

# “I Mean, We’re Guys”: Constructing Gender at an All-Male Trade School

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## Abstract

For young men, the transition to adulthood may be a time of heightened adherence to traditional gender roles and norms of masculinity. However, recent research with young men in gender-specific contexts has indicated that some contexts support a construction of masculinity that is more inclusive. Through a theoretical thematic analysis of interviews with young men in their first week at an all-male trade school, we explored if and how participants talked about gender and its role in their lives, how these discussions of gender may reflect individual gender ideologies, and how these discussions may inform participants' experiences in particular developmental contexts. The themes we identified included the following: Becoming a man as an active process, experiences of male embodiment of size and strength, intersections of school identity and being a man, students' perceptions of their all-male school environment and what it means to not have female classmates, and their reflections on the parts of themselves they see as feminine. We discuss the implications of our findings for future research with adolescents and young adults in relation to gender, relationships, and professional development.

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Throughout the life span, people experience different treatment based on the gender norms operating in their developmental contexts (Leaper, 2015) and also construct their own ideas about gender (Liben, Bigler, & Hilliard, 2013). The operation of gender thus reflects social structures of power and privilege that take on specific forms within specific contexts, as individuals adhere to and resist different constructions of gender. Furthermore, both the broader social structures and local constructions of gender are formed with and through sexuality and relationships (Tolman, 2006) and in relation to other aspects of individual development within particular contexts, such as social class, education, and occupation (e.g., Mac an Ghail & Haywood, 2011; Roberts, 2013).

In the present study, we examined the gender-related experiences of young men from working-class backgrounds who were pursuing a postsecondary vocational education. These young men graduated from high school and arrived, within a year, at an all-male trade school. At this pivotal juncture between adolescence and young adulthood, examining gender-related experiences also involves examining the ways in which gender ideologies and gendered experiences coexist with other aspects of development, such as sexuality, relationships, identity, education, and career. In order to unpack these interconnected layers of developmental experience, we undertook multiple angles of analysis. In this article, we draw upon several different areas of scholarship to analyze these young men's experiences of gender, sexuality, and relationships within the context of their school and the careers they are building.

The analyses presented here are part of a larger ongoing study that involves our collaboration with an all-male trade school.<sup>1</sup> The analyses developed iteratively through our examinations of interviews conducted with these young men, as they discussed gender and its role in their lives, and through our reading of multiple interrelated literatures. Therefore, we present several bodies of research and explain how each contributed to our analysis of the ways in which these young men construct gender ideologies and the role those ideologies may play in their reflections about their lives.

We begin by presenting research related to the development of gender constructions. We relate this research to concerns about the ways in which sex-segregated schooling may impact young people's constructions of gender. We then present sociological research on expanding constructions of masculinity among young men in sex-segregated contexts such as athletic

teams and fraternities. This literature raises questions regarding the coconstruction of masculinity and sexuality and about the ways in which masculinity may be differentially constructed in relation to social class, education, and occupation. We draw upon these bodies of research in order to examine the implications of gender constructions for addressing sexism and for promoting inclusive masculinity in young men's personal and professional lives.

## Gender Construction

From birth into adulthood, people actively construct their own knowledge and understanding of gender using the explicit and implicit information they obtain from their social worlds, including their families, peers, schools, the media, and other sources of influence (Bem, 1983). This process is ongoing, flexible, and relational as the individual encodes information about the self (which includes a physical body) and about the structures and messages in the context (Bem, 1983; Liben et al., 2013). Leaper's (1994, 2015) reviews of research on gender development have shown that, when girls and boys are encouraged to socialize separately as children, be it by their teachers, parents, or other influences, they begin to develop two separate social groups—one for girls and one for boys—with distinct cultural norms for interaction. As children enter adolescence, this emphasis on gender separation, and the group norms that develop from it, influence how young people interact with each other, for example, teasing youth from the other gender group and forming friendships mainly within one's own gender group (Leaper, 1994). Children and adolescents also often select their own environments, such as peer groups, activities, and career paths, which in turn shape the kinds of gender norms to which they adhere (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002).

Contemporary Western constructions of masculinity among adolescent boys have been found to include emotional restriction and withdrawal from close relationships, for example, as adolescent boys and young men urge each other to be stoic, to be tough, and to handle their feelings on their own (Oransky & Fisher, 2009; Oransky & Marecek, 2009; Way, 2011). Teasing other boys and being teased oneself is both a way to demonstrate masculinity and to monitor adherence to masculine norms (Oransky & Fisher, 2009; Oransky & Marecek, 2009). These constructions of masculinity are also characterized by constant effort, as adolescent boys continuously participate in asserting and defending their masculinity in order to maintain this power (Chu, Porche, & Tolman, 2005; Oransky & Fisher, 2009). Because men have more social power than women (Tolman, 2006), boys are more likely than girls to grow up with a desire, perhaps implicitly, to initiate and maintain gender group boundaries, as boys would be more invested in maintaining the

group identity that affords them this more powerful status (Bigler, Brown, & Markell, 2001). These gender group boundaries may be even more salient for adolescents who attend sex-segregated schools.

## **Sex-Segregated Schooling**

Because of these differences in social power, an all-male school may thus have different implications for the development of gender ideologies than an all-female school. Separating schools by gender may have unintended consequences, such as reinforcing rigid definitions of “masculinity” and “femininity,” in-group favoritism, and prejudice toward the out-group (Bigler & Liben, 2007). For example, in one study, students in sex-segregated middle school classrooms demonstrated an increase in gender stereotyping over the course of the school year compared with their counterparts in mixed-sex classrooms (Fabes, Pahlke, Martin, & Hanish, 2013). In another study, students in sex-segregated classrooms resisted assumptions that students of the same gender would have the same learning styles by expressing desires to learn in multiple ways, without being restricted by their gender (Goodkind, Schelbe, Joseph, Beers, & Pinsky, 2013). Attending specifically to the experiences of young men in an all-male school, as we do in this study, provides an opportunity to examine how the construction of gender ideologies may relate to processes of in-group favoritism and the upholding of masculine power within such a context (Bigler & Liben, 2007; Epstein & Morrell, 2012).

Existing research within all-male schools suggests that gender ideologies permeate multiple aspects of student life (e.g., Reichert, 2000). At an all-male private school in the Philadelphia area, Reichert (2000) found that students both conformed to and resisted the behaviors being elicited and rewarded by the school, such as emotional stoicism and competitive athleticism (Reichert, 2000). Some students resisted these school-based standards of masculinity through, for example, avoiding self-disclosure to reduce the risk of hazing and humiliation (Reichert, 2000). Reichert’s work is an example of listening for resistance, which is an approach that allows researchers to understand young people’s roles as producers of their own development (Lerner, 1982) as they negotiate institutional pressures and cultural stereotypes (Way, 2011). The concept of resistance signifies that even when young people are learning certain gender ideologies from their context, they may still have opportunities for thinking critically about their own constructions of gender and, perhaps, for acting in ways that are not in accordance with the pressures and stereotypes (Way, 2011). We also employed the technique of listening for resistance in the present study.

## **Inclusive Masculinity Theory**

Listening for individual resistance was complemented by our attention to the ways in which gender norms may be operating within the context, as guided by the theory of Inclusive Masculinity (Anderson, 2009). Anderson's research with young men in all-male sports teams and in college fraternities informed his development of this theory. His analyses focused on the function of homo-hysteria, defined as young men's fear of being perceived as gay (Anderson, 2009). In contexts with heightened homo-hysteria, what he termed "orthodox masculinity"—the dominant form of masculinity—was constructed as a way for men to access power and status. As homo-hysteria diminished, he found orthodox masculinity to be in competition with more inclusive forms of masculinity as a means of gaining power. In other contexts, Anderson (2009) found a pluralism of masculinities in which both orthodox masculinity and inclusive masculinities were valued in parallel. Inclusive masculinities were characterized by acceptance of homosexuality, acceptance of feminine behaviors as displayed by men, and access to physical displays of affection among men (Anderson, 2009).

### *Masculinity and Heterosexuality*

Although the present study does not directly address homophobia in relation to the construction of masculinity, we use inclusive masculinity theory and related research to explore the relationship between the construction of heterosexuality and the construction of masculinity (e.g., Roberts, 2014). Oransky and Fisher (2009) used the term heterosexism to describe the way in which masculinity is constructed in opposition to behaviors associated with femininity and/or homosexuality, particularly among adolescent males (Oransky & Fisher, 2009). Heterosexuality and sexism are other aspects of heterosexism that may also relate to young men's constructions of masculinity (Tolman, 2006). Even within contexts characterized by inclusive masculinity, sexist attitudes and violence against women may remain part of a range of behaviors used by men to assert masculinity and masculine power (Anderson, 2009; Roberts, 2014). The construction of masculinity thus has implications not only for the well-being of men but also for the ways in which men relate to women.

During the transition to adulthood, young men endorse family gender roles such as a man as a breadwinner, and a woman as a caregiver, at higher rates than such norms are endorsed by adolescent males and by adolescent and young adult females (Fulcher & Coyle, 2011). There is evidence, however, that these norms do not operate equally across all contexts. For

example, in research by Roberts (2013), working-class young men in retail service jobs were found to endorse positive attitudes toward performing emotional labor in their jobs, a behavior that is stereotypically considered a feminine strength. In addition, these young men anticipated sharing housework with a future female partner, in particular cooking and child care (Roberts, 2013). Therefore, it is important to investigate the ways in which the construction of gender norms in adolescence and young adulthood may be constituted through class, education, and occupation (Fulcher & Coyle, 2011; Roberts, 2013, 2014).

### *Social Class, Education, and Occupation*

Mac an Ghail and Haywood (2011) argued that the socially constructed images of White working-class men have shifted, with shifts in the economic and political landscape, from cultural valorization (through characteristics such as individuality, independence, and autonomy) to cultural pathologization (through being characterized as abject, recidivist, and reactionary). McCormack (2014) found that working-class young men in late adolescence and the transition to adulthood displayed both evidence of inclusive masculinity and indicators of certain ways in which the power and status of orthodox masculinity persisted. Working-class youth may have limited access to the changing and broadening cultural expressions of middle and upper class youth, and they also may find themselves managing different forms of stigma coconstructed through gender and class (McCormack, 2014; Nayak & Kehily, 2008).

Orthodox masculinity may be even more salient within all-male educational contexts and while training for male-dominated professions such as any of the mechanical trades (e.g., carpentry, machining, masonry). Young men's choices of a gendered career path could reflect an adherence to masculinity ideologies (P. Gilbert & R. Gilbert, 2001). Adolescent boys have demonstrated more stereotypical occupational preferences than adolescent girls (Sinclair & Carlsson, 2013). Another study found that young men's career choices were related to their preferences for action and competition and to their endorsement of traditional gender roles (Freund, Weiss, & Wiese, 2013). Moreover, once adolescents have chosen and begun training for these stereotypically masculine occupations, gender norms may be reinforced and gender discrepancies may be heightened.

Traditional gender ideologies appear to persist within the male-dominated trade professions (Denissen, 2010). Students at a high school program in auto body repair expressed gender ideologies that connected masculinity with economic achievement, self-reliance, and competition (Marusza, 1997).

Students at another all-male auto program exhibited pressure to act as “one of the boys”: adhering to traditional masculinity, resisting feminized academic subjects, and teasing each other about cars, about their physical bodies, and about interactions with girls (Grønberg, 2013). Within the context of a Finnish vocational school, teachers professed a code of gender neutrality, but this code masked their constructions of a gender hierarchy in which male teachers had more power than female teachers did (Lappalainen, Lahelma, Pehkonen, & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2012). This research demonstrates the need to further understand the ways in which gender ideologies are constructed and resisted within male-dominated vocational contexts. Such research can inform efforts to promote inclusive forms of masculinity within these educational and occupational contexts and, furthermore, could perhaps inform efforts to address gender inequity and sexism throughout the many diverse contexts in which adolescent development takes place.

## The Present Research

There is little existing research on the experiences of young men in sex-segregated postsecondary institutions in the United States, and the present study provided an opportunity to begin to address this gap in research. We focused on exploring components of gender construction among young men who were first-year students at the Williamson College of the Trades (WC), an all-male, 3-year postsecondary institution that has implemented a character-focused trade education program since its opening in 1891.

Three research questions guided our analyses:

**Research Question 1:** How, if at all, do students in their first week of their first year at this all-male trade school talk about gender and its role in their lives?

**Research Question 2:** How, if at all, do students’ discussions of gender reflect individual gender ideologies that may be relevant to the WC context?

**Research Question 3:** What evidence, if any, can be identified of young men’s resistance to gender ideologies?

We implemented a theoretical thematic analysis of interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in which we focused on evidence of specific gender ideologies in students’ responses. These analyses were guided by theories of gender construction (Leaper, 2015) and inclusive masculinity (Anderson, 2009) and by research on sex-segregated schooling (e.g., Goodkind et al., 2013).

## Method

The data for the current investigation were collected as part of the first year of the Assessment of Character (ACT) Study (Johnson et al., in press), a collaboration between our research team and the leadership of WC. The ACT Study is a longitudinal and mixed-method study of the WC educational model (Johnson et al., in press). Specifically, the study aims to identify (a) which components of the WC model promote the positive development of its students and (b) in what ways the WC model could be enhanced to further influence the positive development of its students (Johnson et al., in press). Full details regarding ACT can be found in Johnson et al., in press. In this section, we describe the general context of the ACT project, aspects of ACT data collection that are relevant to the present study, and our analysis procedures.

### *The Research Context*

The program design, selection criteria, and developmental practices of WC structure the context for this study. Students at the WC are specifically accepted into a program of study for one of six mechanical trades: carpentry; masonry; horticulture, landscaping, and turf management; machine tool technology; paint and coatings technology; and power plant technology. Across the 3-year educational period, students spend their mornings in academic classes geared toward building professional skills such as speech, business, and computers; in the afternoon, they attend shop classes, which include discussions of theory along with supervised projects in their chosen area of study. This training is intended to provide graduates with the skills they need to succeed in positions in their trade and as small business owners, as many students develop entrepreneurial goals (WC, 2014).

There are several admission requirements for WC students. Students must come from families living at or below 250% of the U.S. poverty line (WC, 2014). The young men must be able-bodied, in good health, under 20 years, unmarried and without children, and legal residents of the United States at the time of admission (WC, 2014). Students must also have a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate, and they are required to take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test (although there is no minimum score for admission), and to complete an interview with WC administrators (WC, 2014). WC does not discriminate against applicants on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, or ethnic background (WC, 2014). Although the school does not include sexual orientation in the antidiscrimination policy, we are aware of at least one sexual minority student, and he did have the support of the school.



In addition to its focus on trade-skill development, a WC education is distinguished by its emphasis on character development. WC implements several activities and requirements for students, which are designed to promote character development, including attendance at daily chapel service, a stringent code of conduct, and participation in community-related activities. The college also has a strict zero-tolerance policy: Students are not allowed to drink alcohol or to take any illegal substances throughout their 3 years at WC (regardless of whether they are 21 years of age). Students are randomly drug tested to ensure their adherence to this policy and are expelled if they are found to have violated it.

Due in part to this zero-tolerance policy and to the strict disciplinary code, a portion of students either willingly leave or are expelled each year. Over the past 5 years (2009-2014), the graduation rate was 74% (T. Wisneski, personal communication, February 9, 2015). For students who graduate from WC, however, an average job placement rate of 98% ensures that almost all will secure a job in their trade soon after graduating (WC, 2014).

Finally, and especially relevant to our questions of the construction of gender ideologies within the WC context, is the school's mission of preparing "deserving young men to be useful and respected citizens" (The Williamson Free School of Mechanical Trades, 2014). The school administrators enact this mission through encouraging the students to become what they term "Williamson Men" who, the school declares, are "better fathers, husbands, employees, employers, neighbors, community leaders and gentlemen" than other young men.

## Procedure

The institutional review board at Tufts University approved all interview procedures. We describe here the procedure for recruiting participants and conducting the interviews. We focus specifically on life narrative and semistructured interviews conducted in the first year of the ACT Study, which are the data sources for the current investigation.

**Recruitment.** As part of the ACT Study, we conducted semistructured and life narrative interviews with 30 first-year students at WC during first-year orientation in late August 2012. We chose to conduct interviews with students at the beginning of their first year in order to understand their background experiences and personal characteristics before they were immersed in their education. The interview recruitment procedure was as follows. Prior to the orientation, we randomly selected 40 of the 100 first-year students based on randomly assigned identification numbers between 1 and 100. Thirty students

were invited to participate in an interview, with 10 alternates. One of the initial 30 students selected declined the invitation to participate, so the first alternate student was interviewed.

Three of the 30 participants did not complete the demographic survey. Of the 27 participants who did, self-reported race/ethnicity was 11% Black and 89% White, and 19% reported having received free or reduced-price lunch during high school. The mean age was 18.2 ( $SD = 0.5$ ).

*The interview process.* Interviews were conducted by six female members of the ACT research team (the first three authors and three of our colleagues). Our choice to use only female interviewers was guided by several factors. Our study team included only one male researcher. Thus, one reason to use only female interviewers was to keep gender of interviewer consistent across interviews (i.e., to avoid having one male interviewer and five female interviewers). Female interviewers can be successful at eliciting young men's views about gender, and gender of the interviewer may matter less than the interviewer's awareness of gender (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001).

All participants gave their informed consent, and the interviews lasted between 30 to 90 minutes. Interview participants were compensated with a US\$50 gift card. Each of the interviewers followed the same semistructured interview protocol (described below) and met with each other on a regular basis before, during, and after the week when interviews were conducted to discuss the protocol. Interviews were tape-recorded, professionally transcribed, and checked for errors prior to the beginning of the analysis process.

*The interview protocol.* The interview began with a life narrative task (adapted from Habermas, 2007). Participants were prompted to write down the five to seven most important events that had ever happened in their lives (the exact number was chosen by the participant and thus varied across interviews). Then, they used those events to guide them in telling the interviewer a story about their lives so far.

After the life narrative, interviewers followed the semistructured interview protocol to facilitate discussion about participants' reasons for choosing WC, their expectations and hopes for their experiences at WC, and their future life goals. Participants were also asked directly about their experiences as men. The gender-specific questions on the interview protocol were as follows:

1. Some final questions have to do with gender as some of us are interested in the experiences of men in the United States, specifically. So, for example, we've started to hear the phrase "Williamson Men"

during our time here. Have you heard this phrase in your community? What does this phrase mean to you and how does it feel to be joining Williamson Men as you begin your studies?

2. Related to the previous question, what were some messages you got in high school or before about what it means to “be a man”? What does it mean to you personally?

Because the interviews were semistructured, not every interviewer asked these questions in the exact same way, and interviewers were instructed to follow the lead of the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). There were also many other points in the interview in which participants discussed gender-related topics. For example, participants mentioned gender when they discussed their family histories, their high school experiences, and the important relationships in their lives. Therefore, the responses analyzed in the present study were taken from across the 30 participants’ interviews, and these responses included but were not limited to participants’ answers to the questions that were directly about gender. These data can be accessed by contacting the first author.

### *Data Analysis*

The first author coded all of the interviews, and the second author, a more experienced qualitative researcher, served as an auditor of her coding process. In her coding of the interviews, the first author developed etic codes based on her theoretical framework. For example, the code “being/becoming a man” referenced theories of gender construction (Leaper, 2015), the code “guys are the same” referenced findings in other research on sex-segregated schooling (Goodkind et al., 2013), and there was a section of the codebook for listening for resistance to contextual masculinity ideologies (Way, 2011). The first author also developed emic in vivo codes (Saldaña, 2012) that were directly tied to the words participants used in their descriptions of relationships and their own views of what it meant to be a man, including the statement of “I have a girlfriend” and references to “brothers” or “brotherhood.”

After coding six interviews, the first and second authors met to review the codes the first author developed and to refine code names and definitions in line with the thematic analysis process more generally (Braun & Clarke, 2006). One example of an adjustment to the codebook made through these conversations is that originally, there was one code for “reactions to all-male school.” Based on discussions between the first and second authors, that code was then later divided into one code for “a first reaction” (with several sub-codes) and separate codes for “just being with guys” and for “not having girls

around,” each of which had several subcodes as well. Through discussion of the codes and coded data, the second author also helped the first author remain focused on addressing the research questions guiding her analysis of these data, while noting other questions that emerged from her analysis that could guide the development of additional analyses (Sandelowski, 2001). For example, the first author began to develop a set of codes about how participants referenced male roles in relationships (e.g., “brother” or “son”), and the second author determined that these codes were not adequately assessing information about gender constructions. As part of her coding of the data, the first author also engaged in systematic memoing to ensure that her guiding framework and previous knowledge of the WC context, as well as the guiding theoretical literature, did not preclude her from focusing on participants’ words or identifying themes in the data that ran counter to her initial impressions (Morrow, 2005).

Through reviewing codes and responses coded under the final version of the codebook, we discussed potential connections between codes or themes that addressed our main research questions (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). Some of these themes were developed from *in vivo* codes, and thus, reflected participants’ words directly (e.g., “girls are a distraction”), whereas others drew more heavily from the literature (e.g., embodying manhood; Saldaña, 2012). We iteratively defined, refined, and named the themes to prepare for writing up our results, in keeping with the theoretical thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## **Results**

Through our thematic analyses of the participants’ life narratives, semistructured interview responses, and answers to direct questions about gender and about their school, we identified several themes regarding their construction of and resistance to gender ideologies. We addressed three research questions, and our presentation of results below is organized according to these questions. These analyses were guided by theories of gender construction (Leaper, 2015) and inclusive masculinity (Anderson, 2009) and research on sex-segregated schooling (e.g., Goodkind et al., 2013).

### ***Research Question 1: Talking About Gender***

Our first research question was, “How, if at all, do students in their first week of their first year at this all-male trade school talk about gender and its role in their lives?” To address this question, we attended to the language the students used about manhood. We identified evidence that they constructed

being a man as a process of actively becoming something; it was something to work at. We also identified the theme of manhood as a demonstration that needed to be seen or validated by other people, based on embodied displays of male physicality and through performing toughness and hard work.

*Becoming a man.* Logically, being a man is a combination of being a male individual and being considered an adult. However, when exploring the language these youth used about being men, we identified that they considered “being a man” as something very specific. The participants expressed gender constructions that suggested that becoming a man involved a process of acting like a man that was more than the sum of being in a male body and having had enough time pass to be in an adult stage of development (i.e., being over 18 years). Ben explained,

A lot of people these days don't know what it really means to be a man. Even I at one point thought being a man was just growing up and getting facial hair. People think that nowadays once you're just that age, you can basically do whatever you want and you can call yourself a man. But they don't really know what it means to be a well-respected man and how to also respect others. It takes a lot to be called a man.

“It takes a lot to be called a man,” Ben told us; it was not a simple combination of “growing up” (age) and “getting facial hair” (purported adult maleness). His emphasis on being called a man also suggested that he recognized a social element to claiming both adult status and male gender status—Other people would look at male adults' behavior, determine if they were behaving correctly (respectful, deserving of respect), and call them a man, or not.

Other participants also discussed being a man while using language that suggested they had constructed specific gender ideologies. Al, for example, shared that his oldest brother is such a great role model because, “As a man, I respect everything he does.” This statement pointed to a connection between Al's masculinity constructions and the specific actions and behaviors that he valued as masculine. Dan expressed his view that the behaviors of manhood were learned behaviors, which he reportedly learned from his father when “he took me in and taught me how to be a man.” Greg noted that he expected to learn behaviors related to being a man from being at WC: “It's gonna teach me how to be an overall man.” Similarly, Andy said, “they teach us . . . how to be a proper man.” Sam agreed that school “shapes you to be a grown man,” and Leo noted that “they're molding us into becoming a man.”

These young men expressed that being a man would need to be learned and developed. Other people would need to then recognize a person's manhood, so that a male adult may be “called” a man. These comments indicated

that the construction of masculinity was ongoing and interpersonal. The participants discussed masculinity as an accomplishment that they were striving to have recognized in the eyes of other people. In order to better understand this dynamic construction of gender, it is important to know what particular combinations of body and behavior these youth considered to be part of being called a man, so we now turn to a discussion of these issues and how they manifested in participants' responses.

*What is a man?* The participants expressed that a man is differentiated by his physical body, that the male body is experienced in relation to the associated meanings and expectations. The participants discussed embodying manhood in relation to size and strength. They also expressed meanings of manhood related to expectations about hard work.

*Embodying manhood.* Ben said (above) that a key symbol of growing up in a male body was facial hair. Other participants echoed this statement. Leo specifically looked forward to growing a mustache: "I never really grew out my facial hair before because it didn't look that good. But I guess if I do it for a whole year, it's just gonna be this manly mustache." Leo reportedly saw the ability to grow a mustache as an achievement of male embodiment, in contrast to "the little straggly ones" that would not count as manly. He wanted to grow a mustache like his father, explaining, "I feel like I can because I've seen pictures of my dad when he was younger. He was my age, and he had one of them thick ones." Greg also had a father with a mustache, and he appeared to associate his father's mustache with being a man. Greg talked about his father, explaining that his mustache was part of him being "a hard man . . . real hard man. He's had a mustache since he was, like, 12. I don't know if that means anything, but . . . Yeah, I've never seen him without a mustache."

As these young men remembered their fathers and described images of their future selves, they demonstrated that growing facial hair was a part of signaling their manhood through their bodies. Not all people with a male body grow facial hair to the same extent (Wade, 2013). As these young men described it, they wanted not only the indication of facial hair that could result from a range of levels of testosterone, but they wanted a "manly mustache"—facial hair that signals not just maleness but rather a specific form of achieving masculinity. The location of masculinity within these particular physical accomplishments might suggest questions about what happens for young men whose facial hair does not become what they want it to be. Importantly, the participants described other aspects of achieving masculinity over which they might experience more control.

Strength and toughness, for example, were about actual individual physicality and also about how an individual would use his body in relation to physical and social displays of power or attempts at gaining power or status. The stories that participants shared demonstrated that they did not think that *all* male bodies were big and tough, but rather that these qualities or the perception of having these qualities were desirable. In this way, the participants were expressing an internalized value rather than a normative expectation for all men. They revealed that male size and strength was a detail to which they were paying attention, and a value against which they were assessing themselves.

Al, for instance, remembered feeling “pretty cool” hanging out with his older brothers and their friends because “you felt like you’re bigger and badder and everything.” Dan made a general declaration about his experience navigating social dynamics: “High school likes the bad guy, the bad kid, the tough guy.” In these comments, being “big” and “tough” was also associated with being “cool” and “bad” and having friends. Greg articulated similar views about the physicality of manhood: “Other messages I got to be a man before I came here, you know, you had to be big and brawny, you had to lift heavy things and . . . yeah, tough.”

The young men’s constructions of what would be desirable in male embodiment included size and strength and a certain edge of being tough, bad, or intimidating. In these gender constructions, to be a man was connected to one’s physical abilities and the attitude with which a person holds his own body around others. Furthermore, the embodiment of masculinity was constructed as a way to earn and display social status and power, such as having friends. These comments indicated that the ongoing, dynamic construction of masculinity had specific content, involving a specific kind of person that these young people want to become.

*Working hard and being independent.* The association these young men made between size and strength extended to the rhetoric they used about hard work and independence. The participants emphasized working hard, specifically in gendered terms. Ben said he was at school to “concentrate on becoming a man, becoming a hard worker,” explicitly demonstrating that hard work was part of his gender construction of being a man. Tom elaborated, “Just showing that you’re successful . . . and you’re a hard working guy shows that you’re a man.” Al tied it together when he explained how he thought about men: “They don’t need everyone to lean on . . . They’re able to do what they need to do by themselves.” Greg seemed to agree that independence was central to manhood: “When things go wrong in your life . . . you’re the one who has to make them right because that’s what men do.” Chris emphasized independent decision making by saying, “What makes a man a man is just

by doing what he feels needs to be done, not by doing what other people feel needs to be done.” Kyle expanded,

Taking things and doing it myself, not getting someone else to do it. If I want something done, I have to do it myself. And just getting up and doing things by myself, not having someone tell me to do this, do that. I would just be myself and just take care of myself. That’s what I consider being a man.

These young men expressed gender constructions in which men work hard and get their work done. Furthermore, this hard work was in a very specific context: by themselves, not physically or metaphorically leaning on anyone else. Independence in this way was not only tied to being an adult but also to masculinity, because the whole conversation unfolded in gendered terms.

These young men’s words demonstrated that, according to the gender ideologies they held, becoming a man and embodying manhood were related to self-reliance and productivity. This emphasis on self-reliance and productivity echoed the ways in which White working-class masculinity has been historically valorized in Western cultural consciousness (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2011). These gender constructions may, therefore, be a means of earning and asserting pride and power within a broader context in which these young men may lack access to other forms of social and economic validation. Thus, these working-class young men may be accessing power through their constructions of masculinity in the context of their trade education at this all-male trade school. Accessing such power in an all-male school may imply that such power is available only to men, through the sex-segregated structure of the context.

### *Research Question 2: Gender Ideologies*

Our second research question was “How, if at all, do students’ discussions of gender reflect individual gender ideologies that may be relevant to the WC context?” To address this question, we explored the responses to questions about what it means to be a “Williamson Man.” We also examined participants’ discussions of being at an all-male school, including reasons they liked being with only male students and reasons they liked not having female students at WC.

*Becoming a Williamson Man.* In addition to their own gender constructions about “being a man” or “becoming a man,” the participants were just entering a new school that had a reputation for producing its own kind of man: a “Williamson Man.” In order to explore participants’ reflections on the type of man



their school aimed to produce, we asked, during the interviews, what the phrase *Williamson Man* meant to them. Indeed, participants shared that they had not only heard the phrase *Williamson Man* but had also hoped or expected to become a “Williamson Man” during their time at school. Al said, “It’s a good feeling to be able to do everything [by] yourself and be able to one day call yourself a Williamson Man.” Ben echoed the feeling, “I’m just hoping that I can be called a Williamson Man. I’m looking forward to it.” Kyle’s brother, a recent graduate, “calls himself a Williamson Man.” And Kyle added, “I want to be able to call myself a Williamson Man.” Here, too, was another instance in which participants’ language revealed their focus on what others call them or what they are able to call themselves; these instances demonstrate the ways in which their gender ideologies were constructed as accomplishments to be recognized and affirmed by others.

When asked if he had heard about “the Williamson Man,” Ike explained, “That’s just like taking members in modern society or making members something, respectful members of modern society.” In other words, the school was actively producing Williamson Men to be a particular kind of member of society. Eric said the “Williamson Man [is] I guess just like the ideal man,” and Bob explained that this involves being “good husbands, good fathers, good sons, productive members of the community.” In service of this goal, Williamson Men follow the strict rules of the school and are held to a high standard of hard work. Dan said that a Williamson Man will “just do it”—“no matter how much you don’t like it, just do it.” Evan similarly explained,

It’s just they drill into our brains: Be organized. Be clean. Be on time. Be well-dressed. Dress for what you have to dress for, not even be on time just be early, be at least fifteen minutes early to everything. And over the three years they just drill it into your brain and then I guess once you get out it’s just force of habit.

Evan, thus, shared his view that he expected to internalize the values, habits, and behaviors of this certain type of manhood throughout his WC education.

In an all-male school, these students are learning to be adult members of society at the same time as they are learning to be men. Growing up into an adult was thus conflated with a certain kind of achievement of gender. These findings indicate the ways in which gender ideologies may be inflated or reinforced by sex-segregated educational contexts. As these young men entered the transition to adulthood within the context of this all-male school, maleness may have been functioning as the filter through which they anticipated developing as professionals, as members of civil society, and as future

husbands and fathers. In this way, their constructions of masculinity may position them to seek and inhabit traditional roles of male power, such as “breadwinner” and head of household. Indeed, when asked about being at an all-male school, the participants spoke both about how they felt in the presence of their male peers and about how they felt in the absence of female peers.

*Education at an all-male school.* In response to the question, “What do you think about this school being all-male?” the participants expressed that being at an all-male school was “not a big deal.” They provided two main explanations as to why it was not a big deal. Some explained that they really like being with only boys because “everybody gets along” and others replied that they do not need girls around if they “already have a girlfriend.”

“*Not a big deal.*” Overall, the students expressed neutral feelings regarding the school being all-male. Carl said, “I don’t care.” Fred validated, “I understand where they’re coming from.” Evan expressed his neutrality in many ways, stating, “It doesn’t bother me that much . . . It’s not a big deal . . . I’m kinda used to it playing hockey, too.” Kyle was also reminded of his experience playing sports, explaining, “My friends made fun of me . . . but it’s fine by me” because “I’m used to going to wrestling camps where it’s all guys and just being around guys.” Each of these declarations of neutrality seemed to have a hint or tinge of negative feelings. The words suggested that being at an all-male school could potentially be something to care about, it could be difficult to understand, it could be bothersome or a big deal. At the same time, there was a consistent theme that participants could just get used to being at an all-male school. Ben revealed this initial hesitation: “At first, it made me think twice. I had never heard of an all-guys school. Now I’m used to it.”

Other participants were clearer about the downsides of not having female students at WC. Ike felt like “it kinda sucks,” and Leo confirmed, “I’d rather girls here of course.” Jim wavered, “It’s good and bad at the same time . . . it’s kinda weird . . . I don’t know, it’s different.” Greg was unique in expressing how he missed “the feminine side,” saying,

I haven’t really gotten used to that yet . . . that’s another thing I’m really kind of worried about, too, just being around all guys for three years . . . It’s gonna be an experience. It’s gonna be something I’m not used to.

Even his language suggested that it would still be fine, just something to get used to, even if he did not like it and was really worried about it. These

comments indicate that there may be hesitations or doubts underneath the performance of indifference. However, participants drew upon several dimensions of the construction of masculinity in defense of their attending an all-male school.

*“Everybody gets along.”* Separate from discussions of whether they wanted girls to be students at the school, the participants identified a lot of reasons they liked having all the students at the school be male. However, we interviewed them during orientation week before their first year of school, so they had not yet had extensive experience in this particular all-male setting. They reported, nevertheless, clear opinions about what it had been like so far and what they expected moving forward.

Evan thought that “we’re all the same” because “we’re all boys.” Fred started to say, “Everybody gets along” but then corrected himself, adding, “You can relate to a lot of the people.” These words displayed evidence of intergroup relations in which the in-group (boys, males) had a set of positive attributes that made them similar and thus provided them with a particular way in which they could relate to each other.

Ben’s comments took this analysis of intergroup relations a step further:

I really love that bond that two men can have. You can’t have that with a woman . . . You’re always looking out for a brother and helping your brother become a man and just having each other’s back.

Ben talked about a social dynamic among men that appeared to be related to gender ideology because it was very specifically about being like brothers and becoming men together. Carl also reflected on what it was like to be among only men:

I mean we’re all guys. It’s like you walk into a dorm room, either you’re gonna laugh or you’re probably just—your face is gonna get red or you’re just gonna be like these guys are a bunch of idiots. ‘Cause I mean, we’re guys. I mean, guys talk about just the dumbest stuff. And it’s basically like animals up there. I mean, we’re good, but it’s just like guys are just walking around in towels just chilling. Guys are talking about when they went to the bathroom last and just how that was. It’s like—so we’re guys. We’re gonna laugh about it, but it’s like, all right, I don’t need to know everything. Dude, keep that there.

As he described this scene in the dormitory, Carl emphasized “we’re guys” repeatedly. He saw guys as “idiots” and “animals,” adding another dimension to his peers’ characterizations of the male in-group. The implication was that girls would not have a place there, or maybe would not even want to be there.

The participants said they liked having only “guys.” They expressed that they did not want girls around, and that it could mess up their social dynamic, their “brotherhood.”

These comments indicate that the young men were constructing masculinity in opposition to women—masculinity as something that excludes women or as something that women should not be present for. The emphasis on the similarity among men also indicates the functioning of a single form of dominant masculinity within this context, rhetorically erasing differences among men in the service of justifying male bonding and male intimacy. In this way, the all-male school context may facilitate the emphasis on the in-group similarities (men are similar) and also references to the differences of the out-group (women would not like it here.) However, even though the participants did not have female peers within their school, several of them emphasized that they had particular young women who still played an important role in their lives: namely, the role of a girlfriend.

*“I already have a girlfriend.”* The one possible negative effect of being at an all-male school that several of the young men did mention was that without girls around, it could be harder to get a girlfriend. But seven of these young men were clear that they had a girlfriend already and that, for them, having a girlfriend made it okay or even good that they were at an all-male school. Harry still reportedly found it difficult. He explained, “The no girls thing was pretty huge. I mean I have a girlfriend now, but it’s hard.” Fred and Ike, on the other hand, said that having a girlfriend at home made up for not having girls at school. Ike explained, “I get to go home and see my girlfriend every weekend, so it’s not really a big deal.” Fred specified, “I’m happy with my girlfriend. I don’t need anything else.” Carl was a little more defensive in his reply: “I mean I have a girlfriend. I’m not—I’m focused on her. I’m not gonna steer away from her.” Carl’s seeming defensiveness suggested that he felt that admitting to wanting girls around would convey some sort of unhappiness with his girlfriend or perhaps a susceptibility to infidelity.

Ben articulated that he had actually received this message from his female romantic partner. He noted, “She loves the fact that this is an all-guys school. She loves the fact that there are no girls here.” She felt that having girls around would be a potential temptation, something she might need to be concerned about. The idea that these young men could want to be around other young women seemed to imply that they would be interested in these young women in a romantic way.

In this gender dynamic, the role of women was restricted to that of a romantic partner or object of attraction. What it means to be a man, therefore, was to be sexually attracted to women and romantically involved with a

woman and not, apparently, to consider other ways to form personal or professional relationships with same-age female peers. Indeed, the participants spoke clearly about the difficulties they would encounter with regard to sexual attraction and distraction if female peers were to be present at their school.

*“Girls are a distraction.”* The participants thought it was easier to focus on their work when they were only around students who were male. Ben explained, “Having just guys here lightens that load” because “there’s not much you have to worry about.” Fred emphasized, “You have nothing to do but your work.” They thought that not having girls around would help them focus on their academic and professional achievement. Their work was what mattered to them. As presented in six of the young men’s interviews, their internalized image of girls was reduced to simply a distraction:

- Ben: Not to brag or anything, but girls are a big distraction to me.  
Carl: No offense, but at some places, girls would be a distraction for half these guys.  
Evan: It’s fine, you know, no distractions, I guess. (Distractions?) Yeah always a distraction. (Girls?) Yeah a little bit . . . not in a bad way it’s just, you know.  
Ike: I think they’re just trying to bring out the best in you . . . It’s just, they’re eliminating all distractions here. There’s no distractions at all.  
Jim: You can concentrate in class . . . and you’re not distracted by girls.  
Leo: Well, I’d rather girls here of course, but I guess that’s smart ’cause it keeps the guys less distracted. I don’t know. I think it’s better.

Each of these young men used the same word—distraction—when talking about girls and why it was good for them not to have female students at the school. In addition, many of them indicated that they were aware that calling girls a distraction may have made them sound bad somehow. Leo wavered, “I don’t know.” Ben qualified, “not to brag or anything,” and Carl qualified, “No offense.” Evan tagged on his qualification at the end, “not in a bad way.” It was unclear what they thought would be bad or offensive about calling girls a distraction. Fred, however, presented a possible explanation about where this idea might originate:

It’s like they say, girls are a distraction. Well, honestly, sometimes I think they are because you’re too busy talking to them or anything, and not paying attention. That’s the way it was. I’d sit with my friends and we’d talk to other

girls around us, and we wouldn't be paying attention to the teacher. So, for me, I did see them as a distraction. So now I just stare at the teacher so I learn better.

Fred revealed that he had heard the message that girls are a distraction, and he appeared to be figuring out whether he agreed. He said, "I think they are" and then later, "I did see them as a distraction" and described how at the time of the interview, he sat alone. He did not sit with any friends, and yet he interpreted his experience in terms of this message that girls, specifically, had been the source of distraction the whole time (rather than sitting next to any friends, regardless of the gender of the friends).

In the interview, Fred repeated the phrase, "it's like they say," and the first author asked Fred more about this phrasing:

Interviewer: Have you heard that, the teachers and administrators saying girls are a distraction, that's why they're not here?

Fred: Oh, yeah. They said it the first day.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah? What'd they say?

Fred: One of the guys asked, "Why is it an all-male school?" And they specifically said that they see girls as a distraction to younger boys, and that they feel that they do better when there's nobody around, and they're with their own kind, and they just can just pay more attention to the teacher.

Fred expressed specific messages that he reportedly heard from the administration that girls are "a distraction" and that boys do better when "they're with their own kind." These are the messages Fred reported that he obtained from the school about why the school is all-male.

Comments about already having a girlfriend and about experiencing girls as a distraction provide evidence of ways in which masculinity is coconstructed with heterosexuality. Although these comments include no references to homosexuality and no expressions or denial of homophobia, the participants constructed their own heterosexuality through emphasizing their attraction to women and relegating women, as a category of people, to the domain of romance and romantic relationships. The participants made no reference to imagining women as classmates or coworkers, perhaps indicating the ways in which their all-male school structures their education and occupation by constructing masculinity through the exclusion of women. Naming women as the sole source of potential sexual distraction also functions to reify heteronormativity, in which young men expect themselves and others to be sexually aroused by women and not by men. This normalized and presumed heterosexuality thus reflects broader social structures of heterosexism,

as in male power over women constructed through sexuality and romance. The combination of excluding women from the sphere of male learning and achievement and relegating women to the sphere of sexuality and romance functions to maintain male power in both the economic and domestic spheres. In other words, the coconstruction of masculinity and heterosexuality results in the production of systemic sexism.

### *Research Question 3: Listening for Resistance*

Our third research question was, “What evidence, if any, can be identified of young men’s resistance to gender ideologies?” We attended to evidence of resistance to conventions about manhood as they discussed it—for the ways in which they made space for themselves to be something other than their ideal man. Several participants referred to their similarities to women, or parts of themselves that they felt were feminine or were like particular women in their lives.

Dan lived with his great-grandmother growing up, and credited his great-grandmother with teaching him “how to be kind and gentle, which everybody needs to know how to do.” With these words, Dan expressed that he thought he could learn from a woman how to be a good person. Ike also learned from a woman about treating other people well: “I don’t know why, I just always liked making other people happy. I kinda take after my mom.” Ben’s strongest relationship growing up was with his mother. He saw similarities between himself and his mom, saying, “I’d even act like my mother sometimes.” He also got that message from others: “Everybody would say we were like twins because I’m just like her.” In this case, Ben was not discussing moral lessons, but rather personality and behavior. By acting like his mother, he was acting like a female and experiencing that part of himself in a positive way because he felt positively connected to her.

Fred talked not about a specific woman, but about stereotypes of women. Fred said proudly, “I’m like a girl when it comes to shoes, I love buying shoes. That’s the only thing I spend money on, are shoes and jewelry . . . It’s just the way I am.” He acknowledged and enjoyed that part of himself that loved to spend money on shoes and jewelry, and he associated those behaviors with gender constructions about what it meant to be a girl or to be like a girl. By aligning themselves with a specific female or with qualities associated with girls in general, these participants demonstrated that there was room in their self-concepts for not always being the “perfect” man but also being sometimes a little bit like a girl or like a woman.

Greg explained that he actively valued being like a woman in addition to being a man:

You've got to kind of have a little feminine in you, so you can be happy with your partner later in life and stuff. You can't be all, "Oh, my heart," and stuff. You have to open up, and you have to show that—and you have to always play with your kids and stuff and care for them, not because you have to, but because you want to. Even if it's just the little things, like maybe, let's say, take them out to ice cream or a park or something even or walk the dogs with them. Go up and ask them how their day was or something.

In this passage, Greg expressed that being in a relationship with others was something he saw as a feminine trait. Although the participants expressed that being able to take care of oneself was an important part of being a man, Greg also named his value of forming connections with other people as part of his "feminine" parts, which he appreciated. He was very clear, however, that a man should not be too feminine—all "Oh, my heart"—but that he believed to be a husband and father would involve some embracing of feminine qualities.

We have found evidence suggesting that the participants had experiences of being like a woman or of crossing gender divides. It was as yet unclear what these youth believed to be the implications of these female-like parts of themselves for engaging in the process of becoming a man and, specifically, in the process of becoming a Williamson Man. It is also of note that the participants referred to feminine characteristics in the context of their personal lives, but not in reference to their professional pursuits.

When the participants themselves were recounting these stories and reflections, they were not labeling them as experiences of resistance to gender norms in any way. They were simply expressing themselves, providing a small window into their construction of and resistance to gender ideologies. However, these expressions do indicate that there may be some space of inclusivity within their constructions of masculinity—some possibility for accepting femininity and feminine attributes in tandem with the ways in which they identify and perform masculinity. Recognizing and even valuing their own femininity within already feminine domains of personal development may also be distinct from valuing the role of actual women within their professional sphere. In other words, the acceptance of femininity within themselves may be distinct from the acceptance and integration of individual women into their social and professional spheres.

## **Discussion**

As people develop within contexts that perpetuate ideas about what being male or being female should entail, they also construct their own ideologies



about gender (Liben et al., 2013). Because of the complex interactions between people and contexts through which gender ideologies develop (Liben et al., 2013), exploring individual gender ideologies within specific contexts may provide information relevant to understanding human development within the current sociological landscape (Anderson, 2009). In the present study, we examined the gender-related experiences of young men from working-class backgrounds who were pursuing a postsecondary vocational education at an all-male trade school. Our research questions addressed how these young men talked about gender, if and how their discussions of gender reflected ideologies relevant to their institutional context, and evidence of resistance to gender ideologies.

### *Relating Our Findings to the Research*

We examined young men's constructions of gender along several dimensions. We analyzed the interviews for evidence of how they construct masculinity and what the content of their gender constructions were. We analyzed their responses to specific questions about the gendered aspects of their school contexts. And, finally, we listened for evidence of resistance to the dominant gender ideologies that were identified.

*Constructing masculinity.* Our first research question addressed how participants talked about gender and its role in their lives. We identified themes of "becoming a man," "embodying manhood," and "working hard and being independent." Within the data corresponding to these themes, the participants spoke about becoming a man as a social process in which one displays certain evidence of manhood and then is literally or metaphorically "called a man" by other people.

In these responses, the concept of gender construction took on multiple meanings (Leaper, 2015). The young men were discussing the gender ideologies they had constructed from the messages they had received—and those very ideologies were focused on the idea of gender (and manhood, specifically) as something they needed to construct through their behavior so that it could be signaled and they could be seen. These responses reflected the idea that masculinity, and/or being viewed as "masculine," involves constant effort to maintain (Oransky & Fisher, 2009). The theme of "working hard and being independent" also reflected masculinity ideologies related to stoicism and toughness (Oransky & Fisher, 2009) as well as the valorization of White working-class masculinity through characteristics such as individuality, independence, and autonomy (Mac an Ghail & Haywood, 2011). In other words, these ideologies displayed by young men entering their first year at an

all-male trade school may be constructed not only through gender but also through class, education, and occupation.

*Frameworks for assessing sex-segregated schooling.* Our second research question explored how students talked about gender in relation to their school context. We explored how they spoke about “becoming a Williamson Man” as a form of imagining themselves contributing to society through the achievements of career and family. When asked about their reflections on attending an all-male school, they responded that it was “not a big deal” because “everybody gets along,” “I already have a girlfriend,” and “girls are a distraction.” Although it was only orientation week of their first year, the students and the school appeared to have already begun coconstructing the meanings of masculinity in this specific context (Reichert, 2000). The conflation of manhood with personhood with regard to an individual’s role in society connects to research about how sex-segregated schooling may be related to gender stereotyping (Fabes et al., 2013) and how male separatism may be related to maintaining male power (Bigler et al., 2001).

While showing their support for the sex-segregated structure of the institution, several participants emphasized the idea that boys are more similar to each other or somehow get along better with each other than they would with girls. These comments reflected disproven arguments from proponents of sex-segregated schooling that people of the same sex learn in the same ways and would thus benefit from only being with similar youth (Goodkind et al., 2013). These comments also suggest that there might be one dominant or expected form of masculinity operating within this social context, which Anderson (2009) identified as an element of orthodox masculinity rather than inclusive masculinity.

The responses of “I already have a girlfriend” and “girls are a distraction” demonstrated the ways in which the construction of heterosexuality may be related to the production of sexism and exclusion. These comments were justifications for excluding women from this educational institution in which they were preparing to be leaders in their fields. Furthermore, these comments asserted heteronormativity among the male students at the school, supposing that they would not be sexually distracted by other boys, and that they would benefit from the removal of girls who were cast as either sexual objects or romantic partners (Goodkind et al., 2013). As such, these comments also functioned to sexually objectify women and, ostensibly, to burden women with the ways in which men respond to them (Tolman, 2006). These students were thus lacking in opportunities to learn to regulate their own responses to women (sexual or otherwise) and may, therefore, have lacked skills for interacting with women in respectful and productive ways as coworkers or business partners as they pursue their careers. The coconstruction of masculinity

and heterosexism has implications beyond the idea that men should not be homosexual or effeminate (Anderson, 2009; Oransky & Fisher, 2009). Rather, the construction of heterosexism may contribute to the maintenance of a system of men's power over women through the sexual objectification of women and through the exclusion of women from educational and occupational domains.

*Evidence of resistance.* Our third research question addressed evidence of participants' resistance to gender ideologies. Participants spoke about the ways in which they were similar to important women in their lives, such as their mother or grandmother. They also spoke more generally about the ways in which they were "like girls," or how they valued "feminine" aspects of themselves. These findings correspond to other research indicating that young men experience limitations to their constructions of masculinity and seek ways to value aspects of themselves both within and beyond those constructions (Reichert, 2000; Way, 2011). Valuing the ways in which men express feminine characteristics is also an aspect of inclusive masculinities (Anderson, 2009). However, even if some of the young men accepted aspects of femininity within themselves, that form of acceptance may be different from accepting women into their social context. Thus, the promotion of inclusive masculinities may be distinct, in certain ways, from addressing systems of sexism in personal and professional domains.

### *Studying Heterosexism*

Overall, the present study suggests the importance of assessing heterosexism as the coconstruction of gender and sexuality, namely, sexism and heteronormativity (Tolman, 2006). These young men constructed the image of themselves as heterosexual in ways that justified the removal of women from their educational and occupational experience and relegated women to the personal domain, as romantic partners and as sexual distractions. As such, heterosexism functions to reinforce the differentiation of men from women and to reify men's power over women. Thus, the construction of masculinity ideologies that are inclusive of young men's femininity and of the possibility of homosexuality (Anderson, 2009) may be strengthened by directly addressing systems of sexism and sexual differentiation within salient developmental contexts for young people during adolescence and the transition to adulthood.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

The strength of this research resides in starting a conversation; its limitations are that we do not have enough information to finish that conversation at this

time. We included young people who are not usually studied in the gender development literature: young men from working-class backgrounds who are enrolled in vocational education. Attending to the experiences of diverse youth in diverse contexts is essential to helping illustrate a more complex understanding of gendered experiences within systems constituted not only by gender but also by race, ethnicity, and class (Way, 2011). Another strength of this study was the opportunity to explore the associations and meanings expressed by these young men as they reflected on their lives and their new beginnings at WC through the use of rigorous, theoretically predicated qualitative research methods. Semistructured interviews allowed us to offer participants the opportunity to express themselves, and we used thematic analysis to find the ideas and the equivocations that echoed throughout multiple interviews.

We note several limitations of this research. First, the words of these young men could have multiple meanings, as is the case whenever participants' words are analyzed. At many points in discussing our findings, we presented our interpretation of their words, which may provide only one of many potential explanations for what was occurring. Furthermore, the interviews themselves were not solely focused on gender, so the information in the analyses was only a fraction of the total conversation we had with the participants, and, as a result, their comments may appear decontextualized. One step for future analysis is to investigate what participants said using gender-neutral language such as "people" or "adulthood," and whether these language uses differed from when they were referring to men and manhood.

A unique opportunity presented in this study is that the interviews took place during orientation week at WC. It is interesting that, even during orientation week, the students still had meaningful associations with the idea of being a "Williamson Man" and what it was like for them to be at an all-male school. It is likely that the students had already received many messages from the school when applying to the school, deciding whether to attend, attending orientation programming, and during their first few nights in the dormitories.

There may also have been selection factors that will likely combine with the characteristics of their sex-segregated educational context to influence participants throughout their 3 years at the WC. The students described, for example, that they had received many other messages about gender from their families, schools, and friends, as well as differential exposure to sex-segregated contexts, before coming to WC. These initially identified themes provide a foundation for continued research with this population as they progress through their education at WC. We will follow-up with the young men in this study to understand if/how their understandings and enactments of masculinity change, and the connection between their understandings and

enactments of masculinity and their involvement in their personal and professional pursuits.

As preliminary research, this study has implications for continued research on gender development as well as research on all-male schools, such as exploring the ways in which inclusive masculinities may be constrained and facilitated within contexts that differ along dimensions such as class, education, and occupation (Anderson, 2009; Mac an Ghail & Haywood, 2011). In addition, this work can provide a basis for future application of research to practice (e.g., evaluation of policy regarding sex-segregated education). Young people's construction of gender ideologies occurs in dynamic relation with their developmental contexts and, as such, is likely to reverberate throughout the course of their individual development and their contributions to society, for example, through work and family. Understanding the process of gender construction in late adolescence is thus an essential component of promoting successful transitions into adulthood for individuals and building developmental contexts that will be supportive and welcoming for the widest variety of young people.

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