

A Contextual Examination of Gender Role Conflict Among College Football Players

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This mixed methods study examined the contextual nature of gender role conflict (GRC). Using a quasi-experimental design, 153 male college football players were randomly assigned to two groups wherein they were instructed to report levels of GRC based on the assigned life domain (within the football environment vs. life outside of football). Results indicated that participants did not differ significantly in levels of GRC across life domains but did reveal that life domain (within the football environment) moderated the significant relationship between Restrictive Affectionate Behavior Between Men (RABBM) and life satisfaction. Qualitative findings provided support for quantitative results and described ways that football players express emotions and affection toward other men within this unique context. Results can help psychologists design interventions that normalize and encourage affective and emotional expression within the domain of football, with the intent of teaching players to transfer these behaviors to life domains outside of football.

Keywords: contextual masculinity, student-athletes, intercollegiate sports, life satisfaction, masculinity socialization, mixed-method studies

Within the psychology of men and masculinity, there is growing scholarly support for the social constructionist viewpoint that men's experiences of masculinity vary across social groups and context (Addis & Cohane, 2005; Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Smiler, 2004; Wong & Rochlen, 2008). From that perspective, masculinity is conceptualized not as a stable attribute that resides within individuals but as a series of social practices that vary across situations and life domains (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010; Wong & Rochlen, 2008). Addis, Mansfield, and Syzdek (2010) argued that boy's and men's actions result in particular consequences only in specific contexts. For instance, crying might invite ridicule from others in a specific domain of a boy's life (e.g., in school with his

male peers) but not in another life domain (e.g., at home with his family).

However, despite scholarly acknowledgment of the contextual nature of masculinity (e.g., Addis & Mahalik, 2003), the context of men's lives (e.g., variations in social situations and life domains) has not been a focus of quantitative research (Addis et al., 2010). This divide between theory and empirical research can be attributed to the manner in which masculinity-related constructs are currently operationalized in self-report questionnaires (Addis et al., 2010). For example, masculinity-related measures, such as the Gender Role Conflict Scale (O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986) and the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (Mahalik et al., 2003), assess men's attitudes, behaviors, or beliefs generically (e.g., "I never share my feelings"), rather than doing so in specific contexts. As a result, we sought to address this limitation by assessing men's perspectives on masculinity from a contextual perspective, focusing in particular on a domain of life that greatly influences masculinity development. Because sporting domains represent a potentially influential agent of masculinity socialization (Foley, 2001; Messner, 1992; Whannel,

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2007), we intended to examine the contextual nature of male college football players' experience of gender role conflict within a particular life domain (i.e., within the domain of football) as compared with their experiences with gender role conflict in a broader life domain (i.e., life outside of football).

Gender Role Conflict

Gender role conflict (GRC; O'Neil et al., 1986), a psychological state in which socialized gender roles contribute to negative interpersonal and intrapsychic consequences, occurs when "rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender roles result in restriction, devaluation, or violation of others or self" (O'Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995, p. 166). Gender role conflict has been conceptualized to have four distinct patterns: (a) Success, Power, and Competition (SPC); (b) Restrictive Emotionality (RE); (c) Restrictive Affectionate Behavior Between Men (RABBM); and (d) Conflict Between Work and Family Relationships (CBWFR). Gender role conflict has consistently been empirically linked to a variety of negative outcomes, including low self-esteem (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995), heightened stress levels (Sharpe & Heppner, 1991), anxiety (Liu & Iwamoto, 2006; Wong, Pituch, & Rochlen, 2006), depression (Blazina & Watkins, 1996; Fragoso & Kasubeck, 2000; Good & Wood, 1995; Shepard, 2002), substance abuse (Monk & Ricciardelli, 2003), shame (Thompkins & Rando, 2003), decreased marital satisfaction (Rochlen & Mahalik, 2004), and other negative intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes (O'Neil, 2008).

Recent research (e.g., Blazina & Jackson, 2009; Blazina & Shen-Miller, 2010; Liu, Rochlen, & Mohr, 2005) has focused on contextual examinations of men's experiences with societal gender role expectations. Liu et al. (2005) asked participants to evaluate their experiences with gender role conflict across different scenarios by assessing participants' real gender role conflict (i.e., actual reported level of GRC) in comparison with participants' ideal levels of gender role conflict (i.e., participants were prompted to respond based on imagining that they were the person they wanted to be in a perfect world). Blazina and Jackson (2009) examined the contextual nature of boys' gender roles by asking participants to describe "how

you are as a man" across eight different roles (e.g., in classroom, with my father, in sports). Their findings indicated that it was conflicts within roles—rather than conflicts across roles—that were related to increased psychological distress (Blazina & Jackson, 2009). Thus, the ability to compartmentalize when moving from one role to another might serve as a protective factor when self-related issues come into conflict, a finding that can help us begin to better understand the contextual and nuanced nature of gender role conflict. Previously, this body of research has explored gender role conflict within traditionally *masculinized* contexts such as law enforcement (e.g., Wester & Lyubelsky, 2005) and sports (e.g., Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010; Steinfeldt, Steinfeldt, England, & Speight, 2009). However, the examinations of participants within these contexts do not fully address contextual aspects of masculinity; instead, these examinations have addressed masculinity within a unique social group (e.g., police officers, athletes) but are still exposed to the criticism of measuring gender role conflict in a trait-like manner (e.g., Addis et al., 2010), even if it occurs within unique contexts. To avoid this criticism, research should examine men's perceptions of gender role conflict across different scenarios that elicit experiences within different domains of their lives.

Masculinity Within Sporting Domains

Gender role conflict emerges from socialization experiences that provide men with messages about constraining societal expectations of what it means to be a man (O'Neil, 2008). Traditional messages of masculinity conveyed within the athletic domain (e.g., power, dominance, competition) can contribute to the dynamic of men experiencing conflict with societal gender roles expectations (e.g., O'Neil, 2008). These messages of masculinity socialization are often conveyed within prominent societal domains like school and sports (Whannel, 2007). In 2009, nearly 4.5 million young men participated in high school sports, and over the years millions more have participated in sports throughout their formative adolescent years (e.g., Martin & Harris, 2006; National Federation of State High School Associations, 2010). As a result, the institution of sport is considered to be highly influential in the construction of masculinity among young men (Messner, 1992;

Wellard, 2002; Whannel, 2007). Within sport, young male athletes receive increased self-competence from evaluations of their athletic accomplishments by themselves and others (Schrack-Walters, O'Donnell, & Wardlow, 2009). Through participation in sport, boys learn behaviors, norms, and values (e.g., competition, toughness, independence) that are considered to be aspects of masculinity that are valued by society (Messner, 1992). The norms, behaviors, and values that operate within sport can influence the masculinity development of an athlete by providing him with strong messages about what it means to be a man (Steinfeldt et al., 2010).

According to Gage (2008), "Participation in different sports may alter the construct of masculinity enforced by team culture, as well as the degree of pressure athletes perceive to conform to it" (pp. 1017–1018). Thus, different sports can differentially impact the process of masculinity socialization that operates within each respective sport—specifically, sports that are deemed to be more consistent with traditional notions of masculinity are generally afforded greater prominence and power. To this point, Messner (2002) coined the term, *center sports*, to refer to sports with relatively high status on campus and an increased ability to attract economic resources. A center sport such as football is likely to maintain its position of privilege on campus by receiving preferential institutional interest, greater financial resource allocation, and more media attention. Subsequently, this sustained level of preferential treatment can contribute to an environment that perpetuates the superiority of traditional masculine gender ideologies within this sport (Gage, 2008). As a center sport, football is seen as an influential agent of socialization for new generations of young men, while also serving to maintain the traditional values of the previous generation of men (Foley, 2001). In 2009, 1.1 million members of this new generation of young men played high school football in the United States (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2010).

Current Study

Emerging research on gender role conflict has attempted to examine gender role conflict within specific contexts such as sports (e.g., Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010; Steinfeldt et al.,

2009), but this line of research has not fully investigated men's perceptions of how they experience conflict with masculine gender roles across different contexts. Against this backdrop, we sought to engage in a contextual analysis of masculinity within a unique context by addressing the following research questions in this current mixed methods study. First, we investigated the contextual nature of masculinity as it relates to the domain of football. We assessed whether college football players' level of gender role conflict differed across different domains of their lives (i.e., within football environment vs. life outside of football). This variable will subsequently be referred to as *life domains* for the remainder of this manuscript. Second, we investigated the relationship between gender role conflict and life satisfaction. Consistent with research on gender role conflict (see O'Neil, 2008), we hypothesized that gender role conflict would be negatively associated with life satisfaction. Third, we tested whether the relationship between gender role conflict and life satisfaction would vary as a function of college football players' life domain (within football environment vs. outside football environment). With regard to these three research questions, we examined each of the four patterns of gender role conflict: (a) Restrictive Emotionality; (b) Success, Power, and Competition; (c) Restrictive Affective Behavior Between Men; and (d) Conflict Between Work and Family Relations. Because of a lack of prior research on the contextual nature of gender role conflict, we did not provide specific hypotheses for our first and third research questions. Finally, to provide greater clarity to these research questions, we qualitatively examined football players' perspectives on how they express their emotions and affection toward other men across different life domains (i.e., within the football environment vs. life outside of football). According to Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), a mixed methodological approach enhances empirical evaluations in a number of ways. The qualitative data can provide richness and detail to the results of the quantitative data by clarifying and illustrating results obtained through survey procedures. In our case, the qualitative responses can provide additional information about players' perceptions of aspects of gender role conflict that can help to qualify the scores reported on the Gender Role Conflict Scale.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were 153 college football players who attended one of two universities in the Midwestern and Southwestern regions of the United States. One of the colleges participated at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II level, and one of the colleges participated at the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) level. The average age of the participants was 19.67 ($SD = 1.75$), and the sample consisted of 69 freshmen, 33 sophomores, 31 juniors, and 20 seniors. The participants self-identified their race as White (84%), Black (10%), Multiracial (3%), Hispanic (1%), and 2% of respondents did not report a racial self-identification. In terms of relationship status, 96% of the participants reported being single, 1% reported being married, 1% reported living with a partner, and 2% did not respond to this question. Eighty-eight percent of the players received an athletic scholarship, 11% did not receive a scholarship, and 1% did not respond.

Measures

Gender role conflict. Gender role conflict was measured using the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS; O'Neil et al., 1986), which contains 37 items that measure the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences associated with male gender role socialization. The GRCS contains four subscales: Success, Power, and Competition (SPC); Restrictive Emotionality (RE); Restrictive Affectionate Behavior Between Men (RABBM); and Conflict Between Work and Family Relationships (CBWFR). These subscales are summed together to provide a composite GRCS score, and higher subscale and composite scores represent higher levels of gender role conflict. With regard to the reliability of the GRCS, Steinfeldt et al. (2009) reported internal consistency coefficients in a sample of college football players for the following scales: SPC = .81; RE = .84; RABBM = .78; CBWFR = .74; and overall GRCS = .89. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .86 for SPC, .82 for RE, .77 for RABBM, .76 for CBWFR, and .89 for the overall GRCS. The construct validity

of the GRCS has been demonstrated with positive relationships between GRCS and other measures of men's attitudes toward masculinity (Good et al., 1995).

Life satisfaction. The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985) was used to examine individuals' overall life satisfaction based on their own personal standards. The five items of the SWLS are measured on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A sample item is, "The conditions of my life are excellent." Higher scores reflect greater life satisfaction. The SWLS has been found to be a valid and reliable assessment of life satisfaction, indicated by its associated with the Bradburn Affect Balance scale (Diener et al., 1985). Diener et al. (1985) reported a coefficient alpha of .87 with a sample of college students. Similarly, the coefficient alpha in the current study was .86.

Open-response questions. Because our study intended to enrich our quantitative findings with qualitative data, we included two open-ended questions: (a) *Are there differences between how you express your emotions within the environment of football and how you express your emotions in your life outside of football? Please give some examples;* and (b) *Are there differences between how you express your affection for your teammates and how you express your affection for men in your life outside of football? Please give some examples.* In order to create questions that tap into aspects of gender role conflict, we consulted with college and high school football coaches, sport psychologists, and other professionals familiar with the context of football, as well as the psychological study of men and masculinity. These consultations indicated that intimate interpersonal interactions among football players (e.g., affection, emotions) were considered to be a salient aspect of gender role conflict within football. Subsequently, these questions were written to align with the tenets of the RE and RABBM subscales of the GRCS and were intended to elicit participants' beliefs about affective and emotional expression within the football environment and in players' lives outside of football field. In sum, based on these consultations and results of past gender role conflict research (e.g., Steinfeldt et al., 2009) that indicate differences between football players on these two

particular GRCS subscales (i.e., RE, RABBM), we focused on these two dimensions to explore these aspects of gender role conflict among men within the unique context of football.

To analyze the qualitative data, we used an interpretative phenomenological analysis, which emphasizes the subjective meanings that participants attach to their experiences (Wertz, 2005). Because our methodology was primarily quantitative, with a lesser emphasis on the qualitative methodology, our mixed-methods study can be theoretically categorized as a “concurrent QUANT + qual” study (Morse, 1991) wherein quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time. We modeled our mixed-methods procedures on a previous concurrent QUANT + qual mixed-methods study (Edwards & Lopez, 2006) wherein participants completed a survey that contained rating scales (quantitative method) and an open-ended question (qualitative method).

Procedures

This study was part of a larger research project investigating masculinity within sport. Research was conducted in compliance with Institutional Review Board policies and APA ethical principles. The first author contacted athletic administrators and coaches who agreed to make football players available for voluntary participation in the study. At a team meeting outside of class and practice time participants received consent forms, and those who completed consent forms were provided a survey packet to fill out. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (i.e., *life domains*) wherein they were instructed to fill out

the GRCS based on explicit instructions to do so based on one of two premises: (a) think of your life within the football environment; or (b) think of your life outside of football. Participants took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey packet. Participants were assured of anonymity and were informed that all their data would be kept confidential and in a safe locked location. In an effort to ensure voluntary participation, participants were informed that if they did not want to participate in the study, they could write in their playbooks and turn in a blank survey packet at the end.

Results

Quantitative Analyses

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the main study variables are provided in Table 1. Gender role conflict and each of its subscales [i.e., Success, Power, and Competition (SPC); Restrictive Emotionality (RE); Restrictive Affective Behavior Between Men (RABBM); Conflict Between Work and Family Relations (CBWFR)] were significantly and negatively related to life satisfaction among football players in this sample.

We used a MANOVA to address the first research question. The independent variable was the experimental conditions of *life domain* (within football environment vs. life outside of football), and the dependent variables were (a) SPC; (b) RE; (c) RABBM; and (d) CBWFR. At the multivariate level, life domain was not statistically significant, Hotelling's $T^2 = .91$, $F(4, 148) = .22$, $p = .928$, $\eta_p^2 = .006$. Additionally, at the univariate level, life domain did not have

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Main Study Variables ($n = 153$)

	GRCS	SPC	RE	RABBM	CBWFR	SWLS	<i>M (SD)</i>
GRCS	—	.74***	.70***	.70***	.58***	-.38***	136.86 (21.09)
SPC		—	.23**	.26**	.37***	-.25**	55.61 (9.99)
RE			—	.52***	.18*	-.26**	32.07 (8.04)
RABBM				—	.20*	-.34***	26.22 (6.87)
CBWFR					—	-.19*	22.89 (5.53)
SWLS						—	24.36 (6.27)

Note. GRCS = Gender Role Conflict Scale; SPC = Success, Power, and Competition; RE = Restrictive Emotionality; RABBM = Restrictive Affective Behavior Between Men; CBWFR = Conflict Between Work and Family Relationships; SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

a significant effect on (a) SPC, $F(1, 151) = .49$, $p = .486$; (b) RE, $F(1, 151) = .20$, $p = .659$; (c) RABBM, $F(1, 151) = .48$, $p = .489$; and (d) CBWFR, $F(1, 151) = .00$, $p = .999$. We also conducted a post hoc ANOVA using overall GRCS scores instead of the GRCS subscales. Participants did not differ significantly in their GRCS scores as a function of life domain, $F(1, 151) = .54$, $p = .465$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$.

To address our second and third research questions, we conducted a hierarchical linear regression (see Table 2, Model 1). The outcome variable was life satisfaction. At step 1, the four gender role conflict subscales and life domain were entered as predictors. At step 2, the interaction terms between the four gender role conflict dimensions and life domain were entered. Following guidelines provided by Frazier, Tix, and Barron (2004), predictor variables were standardized to reduce multicollinearity. None of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) scores exceeded 1.5, suggesting there was no evidence

of multicollinearity. At step 1, the only predictor variable that was significantly related to life satisfaction was RABBM, indicating that participants who were more likely to restrict their affectionate behavior between men also tended to report lower levels of life satisfaction. At step 2, the only significant interaction effect was the RABBM \times life domain interaction (see Figure 1). Using an SPSS macro (Hayes & Matthes, 2009), we tested the significance of the slopes of the regression lines representing the associations between RABBM and life satisfaction across different life domains (within football environment vs. outside football environment). Within the football environment, RABBM was negatively related to life satisfaction, $B = -.53$, $SE = .16$, $p = .001$. However, outside the football environment, RABBM was not significantly related to life satisfaction, $B = -.07$, $SE = .16$, $p = .673$. To summarize, our findings suggest that life domain was a significant moderator of the association between RABBM and life satisfaction.

To compare the predictive ability of the four gender role conflict dimensions with the larger gender role conflict construct, we also conducted a post hoc analysis in which we replaced the four GRCS subscales with overall GRCS scores in the hierarchical linear regression (see Table 2, Model 2). At step 1, GRCS was significantly and negatively related to life satisfaction. However, at step 2, the GRCS \times life satisfaction interaction effect was not significant. Thus, although life domain did not moderate the relationship between the overall gender role conflict construct and life satisfaction, one pattern of gender role conflict—RABBM—was a significant moderator of this relationship among the college football players in this sample.

Table 2
Hierarchical Linear Regression Predicting SWLS
($n = 153$)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	R^2
Model 1				
Step 1				.15**
RABBM	-.29	.11	-.23*	
RE	-.12	.11	-.09	
SPC	-.17	.11	-.14	
CBWFR	-.10	.10	-.08	
Life Domain	-.01	.10	-.01	
Step 2				.20**
RABBM \times Life Domain	.23	.11	.19*	
RE \times Life Domain	-.21	.11	-.16	
SPC \times Life Domain	.14	.11	.11	
CBWFR \times Life Domain	.01	.10	.01	
Model 2				
Step 1				.14**
GRCS	-.47	.10	-.38**	
Life Domain	-.02	.10	-.01	
Step 2				.16**
GRCS \times Life Domain	.14	.10	.11	

Note. SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale; RABBM = Restrictive Affective Behavior Between Men Subscale; RE = Restrictive Emotionality Subscale; SPC = Success, Power, and Competition Subscale; CBWFR = Conflict Between Work and Family Relations Subscale; GRCS = Gender Role Conflict Scale; Life Domain = within football environment (coded as 0) vs. life outside of football (coded as 1).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Qualitative Analyses

In an effort to provide added perspective about affective and emotional expression within the unique context of football, we analyzed the qualitative responses that participants gave to the two open-response questions. The first author read through all of the participants' responses and generated themes from the data, which were analyzed and consolidated into domains that represented clusters of common themes. We then attempted to ascertain the fre-

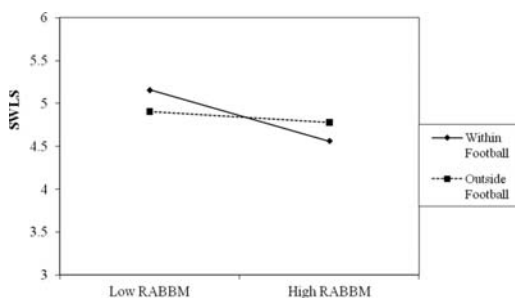


Figure 1. The relationship between RABBM and SWLS across different life domains (within the football environment vs. life outside of football). SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale; RABBM = Restrictive Affective Behavior Between Men Subscale.

quency of each domain within the data by using a coding scheme based on the themes and domains initially generated in order to code each comment's content. The third and fourth authors separately coded the responses to each of the open-response questions, and we compared their results. We calculated a kappa value ($k = .89$), which indicated adequate interrater reliability between the independent coders. Differences were reconciled through consensus to provide the final results on the frequencies of the domains within the data.

Of the 153 participants, 98 responded to the first question concerning emotional expression. Of these respondents, 31 indicated that there were no differences between how they express their emotions within football and how they do so in their life outside of football. Of the respondents who indicated that they expressed their emotions differently within the context of football, the following categories represented the participants' reported increase in emotional expression within the football environment as compared to their lives outside football: (a) 45% of these responses conveyed a sense of intensity, adrenaline, or aggression as a perceived proxy for emotions; (b) 16% of responses conveyed a theme of social expression of emotion (e.g., sense of relatedness among teammates); and (c) 12% of responses were categorized as verbal expressions of emotions (e.g., feeling free to express yourself to your teammates). Additionally, as opposed to the aforementioned responses that conveyed a sense of greater emotional expression on the field, 18% of responses from players indicated

that they felt more emotionally restricted within the context of football than they did in their life outside of football.

Of the 153 participants, 102 responded to the second question concerning affectionate expression between men. Half of these respondents ($n = 51$) indicated that there were no differences between how they express their affection toward teammates within the football environment and how they do so with men in their life outside of football. Among the respondents who indicated they expressed increased affection toward teammates (as opposed to doing so with other men outside football), their responses were categorized accordingly: (a) 22% of these responses conveyed a sense of physical affection (e.g., hugs, slaps on the butt), (b) 62% of responses conveyed a theme of social expression of affection (e.g., trust, social connectedness on the team), and (c) 16% of responses were categorized as verbal expressions of affection (e.g., telling their teammates they love them). These results provide added insight into dimensions of gender role conflict (i.e., restrictive emotionality, restrictive affectionate behavior between men) that may operate uniquely within the domain of football.

Discussion

In regard to our study's first research question, we did not find significant differences in gender role conflict between players in either of the experimental conditions (i.e., life domains). That is, football players did not report different levels of gender role conflict within the football environment as compared with the levels of gender role conflict they experienced in their lives outside of football. In support of the hypothesis for our second research question, all four subscales of the GRCS (i.e., SPC, RE, RABBM, CBWFR) as well as the overall GRCS were significantly and negatively correlated with life satisfaction. However, despite past research on gender role conflict's contribution to a host of negative outcomes (see O'Neil, 2008), the hierarchical regression analysis revealed that among the four dimensions of gender role conflict, RABBM was the only dimension that was significantly and negatively related to life satisfaction among football players in this sample.

Although our first research question's attempt to examine differences in gender role conflict across our experimental conditions (i.e., life domains) did not produce statistically significant results, our third research question yielded fruitful findings. Results indicated that a particular pattern of gender role conflict was significantly related to life satisfaction, based on differences in life domains. Specifically, lower levels of RABBM were associated with higher life satisfaction for participants who were instructed to evaluate their experiences with gender role conflict within the domain of football. This finding implies that the less a football player restricts his affectionate behavior with his teammates, the greater satisfaction with life he reports. However, this relationship did not exist for players who were instructed to evaluate their experiences with gender role conflict in their lives outside of football. Thus, avoiding the restriction of one's affection toward other men outside of football was not significantly related to greater life satisfaction.

The qualitative results provided potential insight into this finding that life domain moderated the significant relationship between RABBM and life satisfaction. The coded domains (i.e., Social Interactions, Physicality, Verbal Interactions) we found in responses to the second open-response question about affection toward men described different ways that football players acknowledged how they express their affection toward teammates. These themes were exemplified by quotes such as: (a) "Yes I am a lot closer to my teammates. It's okay for us to hug and cry together. We are a team and act accordingly so. We are close and show we are close"; (b) "Football brings out more emotions and is completely different than life. For example a simple 'spank on the butt' would never happen outside of football"; and (c) "I tend to express my feelings toward men that I know better and can trust. In football I tend to build strong relationships with my teammates. My best friend is my teammate and I tell him everything." Thus, the significant relationship between RABBM and life satisfaction as it relates to life domain is an interesting finding that is highlighted by participants' qualitative responses.

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative results suggests that the football domain can cultivate an environment where young men are

provided with opportunities to develop their ability to express affection for other men. Perhaps restrictive affectionate behavior between men is potentially reduced within the football environment because teamwork is critical to the success of a football team. Accordingly, the ability of football players to express affection for their teammates might contribute to a sense of functional team unity and camaraderie necessary for successful competition. Conversely, societal masculine norms (e.g., Mahalik et al., 2003) might constrain football players from expressing affection for men outside of their comfort within the football environment, which may result in a sense of decreased life satisfaction. These findings about domain-specific contributions of gender role conflict variables require further empirical examination on the contextual nature of this aspect of masculinity socialization across different life domains.

It is noteworthy that the qualitative results did not provide consensus concerning participants' perceptions of differences in how they express their emotions or affection toward teammates within the football environment and how they do so with men outside of football. Half of the respondents ($n = 51$) indicated that there were no differences between how they express their affection toward teammates within the football environment and how they do so with men in their life outside of football. Blazina and Jackson (2009) indicated that it was conflict within roles—not across roles—that was related to increased psychological distress, which suggests that conflicts are more difficult to address within a single role context, particularly when this context is perceived as ambiguous or in conflict. Thus, the ambiguity surrounding appropriate affectionate behavior between men within the context of football may contribute to some football players qualitatively reporting success navigating between roles while others reported difficulty in doing so. Future research should examine within-role conflict as well as between-role conflict to better understand the contextual nature of men's gender role conflict.

However, these results do support the existence of heterogeneity in how football players express their masculinity (e.g., Steinfeldt et al., 2009) and provide the impetus for further research into how this unique context of masculinity socialization can influence how men view

displaying emotions and affection toward other men. Interestingly, Restrictive Emotionality, the pattern of gender role conflict most consistently and robustly linked to negative outcomes (e.g., O'Neil, 2008), was not significantly related to life satisfaction among football players in this sample. However, the results from the qualitative analyses did produce interesting insights into men's emotional expression within the domain of football. When asked about how their emotional expression in football compares to their emotional expression outside of football (i.e., the first open-response question), many participants equated emotions with energy, adrenaline, and aggressiveness. One player said, "In football I can express my emotions by physically dominating the man across from me. In my outside life, I have to walk away." Another said,

I express my emotions more on the field. When I am excited, I yell and scream, and when I am angry, I make fists and react violently. The only two times I have cried in the past two and a half years were when we lost the state [championship] game in 2007 and when my senior season in high school ended in 2008.

This quote, and many others like it found in the data, is interesting because it represents not only a reframing of emotion (i.e., intensity instead of affect) and a restriction of emotion in life outside of football (i.e., this player reported only crying twice in two years), but it also represents a life domain in which this participant was moved to this level of affect (i.e., within the football environment). This finding among college football players is also consistent with past research on college football coaches' perspectives on masculinity socialization (Steinfeldt et al., 2010). Much like the players in the current study, many of the coaches in the Steinfeldt et al. (2010) study replaced affect with intensity and adrenaline when asked about emotions in football, and these coaches also described football as an environment where young men felt supported, connected, and related to each other. Thus, even though men may be socialized within the football domain to express their affection toward other men, they may simultaneously feel constrained about how to express their emotions—oftentimes reframing emotion away from affect and into aggression or intensity, which could contribute to negative off-field outcomes (e.g., fighting, violence; Kreager, 2007). Men are so-

cialized to show anger, which is consistent with values and practices reinforced in football (e.g., aggression, dominance, violence). Additionally, men are socialized to not express a more expansive range of emotions (e.g., sadness, shame, fear), yet the qualitative results of this study indicated that some men reported experiencing these less-expressed emotions in football (e.g., crying—albeit only twice in two years—but both times after a disappointing loss in a football game). This context-specific acceptance of certain emotions is interesting, particularly in that it occurs in a context that also supports a relatively limited range of situationally acceptable affectionate behaviors among men (e.g., post touchdown celebration). Future research should examine socialization processes operating within sports—particularly within the domain of football—to determine ways in which this influential institution of masculinity socialization (e.g., Messner, 1992; Whannel, 2007) can be best used to effectively teach men how to expand their emotional and affectionate repertoires.

Clinical Implications

The results of this study have implications for psychologists who work with male student-athletes, particularly those men who play in center sports and/or contact sports like football. Psychologists can design interventions that normalize and encourage affective and emotional expression within this domain (i.e., football), with the intent of teaching players to transfer these behaviors to domains outside of football. Psychologists can facilitate discussions with players about what it means to be a man in an effort to help these young men explore messages about masculinity that they receive in football (e.g., be tough, dominate your opponent, play through the pain). Doing so can help young male athletes become better equipped to internalize adaptive masculinity messages (e.g., men are responsible and accountable; Steinfeldt et al., 2010) while choosing not to internalize other potentially maladaptive messages (e.g., men don't ask for help; Steinfeldt et al., 2009). Psychologists can design interventions intended to reframe these messages and restructure cognitive cues in this environment, with the goal of expanding players' emotional and affective repertoires so that these young men can use the

valuable life lessons learned on the field to become better men off the field.

Additionally, the results of our study can help psychologists begin to better understand the notions of *flipping the switch* and *between the lines* that are commonly expressed by football coaches (Steinfeldt et al., 2010). As the findings of our current study indicated, college football players—like their coaches—conceptualized emotion in terms of intensity and aggression, rather than affect. Coaches expect and encourage football players to channel this “aggressive emotional energy” and know how to *flip the switch* by becoming instrumentally aggressive and often violent on the field at appropriate times during practice or at a game (e.g., dislodging the ball from a receiver in midair, engaging in an isolation block on a middle linebacker, cutting a defensive end’s legs from underneath him on a three-step-drop passing play). However, these young men are also expected to only engage in this aggressive behavior *between the lines* of the field, not off the field. The aggressive and often violent behaviors necessary for success in football—along with the pressure to conform to societal expectations of masculinity established within this domain—are believed to contribute to aggressive behaviors and violence off the field (e.g., bullying, fighting; Curry, 2000; Kreager, 2007). Psychologists can use the results of this study to initiate conversations with male football players about the process of *flipping the switch* of instrumental aggression that they learn on the field. Doing so can help football players learn to more effectively compartmentalize this aggression so they can more fully understand the impact of this aggressive behavior when it does not occur only *between the lines* of the field (e.g., domestic violence in romantic relationships, fighting in social settings). Engaging in these types of discussions can help psychologists equip football players with the tools to become the accountable and responsible young men off the field that their coaches expect them to be (e.g., Steinfeldt et al., 2010).

In addition to the importance of reducing the prospect of violence outside of the playing fields, these types of interventions are important because even though our study’s results suggested that football players are relatively comfortable expressing affection toward other men within the football environment, many scholars (e.g., Gage, 2008; Messner, 1990, 1992, 2002;

Pringle & Markula, 2005) have acknowledged the prevalence of homophobia in sport, particularly in contact sports like football. Football provides an interesting environment wherein certain displays of affection may be considered unacceptable, yet other man-on-man affectionate acts are allowed and deemed appropriate in particular situations (e.g., celebrating a good play). Paradoxically, the “spank on the butt” response quoted from a participant earlier in this manuscript represents an oft-used congratulatory gesture in football (e.g., done after a touch-down, a sack, or a tackle) that might otherwise be met with homophobic scorn if done outside of football, if done at all. Thus, future research should address the complex and nuanced manner in which homophobia coexists with context-specific acceptable man-on-man affectionate behavior in sport, particularly in a *masculinized* contact sport like football (e.g., Kreager, 2007).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has a number of limitations to note. First, the experience of football players at these two colleges may not generalize to the experience of other college football players in different geographic regions or from different backgrounds. For example, the majority (84%) of the participants in this sample were White college football players. Thus, additional contextual variables (e.g., race, ethnicity) may uniquely influence aspects of gender role conflict and men’s interpersonal relationships (e.g., affectionate connections to teammates, expression of emotion) among football players. Second, we primed the participants to evaluate their experiences with gender role conflict within the football environment and in their lives outside of football. We acknowledge that although football represents a discrete life domain, asking participants to consider their experiences in their lives outside of football could result in participants evaluating a number of different life domains. The life domain *outside of football* used in this study can potentially be considered too broad, too vague, and ultimately too heterogeneous to render meaningful comparisons when contrasted with the life domain of football. To address this major limitation of our study, future research should examine whether men’s gender role conflict varies across other specific life domains (e.g., at home with one’s

family vs. in a particular social setting with one's peers). A more specific contrasting life domain could potentially yield more significant differences between conditions.

The methodology of our study also represents a notable limitation. Although our quasi-experimental design addresses a methodological gap in masculinity research (Wong, Steinfeldt, Speight, & Hickman, 2010), our results could have been enhanced by using a counter-balanced within-subjects design. Additionally, the validity of our qualitative findings could be limited by our reliance on written responses to only two questions in the survey, which assessed only two of the four subscales of the Gender Role Conflict Scale. Our findings could have been strengthened by triangulating the data with multiple sources (e.g., interviews, focus groups) and through other methods (e.g., member checks, follow up with participants to clarify the meaning of their responses). These particular limitations should be viewed in relation to our QUANT + qual mixed-methods research design (Edwards & Lopez, 2006; Morse, 1991), which placed more emphasis on the quantitative portion of the methodology. Nevertheless, we encourage future researchers to use rigorous mixed methods to further examine contextual masculinity within domains of interest. Regardless, in sum, results should be interpreted in light of these limitations.

Conclusions

The results of this mixed methods study highlight the importance of examining the contextual nature of men's experiences with gender role conflict across different life domains. In their review of *Psychology of Men and Masculinity's* first decade of scholarship, Wong et al. (2010) reported a dearth of experimental studies as well as a paucity of studies within the sporting domain. This study was successful in addressing both of these gaps in the literature. Additionally, this study demonstrated that the correlates of gender role conflict might vary across life domains. Taken together, the results of this study indicated ways that football players display affection and emotion toward other men, and the results also suggest that the life domain of football can moderate the relationship between displaying affection toward men and life satisfaction. These results provide in-

sight into the sport of football, a unique institution of masculinity socialization that influences millions of young men every year (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2010). We hope that these findings can contribute to a greater understanding of masculinity socialization within sport, as well as stimulate future research on the contextual nature of masculinity.

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