquium, asking if they would be interested in participating in my study. Once I gained access to each social and academic space of interest and interviewed initial participants, these relationships acted as a gateway to subsequent interviews with men in those same communities or social spaces. Gathering a diverse set of participants allowed me to understand experiences of senior men on campus in different social groups and academic interests.

Though I recruited participants, no identifiable information was recorded or shared during the interviews or in analysis processes. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form agreeing to be interviewed and audio recorded for research purposes prior to the interview. Interviews were held in a private study room in the Dickinson College Library. Interviews lasted between 40 and 75 minutes. I did not aim to find the same answers from each participant. The questions were open ended and participants drove the progression of the information shared during the interviews. While I had my research questions in mind, I had no preconceived notions about how gender constructions would specifically influence attitudes about performances of masculinity for the men of Dickinson. Participants were only asked to discuss their personal experience with, and attitudes about, masculinity and gender constructions.

The interview questions focused on influential and memorable childhood experiences regarding gender and sexuality. I also asked participants to share a personal working definition of masculinity as they conceptualize it, and describe how well they and other students fit that working definition of masculinity at Dickinson. Additionally, participants were asked to provide examples of behavior, thoughts, and attitudes that influenced their perceptions of masculinity in childhood and at Dickinson. Finally, participants are asked to compare and contrast their own social group's performances of masculinity with others on campus and discuss roles and expectations of masculinity influencing Dickinson's culture. I asked tailored questions that probed further information from participants who offered interesting insights during the interviews. The interview questions aimed to paint a picture of the various performances of masculinity operating at Dickinson College.

After interviewing, I transcribed the interviews and deleted the audio recordings. No personal identification was used in transcriptions or analysis. Each participant was labelled with the letter P followed by a number referring to the order in which I conducted interviews. After transcriptions, the interviews were coded for responses and themes using MAXQDA.

### **Data Analysis**

Using MAXQDA, I created five main coding categories, and 38 subcategories. The main coding categories worked to separate experiences participants had at Dickinson, at home, a combination of the two, general life experiences, and personal definitions of masculinity. Using the five main codes, I segmented pieces of transcriptions to show participant engagement with masculinity, social and academic spaces, and description of interactions with peers, siblings, and parents relating to masculinity. After coding all 13 interviews, there were 876 coded segments from the transcripts. Many codes overlapped with

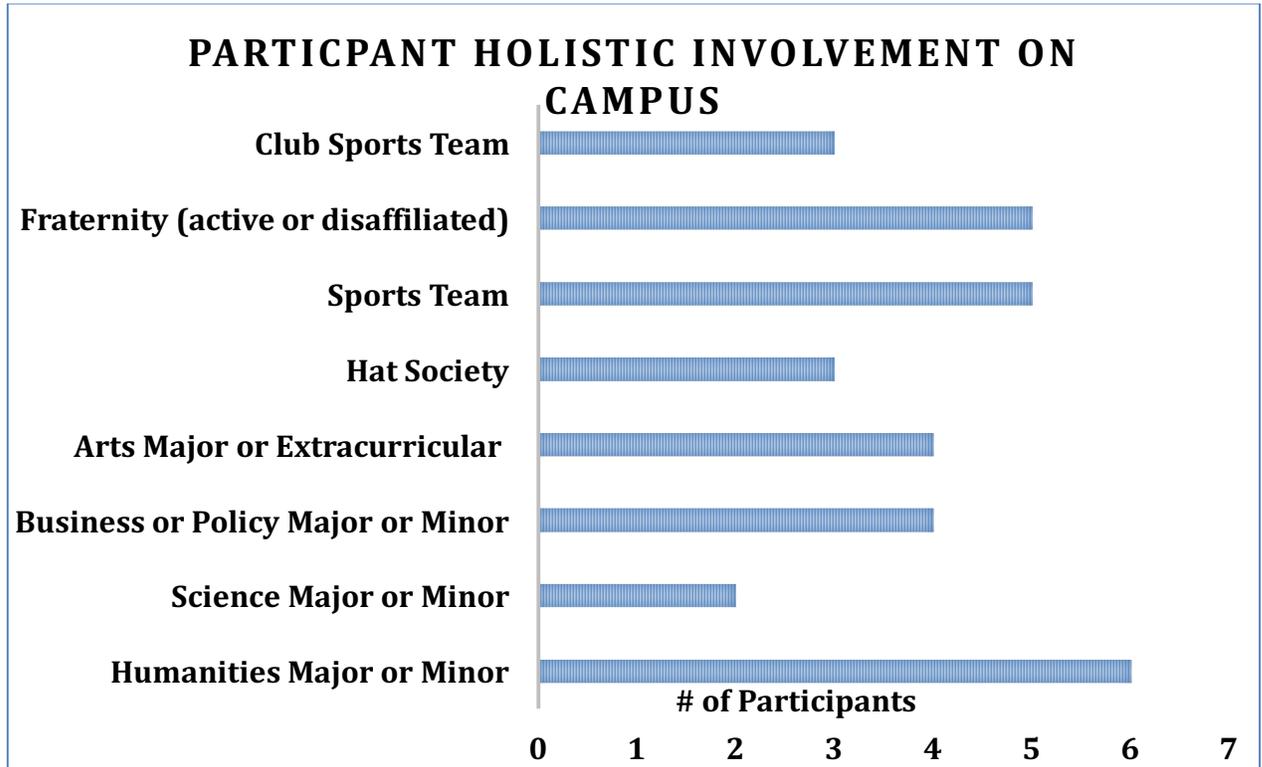
one another, showing the interconnected experiences of participants through their childhood and college career.

Participants were involved in diverse subsets of the Dickinson College community both academically and in extracurricular activities. Every participant claimed membership in two or more of the academic and social spaces that I aimed to capture in my research. Added together, the 13 participants held 32 memberships in the 8 social or academic spaces that I researched. Table 1 shows the breakdown of individual participant membership status in these groups while Graph 1 shows holistically where the majority of participants claimed membership on campus.

**Table 1**

Individual Participant Involvement on Campus	
Social or Academic Space	Participant #
Humanities Major or Minor	1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10
Science Major or Minor	3, 7
Business or Policy Major or Minor	2, 5, 11, 12
Arts Major or Extracurricular	4, 7, 8, 10
Hat Society	3, 9, 12
Sports Team	3, 5, 11, 12, 13
Fraternity (active or disaffiliated)	1, 2, 6, 9, 11
Club Sports Team	2, 6, 9

**Graph 1**



To finish my data organization and analysis, I conducted cross-tabulations between codes to illuminate the intersections of childhood experiences, social group participation, and experiences performing masculinity. In particular, codes related to political affiliation, religious identity, and race were fruitful in my analysis of how masculinity is performed and viewed differently by those of different personal backgrounds.

## **Results**

### *Childhood Gender Formation and The Impact on Masculinity at Dickinson*

For the people whom I interviewed, it was difficult to pinpoint what time during childhood they knew their gender and sexual identities. When asked the question “When did you know you were a boy?” and “When did you know you were heterosexual?” not one

participant could recall a particular moment or time in their lives when they knew these identities. The quotes below demonstrate this commonality among participants.

“I don’t know if there was a specific time when I knew I was a boy. Gender is something, I mean obviously it is performative, but even before you are born there is blue and pink, and your parents see a baby penis, they are expecting a boy, my room is set up for a boy, and then I guess I exhibited behaviors that fit with being a boy so I thought I was a boy.”-Participant 3

“Male, I never really thought of it, I was just born that way so I thought it was meant to be. I used to play soccer in a co-ed league and I was physical with everyone and one time I ran over this girl. And my parents told me I couldn't do that and I was like why not? And they said I couldn't do that to girls, you can't treat girls like that. And I was like well that is the game. But then I stopped playing soccer and started playing football.” -Participant 5

“I didn’t think about it much until high school until I started encountering more people who are gay and I was like “huh I don't know” I had never thought about it. And for a few years I thought oh maybe I am but I think I’m not. But it’s always been pretty clear to me and it's so normal to be straight so I never had a moment where I thought “OMG I might be straight.” I definitely remember having my first crush in 3rd grade, I guess that was somewhat conclusive.” -Participant 7

“Just in terms of being male it's something that was a thing since I was born. In terms of being straight, I think it's the same thing. I never thought anything was, that I would be anything else. I started liking girls probably in middle school.” -Participant 8

“No I definitely can't pinpoint a certain time in my life. Probably around fourth grade, I remember having a crush on a girl. Boy gender probably earlier than that and that probably came about from an athletic sports perspective.” -Participant 12

“When I was born my parents brought me into the world and when I was a kid, parents give you toys that are catered to men. I played on sports teams that were men. I think the way you are raised conditions you to know you are a man. I had rescue heroes which are all men and I played with those and Legos. I haven’t given this critical thought but I would say I played with typically male toys.” -Participant 13

Though some participants can recall having romantic or intimate feelings towards girls at different stages of childhood, none could name when they first knew they were heterosexual. The similarity among responses supports the idea that cis-gender identity and

heterosexuality is expected and the norm free from critical self-reflection. Only when my participants as young boys encountered “the other” including girls and non-heterosexual people, did they understand their identities as cis-gender and heterosexual and rarely seriously questioned these identities. Many participants said that they were unsure of an exact time, and this is likely because cis-gender, heterosexual men or men who present as such, are rarely asked these questions at any point during their life. Conversely, people who identify as non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming are often asked when they knew this about themselves. Asking these questions to cis-gender, heterosexual men confronts the fact that their identities are often accepted as the norm.

Though only five of thirteen participants are or were members of sports teams while at Dickinson, during the first few questions many participants noted that playing sports and male bonding through sports was a critical way for boys to construct ideas of self. From infancy, watching and playing sports was a way of identifying with and performing masculinity. These activities were often supported by a participant’s father.

“When I was younger I would watch games with my dad, never my mom. So that influenced what I would talk about with boy friends and girl friends and that carried over into high school.” -Participant 3

“At my last [football] game in high school I started to cry and my dad said to me, “it’s okay to cry, just don’t do it in public.” And I think he is right, but a lot of people like my mom would disagree. I just think it is better to do it in a private space than a public space because in life if someone sees that you are down they are going to kick you while you’re down. Why wouldn’t they take advantage of you if they have the opportunity.” -Participant 5

“Well when my parents did let me watch TV when I was younger it was usually for sports. I’m the person in the family who is that huge sports fanatic and I’ve bonded a lot with my parents by watching sports, both of them. And I was the one that played a lot of sports when I was younger. And I continued doing so through high school... So I’ve bonded pretty equally with my mom and dad over watching sports. But in terms of playing sports that something I bond with my dad over all the time. Whenever we are home together during the summer or over breaks we always make time to play golf and basketball together.” -Participant 8

“My dad was always my coach growing up. I played football, lacrosse, and then I did little rug rat sports and my dad always tried to be the coach to influence me positively. My mom never coached me. He was never really tough on me or anything like that. I mentioned the be a man thing but he doesn't care how well I play or how many goals I score. It was more about him being happy that he has the ability to see me play and we share an interest in sports. We watched the Packers game together every Sunday in high school. And I would get annoyed with my mom because she would make comments that didn't make sense and my dad and I were trying to focus.” -Participant 13

Whether coaching, supporting, or playing alongside their sons, participants resonated with sports as an important way to bond with their fathers. These were often teaching moments from father to son, and a way to pass down certain expectations or social norms about masculinity. Participant 5 discussed a time when his father told him not to cry in public after a life milestone. While his mom disagreed, Participant 5 agreed that crying publicly made him vulnerable to others who may try to “kick you while you're down.” This excerpt shows that Participant 5 and his father were both nervous about other's witnessing a vulnerable moment and to fight against this, emotion should only be shown privately. The memory that Participant 5 shared resonates with other's comments that participant's adult family members worried about visible vulnerabilities and taught against these emotional responses with sayings such as “man up.” Many times, as participants explain, vulnerabilities were often associated with a fear or rejection of homosexuality.

“Something and this is widely frowned upon now and [my mom] still does this to this day, but she will constantly say “man up.” And whenever the going gets rough she'll say man up, take a breath, and face the situations. Which doesn't bother me personally because I am a straight man but I guess in other contexts can be pretty toxic.” -Participant 2

“I remember gender roles are very specific in my household. My mom is the discipliner and my dad is more laid back. I played basketball really seriously when I was young and would pretend I was doing a jump shot around the house and leave my hand up with the follow through and walk around like that. And I remember my mom seeing me and saying don't do that, that is gay. And at the time I didn't understand, I didn't have the language to get what she was saying and know it was wrong. My family is Muslim so this is what guys do, this is what girls do and there is no overlap.” -Participant 3

“I will say that I am very thankful for my mom and dad. They never said “be a man” or anything like that but I have encountered that mentality with my uncles. Like questioning why I feel comfortable being more vulnerable or like making deeper connections with people and they would say “be a man.” I guess I always considered it a misleading phrase, and I know lots of men struggle with that, but it's not something I ever worried about. Coming into Dickinson is where I challenged myself and revisited that notion and now see it as more of a social construct grounded in gender norms that are coded as masculine.” -Participant 4

“But there is one time that my parents thought I was gay. My mom told my dad and he seemed much less worried about it, like...I guess my dad could've done some things like this is what a man does. I can't think about anything in particular except recently. Over winter break we were in Vermont and our dog found a field mouse and was killing it. I stopped him and it was still half dead. My dad and I took it outside and he wanted me to bury it in the woods. And I'm a vegan and I just really don't like seeing animals die or dying. So I asked my dad to do it instead, and he said “be a man,” and I said “that does not work on me.” Anyway that was this summer and maybe there was more stuff in childhood that I didn't know about.” -Participant 7

“I think there were times where my dad would say “be a man” and take something head on. And obviously there are changes of what it means in masculinity. But I'd say yes they have influenced the way I think about how to be masculine whether that's how to deal with problems or if something is going wrong you should understand different perspectives...For me it wasn't traditionally “be tough,” let it go, deal with your problems head on. I think it was more about do the right thing, own your mistakes, it was more that kind of stuff and that's a characteristic between men and women and I don't know why that was associated with being a man from maybe my father's perspective.” -Participant 13

Participants recalled moments with their parents in which masculine expectations were being clearly suggested or enforced. Using language similar to “man up” creates strong gendered division of behavioral expectations for sons. These expectations included rejecting stereotypes of homosexuality, keeping emotional vulnerabilities private, and encouraging specific ways to handle a problem or conflict. These gendered expectations, as participants 4 and 7 mentioned, continued to influence their lives through childhood and their Dickinson experience. This suggests that expectations of masculinity either continue to be reproduced

through cis-gender, heterosexual male students or are disrupted by our community to create gender-neutral expectations of our students academically, athletically, and socially.

*Masculine Expectations, Sites of Masculine Performance, and A Masculinity Hierarchy*

Though participants noted that not all students were performing masculinity in the same ways, participants universally recognized the expectations of masculinity operating on campus that affect everyone. Additionally, participants uniformly discussed the sites where these performances are most common, and how they create a “masculinity hierarchy” which perpetuates male-on-male social violence on campus. Participants clearly labeled activities involving alcohol, sports, and discussing sexual encounters as the three main sites of hyper-masculine performance, competition, and creation of a “masculinity hierarchy.”

“Even if it isn't explicit, implicitly it's a power dynamic thing. Like if I say oh I did this with this girl last night, what did you do? I did this on the court, what did you do? And of course here I have a wide variety of friends at Dickinson but when I'm in a hyper-masculine space, all the conversations go towards there and we are all trying to meet that standard.” -

Participant 3

“Um, in high school I was only friends with varsity athletes who play in college somewhere so I was good at soccer in high school but now I come here and at club soccer I'm like “woah these people don't know how to play.” And that made me think like oh maybe not everyone grew up with the same experience around sports as I did. I thought they were weak or pussies especially when playing soccer because I get very competitive and I have a standard of what I expect the level we should be playing and when that isn't met I honestly think what is wrong with you did your mom not hit you when you were little? That is obviously a negative thing to think and I can't help it. Like how did that trait not get bullied out of you? Man up. I constantly think that and have to bite my tongue from saying it even when I hear my mom's voice saying it. There is also definitely more of an emphasis on sex in college. College is where I discovered that meaningless sex is part of someone's identity. I had this idea that in high school sex happened but it almost always involved feelings and I think college made me reject that assertion that sex doesn't have to have feeling involved. Although I think it's better when it does.” -Participant 2

“I definitely see it a lot but I think it depends based on the social group. For me there are two main friend groups I have here as well. My one main friend group, we do not at all feel the

impetus to outwardly express physical strength or self-confidence to each other. Then the other friend group I have is the outward expressions of physicality, it comes out more often. That's usually because we play pong a lot. But I think it really depends on one group to another." -Participant 8

"Yes I mean in terms of the social spaces I participate in, I definitely see especially when I've been at club basketball, parties, pre games, playing pong there have been times when there are guys who's intent may not be to start a fight but if they feel provoked they have no problem getting in someone's face and threatening violence. It's happened a couple of times at club basketball and a couple of times at parties I've been at. I feel like that even the slightest of provocations, a lot of men will interpret that as an affront to them personally and then overreact." -Participant 8

"I being on football I am exposed to it and there are clear expectations of masculinity. And my friends outside are similar. I think the word "pussy" gets used a lot to call people out for masculinity and I've done that before too. I think that the main sports teams think that they are rule setters." -Participant 11

"I think there is just this constant desire to put yourself over other men in your social group and it gets mad weird and you do it whatever way possible- talking about how much you get laid, or how someone else never gets laid, or winning those wrestling matches. All these people are my friends and giving jabs to other friends its very demoralizing. We've gotten to the point where nobody is fighting anymore but there are moments." -Participant 1

"I consider myself as a competitive person whether it is school, playing pong, or basketball. But let's say we are playing pong, boys tend to take it way more seriously than girls. Like oh you can't drink, you aren't a manly man. Or playing basketball, if you can't guard me. Yeah sports, alcohol, and talking about girls are the spaces where I see it." -Participant 3

"Everybody is trying to impress everyone else and becomes a competition where everyone is trying to one-up each other over and over again. So I think the aspect of it's nobody's fault and everyone's fault. The alcohol is going, it's all boys, this is what has always happened, so it just keeps going. Then when you are adults you'll still be drinking beer and watching football so it's always all around and this is how you act in those spaces. And obviously an individual can decide to change that but it's a deeper social problem." -Participant 3

"Here we have more conversations about sexual encounters and things like that. And that just becomes more prolific in conversations. And you start putting numbers on things and I think some of it makes people think that if you hook up with more people that makes me more of a man. And you don't want to be the one that hasn't done anything when other people are

talking and trying to put themselves higher than you. You question if something you are doing is wrong, they are getting all this positive attention, so maybe that's what I should be doing.” -Participant 6

“I think that kind of social hierarchy is definitely related to sports. The kids who were always best at sports were viewed as the cool kids. I'm from [redacted] and lacrosse is big there. And it was almost like the sooner you commit to a college for lacrosse the cooler you are, it validated that. So I definitely think there is a connection between sports, masculinity, and girls.” -Participant 12

“Stereotypically if you are bigger, stronger, faster you will be better on the field and I guess in the classroom with confidence if you assert yourself then you are viewed more masculine. So my definition of masculinity is so much different than the stereotype but going off the stereotype then yeah my social group definitely treats and acts differently- we view ourselves as more socially active, people that hang out with better looking girls, hookup with better looking girls than I'd say the most of campus” -Participant 12

As identified by the majority of participants, masculine performances while drinking, playing or discussing sports, and discussing women are more toxic than in other sites on Dickinson's campus. When performing masculinity within these three sites, participants felt as though they were competing with one another to be the “most” masculine through a process of “one-upping” one another. I describe “one-upping” as small verbal or physical statements that demean another person or make the speaker seem more masculine than the other. This results in what participants described as a “masculinity hierarchy.” Those at the top of the hierarchy are the most masculine in a social group, and prove this status by “one-upping” other men in the group by drinking the most, having sexual experiences with the most women, and being the strongest or most athletic. Men often experience pressure to engage in the masculinity hierarchy operating in their social group either because they were raised with the same normalized expectations of masculinity or feel anxiety that their social status and belonging will decrease if they do not conform to this behavior.

#### *Refusal to Engage in the Masculinity Hierarchy*

While every participant I interviewed acknowledged that masculinity hierarchies exist on campus, participants shared that not every person engaged with this seemingly widespread structure. The theme of refusal to engage in hyper-masculinity and “one-upping” within one’s own social group was described by participants in two ways: acknowledgment of having seen men around campus who appear to be resisting hierarchical hyper-masculinity performances; or by participants who discussed personally refusing to participate in masculinity hierarchies within their social groups.

“But I see people around campus who are objectively doing their own thing and being weird and I respect that. For me personally that is a representation of masculinity because they are going against the grain” -Participant 1

“My new motto is live your truth. So I do think that I practice that theory and I dress differently than the stereotype. People tell me I speak eloquently; I don’t know if that’s true. I am involved in the arts and music despite popular opinion that that isn’t masculine. I like to connect with people on a deeper more emotional level. I would say in high school I did. It was a more toxic environment and more narrow minded and I thought I needed to read up on sports to be able to talk to people about it. Oh the Steelers and football what’s going on, or go hunting with my friends because that is what they did. But at Dickinson I don’t feel that because I’m surrounded by people who are open minded. In some ways I feel more comfortable putting myself in spaces that are more masculine. I like to go to football or lacrosse games just to see what it’s like.” -Participant 4

“For me I feel like no matter what I have this group of people who are there for me. Having that is really enjoyable but the other side is more important to me. Like hey I’ve had a shitty day and I want to talk to you about it. I don’t have to keep things inside because I have people to talk to about it, listen to me, hear me out, and that is really important... Its having a spot to reflect on yourself knowing that you have a space of people who accept who you are. So don’t change that because you are in a different group.” -Participant 6

“When I got to Dickinson I didn’t feel like I needed to align myself with the stereotypical jock cultures where you are always joking about sex. That is something that was very prevalent in high school but when I got here I didn’t feel like I had to be up on certain things or participate in certain conversations. I’ve been able socially to chart my own course at Dickinson than in high school...I definitely see it a lot but I think it depends based on the social group. For me there are two main friend groups I have here as well. My one main

friend group, we do not at all feel the impetus to outwardly express physical strength or self-confidence to each other. Then the other friend group I have is the outward expressions of physicality, it comes out more often. That's usually because we play pong a lot. But I think it really depends on one group to another." -Participant 8

"I have good friends who will get in my face and call me a pussy. But I don't really care, I'm comfortable with my definition of masculinity and that's who I am." -Participant 11

Participants 4 and 6 describe their refusal of competitive hyper-masculine performance, and their ability to "live your truth" as essential to their masculine identities. Here, instead of being conceptualized as a weak or non-masculine trait, disengagement with hyper-masculinity reclaims a definition of masculinity for participants personally and within particular social groups on campus. Additionally, Participant 1 notes that he respects the will of others he has witnessed who refuse to engage in the hierarchy. Participants 4 and 8 both note that engaging in masculinity hierarchies was more present in their lives during high school, but have felt more comfortable rejecting this structure at Dickinson. However, interestingly, Participant 8 notes that out of his two main friend groups, he engages in the hierarchy in one space and not the other. He states that the difference between his performances is due to the presence of playing beer pong, one of the sites of competitive hyper-masculinity and hierarchy as discussed earlier. Additionally, Participant 11, who noted earlier in his interview that his social group was often surrounded by hyper-masculinity and "one-upping" and personally admitted to calling other men "pussy" to demean their status in the hierarchy, states that he also rejects the hierarchy. This shows that while individuals may personally object to masculinity hierarchies or respect those who refuse to engage as they described in their interviews, participants continue to engage in "one-upping" and hyper-masculine behavior in certain spaces.

## *Social Stratification*

The majority of participants spoke about the visible stratification between social groups on campus. The question that most often sparked these comments from participants was “Do you think you and your friends perform masculinity differently than other social or academic groups on campus?” While participants stated that they see many similarities between their social group and others, they also discussed the distinctions between social groups working in the campus community. This also sparked conversations about how infrequently participants engage with people on campus outside of their social group and rarely seek to learn about difference.

“I think there are similarities and differences but my friends certainly use substances and drink more than the average Dickinson student, which isn't necessarily a masculine thing, there are definitely girls that do that too. But that sort of got grained into us during pledging so that behavior was brought in a very masculine way. You should be able to drink 12 beers, you should be able to smoke two blunts and go out still. I think that got ingrained into us in a very masculine setting though it's not inherently masculine. There are definitely those girls that have wine night every night and it's not different but the type of performance is different.” -Participant 2

“Without [my ex-girlfriend] I doubt I ever would have. And I don't want to say I don't have the chance to but I don't really want to, because I don't really see a reason to. If there was a LGBTQ event I probably wouldn't have the courage to go by myself but if I invited any of my friends they would just laugh so why would I go, if that makes sense. It's two different worlds, they have their own vulnerabilities and insecurities and I do as well and they don't really know my intentions of being there.” -Participant 5

“I think Dickinson is really cliquy and there is not much opportunity to engage with wider social circles so I think if that happened you could challenge places that have toxic masculinity. I don't think there is a lot of purposely bigotry here, I think that ties back to middle school and what you think it means to be a man and make homophobic comments... because you don't think about what the connotations are. But if we mend that gap and have more diverse conversations I think that will help a lot.” -Participant 6

“I mean it's nice to have your group and then that's it. So it's hard to put yourself in a spot where you are going to go somewhere that will challenge my beliefs when I can easily sit at home and be around people with the same beliefs.” -Participant 6

“With people I don't know, yes definitely [uncomfortable]. With people I know well or am close with I am not nearly as uncomfortable either expressing my views or joking about something. But if there is something I don't understand or don't understand the perspective on it then I will reach out. My main friend group as well I will reach out and ask for their perspective because I genuinely want to know what they have to say. And I feel like that is being a friend, a common courtesy whether you agree with them or not.” -Participant 8

“[Dickinson is] very multicultural. It is a good reflection of America. Different isolated populations and they don't really interact with each other very much. And I don't really know how to get rid of that.” -Participant 9

“A lot of these people don't go outside of their sports team, the lacrosse team they are only friends with each other and that is why issues arise between race and sports teams. The lacrosse team is all white, from nice families, and they don't get the other side of it. Football and basketball are a little different because there is more diversity so it's interesting to see the different viewpoints between those people. But I'd also say that sports teams that have greater diversity are also more segregated. Like black kids on the football team hang out with black kids and whites are with whites. And that is the same for the campus as well, you are going to hang out with people who are more similar to you.” -Participant 11

“I think the best way to dispel any stereotypes is by getting to know people and I think those people try to get to know people outside of the team. My freshman and sophomore year- we spend a ton of time together- and when you first come in there are 55 guys and you are immediately like okay this is my group of friends and it's easy because you are with them all the time and automatically are put in that social setting. My freshman and sophomore year there was this idea that this is our group and everyone else is, not the enemy, but like this is the football team, this is the baseball team and we don't hang out with them. And we've in the last two years tried to break that down and encourage people to make friendships outside of our team.” -Participant 12

According to participants, the reason social group stratification exists is because staying within your social group is the easiest and most comfortable space in which to operate. To seek out difference in others and bridge the gap between stratified groups opens oneself up to be uncomfortable and have your beliefs challenged. Participants were open

about the un-comfortability in reaching out or socializing with different social groups.

Though some participants wished they made more personal connections with students of different races, genders, political affiliations, and academic interests, making that initial step was difficult. Additionally, some participants worried about how those in their own social group would react to seeing them engaging with new or different people.

Participants believe that sports teams, particularly lacrosse, and fraternities are the most insular social groups on campus. Entrance to these social groups is dependent on a certain skill or quality that is recruited by the group, naturally making the group homogenous and generally comfortable in one's feeling of belonging. These most homogenous groups are positively correlated with their position on the masculinity hierarchy. Those at the top of the masculinity hierarchy hold the power to perform masculinity and status freely, without fear of being challenged or "one-upped."

Participants 9 and 11 note the racialized component to social stratification. Social groups are highly stratified by race, and racial groups rarely interact with one another with the exception of one or two people who are mobile between groups. As Participant 11 notes, racialized segregation among social groups leads to unchallenged beliefs about race, and ignorance about what students of color experience on campus.

#### *Racialized Implications in the Masculinity Hierarchy*

Participants illuminated the connection between social group stratification and racism on campus. Social groups are often formed due to similarities among the group members, including race. Therefore, students tend to self-segregate themselves, leading to further distance between social and racial groups. Some participants suggest that the lack of

connection between racial groups on campus is the cause of racism and racial tension on campus.

“But a fraternity is also a self-selecting group. Everyone had the opportunity to rush and find out if it was for them or not. But I only had the opportunity to vote once, as a sophomore, and there is definitely some self-fulfilling- like two people could have the same personality and I bet the members of my fraternity would vote in a white person.” -Participant 2

“And people just assume that you will perform masculinity in a specific way like “do you play basketball?” or “do you play football?” and it’s like there is this expectation of a 6’3” black guy you must play a sport. But there is a very distinctive line between the students of color and white students on campus.” -Participant 3

“Dickinson is upper class and a financially good area. Dickinson prides itself on diversity but it really isn’t that diverse and my high school did the same thing. My sister is a year younger than me and I loved my high school and she hated it, and we are both black but, she said it’s different for me because I was the captain of the football team and she did fashion which isn’t a bad thing but people didn’t recognize it like they did football. Like I may feel comfortable in class but that is because people knew me as the captain of the football team and already know me as a black man and as long as I had that football status attached to me, that doesn’t negate me being black but as a girl it was different because there was nothing she could do for people to hear her because she didn’t have a title for people to hear her... When she told me that it made me listen but my mom always told me we have to be twice as good to go half as far and I didn’t really know what that means until I came to Dickinson. There have been multiple times where I’m the only black kid in the class and I don’t really like it but there is nothing I can do about it. I can cry, complain, but at the end of the day it’s not going to change so I have to do what I have to do to get the job done. And that could be seen as a toxic trait as well.” -Participant 5

“I think that sometimes the identity politics on this campus are overplayed in term of issues are made over white men or white women or different groups and it feels like there is a hostility between people who have never met and everyone is immediately putting everyone in a box because it is such a small school whereas the advantage of this school should be because there are such few people we should intermingle but we don’t. I just hate the divisive. I know people like to put things in a box but it’s not cut and dry. I do wish I could say that I had more friends who were people of color or friends that were girls, but I don’t.” - Participant 9

“I think sports teams, partially their fault that we have a lot of gender and ethnic based discrimination. I don't want to pin that on them but these old institutions that hang around like the baseball and lacrosse team. It's too deeply entrenched....” -Participant 9

“If you think about stereotypes about lacrosse teams they are white, wealthy guys, who carry themselves with confidence and our team definitely does that and those stereotypes also hold with them that players are douchebags, don't care about women, drink excessively, socially they are bad people. Honestly being an insider on my team I think that is not true and we work really hard to dispel those notions. But any time you see a group of 55 white wealthy kids who carry themselves with confidence and are tight-knit, people are going to make assumptions.... We fucked up last year one hundred percent with that Halloween incident. That set back our team and wasn't really indicative of who we are. And I say that it is a we thing, one kid fucked up, but it's a we thing because it is on our team's culture to not let that happen. I think there are always going to be people who dislike us but we definitely interact with more groups on campus than we used to.” -Participant 12

“There may be one person here who shouldn't have done it. I think just like any news headline there are people that are crazy and have issues with a certain race and it's one person. I think that if this starts happening regularly then it may be more of an issue. Like we don't know if the KKK thing came from a student. But the note that I saw in the Dickinsonian that is hateful and terrible but in all likelihood that is one person and I don't think it represents Dickinson... don't think they are very common. We had that Halloween thing but that guy had no intention of being racist. That happened on our campus and all colleges have issues like this. I don't think Dickinson has an inclusivity issue. I think there are isolated incidents that come up and blow up and make the news and everyone starts thinking that there is this huge problem. I don't think there is, I'm on the stereotypical lacrosse team and I'm probably the furthest thing from having an issue... Maybe because I have my own perspective. And I have different experiences than other people. Again I'm sure it's a problem but I don't think that note is a cause for everyone to think there is a huge problem.” -Participant 13

The responses from participants that describe racialized social stratification points to the ideological divide on campus about race relations. Participants noted that sports teams, particularly the Dickinson Men's Lacrosse and Dickinson Football teams, are the most visibly racially segregated and problematic. In conversation with the masculinity hierarchy operating on campus as discussed earlier, we can understand why participants discuss the lacrosse and football teams as most visibly problematic. The masculinity hierarchy gives

power to those who perform and present more masculine than other men, particularly in the context of sports. Therefore, the lacrosse and football teams are given the most privilege and reign at the top of the masculinity hierarchy, meaning those at the top are also overwhelmingly white. The presence of white athletic men at the top creates a spaces that is almost unattainable for other male students, and particularly for men of color.

Given this white male privilege, combined with social and racial stratification, these men commit, and sometimes admit to committing racist acts with little to no consequences due to their positionality on the masculinity hierarchy and in society more generally. For example, as Participant 12, a lacrosse player, shares, “We fucked up last year one hundred percent with that Halloween incident.” The “Halloween incident” is referring to a photo that circulated campus of a lacrosse player in black face dressing up as Colin Kaepernick, in a kneeling position with a fake gun pointed to his head at a lacrosse social event. Not only is blackface, the painting of one’s face black to “dress up” as a black person, a historically racist act, but the members of the team were sensationalizing and diminishing the lived experiences of racial minorities in the United States. Participant 12 continues, saying that the entire team takes responsibility for that incident because it is everyone’s duty to ensure these types of racist acts do not happen. By taking this responsibility, Participant 12 acknowledges that the team is at fault for racist acts but simultaneously denies that the lacrosse team is racist, which unveils an interesting tension. Participant 13 stated similar views when he told me that he is on the lacrosse team but is the furthest thing from a racist.

These comments and claims that the lacrosse team and its individual members are not racist and do not foster a racist culture despite their actions raises concern about the chosen ignorance that these men have adopted. The fact that Participants 12 and 13 are oblivious to

the racist culture on their team shows that they have no understanding or awareness of the experiences of people of color at Dickinson or in our country more generally. These 55 men on campus have the luxury of ignoring racism both committed by them and others because it does not personally affect them or their social group. Due to the members of the lacrosse team's overwhelmingly white, upper-class, and male identities, along with their athletic ability and visibility at the school, they receive no serious consequences for their racist actions. All the men involved in the racist Halloween act are current or graduated students of the college, making it clear that these men are valued over the safety and belonging of people of color on campus.

Due to this chosen ignorance, when the men of the lacrosse team are asked about issues of racism on campus, they diminish its existence and impact on the students around them. Participant 12 believes that people on campus make assumptions about their team being racist and hyper-masculine because of cultural stereotypes about lacrosse players rather than because they do commit racist acts. Participant 13 echo's this concern and shares that he believes the campus community overreacts when what he describes as "isolated" racist incidents occur on campus. Throughout their interviews Participants 12 and 13 diminish the seriousness of racist incidents on campus by claiming others, and particularly communities of color on campus, are overreacting. Racist incidents on campus are not isolated incidents, are not being committed by a singular person, and are not met with overreactions. Students of color at Dickinson consistently explain this to their white peers, professors, and administrators who are open to discussions about race, however it continues to be misunderstood, minimized, and ignored. Perhaps if the lacrosse team was more racially diverse and if the members made meaningful connections with students who do not have the

same background as them, they would better understand how racism operates on campus and its intersection with masculinity hierarchies.

When discussing the Dickinsonian article “Should White Boys Still be Allowed to Talk?” (Fisher 2019), it became more clear how understandings of race and racism are skewed in the minds of the men on the lacrosse and football teams whom I interviewed. Participants felt personally attacked for their whiteness and once again considered the message in the article to be an overreaction from students of color about their experiences on campus. Furthermore, racist incidents that occurred on campus in the Spring semester of 2019 during my research, were considered isolated incidents that are not indicative of the campus, but rather are coming from hateful individuals, and insisted that students of color should not be legitimately concerned about these incidents. Included in this assessment by Participants 12 and 13 were KKK fliers that were distributed throughout campus and racist hate notes that were posted on a student of color’s dorm room door. This ideology about race among the lacrosse players I interviewed raises serious questions about the visibility of racism on campus and how racial stratification between social groups works to hide the experiences of students of color on campus.

#### *Religion and Understandings of Gender and Sexuality*

For two of my participants, the Christian religion was a major influence on their development during childhood. Being involved in the church since a young age, these participants were taught certain beliefs about gender and biological sex, marriage, and LGBTQ identities. These teachings became more complex when these male students entered Dickinson and began engaging with a more diverse community than their childhood environment.

“Growing up in the church and coming from a conservative family I was ingrained with the idea that gender was based on genitalia and that being LGBTQ was wrong. I would say my family has challenged themselves and revised their views since then. But being in this arts space [with people] who knew who they were and were confident in that, it was hard for me to wrestle with how to uphold my personal values, morals, and identity as a Christian, with my humanistic capacity to uphold everyone in their identities. It was hard to figure out how those two go together. But being at Dickinson I continue to challenge myself to re-evaluate my understandings. And being a Christian now I just see the bible as a text written in a historical context, primarily by men, which created certain stereotypes. I can still believe in LGBT rights and gay marriage even though they don’t necessarily go together. In media we see everyone as stereotyped, if you are Christian you are conservative and you don’t have any liberal values. I have met people from Dickinson. I have changed those views a lot.” - Participant 4

“[Religion] was really influential in my life. I wouldn’t say it plays a role in how I think about gender and sexuality. But I went to church every Sunday, I grew in my faith, and I’d say it was a pretty big part of my upbringing. It has affected my family a bunch in good and bad ways. I think one of the things my dad used to say is that we believe that what is written in the bible is that marriage is between a male and a female but we don’t think that gay people shouldn’t be able to be together and I think that is a common misconception. Christian people just think the term is between a male and female. But never has my family or me had a problem with that and we support it and I know people that are gay. In terms of my perception, I’ve always thought of marriage as between a male and female but obviously things are changing across the world.” - Participant 13

Participants 4 and 13 touch upon an important point that religious identification does not necessitate itself on strict adherence to biblical texts. Participant 4 struggles to weigh his commitment to faith while also supporting and humanizing non-conforming people who are not traditionally accepted in Christian communities. To remedy this, Participant 4 stays connected to religion by considering the Bible a historical text that perpetuated stereotypes of masculinity and heterosexuality. Similarly, Participant 13 believes that marriage is an institution between cis-gender heterosexual couples, but argues that his family does not believe that people of the LGBTQ community should not have opportunities for partnership. These comments about the intersection of religion, masculinity, and heterosexuality highlight

the importance of complicating common conceptions of religious people as strictly conservative. As Participant 4 notes, simply because a person is Christian, does not mean that they have no liberal thoughts.

*Perception of Dickinson's Political Climate in Relation to Childhood*

Participant's beliefs about political affiliation of the students and faculty who make up the institution is incredibly varied. Five participants discussed in length their own political affiliation in comparison to others on campus and how that impacts ideas of gender, sexuality, and masculinity on campus.

"I obviously don't know every man on campus but of who I've met, a lot of people tell me that Dickinson is a very liberal campus and I tend to challenge that notion. From a lot of people I've met I would say it's kinda conservative here or moderate." -Participant 4

"Well one of my best friends from freshman year but he started hanging out with that group of people last spring and he introduced me to them when I came back from abroad and its mostly people who live at Russian house or hang out there a lot. There's only one or two that are liberal and the rest are conservative. And then my main friend group, we joke about politics and history a lot and make fun of both sides. There are 8 or 9 of us and its people of all political beliefs and because of that we just make fun of whatever. That's kind of the dynamic in each group." - Participant 8

"Like I said I was sheltered growing up so the whole conversation about sexual assault and sexual misconduct so the whole conversation around that was new to me when I got to college. I can't remember a specific conversation but it developed over time talking about it with the people I am close with. There is some stuff I still have questions about and I try to reach out to people who are different than me politically and ask what the situation is. There is so much going on that it is hard for me to keep track of it all the time." -Participant 8

"It speaks to Dickinson's culture a bit, the conservative culture that underlies everything because James Buchanan was our president and he was absolutely junk. But I interact with a lot of the alumni and they are really conservative Republicans and as a liberal political science major it's difficult to talk to them sometimes. And like the judge who is a trustee here, was like 'yeah I gave the landmark ruling on gay marriage.' That is great and important but I felt like he was tokenizing it." -Participant 9

“I think that sometimes the identity politics on this campus are overplayed in term of issues are made over white men or white women or different groups and it feels like there is a hostility between people who have never met and everyone is immediately putting everyone in a box because it is such a small school whereas the advantage of this school should be because there are such few people we should intermingle but we don't. So it fuels these narratives that Dickinson is too conservative, too liberal. But I think its somewhere in between.” -Participant 9

“People want to fit in. People don't want to be completely different all the time. On the football team I am not always comfortable. The team is very conservative and I am fairly liberal and you- I don't want to act as this social justice warrior- these people were just raised differently than me. So it is difficult to assert my views over there. When I do say something they will say who cares. When you are in the minority it is hard to speak up in those situations.” -Participant 11

“I think people talk about it more here than at other schools. I come from a liberal area but my family is conservative. These things don't come up as much on the right as they do on the left. So coming here where most people are liberal it completely changed my perspective on things which is a good thing. You come in with an open mind. Masculinity specifically, I hadn't thought about it much until this year when we had people come into speak to [the lacrosse team]. We watch these videos about kids on a playground who meet every day and talk about what they think it means to be a man. I would say coming here has opened my mind a little bit. I don't know if I necessarily have an opinion on it besides that there is a societal stereotype and it is changing. And I think Dickinson is doing a good job. I think I have the language to talk about it.” -Participant 13

Participants 4, 8, and 13 describe themselves and their families as conservative, while Participants 9 and 11 identify as politically liberal. However, Participants 4, 9, and 11 consider the campus to be majority conservative politically. Participant 13 describes Dickinson as a mostly liberal environment. Participant 8 did not make it clear how he generally viewed the political climate on campus, but often reached out to liberal people when he was curious about other viewpoints. These stratified ideas about the campus climate highlights the comment of Participant 9 who argued that students rarely seek out people different from themselves, which perpetuates stratification of social groups and conflated ideas about Dickinson as both a liberal and conservative campus.

### *“Rule Makers”*

Participants considered historically white fraternities, the lacrosse team, the football team, and women who engage in hookup culture with the men in these groups as the “rule makers” of acceptable masculine performance on campus. The men in these spaces have privilege and the ability to “one-up” others with ease. Furthermore, women on campus are socialized to be attracted to the men at the top of the masculinity hierarchy even though they often display hyper-masculine and toxic traits. Participants believe women who engage in sexual relationships with these men are reinforcing hyper-masculine behavior which helps to reproduce and enable the masculinity hierarchy.

“I think the time I was most wrapped up in my masculinity was right after pledging and we thought we were frat stars and all we did was drink for a month. Also having the context of the me too movement has given a lot of context of how we are acting. The concept that everyone wanted to fuck you if you were in [my fraternity] was insane and totally made up by the boys in [the fraternity]. The first night of pledging they left us in a room to talk and the first question that was asked to the group was “so nobody in this room is a fucking virgin right?” I felt pressured to not tell the truth and that made me feel pretty bad about myself so I tried to stop buying into that logic. I’ve told a few people that wasn’t true but I don’t want to get labelled as a liar and have people look at me differently. Because it’s all bullshit and I was scared.” -Participant 1

“[Fraternities are] an old hierarchy system based on male leadership and dominance. They are old and value tradition. And when an organization values tradition it is very hard to change certain parts of the culture.” -Participant 9

“I definitely feel like there is a football and lacrosse thing where a lot of people look to that, and I see it reinforced by the women at this school. There is a girl I know who always complains about how men are trash but then only hooks up with people in one frat, who I know are assholes and she’ll be really into them and reinforce that those are the desirable people. I was good friends with this girl who was dating someone on the lacrosse team and she told me that she was nervous about the start of the season because as soon as it starts everyone will be trying to fuck her boyfriend.” -Participant 7

As Participant 9 suggest, due to traditions and hierarchical systems within groups on campus, masculinity performance and position on the hierarchy is inherited by the next generation of men in historically white fraternities, the lacrosse team, and the football team. These behaviors, participants note, are then reinforced by the sexualized attention they receive from women due to their belonging in these social and athletic groups. Participant 7 discusses the idea of “desirability” in relation to the masculine performance and position on the masculinity hierarchy due to his group identity. The participants illuminate the cyclical nature, which ensures that masculine performance and hierarchy continue to exist and privilege the same types of people on campus.

#### *Integrity and Masculinity as Essentialist Conceptions of Self*

Four participants discussed the trait of integrity as essential to their personal understanding of masculinity. This commonality among participants was surprising due to my personal conceptualization of integrity as a gender neutral trait. Participants viewed integrity as encompassing honesty, authenticity, and respect.

“Just being yourself and being the best version of yourself you can be. Masculinity or femininity whatever it may be. At the end of the day I try to be my most authentic self, I act the same around all my friends. Why would I try to impress someone when playing pong, what does that do for me at the end of the day? Performing masculinity for yourself I guess.”  
-Participant 3

“Masculinity means being honest to yourself and looking deep within yourself and being true to yourself. Speaking openly and honestly and not thinking you have to push down that voice. And using your voice to speak up for others that don’t have a voice. And working with everyone to create an even playing field.” -Participant 4

“Masculinity maybe is the perspective in terms of the identity of a heterosexual or someone who identifies as male. Certain traits or characteristics that are pervasive through pop culture, media. Maybe fortitude, I wouldn't say strength, some form of integrity, and confidence... I think also integrity comes with certain ideas of respect, respecting people regardless of their gender, orientation, or ethnicity. I think it’s okay to recognize that you might have biases or

be uncomfortable with certain things but recognizing those, accepting those for what they are and moving past them to treat everyone the same.” -Participant 9

“Honestly I think, and I have derived this definition from people I respect and revere, it comes down to being a good person and there is really nothing else besides that.” -Participant 12

The repeated use of the term integrity to describe participant’s personal definitions of masculinity denotes an essentialist view of the self, meaning participants consider themselves as an entity with determined identities and traits that make the self. Integrity as a definition of masculinity speaks to participant’s conceptualization of masculinity separate from stereotypical notions. Though these four participants described their definitions of masculinity in opposition to stereotypical actions, many also admitted during the interview process their engagement in “one- upping” culture and the masculinity hierarchy.

## **Discussion**

Throughout this thesis, I aimed to build upon, and fill gaps within, the anthropological literature on manhood and masculinity. By rejecting the idea of biological determinism of gender as disproved by Mead (1935), Malinowski (1941), Kaberry (1939), and Brettell (1993), the importance of studying men as gendered subjects becomes increasingly important. I analyzed the experiences of men at Dickinson College *as men*, which inherently worked to disentangle the western colonial expectations of masculinity that have influenced our society and Dickinson as an institution since their foundings. As Reiner (2017) explores, gendered socialization begins early in childhood in often implicit ways. Therefore, I focused on the evolution of masculine performances and expectations for Dickinson men from childhood to the present. Trends in behavior among men at Dickinson

are not occurring independently from cultural phenomena, but are influenced by familial and wider societal understandings about ideal and “normal” forms of masculinity.

Though this was a study of *men as men*, feminist anthropological research practices were critical to informing my methodology. Feminist anthropology aims to address social injustices within the field, particularly for the most marginalized groups in a particular community. While the men of Dickinson whom I interviewed are largely not members of marginalized groups, their positions and expectations on campus heavily impact marginalized groups on campus including women, LGBTQ identified students, and people of color. Therefore, understanding the experiences of heterosexual men in the senior class in relation to masculinity followed a feminist anthropological approach to illuminate the reasons why and how masculine performance affects the entire Dickinson College community.

Masculinity at Dickinson College is performed in both healthy and toxic ways among men and their social groups. Masculine expectations on campus are driven by current and former fraternities, the Dickinson Football Team, and the Dickinson Men’s Lacrosse team by way of their conversations, performances in public space, and stereotypes on campus. Though these stereotypes may not be true, due to social stratification, men in other social groups tend to only know and understand masculine expectations expressed by these three groups from their reputations on campus and perceived performances of masculinity. The masculinity expectations driven by the lacrosse team, football team, and fraternities trickles down to influence other social groups on campus. Due to our natural human desire to belong, masculine expectations affect masculine performance for many participants and their social

groups. This sparks a “one-upping” process in which men compete for the spot at the top of what I define as a masculinity hierarchy.

However, not all male-identified people on campus engage in this behavior. Three participants openly refused to operate within a masculinity hierarchy as did their immediate social group. They felt no need to perform in hyper-masculine ways, and reclaimed masculinity to be defined as portraying honesty and individuality. Additionally, some participants who did admit to performing within the masculinity hierarchy respected those on campus that they identified as refusing to participate. This illuminates that there is some disdain among men whose social groups are competitive and hyper-masculine but they may be unsure how to break out of this mold.

Intersectionality among participants revealed the intricacies of masculine expectations, “one-upping,” and the masculinity hierarchy operating at Dickinson College. Particularly, racialized masculinity performance, demonstrated by both white and students of color, reveals how racial hierarchies are ingrained in other societal structures in our culture, including gender and sexuality expectations, stereotypes, and hierarchies. Racialized expectations of men combine with gendered expectations to create different understandings of masculinity for students of color compared to white students. While men of color face a double burden within the masculinity hierarchy due to their intersectional identities, their status of belonging and masculinity performance is often ignored by the white athletic men who reign at the top of the hierarchy. Due to the chosen ignorance of these men, racism on campus is continuously inflicted on students of color with no substantive consequences, which reinforces white athletic men’s dominance and sense of belonging on campus.

If stereotypes about the masculine expectations set by the Dickinson Men's Lacrosse Team and the Dickinson Football Team ceased to exist on campus, the pressure to engage in the masculinity hierarchy amongst a variety of social group may decrease. However, for this to be possible, social group stratification must be dismantled. The only way to see and understand experiences of other people and social groups is by actively engaging with those who have different identities than you. Unfortunately, this is rare at Dickinson because it is seldom necessary that students must put themselves in new and uncomfortable environments, and choosing to do so can be frightening. Social group stratification, and the racism, homophobia, and bigotry that participants identified as stemming from this divide, must end to deconstruct the masculinity hierarchies operating on campus and aid honest inclusivity on campus.

The masculinity hierarchy that is constantly operating at Dickinson College is not a victimless game. Participants often noted that they wished hyper-masculine performance was not necessary to reaffirm their status as a man or as desirable to women, but rather wanted to live more authentically to their own beliefs. Competitiveness among young men to perform in the most masculine ways negatively affects self-esteem, intimate relationships, and male bonding. The performances of masculinity operating at Dickinson College raise important questions about belonging and inclusivity even in one's own self-constructed or chosen social group. This has created a system of male-on-male social violence that continues to be normalized and reproduced due to social stratification, and social institutions such as fraternities and sports team.

Masculinity should not and does not have to be a site of anxiety. We can reclaim what it can mean to be masculine within our campus culture as being inclusive and non-

competitive, as exemplified by some participants. To do this, we must create a culture where “one-upping” does not increase one’s social status or desirability, and appreciate a variety of masculine performances. Dickinson College is a community made up of diverse members of society who can learn from one another while also learning in a classroom environment. Students must see and appreciate their unique differences and make connections across social groups to respectfully challenge one another and refute hegemonic expectations setting the course for their everyday lives.

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