The Organizational Life of the College Football Player: An Exploration of Injury, Football Culture, and Organizational Dialectics

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This dissertation titled
The Organizational Life of the College Football Player: An Exploration of Injury, Football Culture, and Organizational Dialectics

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ABSTRACT

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The Organizational Life of the College Football Player: An Exploration of Injury, Football Culture, and Organizational Dialectics

Director of Dissertation: Claudia L. Hale

This dissertation attempts to better understand the lives of college football players. The project begins with the assumption that the ways individuals talk about their experiences have a significant impact on others. An organizational framework is used to appreciate the central importance of communication in coordinating organizational relationships and developing impressions.

College football players were gathered from three separate institutions representing different competitive levels of college football. Through interviews, participants were invited to provide stories that reflected their understandings of what it means to play college football. Because the intent of this study was to better understand issues related to the culture of playing football, common themes were derived from those interviews in an attempt to answer four separate research questions. Not surprisingly, athletes commonly discussed the role of injury during college football as injury is a common experience across competitive football teams.

The results of this study are interrelated. First, I discuss how metaphors are used to illustrate the lives of college football players and how these reflect one’s relationship to the team. The metaphors of football as a job and football as a family were shared among participants. Second, by exploring the expectations of what it means to be an athlete, I was able to discuss the importance of gaining trust among teammates and how
trust in others can be lost if one does not conform to proper scripts of interaction. These results support the notion of the “generalized other” discussed in the third portion of this study. The stories concerning college football players’ experiences with being injured revealed a dialectical tension between the individual and generalized other. When injured, the athlete experiences a dialectical tension between participation and exclusion and is called upon to manage this tension between himself and the rest of the team.

This study supports how one’s experience in sport is socially constructed through communication with others. Issues of masculinity, group influence, and the role of the athlete are discussed. Furthermore, limitations to this study and directions for future research are also presented.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Claudia L. Hale

Professor of Communication Studies
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CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT

Athletic competition is important to American culture. Each year, more than 30 million youths participate in organized athletics (Prettyman, 2006) and while a select few go on to play a sport professionally, an increasing number of adults find outlets for continued participation in sports. The overwhelming number of sports fans and spectators offer support for the significance of athletics in American culture. The prevalence and popularity of sports is undeniable in the lives of those who participate as well as those who watch sporting events for entertainment. No matter what the context, individuals cheer for their favorite sports teams (and/or athletes), ranging from their favorite professional teams to their children’s little league teams. Sports are an important part of our society and are enjoyed by numerous individuals in a variety of ways.

For instance, news programs report on sports-related events ranging from various local high-school sports to professional sports. Television stations, such as ESPN, report on every sport imaginable to satisfy the public’s obsession, while a variety of channels have emerged addressed to specific sports interests, such as football, basketball, tennis, and golf. Furthermore, countless classic films, such as the boxing movie Rocky (Chartoff-Winkler Productions & Avildsen, 1976), the baseball movie The Bad News Bears (Jaffe & Ritchie, 1976), and the football movie The Program (Rothman, Henderson, Golgwyn, & Ward, 1993) demonstrate the entertainment value of sports through dramatic and comedic elements. These classic movies as well as many other contemporary movies provide captivating stories about participating in athletics that the public finds intriguing.
Although movies provide entertaining narratives, reality-based television and radio programs satisfy the deeper desire that the public has to understand the personal lives of athletes or to live vicariously through those individuals (Penzhorn & Pitout, 2007). Since 2001, the HBO series, *Hard Knocks* (Rodgers & Cossrow, 2009), has followed professional football teams through summer training camps, depicting how professional athletes compete for positions and how rookies adjust to life in the NFL. The series includes narratives from the coaches and players, providing insights into how players deal with injuries and how coaches struggle with making “cuts” to the roster. The series has followed the Baltimore Ravens (2001), Dallas Cowboys (2002 & 2008), Jacksonville Jaguars (2004), Kansas City Chiefs (2007), and Cincinnati Bengals (2009). The popularity of this HBO series demonstrates the public’s craving to understand how athletes interact with one another in professional contexts.

Although professional teams serve as a focal point for many, others acknowledge the importance of understanding how younger individuals experience and cope with participating in sports. In 2009, National Public Radio (NPR) began broadcasting a series, called *Friday Night Lives* (NPR, 2009a), that focuses on high school football teams across the country. These teams range from small-town teams to larger, more prominent teams in bigger cities. NPR’s website states that the focus of *Friday Night Lives* is to provide “the stories, struggles and victories of the sport, while exploring the costs and issues it raises” (NPR, 2009b, para. 1). This series is particularly interesting as it depicts young adults’ struggles with the psychological and corporeal demands of playing high school football. In combination, *Hard Knocks* and *Friday Night Lives* offer valuable insights into the lives of athletes as they participate in the organized athletic
context of football. Ultimately, sports have a magnetic presence that makes viewing, participating, and understanding them important.

Perhaps the popularity of sports stems from the noteworthy social and cultural functions they fulfill. From the field of anthropology, Calhoun (1987) proposed that sports serve two general functions in society. Those functions are: 1) a context where individuals are able to cheer and learn about important attitudes relevant to their culture, and 2) a safe context to express one’s emotions in a dramatic environment by way of creating spaces to experience excitement and amusement. These claims assert that sports provide places to learn those values commonly embraced by a culture and where expressing certain emotions associated with competition are appropriate. When considering learning and expression, it is not only important to recognize this as existing within sports, but as also being experienced by the communities of fans that are created around sports and sports teams (see, for instance, Aden, 2008; Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007; Hugenberg, Haridakis, & Earnheardt, 2008).

Messner (1992) proposed that one possible reason for the prevalence and popularity of men’s sports in American culture is due to the “crisis-of-masculinity.” In general, the crisis of masculinity proposes that, because society attempts to suppress “natural masculine behaviors,” such as the ability to be aggressive (Whitehead & Barrett, 2001), areas or institutions where men are able to engage in activities that are deemed masculine are celebrated as something that preserves “what is ‘natural’” (Hardin, Kuehn, Jones, Genovese, & Balaji, 2009, p. 185) for men.

It is undeniable that sports provide several important functions to society and satisfy many of the needs of a culture. In general, sports provide areas to celebrate
competition and to be entertained. These ultimately reflect cultural elements that are
embraced by a group of individuals. However, research notes several other specific
functions that sports provide for the participating athletes. Both positive and negative
functions are discussed below.

Positive Functions of Sports for Athletes

There are a number of positive benefits that individuals receive from playing
sports. For children, research has identified several benefits that facilitate personal
growth (Kaufman, 1987). Participating in sports enables youngsters to improve their
self-esteem and learn the meaning of playing “fair” through competition (Ewing, 1999).
From a young age, children are commonly praised by parents and coaches for good
performance while learning the value of sportsmanship. Shaking hands after a game is
one commonly recognized sign of sportsmanship that athletes display. Whether one wins
or loses, the athlete learns to walk away from a game with dignity which, ultimately,
helps that athlete (and perhaps observers of the athletic competition) learn about the value
of civility.

The communicative processes that take place within sports teams play an
important role in teaching the values that are important to one’s culture. For instance,
communication within sports organizations has been shown to play an important role in
learning culturally appropriate characteristics, such as leadership skills, conflict
management skills, and group cohesion (Kassing et al., 2004). These skills prepare the
individual for interacting with others, whether it is in the business world, with family
members, or at social gatherings.
If an athlete continues to play sports throughout his/her life, competing can provide several additional benefits. Dunning (1999) outlined the following benefits:

Sport can: (1) provide a source of meaning in life; (2) act as a focus of social identification; and (3) offer experiences which are analogous to the excitement and emotional arousal generated in war and other “serious” situations like “being in love.” (p. 221)

The above quote can be interpreted in several ways. One can apply the listed benefits to a recreational sports team competitor, high school athlete, or college player. Considering the high school athlete, participating in sports can provide a meaning for that individual that extends beyond being a common student at the high school. Participation could give purpose to that individual’s life, giving him/her pride in representing his/her school. Furthermore, a high school competitor would probably be classified as an athlete by his/her peers and could come to identify with the team and the players which would give him/her social capital. In addition, competing could serve as an outlet for daily frustrations and can provide exciting results that might not be experienced elsewhere in an individual’s life.

A number of positive benefits associated with participating in a sport. This would help to explain why individuals tend to gravitate towards competing in sports throughout a lifetime (Prettyman, 2006). Although there are several benefits to participating in sports, research demonstrates that negative consequences as well.

Detrimental Aspects of Sports for Athletes

The negative consequences associated with participating in sports are numerous and complex throughout an individual’s life. Arguably, the first step for a child to
become involved with organized sports begins with parental suggestion or pressure. Although participating in a sport is a potentially good step for a child as it can help that child learn valuable interaction skills for later in life, parents might place unwanted pressure on the child to participate. Research has shown that children are often asked to perform beyond their physical and emotional abilities and often miss valuable childhood experiences when their families emphasize sports too much (Dalton, 1999). For the young athlete, parents or coaches could possibly become overenthusiastic and place unrealistic demands on the child, such as demanding that he/she devote more time to the sport or perform better at the sport. When a child is incapable of performing up to parental expectations, this creates unwanted stress in the child’s life. In addition to placing these demands upon the child, the child could become more frustrated when summer fun with friends is missed, or he/she is unable to take vacations or begins to fall behind in school because of the time taken up by sports.

Sports participation demands a large amount of time and dedication, and some athlete’s grades suffer as a result. In general, college athletes do not perform as well academically. Those who compete in collegiate revenue sports average one tenth of a grade point lower every term as compared to their “non college athlete” peers (Maloney & McCormick, 1993). In addition, the more closely athletes identify with their team, the less well they perform in the classroom (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004). This provides evidence that supports the “dumb jock” stereotype that surrounds sports (Sailes, 1993). Although a number of researchers have found evidence that athletes perform less well as a result of belonging to a sports team, other scholars have found that athletes’ grades are, in fact, no different from non-athletes’ grades (Farrell, 1984;
Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2004). Even though these discrepancies demand further attention, it is apparent that athletes’ participation in sports within educational settings is worthy of scholarly attention.

In school, research has found that athletes are more likely than non-athletes to be involved in misconduct, such as skipping class or getting into trouble with teachers (Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell, & Sabo, 2005). This tendency to engage in more misconduct becomes problematic when it is understood that those who closely identify with being a “jock” act out more violently towards others in general (Miller, Melnick, Farrell, Sabo, & Barnes, 2006). Whatever the cause, teachers, coaches, and athletic departments have certain protocols in place to discipline athletes when problem behavior occurs in the classroom or outside of the classroom. Many coaches and administrators are intolerant of an athlete’s irresponsible behavior although problem behavior seems common among athletes.

One possible explanation is that violence is a pervasive aspect of some sports whereby the athletes are either unaware of their actions or unable to “turn off the switch.” Violence surrounds many sports teams (Sabo, 2004a) and the fans who are invested in their teams. This can be seen in the fights that take place on the field when a match gets too intense or between parents or fans in the stands who get into disagreements and begin to throw punches. Whether competing or viewing competitive games, emotional states can be created that lead to acts of violence that go beyond the boundaries of appropriate competition. These states can be initiated for a host of reasons. Such reasons include the arousal of anger from perceptions that another athlete is being unfair and the desire to pick a fight in order to excite the team (Kerr, 2009). Such violence can arise in actions
between players, between teams, or between/among fans in the stands. In some cases, coaches actually encourage their players to act violently even after the game has ended. In the case of a recent college hockey game, a coach encouraged violence against the other team (Mixer, 2009). With three minutes left in the game, the coach’s team was down 5-0. During a break in the competition, the coach prompted his players to take their positions on the ice, then drop their hockey gloves and attack the other team in an orchestrated act of violence while the officials were escorting a member of the winning team to the penalty box. This event represents how violence can even be seen as an acceptable practice within a sport. In general, violence is an unfortunate negative byproduct of some sports where the likelihood of it happening is always present.

_Injury and the Paradox of Sport_

In high contact sports, such as football, Sabo (2004a, 2004b) implied that violence is an important foundation of the game. He further stated that getting hurt is “basically unavoidable in sports but, in traditional men’s sports, there has been a tendency to glorify pain and injury, to inflict injury on others, and to sacrifice one’s body in order to ‘win at all costs’” (p. 338). In such a system of athletic competition, individuals who push through the pain are typically rewarded by their coaches and fellow teammates (Messner, 2005). Recognizing that injury, sacrifice, and the glorification of being tough are common, being hurt is something that is considered “normal” in sports such as football (Sabo, 1994, 2004a, 2004b). Especially for male athletes, toughness is an expected quality that one should possess because it reflects the masculine traits of our society. It is unfortunate that very few athletes finish their competitive careers without developing a
long-lasting physical injury (Calhoun, 1987). One can not help but assume that this reality comes from the socially learned expectations of the athlete.

In general, team-based athletic competitors come to embody the expectations of society, fellow teammates, and coaches, and suffer the demands of what it means to be an athlete. Such expectations are apparent in the sacrifices that some individuals make in order to effectively participate. For instance, a college football player removed a portion of one of his fingers in order to participate on and support his team instead of sitting out the rest of the season to allow the finger to properly heal (Saunders, 2008). In a picture of this incident, his teammates were seen giving him a “high-four” instead of a “high-five,” tucking their pinky fingers into their palms.

Other football players neglect personal safety and experience repetitive head injuries that have the potential to leave them permanently injured (see Schwartz, 2008; Smith, 2008). One can see that the possibility of experiencing severe consequences from participating in team sports, especially those that are high-contact, tend to carry corporeal penalties and costs for participating within those competitions. Even though those consequences have the potential to follow the athlete throughout a lifetime, destructive behaviors are promoted by the structure of sports, such as football.

Because becoming hurt is unavoidable in high-contact sports, it is paradoxical to think that the very vessel that athletes use to compete in athletic competition is also the thing that experiences the most abuse and is at the greatest risk for “breaking down.” If one is to assume that athletes are supposed to sacrifice their bodies for sport, it can also be assumed that such acts can limit the athlete, when in pain, and increase the likelihood
that the athlete will suffer injury which will limit the athlete’s ability to participate in the future.

Injuries, in this sense, can be considered a physical disability such that one cannot play for a period of time. The onset of such a disability creates a situation where the athlete must either continue to sacrifice his/her own body or neglect to participate in order to properly tend to the injury. Because the male athlete’s identity is closely tied to conceptualizations of masculinity, this period can be extremely challenging given that they cannot uphold the expectations of what it means to be a male athlete.

Gerschick and Miller (1995) proposed that males “come to terms” with their disabilities (in the context of masculinity) in three different ways. Utilizing hegemonic masculinity (see Mumby, 1998) as a frame of reference, the authors concluded that men often 1) reformulate their definition of masculinity in the context of their injury, 2) rely on traditional notions of masculinity, or 3) reject culturally sanctioned notions of masculinity. Reformulation occurs where individuals use their position of disability and argue that they still embody masculine traits through the ways in which they deal with their disability. For example, an individual might cite his condition, but focus on how independent or autonomous he is (or has to be) to deal with the injury even though there exists a reliance on others to get better. Second, reliance on traditional forms of masculinity can be seen where the individual uses others’ benchmark of masculinity to critique his own state. The authors stated that “men who rely on dominant conceptions of masculinity are much more likely to internalize their feelings of inadequacy” (p. 203) and neglect to express these feelings outright. Here, the emphasis is placed on outward appearances and the desire to adhere to traditional masculine standards. Third, rejection
is evident where men outwardly challenge socially constructed understandings of masculinity. These individuals attempt to reconstruct masculinity by questioning its definition and focusing on its arbitrary, socially constructed nature in an attempt to create alternative frames of reference. Although research such as this provides insights and better understandings as to how individuals cope with or perceive their injuries, it is lacking in its ability to explain, from an organizational standpoint, the tensions that arise from experiencing an injury while a member of an athletic organization.

Relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) provides an overarching theoretical lens through which such contradictions and paradoxes can be explored in organizations (Johnson & Long, 2002). Discussed in detail later, relational dialectics addresses the ongoing tensions that occur in all social relationships, including among those individuals who are part of an athletic organization. It can be argued that, at the onset of an injury, the athlete experiences a tension between stability and change. This can be seen through the simultaneous desire to continue to play (stability) and the desire to sit out and not play (change). The ways that these tensions are continuously acknowledged and managed by the athlete and the organization has implications for the psychological well-being of the athlete (Malinauskas, 2010) and the unity of the athletic team or organization.

Summary

Overall, there are a wide range of viewpoints as to whether or not participation in athletics is mostly positive or mostly negative throughout one’s life (see Egendorf, 1999). Because of these varying viewpoints, it is valuable to look at how athletes interpret their own participation and how those impressions are established. The communicative
practices that take place within sports teams play an important part in formulating the experiences and interpretations of what sports means to those participants by way of having the meanings and experiences of sport socially constructed through the discourses that take place therein (Kassing et al., 2004). Understanding these processes will help researchers to better understand how sports leave a lasting impression on the athlete.

Although sports teams are recognized by scholars as being an important part of culture (Calhoun, 1987; Dunning, 1999; Jarvie, 2006), little research exists that examines how sports teams and athletes communicatively construct expectations for the athletes who participate on those teams (Jablin, 2001). The meanings and expectations concerning what it means to be a male athlete are communicated among athletic teams, between players, and between players and coaches (Kassing et al., 2004) in addition to cultivating masculine identities (Sparkes & Smith, 1999). The understandings of what these communicative processes entail leave some scholars wondering if sports are beneficial or detrimental to the athlete (see Egendorf, 1999).

The purpose of this study is to explore how those who participate in competitive sports conceptualize and understand what it means to be an athlete. Specifically, this study will explore college football players and how they make sense of their experiences within organized, college athletics. Similar to the approach taken by Harter and Krone (2001), this study “is grounded in the notion that the way individuals talk about events, issues, and institutions provides knowledge about their beliefs, actions, and world view and ultimately into the process through which they make sense of their experiences” (p. 271). The important communicative processes that help to form (and inform)
expectations for the college football player emerge through the stories individuals tell about themselves and other teammates.

By exploring the experiences of the college football player told through the accounts of the interactions that take place within a sports team, and the stories that individuals tell about their participation, researchers can gain valuable insights into the lives of college football players. Ultimately, these results will provide insights into how athletes construct and perceive their organizational role and membership in the organization. Other potential results will offer insights, and develop better understandings, of how athletes negotiate, manage, and make sense of injuries in relation to others on the team and will satisfy the need for research to examine the ways in which individuals and groups perceive and manage moments where dialectical tensions gain prominent presence (Erbert, Mearns, & Dena, 2005).

Storied accounts of athletic participation will provide rich understandings of the interactions that take place in sports organizations. Stories provide a wealth of knowledge when it comes to understanding organizational culture (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983) and will be crucial to understanding how those expectations and experiences are communicated and perceived within sports teams. Understanding sports teams as a cultural phenomenon can yield important supporting information that helps to explain how athletes communicatively deal with the sacrifices (i.e., the body, mind, time, education) that are demanded of many competitors. Such communicative practices have the possibility to be reflected and (re)emerge through teammates, coaches, the media, and even sports fans (Trujillo, 1994). By examining such trends within the relationships that the players and coaches share, researchers are able to discover the
meaning(s) of athletic participation through the communicative encounters within athletic contexts (Spitzack, 1998). In doing so, understandings of how legitimate members are viewed will inform how marginalized members are scrutinized for not meeting those standards (Kassing et al., 2004).

Sports Context

This dissertation will focus on male team sports. Specifically, collegiate football players will be interviewed in order to better understand the communicative practices that shape the expectations of athletes and which, as a result, carry the potential to influence behavior and/or impressions. Because of my background playing college football and experiencing similar pressures outlined in this chapter, as well as the following chapters, this topic is both personally interesting and valuable to numerous areas of communication research.

Football provides a rich environment through which masculinity, injury, and athletic expectations can be viewed because of its high-contact nature, popularity, team atmosphere, and the demands it places on the athlete. For this reason, it is worthy to study this context from the perspective of the athlete to uncover the communicative byproducts of being involved in such organizations. Football fits the purpose of this study and will be referenced throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

Although male football players will be the focus of this study, it is important to acknowledge the value and implications that this research has for other areas. For instance, conclusions from this context will contribute to later research in other worthy sports contexts including non-contact sports, women’s sports, individual sports, and recreational sports. In addition, other externally-connected individuals (such as
administrators or the media) to a particular team can gain practical knowledge of the experiences of athletes. Carrying this line of research into those areas will uncover shared and dissimilar communicative practices across sports contexts.

Key Terms

The purpose of this section is to highlight the key terms used in this project. Although a general understanding of the terms used above is sufficient enough to understand the direction of this study, some of the key terms that will be used in the following project need to be clearly defined before moving forward. Below are the key terms used this study and their definitions as they will be used throughout. The terms are listed in alphabetical order below.

**Athlete** – For the purposes of this dissertation, the term “athlete” will refer to any individual who devotes or has devoted large portions of his life to competing within an athletic organization which involves extensive practice, conditioning, or training. This includes athletes involved with both individual sports and team-orientated sports. After the review of literature in chapter two, the term “athlete” will be used to refer to male American football players, the focus of this study.

**Culture** – In general, the term culture will be employed following Geertz’s (1973) conceptualization of culture. Respecting Max Weber’s visualization of culture, Geertz stated that humans are animals “suspended in webs of significance he [sic] himself has spun . . . and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (p. 5). The main goal of this study is to better understand the meaning(s) athletes have with being involved in sports.
When referring specifically to sports, Jarvie (2006) stated that a sports’ culture is composed of “the values, ceremonies and way[s] of life characteristic of a given group and the place of sport within that way of life” (p. 5). This definition references the role of sport in society and the role of sport as it surrounds and influences athletes. In particular, the definition of culture within sport will refer to the influences that surround one’s involvement within a competitive athletic sports team organization. Jarvie’s definition is, in effect, informed by Geertz’s definition of culture.

Although one can acknowledge that every team has its own way of conducting practice, motivating players, or forming common goals, it is important to recognize that, because of similar organizational and social pressures (Elias & Dunning, 1966; Sabo, 2004a, 1994; Verser, 1981), athletes share similar cultural elements. Because of this, the argument is made that although team organizational culture can differ, football teams share similar cultural values that influence athletes’ participation in the sport because of the nature of football and the demands it places on the athlete.

**Norms** – The term “norm” has been defined as an unstated rule where “shared values, beliefs, behaviors, and procedures that govern a group’s operation” (Adler & Rodman, 2009, p. 235). To researchers that study group interaction, this definition encompasses social norms (relationships in all groups), procedural norms (operation in problem-solving groups), and task norms (resulting products in problem-solving groups). For the purpose of this dissertation, however, norms will refer to the social guidelines of belonging to a collective which both establishes and limits member’s behavior (Johnson & Long, 2002) while creating expectations for future interaction.
Sport – The term “sport” has been used by different authors to define a variety of events. For the purposes of this study, the term sport encompasses activities with four general characteristics (Woods, 2007). The first characteristic of sport includes the involvement of physical activity that demands some level of skill. The second characteristic is that sports must include some level of competition where opposing forces find winning important. The third characteristic is that sports need to be overseen by an outside institution that enforces rules on teams and competitors. The fourth and final characteristic of sport is that it needs to include specialized equipment or areas for competition, such as a track or shared area of competition. In general, sport is any activity that is overseen by a common governing body, that involves some measure of athletic skill in order to win, and that requires specialized areas to compete. Although this definition is valuable to consider when understanding what “a sport” is, there are other aspects that the term implies.

For instance, other researchers have chosen to take somewhat of a critical view when considering what “sport” means. For instance, Jarvie (2006) stated that a sport is a social product that involves ritualistic elements that call for a sacrifice for human energy (both on and off the field of play) which ultimately reflects the values appreciated by a culture. By embodying cultural values, sport can serve as a means through which individuals in a culture can identify reflecting identity and creating differences among the population. As a result, Jarvie also proposed that organized sporting competitions reflect capitalistic needs and, at times, turn into business organizations rather than sporting organizations. Overall, Jarvie’s criteria encompass a wide range of activities and connote a more subjective view of the term. Although this approach reflects much of the
literature in the next chapter, only parts of this definition will reference the term “sport” as it is used in this dissertation.

By combining the two definitions, I will use the term “sport” to refer to any competitive activity (overseen by a common governing body) requiring specialized apparatus that requires participants to have some measure of athletic skill involving (and obtained through) some level of personal sacrifice in order to win, thereby achieving some level of personal or social recognition.

**Stories/Narratives** – Stories/story and narratives/narrative are interchangeable terms (Riessman, 2008). For the purposes of this study, the terms denote any account that “connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story [which are] selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience” (p. 3). Stories and narratives are represented in individual’s accounts of events that have taken place or those storied justifications used to explain a point of view. A more conceptual view of stories and narratives are developed in later chapters.

**Team** – The term “team” has been recognized as “a number of persons forming one of the sides in a game or contest” (Team, 2009) in an organized fashion where teammates rely on each other for the purposes of winning an athletic competition. In the remainder of this dissertation, the term team will be applied to specific college football organizations where athletes compete together through practices and games.

**Teammate** – The term teammate refers to “a member of the same team” (Teammate, 2009) who competes alongside others as part of organized athletic competition. The term
“group” will also be used in a way that is synonymous with teammate. Teammates/group will refer to fellow, college football players in the following chapters.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of literature that intersects sports, organizational communication, and organizational culture. In the process, discussions about the importance of dialectical tensions and masculinity will provide a framework through which to examine how the expectations associated with being an athlete are communicatively managed. By doing so, a probable understanding of the experiences of an athlete participating on a competitive sports team will be developed and will inform the research questions identified at the end of this literature review.

In the following review of literature, several important concepts will be discussed in order to create a conceptual framework in which to contextualize this study. Initially, a discussion of a sports team as an organization will be offered which will create a lens through which college football players’ memberships are understood. Next will be a presentation of literature that addresses how individuals reflect and conform to particular culture/peer group expectations. Finally, extant literature on sports culture, masculinizing aspects of that culture (including injury), and masculine identity will be covered. Finally, research questions will be posed in order to better understand sports teams, sports culture, and the sport-based cultural expectations of being an athlete.

An Organizational Framework for Understanding Sports Teams

The development of modern day sport in America originated and was influenced by the industrial revolution (Calhoun, 1987). This is apparent when it is understood that (the development of) sports teams mirror the qualities that emerged during that time. In explaining this connection, Calhoun stated that participation on sports teams reflects this connection in many ways, including how athletes on organized sports teams have
specialized roles that they play on the team in addition to being influenced by outside forces, such as advertisers, the media, organizing bodies for sports, and society in general. This resembles the connectivity that business organizations have to outside forces. Within both business and sports organizations, individuals “play” specialized roles that influence one another for the successful operation of the organization. Furthermore, researchers must recognize that the extant literature that has been accumulated from exploring workplace interactions can add valuable, connected insights into sports-related studies (Young, 1993). The direction of this literature review is not to understand one specific college football sports organization in particular but, rather, to inform the reader as to how one’s membership in a college football organization is similar across those organizations.

Similar to employees in business organizations, each athlete plays a specialized role on the field of play. In order for the athlete “to be effective, [roles] have to be internalized, so that not only are they expected of us by others, but they are expected of us by ourselves” (Calhoun, 1987, p. 263). Such specialization of roles can be seen on a football team through the positions and language used to describe those positions. For instance, the linemen, quarterbacks, receivers, running backs, defensive backs, and linebackers embody specialized roles on football teams. However, these specialized positions can be further divided into such positions as middle linebacker, weakside linebacker, and strongside linebacker, all knowledgeable about their responsibilities on the football field. Many other sports teams share the same division of roles, just as organizations have a division of labor. This makes sports teams organizational entities
(Calhoun, 1987) capable of being examined through existing organizational communication frameworks.

The existing research on organizational communication and culture provides a valuable lens through which one can understand the shared dynamics and communicative practices of sports teams. As Schein (1992) stated, “the concept of culture is most useful if it helps to explain some of the more seemingly incomprehensible and irrational aspects of groups and organizations” (Schein, 1992, p. 15), such as paradoxes that are apparent between those things that are seen and those things that are (un)stated or assumed. This is valuable to recognize when understanding why athletes put themselves at risk for injury through athletic competition and whether or not the participants view athletic participation as being beneficial or detrimental to their development (see Egendorf, 1999).

Schein (1992) observed that “any group with a shared membership and a history of shared learning will have developed some level of culture” (p. 15). In Schein’s view of culture, the emphasis is on a shared history, enough to provide common assumptions (outside of one’s awareness) about the ways things are done or should be done. When individuals progress through participating on childhood athletic teams to high school and even college and professional sports teams, they encounter different coaches with different ways of running a team. Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo (1983) acknowledged this through their claim that “each organization has its own way of doing what it does and its own way of talking about what it is doing” (p. 128). Although each sports team will have a distinctly unique culture, the essence of playing football, baseball, soccer, or volleyball (and the expectations for how those athletes should participate)
arguably share some of the same characteristics (i.e., valuing competitiveness; Verser, 1981) and will be an important consideration in this study as well as in other areas of sports-related research.

Organizations consist of individuals. Individual perceptions and interpretations are often linked to the culture in which they participate (Laing, Phillipson, & Lee, 1966). An individual “learn[s] how to structure his [sic] perceptions . . . as a subsystem interplaying with its own contextual subculture, related institutions and overall larger culture” (p. 10). Such an acknowledgement creates an understanding that the behaviors of others and the ways in which individuals communicate have an impact on our own communicative behaviors. The repetitive symbolic actions of others revolve around cultural values which, in turn, can create expectations for how others should behave within an organization.

When understanding how expectations of being a member of a particular sports team are (re)produced, it is important to consider the sports team as a separate culture or co-culture. Although not the main focus of this study, a cultural perspective of athletic sports teams provides an appropriate lens through which to contextualize the interactions and experiences of the athlete. Furthermore, a dialectical lens will aid in understanding the possible tensions that exist between individual members and the team.

Relational Dialectics

In 1996, Baxter and Montgomery forwarded their metatheoretical perspective of relational dialectics in their book, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics*. Although they focused primarily on “the communicative enactment of friendships, nonmarital romantic relationships, marital relationships, and family relationships” (p. 4), their work is
centered on the contradictions that encapsulate, permeate, and inform the oppositional forces that individuals often experience in their larger communal social lives with others. As a theoretical perspective, relational dialectics has traditionally focused on interpersonal relationships. However, the concept has begun to permeate understandings of both groups and organizations as well (Apker, Propp, & Zabava Ford, 2005; Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Gibbs, 2009; Jameson, 2004; Johnson & Long, 2002; Kramer, 2004; Prentice & Kramer, 2006; Seo & Creed, 2002; Tracy, 2004) as it “provides a strong complement to existing research in teams and groups” (Erbert, Mearns, & Dena, 2005, p. 22). This is not surprising given that groups and organizations consist of large numbers of individuals and individual relationships.

Incorporating the work of Bakhtin, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) recognized that, in any interaction, individuals need to “fuse their perspectives while maintaining the uniqueness of their individual perspectives; the parties form a unity in conversation but only through two clearly differentiated voices” (p. 25). In other words, communication (the need to understand) emerges out of the inherent differences between individuals. As Baxter and Montgomery explained:

To commit to a relational-dialectics view is to accept that individuals are socially constructed in the ongoing interplay of unity and difference. Communication events, relationships, and life itself are ongoing and unfinalizable, always ‘becoming,’ never ‘being.’ There are no ideal goals, no ultimate endings, no elegant end states of balance. There is only an indeterminate flow, full of unforeseeable potential that is realized in interaction. (1996, p. 47)
Relational dialectics does not acknowledge any type of final, enduring state. The only enduring states are those of continuous, opposing demands. Therefore, research in the area only expresses a “snap shot” of the turbulence inherent in the experience of difference and how social individuals attempt to manage those tensions.

For group researchers adopting a dialectical perspective, group norms are the resulting patterns of communication that emerge from dialectical tensions experienced within the group (Johnson & Long, 2002). These norms can change depending on such factors as new demands placed on the group or the addition/maturation of group members. These norms consider the ways in which individuals in groups and organizations continuously manage those tensions. In contrast to traditional theories, relational dialectics revolves around the assumption that any communicative act is bound in ongoing tensions evident in the constant demands and webs of relationships.

Ultimately, dialectical theorists share similar assumptions that help guide, inform, and characterize the body of research that seeks to explore the tensions individuals experience and how they subsequently manage those tensions. These assumptions, or tenets, include the concepts of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; 2000). These guiding principles set the stage for researchers and practitioners to better understand how “social life is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a ceaseless interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 3, italics in original) and how individuals use communication to manage these forces. Contradiction, change, praxis, and totality are discussed below in order to better explain this metatheoretical perspective.
Contradiction

Contradiction is illustrated through the “dynamic interplay between unified oppositions” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 8) that mutually negate one another. Such oppositions can exist in two conceptually different ways (Baxter & Montgomery, 2000). The first is a logically defined opposition where the identified tension is present with its absence. Some examples of logically defined oppositions are “stable vs. not stable, autonomous vs. not autonomous, and loving vs. not loving” (p. 32). The second category of oppositions is that of functionally defined oppositions that “take the form ‘X and Y’, where both ‘X’ and ‘Y’ are distinct features that function in incompatible ways, such that each negates the other” (p. 32) such as love versus hate. Although opposition is an essential component of contradiction, not all tensions exist in direct logical opposition to each other. Rather, the interpretive skill of the researcher is needed to justify how any given logical or functional opposition/polar dimension/tension exists in simultaneous opposition to one another.

Initially, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) proposed three overarching dialectical tensions: separateness and connectedness, certainty and uncertainty, and openness and closedness. At the same time, they acknowledged the likelihood that an infinite number of tensions exist. Each tension offers a unique lens through which relationships can be explored. As an example, consider the demands experienced between romantic relational partners. In a romantic relationship, an individual might view, and subsequently communicate with, his/her relational partner in ways that both highlight how he/she is an independent, autonomous individual and in ways that stress the connection and dependency that he/she has with the other. In recognizing such a contradiction, the
both/and nature of autonomy and dependence is acknowledged as an important factor that pulls relational partners in opposite, but simultaneously occurring, directions (i.e., together and apart). Because relationships are often highlighted by such mutually occurring oppositions, those dynamics are a continuous driving force behind communicative acts in all relationships. Thus, dialectical contradictions do not exist in a dualistic sense. Instead, these driving forces are never static and vary in their gravitas, much like the tension of a rubber band. This driving force ultimately helps to explain the changing nature of relationships over time.

As described above, the forces of connectedness (unity) and separateness (difference) are created and emerge through interaction. One constructs the self out of “two contradictory necessities—the need to connect with another (the centripetal force) and the simultaneous need to separate from the other (the centrifugal force)” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 25). The centripetal and centrifugal forces in relationships are continuously constructing notions of the self and the relationship(s) through dialogue and over time. As the authors so eloquently phrase it, “One’s identity is awash in the tides of different relationships, each one providing a crosscurrent version of who a person is, or more accurately, is becoming” (p. 159). As one can imagine, this becomes increasingly complex in the context of groups and organizations.

In organizations, for instance, evidence exists that illustrates how healthcare nurses experience role tensions that are highlighted through their experiences of hierarchy, status, and identity within healthcare teams (Apker, Propp, & Zabava Ford, 2005). In addition, another study provided insights into how individuals negotiate the tension between autonomy and connection by using politeness strategies during times of
organizational conflict (Jameson, 2004). Similarly, in the classroom setting, students have been found to experience tensions between speaking up and remaining silent, predictability and novelty, and the preference for a class activity versus other educational activities in class (Prentice & Kramer, 2006). As such, the relational dialectics approach has proven itself fruitful in examining not only interpersonal relationships, but also small group and organizational relationships as well.

Johnson and Long (2002) proposed that, within groups, there are several different levels where contradictions can exist. These include 1) interpersonal level dialectics, 2) group-level dialectics, 3) external level dialectics, and 4) individual-generalized group level dialectics. First, within groups, interpersonal dialectics exist between one person and another person in the group. Baxter and Montgomery (1996, 2000) concentrated on this level of dialectics which serves as a departure point for understanding the other spaces of group contradiction and tension. Second, group-level dialectics differ from the previously mentioned dialectic that exists at the individual-generalized audience level. With group-level dialectics, a group can be viewed as being an entity itself with unique ways of thinking and feeling which are separate and unique from that of the individual members. The group’s climate and/or synergy are the direct result of how particular tensions are managed. Because the entire group is responsible for maintaining a positive/negative climate, for instance, these can be said to exist at the group level. Third, external dialectics “exist between a group and its parent organization, a community, or the society in which it is embedded” (p. 36). For instance, if an organization is experiencing change, there might be expectations placed on an individual group to change in accordance with the organization. This resulting tension can be seen
through the dialectic of stability/change between the group and the larger organization in which it exists. The fourth level where contradictions can occur is at the individual-generalized group level. The focus of this dissertation rests in the contradictions at this level. The next sections describe this level in greater detail as it relates to college football athletes and teams.

**Individual-Generalized Group Contradictions**

In the individual-generalized group level, tensions can be found within the relationship that one individual has with the larger group as a whole. This level of tension informs the scope of this project in relation to college athletes. Johnson and Long (2002) stated the following about this particular level of tensions:

> This relationship between the one and the combined many creates a set of dialectics to which members must respond and that might be perceived as both interpersonal and group level in nature. This also creates an abstract level of tensions for members, because individual communicative behaviors are now often chosen (somewhat self-reflexively) in relationship to a generalized “them.”

Evidence for the existence of this level as distinct from other levels exists in roles and role-specific norms. . . . As individual members create patterns of behavior that vary from the overall patterns acceptable for the group in general, the group’s communicative behaviors serve to encourage or discourage these patterns based on the tensions they create. When these unique individual patterns are accepted (and even rewarded), despite their variance from the larger group’s more accepted patterns, the group and its members have responded to tensions operating on distinct (although intertwined) levels. (p. 35)
In other words, tensions exist between individuals and the general group of individuals with whom they associate. Group norms provide a standard (via which to judge others) where individual group members, or the group as a whole, can choose to respond to a change in the individual’s pattern of communication. Arguably, each group develops, over time, expected norms of interaction. When an individual communicates in a way that exists outside the norms, the group responds in ways to correct this behavior. This example illustrates how groups can rely on norms to stabilize a change in the group’s environment.

Ultimately, the social norms that are understood to be part of the culture in which one belongs influence how one interacts, especially if one wants to be seen as a legitimate member of that culture, society, or group. For instance, Hagman, Clifford, and Noel (2007) provided the following description of relationships among social norms and one’s participation and one’s identity:

_Social norms_ are the rules indicating how individuals are expected to behave in specific situations. . . . [P]ressures toward peer group conformity and the acquisition of reference group norms typically produce strong desires in individuals to adopt and maintain peer group expectations and behaviors and then to act in accordance with these perceptions. (p. 293, italics in original)

The desire to be viewed as a legitimate member of a team suggests that individuals embody and display socially appropriate behaviors. Extending from Hagman et al., one could argue that athletes not only actively portray themselves as what other teammates would expect of an athlete, but also correct fellow athletes’ behaviors when they do not meet those expectations. The pressures of “fitting in” and not being “called out”
influence the ways in which organizational members communicate with each other. The resulting interactions from these pressures reflect certain patterns of expected behavior dictated by the team’s culture.

The understanding of group norms and attitudes brings forth Mead’s (1934) idea of a “generalized other.” Johnson and Long’s (2002) discussion of the individual-generalized group relies on this notion. To Mead, the group to which one belongs becomes known to individuals as a generalized “them” through the “attitudes of those involved in the same process” (1934, p. 154). Because the individual is invested in belonging to the group, he or she begins to incorporate these attitudes into notions of the self and how one should interact within the group. In other words, by knowing what is expected of or normal for group members and group member activity, the individual is both knowledgeable about what is acceptable and how to imitate what others desire of group members. Mead (1934) elaborated on this line of thinking.

The self-conscious human individual, then, takes or assumes the organized social attitudes of the given social group or community (or of some one section thereof) to which he [sic] belongs, toward the social problems of various kinds which confront that group or community at any given time, and which arise in connection with the correspondingly different social projects or organized co-operative enterprises in which that group or community as such is engaged; and as an individual participant in these social projects or co-operative enterprises, he governs his own conduct accordingly. (p. 156)

Mead stressed the ability of individuals to enter into groups or organizations and to adjust their behaviors accordingly based on the norms of that group. In fact, Mead used the
example of sports or games to illustrate how, as athletes, individuals enter into a game completely and, in a desire to belong, divorce themselves from the practices of larger social institutions to become completely invested in that group at that particular time to engage in “play.” Although Mead’s illustration emphasized a one way street (invest completely), tensions can exist between the desires of the group and the desires of the individual if the environment in which the group operates is too alien. This tension would, therefore, be managed by the individual and the group throughout their period of interaction. According to Johnson and Long (2002) this tension exists at the individual-generalized group level of interaction.

Overall, the tensions that exist at the individual-generalized group level are influenced by group norms and standards which are ever-present, but can come to the attention of either the individual or group when changes in their environment occur. There are several individual, albeit interrelated, levels of groups where dialectical tensions exist. Ultimately, tensions and contradictions are apparent at any level of individual, group, or organizational interaction.

*Change*

The concept of change is recognized in conjunction with its opposite, stability. Change is ongoing in reference to the constructions of relationships with others and how those relationships inform notions of the self. The goal of the dialectical theorist is to identify the changes that occur, over time, within relational bonds. By doing so, the oppositional nature of dialectical tensions is recognized as the driving force behind the continual state of flux in relationships. In this way, change is connected to the existence of contradictions in relationships through continuous relational involvement and the
negotiations of those relationships. Baxter and Montgomery (1996, 2000) recognized that, although an abstract concept, change helps to inform how individuals “make choices in how to function in their social world” (1996, p. 13). A change in one’s environment can bring a tension to the surface, calling for it to be addressed in a certain way. To the athlete, such a change could be the onset of an injury. As a result, this creates another change, particularly within (athletic) groups, where individuals are presented with new situations creating a need to negotiate and manage those emerging tensions. Throughout this process, the individual receives messages that influence the management of the tension(s) he/she is experiencing.

Individuals and groups cope with the tensions they experience in various ways. Coping mechanisms, negotiations, or techniques used to manage tensions occur through communication. For instance, through the onset of a disability, men communicate to others in ways that reformulate, rely upon, or reject traditional notions of masculinity as ways to manage the change, or difference, they experience in their environment and how others view them (Gerschick & Miller, 1995). The continuous, successful management of such tensions can illustrate how individual members recognize the continued importance of members to the group which denotes the desire for continuing the relationship and opening the door to future possibilities. The responses of individuals addressing these tensions fall under the notion of praxis.

Praxis

Praxis recognizes that individuals both act and react to forces in their communal lives. For instance, “individuals both act and are acted on; their actions in the present are constrained and enabled by prior actions and function to create the conditions to which
they will respond in the future” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1998, p. 9). The notion of praxis
denotes choice bound by constraints or tensions. The resulting choices that individuals
make in moments of interaction are “partially conceived by them, partially negotiated
with others, and partially determined by social and natural factors” (Rawlins, 1998, p.
65). People make choices to act in certain ways that express their own desires, but also
interact in ways that are bound by societal norms and practices (Baxter & Montgomery,

A dialectical framework recognizes both the historical factors that influence
relational communication and the possibilities that a particular action has for future
interactions. For instance, if two people recognize that they emphasize too much
interdependence in their relationship, they could respond in a variety of ways that
“correct” (or “address”) the overemphasis of this tension. In responding to this over-
emphasized tension, the couple might suddenly begin to distance themselves from one
another in order to demonstrate their dependence and autonomy. To Baxter and
Montgomery (1996), this would be considered a spiraling inversion (or cyclic alternation)
where the focus is on one demand, then the other, which would alternate over time. To
Baxter (1988), this falls under the category of temporal/spatial separation which also
includes segmentation. Segmentation occurs when relational partners separate their
activities and decide what they do together and what they do alone, for instance. Another
category, denial (or selection) occurs when relational partners deny the existence of one
tension in preference for the other. In the above situation, the partners might choose not
to respond to the tension of dependence, instead placing all of their energy on stressing
their interdependence. One possible outcome of such a management technique is that both recognize their interdependence as being a positive aspect of their relationship.

Baxter (1988) outlined a third category in which relational partners respond to both tensions at the same time. These include integrative moderation, disqualification, and reframing. Integrative moderation can be seen through the dialectic of openness-closedness where relational partners initially explore appropriate topics of conversation. This management type can be seen through the initial “small talk” of individuals. Integrative disqualification occurs where individuals avoid language that calls them to acknowledge either contradiction by using “ambiguous or indirect communicative acts” (p. 261). Finally, integrative reframing occurs when relational partners acknowledge the existence of contradictions in such a way that “the poles are no longer conceived as oppositional” (p. 261). In other words, the couple embraces both as being an inherent part of their relationship.

Regardless of whether or not the action is mutually agreed upon, any action taken by the individual or couple has the potential to redefine the relationship, impose future strains on the relationship, or create new expectations for the relationship. For groups, Johnson and Long (2002) would state that group norms are developed as a matter of praxis for addressing group dialectics. They provided the following explanation for how norms develop in groups.

Norms represent group efforts to respond to contradictions; that is, norms are developed as members experience dialectical tensions and attempt to manage them through their communication. These ongoing tension management attempts
result in patterns of communicative behavior; if these patterns prove effective at
managing tensions at any given time, they may well be repeated. (p. 32)

At this point, the tensions are not eliminated. Any subsequent pattern of interaction is
based on its perceived usefulness to the group depending on the context. To groups,
norms are default modes for operation.

Using drama as a metaphor for everyday life, Goffman (1959) stated that
audiences have expectations concerning what is a normal and predictable form of
behavior. This predictability reflects the socially sanctioned values of that group. In
other words, individuals “act” and socially perform in a manner that is acceptable to
others. In this way, it can be understood that these social performances fall within some
probable continuum of behavior. To Goffman, social performances are communicative
acts. Goffman (2003) further explained that:

Every person lives in a world of social encounters, involving him [sic] either in
face-to-face or mediated contact with other participants. In each of these contacts,
he tends to act out what is sometimes called a line – that is, a pattern of verbal and
nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this
his evaluation of the participants, especially himself. (p. 7)

Goffman’s idea of a line can be considered a consistent pattern of both verbal and
nonverbal acts within a particular space or context, dependent on that context. These
consistent patterns formulate certain interaction patterns as being normal. Based both in
historical elements and potential for future interactions, such social performances can be
considered norms for particular groups.
When considering normal modes of behavior, it is important to understand that individuals actively adopt these normal behaviors and actions and reflect them in their everyday encounters. It is possible that storytelling episodes embody a scripted essence reflecting the shared practices of a group (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Cultural performances, in effect, reflect the expectations and shared values of organizational members through the artifact of performance (Schein, 1992). This includes times when, if someone has something to lose (e.g., face), that individual will alter communication patterns (and expressions) to fit the predictable, appropriate standard for that social interaction (Goffman, 1969). One such example of a possible self and other face-saving action within sports teams is the notion of “collective silence” (Sabo, 2004a).

Researchers propose that collective silences are the non-expression of emotions considered to be unacceptable during athletic competitions, particularly those emotions that are viewed to be feminine (Lewis, 1981; Spitzack, 1998). Because expressing physical or emotional pain, are deemed unacceptable within the context of athletics, participants silence their outward expressions in order to conform to the expectations others have of them and only express these “negative” physical and emotional experiences, if they express them at all, to others outside of their organization. In this way, athletes are choosing to act in ways that represent the shared expectations of other teammates (i.e., showing personal strength; Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983) and create a culture that values being (collectively) silent. Performing in ways that break the “collective silence” has implications for group members and, arguably, for the group as a whole.
Critical scholars would characterize collective silences as being the result of experiencing a tension (between rationality and emotionality) between something that is “expected” and something “out of the ordinary” (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). When applied to the sports context, an athlete experiences an injury which immediately triggers a response—pain. However, because pain is presumed to be a normal part of athletic participation (White, Young, & McTeer, 1995; Young, 2004), the outward expression of pain is not discussed (silenced) as it is presumed to be an undesired quality. Presumably, this is a common cultural practice across athletics in general.

Such a dependence on what is acceptable to the group can be seen through an individual’s desire to maintain a sense of belonging to a group. When explaining his theory, Giddens (1979) stated that by “analyzing the conditions of social reproduction, and therefore of stability and change in society, I attempt to show the essential importance of tradition and routinisation in social life” (p. 7). Thus, maintaining a connection to an organization by adhering to normalized practices of that organization (in this case, a sports team) is considered a response to the onset of a change in one’s environment (such as injury) in connection with the dialectical tension of stability and change.

Each group forms a unique culture that values different modes of operation (Schein, 1992). Ritualistic elements embedded in sports organizations demonstrate the unique, culturally bound, systems to which athletes adhere (Birrell, 1981). Understanding that cultural performances are connected to value systems demonstrates the importance of communicative behaviors within groups. By taking a dialectical perspective, one can recognize that a choice exists in how individuals respond to the
ongoing demands of belonging to groups. How individuals respond to such tensions, as a matter of praxis, reveals their connection to the group’s system of operation.

Totality

The final tenant of the dialectical approach is totality. Totality is much like the other dimensions in that it recognizes the contextual nature of relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 2000) but does not intend to construct arguments that generalize behavior or make predictions (Johnson & Long, 2002). Totality, in a dialogical sense, assumes three forms in interpersonal contexts. First, one must recognize that contradictions exist at the level of relationships, often working in the background of an individual’s awareness. Second, an awareness of the interdependencies of contradictions must be acknowledged, depending on the context under examination; internal contradictions take place at the dyad level between relational partners while external contradictions exist external to the dyad where elements such as societal expectations for the relationship place demands on the dyad. Third, the environmental and physical contexts in which relationships occur must also be considered. In sum, understanding totality aids in understanding the possible contextual factors that influence the interplay of oppositional interpersonal dialectical forces.

Totality can be understood in a similar fashion in groups. Researchers must acknowledge, much like with interpersonal relationships, that “a group is a work in process—an ongoing creation and re-creation that occurs through social interaction” (Johnson & Long, 2002, p. 39). Such an acknowledgement is related to Giddens’ (1979) duality of structure. Giddens stated that, because group members are aware of the social environment to which they belong, they have the ability to articulate what is acceptable
and what is unacceptable social conduct. Such knowledge is based on the mutually
shared knowledge of group members. An individual actor’s ability to or inability to
reproduce this desired behavior either reinforces the norm or creates new practices that
can be incorporated into new understandings or patterns of behavior. When a tension
arises within a group, the ways in which that group responds to the tension (re)creates a
structure of interaction.

As a result, it is important to recognize the influential social forces that are
significant in creating those tensions. These forces might be understood as emerging
from the larger context in which the group belongs. For college sports teams, tensions
could be brought to one’s attention or emerge from organizational value structures,
coaches, university administrators, or league rules/regulations. Overall, factors such as
context, relationships, behaviors, the level at which the tensions exist, and other
exigencies that influence tensions, such as change/stability in groups, must be
acknowledged.

Relational dialectics within interpersonal relationships acknowledge that
relational partners experience and communicate in ways that address opposing forces in
their relationship(s). Seo and Creed (2002) offered that, by taking a dialectical approach
to the study of organizations, “various ruptures and inconsistencies within and among
institutional systems of meaning, forms of organization, and logics of action” (p. 240)
become apparent. Through applying a dialectical framework to sports teams, one can see
that contradictions and inconsistencies in action occur, especially during times when an
athlete experiences an injury. As a result, forces both between the dyad and between the
dyad and the larger social environment influence how meanings for the relationship and
the self continuously evolve. Contradiction, change, praxis, and totality ultimately guide one’s understanding of how influential dialectical tensions are within individual, group, and ultimately organizational communication.

In sum, Simon (1979) stated that researchers can better understand the actions of particular individuals or groups “if we examine the specific dialectical oppositions that drive them” (p. 478). Such oppositions or paradoxes are apparent throughout one’s involvement in athletics. For athletes, one’s participation in sport is paradoxical. On the one hand, the body is an inherent and critical part of and requirement for participation. On the other hand, bodies wear down, become injured, or become limited in their abilities. For football players, it is common knowledge that the body is used as a weapon through athletic competition. Athletes endure rigorous physical training in order to lessen the chance of injury. However, injury is a risk that athletes willingly accept when engaging in a high-contact sport. Here, an understanding of masculinity and football helps illuminate this perspective as it is a dominant cultural practice which is produced and maintained by such organizations (see Benson, 1977). This is what Mead (1934) would refer to as the ideals of the generalized other.

A framework of masculinity helps to inform the dialectical tenet of praxis, or how group members are “likely” to respond to tensions in their environment. In addition, understanding masculinity’s role among football players helps to inform the contextual nature of high-contact sports (totality), group norms, and ultimately, the generalized other.
Sports and Masculine Values

A number of scholars have proposed several qualities that male athletes share in common. The following section highlights some of the qualities that would be expected to exist when examining a sports team. In general, masculine values permeate sports. Those values ultimately serve as the predominant driving force behind athletic competition.

It has been argued that sports teams and athletes embody and value those qualities generally characterized as masculine within the American culture (Donaldson, 1993; Hatty, 2000). As a result, sports become the “leading definer of masculinity in mass culture” (Connell, 1995, p. 54) making male athletes the embodiment of masculine traits. Although the cultural constructions of masculinity range across contexts, it is commonly acknowledged that athletic masculine identities are cultivated through sports (Sparkes & Smith, 1999), creating a situation where the male becomes profoundly connected to the sport in which he plays.

Because of the many possible interpretations of what it means to be masculine, it is difficult to provide a specific definition that spans all contexts. However, traditional American cultural conceptualizations of masculinity in sports include being tough and able to play with pain (Balswick, 1981; Trujillo, 1994), competitive (Verser, 1981), aggressive (Kassing et al., 2004), non-emotional (Balswick, 1981), chauvinistic (Carter, 1981), and the breadwinner or provider of a family (Liss-Levinson, 1981). Kaufman (1987) added that “many of the characteristics associated with masculinity are valuable human traits – strength, daring, courage, rationality, intellect, [and] sexual desire” (p. 3). These understandings are largely attributed to socialization processes (Kassing et al.,
through sports, media, and social learning in general (Bandura, 1977) and create performative scripts to which the athlete is to adhere (see Ginsburg, 1988). No matter what displays of masculinity are shared among participants on a particular sports team, all organized sports promote winning and create expectations that successful athletes must be winners (Verser, 1981). These expectations connect with contemporary cultural representations of masculinity.

As an exemplar of how masculinity is socially constructed and reified through sports, Trujillo (1994) provided a narrative of the career of Nolan Ryan and how societal representations of him embodied what it meant to be “appropriately” masculine. In these representations, Ryan was portrayed as a tough, physically able, strong, dominant, masculine sports figure. As a result of these representations, Ryan became a powerful symbol (a prototype; see Ginsburg, 1988) of American values in addition to becoming a sex-symbol for some. This objectification obviously diminished Nolan Ryan as a person and, instead, formulated him as a heroic sports icon (Trujillo, 1994), a successful body (a machine for success; Messner, 1992; Naess, 2001), and absent of natural emotions and feelings (see Lewis, 1981). Although athletes commonly neglect to display outward expressions of pain (i.e., because of collective silences), when an athlete does experience a severe injury, his/her injuries can be celebrated and are considered honorable (Foley, 1992), especially in situations where the athlete has become injured for the team, pushed through the pain in order to compete, or has personally sacrificed his/her body for the sport. This heroic quality placed upon the athlete helps to explain some of the expectations that are experienced and cultivated within sport.
It is easy to see how glorified stories, such as the portrayal of Nolan Ryan, influence and reflect a culture’s conceptualization of masculinity. Pleck, Sonenstein, and Ku (1993) stated that masculinity is “a cultural construction, rather than a psychologically (or biologically) based characteristic” (p. 14). They also proposed that the internalization of these roles cause males to act out in ways that are expected of them. Such behaviors are apparent in how males relate with each other or with members of the opposite sex. In this way, masculinity becomes an ideology or “a set of beliefs and expectations about what men are like and should do” (p. 15). Through sports, the creation of a masculine ideology is important to consider when attempting to explain the behaviors that occur on sports teams and how those ideologies are related to the male gender role.

Masculine ideology has shared similar characteristics across time, and still continues into modern times (Adams & Govender, 2008), in its association with “competition, self-sufficiency, and emotional restrictedness” (p. 560). Adams and Govender argued that masculine ideologies are strongly related to parental expectations. These expectations are powerful factors in a child’s life as male children commonly attempt to live up to their parents’ standards of masculinity. This research argued that parental expectations are powerful socialization mechanisms for masculine ideologies and are often communicated between fathers and sons, emerging through parental criticisms of their child participating in sports. The social link between masculine ideologies and what males expect of themselves are powerful connections that occur in various social contexts throughout a male’s life. In a way, such influences force individuals into socially proper behavioral roles.
The above paragraphs give several examples of masculinity and how it is reflected and interpreted in society. These create a social knowledge, or schema, about what it means to be masculine in social interactions. This has the potential to guide the athlete’s behavior to behave in ways deemed to be masculine (as understood by the social group). The aforementioned research creates a schema that is internalized and produced through social interaction. This internalization creates performative scripts to which individuals adhere. Ginsburg (1988) described a script as being derived from schema which informs how an individual is supposed to respond to a given situation. To Ginsburg, such a distinction provides evidence that individuals are knowledgeable about the structures of action in a variety of social contexts. In a way, scripts are stereotypic of a particular role in social interaction.

Another related, yet conceptually different way of explaining how masculinity is displayed and (re)produced across individuals in a particular culture is through the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” (Mumby, 1998). Critical scholars, in particular, utilize the concept of masculine ideologies when exploring how the male is “socially pressured” to act in certain ways (Adams & Govender, 2008). Critical scholars agree that notions of masculinity are inherently tied to the male sex’s domination through communicative practices in the workplace and professional or social organizations (Collison & Hearn, 2005). The concept of what is “masculine” has been debated for some time as that definition has been largely dependent on context and other ongoing social, political (Mumby, 1998), and economic (Dunning, 1999) forces. The need for males to express or prove themselves as masculine has been a continuing driving force in
society (Messner, 1985), regardless of the context. In sports, this connection is especially apparent.

Temporal, social, and cultural influences shape interpretations of what individuals experience (Langellier & Peterson, 2004). The dominant notions of masculinity create master narratives for individuals on football teams where they must respond in ways that align with those masculine values. Master narratives “are built on concepts and explanatory schemes (‘social systems,’ ‘social entities,’ ‘social forces’) that are in themselves abstractions” (Somers, 1994, p. 619) and tend to consist of “summaries of socially shared understandings” (Nelson, 2001, p. 6). In this understanding, master narratives are dominant views that include social norms and might include the understandings of how cultural events shape the present and what actions should be taken to ensure an appropriate future (often used by critical scholars to examine individual agency and group marginalization; see Deetz, 2001; Somers, 1994).

Even though social influences have a profound effect on how individuals interpret their place and experience in society, narratives often arise that counter the master narrative, especially when the master narrative becomes damaging to an individual’s or a group’s well-being (Nelson, 2001). These narratives are called counter narratives or counter stories. Counter narratives are “a subset of stories . . . that constitute a revised understanding of a person or social group [that are] developed for the express purpose of resisting and undermining an oppressive master narrative. . . . They are, then, narrative acts of insubordination” (p. 8) that offer different interpretations to the dominant views of a group. Additionally, these stories can be viewed as “tools designed to repair the damage inflicted on identities by abusive power systems” (Chase, 2005, p. xiii) or to challenge
the norm. As a result, counter stories can provide valuable insights into understanding the personal struggles one faces in response to a role or pressures that are experienced within an organization.

A personal story, therefore, has the potential to reify the master narrative by supporting identities of the self (or others) or can serve as a counter narrative, containing elements that critique and question the dominant narrative. For instance, an athlete on a football team could reflect the traditional masculine master narrative of an athlete and portray himself as being tough and capable of sacrificing his body for the team (Sabo, 2004b). However, if the individual reflects how injuries are negative consequences of playing and affect him (or others) in negative ways, or that there is more to life than sacrificing himself for the team, this would be considered a counter narrative because it would critique the dominant master narrative. Arguably, the audience to which the athlete is telling the story becomes worthy of noting. If an athlete presented a narrative of himself to his team that was counter to what others expect of a teammate, then the group might respond in ways that correct the individual’s story through ridicule or other means. This has the potential to differ with other audiences, such as family, for instance.

Overall, the dominant form of what it means to be masculine saturates a population or group, including football teams. Due to this saturation, one can see that masculinity is a supported and accepted form of behavior while simultaneously becoming the benchmark for others to achieve within those populations. These accepted practices are “socially constructed through various discursive and nondiscursive practices” (Mumby, 1998, p. 167), and they promote the structures of those in power while
influencing subjective interpretations of the surroundings and interactions of which one is a part.

Considering sports, hegemonic masculinity has the capability to “fascinate, undermine, appropriate some men’s bodies, organize, impose, pass itself off as natural, deform, harm, and deny” (Donaldson, 1993, p. 646). Undeniably, hegemonic masculinities are powerful and pervasive phenomena across society that demand the sacrifice of one’s body (Messner, 1992; Sabo, 2004b) and ultimately shape the body as a conceptual tool for success (Dworkin & Messner, 1999; Trujillo, 1994). Such ideas of masculinity have been perpetuated across sports teams (Donaldson, 1993). When athletes do not meet these expectations, they fall victim to other individual’s socially-sanctioned anticipated forms of masculinity (see Lewis, 1981; Sabo, 1994) on the team and could possibly become stigmatized or marginalized as a result.

Consequences of Injury and Masculine Ideology

Conceptualizations of masculinity form the standards upon which individuals on a sports team are evaluated. Giddens (1979) would interpret this standard by which individuals are judged as an interpretive scheme. To Giddens (1979), interpretive schemes are “standardized elements of stocks of knowledge, applied by actors in the production of interaction” (p. 83). Thus, these schemes are commonly known by group members and have the potential to be sustained, maintained, or challenged through any communicative act. Because individual actors within organized sports teams are knowledgeable about their social environment, they use this scheme to manage a tension between group stability and change, for instance.
When athletes do not meet the expectations of an appropriate (masculine) athlete, those individuals ultimately suffer social consequences as a result (Donnelly, 2004). Notions of stigma come into play when individuals deviate from the expectations of the group (see Goffman, 1963). Such expectations can emerge through masculine ideologies where any behavior that is deemed “feminine” could be seen as a negative quality. In relation to sport teams, which can be considered close-knit groups, Goffman (1963) explained how individuals who do not meet the expectations of culture are often stigmatized. They might still be viewed as a member of the group, but for a “special” purpose:

In many close-knit groups and communities there are instances of a member who deviates, whether in deed or in the attributes he [sic] possesses, or both, and in consequence comes to play a special role, becoming a symbol of the group and a performer of certain clownish functions, even while he is denied the respect accorded full-fledged members. . . . He serves as a mascot for the group although qualified in certain ways to be a normal member of it. (pp. 141-142)

In other words, stories about an individual who did not meet the standards of a particular group could serve, through a symbolic storied form, as a teaching tool for other organizational members and become a type of “foil” (see Garner & Poole, 2009) whose presence hinders the goals of the group. Although not perceived as a legitimate member of the group, this individual is an important part of the group as he/she embodies an important narrative that can be used to teach other members about the expectations of that group. For instance, if a male athlete were to break the collective silence appreciated by other members of the group, he could be mocked for having feminine qualities.
uncharacteristic of competitive athletes. This occurrence would have the possibility of becoming a collegial story (Pacanowsky & Trujillo, 1983) when the story about the individual’s “abnormal” behavior begins to circulate across individuals on the team.

Closely related to the concept of stigmatization is the idea of marginalization. Marginalized individuals can find themselves excluded from certain cultural practices because they do not conform to the group’s expectations of the “ideal” member. The injured athlete or the athlete who is perceived as “weak” in body or mind could experience similar sentiments. Because the individual is not considered “able-bodied,” as it relates to the standards and norms of the dominant group, he could experience the feeling of being handicapped (see Abberley, 1987; Erevelles, 1996) in some sense.

Because there are expectations associated with being an athlete, behaviors that can be considered deviant from the norm can create stigmatizing effects against the individual who exhibits those behaviors. The specifics of what these punishments include are not clearly known, but it is important to consider that individuals can be accepted or rejected as legitimate members of an athletic team (Kassing et al., 2004) when considering the schema others hold of an appropriate teammate. Here, it is worth noting that, over time, individuals accumulate what is called idiosyncratic credit (see Altman & Taylor, 1973). In some cases, a deviation from the norm might not result in stigmatization. For instance, Hawkins and Book (1974) conceptualized idiosyncratic credit as an important component of interpersonal communication which involves “the accumulation of positively disposed impressions held by the receiver and is credited to the source if he or she deviates from expectancies” (p. 9). In other words, because the observed individual has perceived interpersonal or group “currency,” he or she can afford
to behave outside of the norm without receiving repercussions from the larger group. The deviations would, in effect, have little influence over how group members perceive that individual.

It is easy to see how acting outside of the expectations of the group can potentially have negative effects on the individual. However, when someone who has devoted a large amount of time and energy to being an athlete (perhaps over a lifetime) becomes stigmatized on a team, that stigma has the potential to be especially detrimental to that person’s identity.

Athletic Identity and Injury

Deetz (2001) proposed that one’s identity becomes apparent through discourse. Through an individual’s association with different entities (friends, family, organizations, etc.), one’s identity becomes fragmented, and in a sense, inconsistent from one group membership to the next. Because of this fragmentation, Deetz explained that one’s identity is controlled by the experiences within those associations. Particularly, with relational dialectics, it can be understood that identities are continuously being negotiated and redefined through relationships with others. Although one’s identity is somewhat influenced by associations and contextual factors, an athletic identity is undoubtedly a significant factor in the male athlete’s life and one that stays with that individual throughout his lifetime.

When it comes to sports, a person’s identity as a successful “masculine athlete” is bound by the context of sport, regardless of whether or not that person is currently participating in the sport (Messner, 1985). One’s identity is so intensely connected to sports that some former competitive athletes take offense at being called an “ex-athlete.”
This is exemplified through an interview that Messner conducted when he referred to a participant as an ex-athlete, a reference which immediately troubled the participant. The interviewee eventually explained, “I’m not an ex-athlete. Just because my career is over doesn’t mean I’m no longer an athlete” (p. 31 underline in original). Messner immediately felt that, by referring to the participant as an ex-athlete, he had challenged the interviewee’s masculine identity.

Masculine identities are, in essence, established through participating in sport (Sparkes & Smith, 1999). Those individuals who participate or who have participated in sport are inextricably tied to their identity as an athlete, just as successful men in business organizations (the workplace) often tie their identities to competitive ideas of masculinity. In the workplace, men identify with progressing through the organization by seeking out challenging workplace projects which ultimately reinforce competition with others (Collinson & Hearn, 2005). The successful completion of a challenging workplace project increases the likelihood that men will have successful careers. Understanding male competition in this way helps outsiders to understand that one’s identity is somewhat tied to what one does in an organization and the respect that is achieved through that success. This idea of competitiveness and achieving success is reminiscent of a traditionally masculine trait and echoes the need for individuals to “prove themselves.”

In a more direct connection with masculinity and sport, Donnelly (2004) proposed that risk-taking is necessary when conforming to athletic peer groups. Having the acceptable identity of a successful competitor is significant to the character development of the athlete (Sabo, 2004a). Donnelly (2004) proposed the following:
Having one’s identity accepted (confirmed) by a peer group (*comradeship*) may involve taking physical risks in order to avoid a social/reputational risk—a risk that may be perceived to have even more severe consequences. . . . In the heat of battle, young soldiers do not fight for their country, or their officers, or for an ideology. They fight for their particular unit in an attempt to ensure the survival of their comrades—they fight for each other. In the parallels between sport and war, this is often a motivation for risky behavior in sports (e.g., “taking one for the team”). (italics in original, p. 45)

In this case, the individual identifies so strongly with the unit that bodily welfare is placed second to that of the group. In this way, putting oneself “at risk for the team” confirms one’s identity as a legitimate member of the team, especially when this masculine behavior is observed by others.

In addition, Young (2004) asserted that masculinity, identity, and organizational expectations in sport are perpetually bound in high-contact professional sports through “both legally binding professional obligations (‘play or don’t get paid’) *and* to the revered values of his [sic] own work culture (‘play hurt and show you can take the pain like a man’)” (p. 6) which often calls for the suppression of pain. In this way, being a productive member of a team means that an athlete commonly experiences a tension between playing hurt/injured and not playing in order to heal and, thus, creating a situation where the athlete feels as though they do not “legitimately” belong to the team. Ultimately, one’s participation in sport, where pain will inevitably be experienced, is a masculinizing aspect of all sports (White, Young, & McTeer, 1995). If one does not perform to the socially constructed standards of an athlete and behave in an appropriate
manner, the masculine character and identity of that individual are put in jeopardy by the responses of others (Donnelly, 2004).

In summary, masculine expectations are pervasive and evident within sports (Collison & Hearn, 2005; Dunning, 1999; Kassing et al., 2004; Sparkes & Smith, 1999; Trujillo, 1994). These expectations have become ways of uniquely identifying with a sports team. Because these masculine scripts (see Ginsburg, 1988) or narratives (see Nelson, 2001) are so prominent, they socialize individuals into understanding what it means to be an athlete (Messner, 1985; Sabo, 1994; Silvennoinen, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 1999) even if it means putting oneself at risk for permanent injury (Sabo, 2004b, 1994; White, Young, & McTeer, 1995). Both individual and group identities are constructed through the “dialogic performances” (Riessman, 2008, p. 135) that occur on sports teams. These dialogic performances in response to dialectical tensions have the potential to continuously reinforce expectations or challenge them. Understanding such a connection is the purpose of this study.

Proposed Research Direction and Research Questions

It can be argued that the appropriate scripts for what it means to be an athlete are socially constructed through storytelling within sports organizations (Kassing et al., 2004). It has been proposed that stories are densely constructed in ways that share meanings and (re)create experiences and future expectations for others (Heywood, 2005; Silvennoinen, 2006). These expectations have the ability to be seen through the eyes of individual participants where players have the ability to respond to others in ways they believe the others in the group expect (see Mead’s generalized other, 1934). The ideas of the generalized other become known through the stories that are both lived personally
and told by others. Such stories can include heroic conceptualizations of athletes to which others aspire (Lines, 2001; Trujillo, 1994), further advancing and supporting the expectations associated with what it means to be a successful athlete.

In addition to furthering knowledge in selected areas of research, the following research questions are derived from my personal desire to better understand the sport of college football and how the athletes understand their experiences as being a participating member. Because of my personal background playing college football, I find the direction of this study valuable for making sense of my own experiences and understanding how others make sense of theirs. During my four years of being a student-athlete, I observed the impact the social environment of football placed on myself and my teammates. The ways in which individuals talked about others on the team and their role as an athlete created interesting discussions which often promoted the aforementioned literature, neglecting to critique it. The stories that athletes share with each other (and with others outside of the team) have a tremendous impact on formulating what it means to be a college football player and what others expect of themselves and fellow teammates.

Scholars continue to note the importance of how gendered identities are created, maintained, and managed on sports teams (Kassing et al., 2004). Because both “being and doing are central features to one’s identity” (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 234), how one identifies with being a member of a football team could elucidate athletes’ understandings of what it means to be a member of the team and forward research in sport communication. By understanding what it means to be a member, one potential
outcome of such a method is a better understanding of “what it means to play” (Kassing et al., 2004, p. 400).

Ultimately, researchers need to examine such socially constructed accounts in sports because of the value they add to cultural understandings (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell- Trujillo, 1983) of what it means to be an athlete (Kassing et al., 2004). Based on foregoing literature, the following research question is posed.

RQ1: How do football players’ stories [narratives] construct what it means to be a college football player?

Although the direction of this research does not intend to uncover a complete cultural view of a sports team, valuable insights can be derived when looking at storytelling in organizations (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983), such as the ability of storytelling to cultivate expectations as to what it means to be a participant on an athletic team (Kassing et al., 2004; Sparkes & Smith, 1999). However, little research exists that represents how these expectations are formed (Jablin, 2001).

Even though there are disagreements as to the overall positive and negative influences that athletic culture has for participants (see Egendorf, 1999), this project does not intend to answer those questions. Rather, a culturally descriptive view of cultural values that arise through artifacts of storytelling (Schein, 1992) will uncover what the stories of athletic participation reveal about the demands the group places on individual athletes. One possible outcome of this is a better understanding of how individuals both include and exclude individuals from being considered legitimate members of the team (Kassing et al., 2004). The following research questions address such needs.
RQ2: What are the cultural expectations involved in being a college football player?

In the pursuit of winning, athletes can perceive the body as a tool for success and abuse themselves (and others) physically and emotionally as a result (Naess, 2001). It has been proposed that an important part of athletic culture silences injuries (Sabo, 2004a) because injuries become commonplace and are expected during athletic competition (White, Young & McTeer, 1995; Young, 2004). In a way, it is paradoxical to think that the most commonly experienced aspect of football is the thing that individuals neglect to discuss or question. This sets the stage for the possible existence of dialectical tensions (Johnson & Long, 2002) and subsequent management techniques to be explored.

Becoming injured could be considered a turning point in one’s relationship with the group where one’s role within the team is changed which will satisfy the need to “examine the specific, localized conditions under which [group] members experience dialectical moments” (Erbert, Mearns, & Dena, 2005, p. 51). Because this is an important aspect of sport culture to consider, the following research question is posed.

RQ3: What dialectical tensions exist that illustrate college football players’ experience of injury during athletic participation?

Summary

The forgoing review of literature creates a framework for understanding college football teams as organizational, cultural entities. Because the sport of football calls forth similar scripts or roles associated with being a football player, the potential exists that college football teams share similar understandings of their participation in the sport. An argument has been made that group members have the ability to influence the
communicative behaviors of others to some extent. Intuitively, some level of
assimilation occurs when an individual enters into a group where he then learns about
what it means to be a member based off the norms associated within group interaction
through a variety of both passive and interactive ways. Based on the developed
understandings of what others expect of him, the athlete then adjusts his behavior
(possibly based off the experience of dialectical tensions) in order to either conform or
challenge the group. The resulting behavior poses consequences (positive and negative)
for future interactions within that group. In general, this first begins with a socially
constructed understanding of what it means to be a college football player in order to
understand the “generalized other.”

One way of illuminating such understandings is by listening to stories individuals
tell about their experiences (and the experiences of others) within the organization.
Based on previous literature, it is likely that several components will emerge through the
research questions. First, it is likely that individuals will reveal their understandings of
what it means to be a college athlete in a variety of ways. It will not be surprising if
metaphors are used to describe their understandings or if dialectical struggles associated
with the life of the athlete are identified. Second, it is probable that aspects of
masculinity will emerge as the dominant narrative told through the accounts of both
individual actions and others actions in relation to the team’s goals. Third, injury is
likely to be a common topic within the stories told by individuals. Even though it is not
common for athletes to discuss injury with each other, they might associate injury and
subsequent behaviors as being either appreciated or rejected by the group.
Overall, by answering the aforementioned research questions, a void will be filled in the organizational literature that will connect the communicative practices within sports teams to the expectations that are created for the athlete (Jablin, 2001). Because these expectations are reflected through organizational members, the storied accounts that participants offer will provide a window through which to view how the experience of participating in sports is socially constructed (Kassing et al., 2004).
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this chapter is to present a framework for exploring the research questions. Specifically, I will discuss the participants who were recruited to provide insights into this study. Pseudonyms have been used in place of the names of the universities and the individuals associated with this study in order to protect participant identity. Participants’ depictions of their lives as college football players are explored using interviews. The importance of using an interview approach will be discussed in-depth. At the end of this section, each research question will be discussed individually as well as the techniques used to address each topic area.

Participants

The research participants for this study consisted of male undergraduate university students who participate on college football teams. Football players operate within a masculine, team-oriented sport which has an elevated rate of injury as compared to other competitive sports due to its high contact nature. As such, it demands great amounts of sacrifice by its members and provides many opportunities for examining tensions that accompany football-related organizational life.

It is worthy of noting that, as one of few revenue-generating sports at the collegiate level, university football teams experience continuing pressure to win in order to bring money into their athletic program (Eitzen, 2001). This places heavy demands on everyone in the organization. The pressures to win and to sacrifice one’s self for the team made college football and college athletes an appropriate focus for this research and an interesting relationship to explore.
The problems associated with trying to recruit athletes for academic research has been noted in previous research (see Braham, Finch, & McCrory, 2004, for instance). Some of the concerns reported by athletes revolved around being “singled out” by teammates or having their input influence their sport in some negative way. Additionally, it is unlikely to be able to gather participants during their season of competition because of the time commitment involved with being both a college student and an athlete. To increase the likelihood that I would be able to gather participants, I chose to gather participants during the off-season to counter some of the aforementioned obstacles.

Originally, my intent was to interview athletes from one institution where I would be able to draw conclusions about the culture of one particular football team (see Appendix A for IRB proposal). In an attempt to satisfy my intent, individuals were recruited at one institution during a three month period in the winter/spring of 2010 during the offseason after obtaining IRB approval (see Appendix B). At the initial institution, over twenty attempts were made to individually solicit interviews with athletes. These athletes were solicited through the connections I had with others primarily out of convenience. I sent emails and had my connections deliver follow-up reminders to potential participants. Seven athletes were kind enough to respond to my requests. After each interview, participants were encouraged to promote the study and encourage others to participate. Overall, these efforts proved quite ineffective and the speed at which I was gathering participants was not ideal. As a result, I extended my data gathering efforts (after an amendment to the initial IRB proposal; see Appendix C for
amendment; see Appendix D for approval) to other colleges/universities where it was possible to employ other personal contacts in gathering participants.

Overall, participants were gathered from three separate institutions, each representing different competitive levels of college football (see Appendix E). Seven college football players were interviewed from the initial institution which is a Midwestern Division I school. These individuals consisted of two freshmen, one sophomore, two juniors, and two seniors. Two of these interviewees had earned All-Conference honors and the title of team captain.

Additional participants were recruited from two other schools by utilizing the connections I had with their particular institutions. One of these schools was a Division III school in the northeast. Telephone interviews were conducted with four participants from this school. Of these four participants, two were juniors and two were seniors. A team captain and All American were represented in this sample.

The final school providing participants is a small, NAIA school, in the Midwest. Four participants were interviewed from this school. Two interviews were conducted and recorded over the telephone, and two were conducted face to face. The other two participants were a junior and a freshman. Two of these interviewees were All-Conference and two were chosen by teammates to be team captains.

Although the argument could be advanced that variations in the football programs incorporated in this study make any kind of claims problematic, I disagree. Scholars, such as Verser (1981) and Elias and Dunning (1966), have noted the connections among sports teams in relation to how they operate on a social level. Elias and Dunning asserted that the same dynamics exist across sports teams, such as football organizations, much
like the similarities that exist across teams in the way a sport is played. Because the argument has been made that football teams share similar masculine values (Verser, 1981), such an assertion is justified (see Sabo, 2004a, 1994). As such, the variation across participants in terms of their level of organizational affiliation did not pose a problem for this research. Instead, exploring the various perspectives among participants provides the opportunity to consider both convergent and divergent experiences through a detailed analysis.

Interview Methodology

As previously mentioned, interviews were conducted where participants were encouraged to provide personal accounts and stories that defined their lives as college football players. A semi-structured interview protocol was used for each participant (see Appendix F). Interviewees were encouraged (through prodding and additional questioning) to provide lengthy responses which yielded rich data. Follow-up and clarification questions were asked in order to obtain detailed accounts. This method proved fruitful as it helped co-construct understandings of what it means to be a college football player.

Interview questions were phrased in a way that elicited narrative accounts from the participants. Narratives include short stories about an event or a lengthy account of an important part of one’s life (Chase, 2005) and often arise in interview sessions when least expected, such as instances when yes/no questions have been asked (Riessman, 2008). This combination of unprompted storytelling and solicited storytelling provided valuable understandings of what it means to be a competitive athlete in a sport that promotes winning, creates pressures for sacrifice, and encourages dedication of its
members. Narrative accounts were helpful tools to understand how participants both interpret and make sense of their lived experiences and struggles within the competitive sport of college football.

In total, fifteen interviews were conducted. Interviews lasted over 758 minutes (12 hours and 38 minutes) with an average interview length of 50 minutes. The interviews ranged from over twelve minutes to two hours. Interviews were transcribed into a Word document which resulted in a total of 317 pages of data (Times New Roman, 12 point font, one inch margins). The transcribed data ranged in page length from 6 pages to 52 pages.

Overall, narrative accounts and storytelling provided valuable insights into what it means to be an athlete (Heywood, 2005; Silvennoinen, 2006) as narrative communicates the point of view of the narrator (Chase, 2005). Storytelling in interviews also served as a retrospective act of sense-making as well as self-making and self-presenting (Reissman, 2008) which, through communication, allows individuals to develop and articulate expectations for how things unfold, the way things should occur, and the way things should be (Bruner, 2002). Ultimately, the stories provided by participants provided a wealth of information, but analyzing such stories is a complex undertaking as storytelling consisted of rich data that included many layers capable of being interpreted in several ways. A more thorough explanation of narrative analysis is presented below.

Narrative Analysis

Reissman’s (2008) book, Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences, outlines several different texts that can be defined as narrative in nature as well as the many ways that these can be analyzed. For instance, narrative encounters can occur in the episodic
accounts individuals provide, through pictures that they draw, or through the story of the interview itself where dialogue reveals power differentials in the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Although these are important aspects to consider, the participants’ experience(s) of being an athlete will be the primary focus of this research. The stories stemming from personal experiences, teammate impressions, and other organizational stories will provide a wide array of information that will serve as a basis for exploring the meanings behind being an athlete. Those actions or stories that stand out to the participant will also be explored as these will help to provide a more complete view of the expectations of athletes on football teams.

These stories were explored for common traits. In order to answer the research questions and to draw connections among the collected stories, a thematic analysis of storied experiences was employed. Because the aim of this research was to uncover similarities between and among storied accounts of the athletes’ experiences, such a method served as an appropriate tool for this study. Focusing on the connections between the participants runs the risk of neglecting the depth and detail of individual accounts. However, when the conclusions are accompanied with representations and examples of individual accounts, those conclusions provided insights into the athlete’s life by adding clarity and colorful interpretations to those experiences while respecting the stories of the participants (Riessman, 2008). This is acknowledged as being just one way of understanding and knowing a phenomenon, but is deemed an appropriate approach to accomplish the goals of this research.

Such thematic interpretations are a valuable way to make sense of how individuals present themselves as athletes. This thematic interpretation relied on
examining the recurrence of information, repetition of that information, and the connections between the reported experiences (Owen, 1984). By constantly comparing (Strauss & Corbin, 1967) the narratives, themes (in the athletes’ experiences, and interpretations) emerged through the understandings developed through the researcher (see Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Riessman (2008) proposed a sequenced method to follow when engaging in thematic interpretation of narrative data. Specifically, Riessman (2008) explained:

The investigator works with a single interview at a time, isolating and ordering relevant episodes into a chronological biographical account. After the process has been completed for all interviews, the researcher zooms in, identifying the underlying assumptions in each account and (coding) them. Particular cases are then selected to illustrate general patterns – range and variation – and the underlying assumptions of different cases are compared . . . [reproducing] excerpts or segments (some fairly lengthy, from the long interview narratives) that are interspersed in the written report with . . . interpretation, theoretical formulation, and references to prior theory. (p. 57)

The process of meticulously analyzing each participant’s accounts of athletic life enabled me to draw connections between personal experiences and interpretations. In an attempt to understand the expectations of the athlete across a football team, a thematic analysis proved appropriate.

Because this study focused on the expectations that athletes have of each other and how they respond in moments of injury, group norms were addressed in relation to the culture of football in which these participants exist. One way to understand
organizational culture is through Schein’s (1992) framework of organizational culture which dictates that culture exists at three different, but related levels.

At the observational level are artifacts, which can include stories, metaphors, slogans, and/or how workspaces are constructed. The accounts of organizational life provided by participants lie at this first level and are considered artifacts. Schein argued that artifacts can be difficult to interpret, but can add insights into the values of a culture. The next level of an organization’s culture is that of the espoused values, including shared, socially validated expectations as to what should be done. A type of organizational philosophy, these are usually capable of becoming verbally shared between members. When the values of an organization are tested and survive, they “gradually become transformed into nondiscussable assumptions supported by articulated sets of beliefs, norms, and operational rules of behavior” (Schein, 1992, p. 20). At the deepest level of organizational culture exist the basic assumptions of that culture. For example, it can be implicit that, in sports teams, a basic assumption is that the needs of the team take the place of (or negate) an individual’s needs. This assumption might be reflected in artifacts displaying the espoused team’s values, such as a poster that says “There is no ‘I’ in team.” As a result, an observer or interviewer has the capability of observing or discussing organizational artifacts in order to make arguments as to the hidden meanings that individuals share within that particular group. Engaging in discussions of this kind helped to formulate a general attitude of a group or organization and informed the researcher of how culture influences perceptions of self and others (see Laing, Phillipson, & Lee, 1966) inside college football teams.
This research aims to make general claims attributed to groups of individuals and would be considered a cultural perspective by some. A cultural perspective will uncover those aspects of being an athlete that are normal or expected by those who identify with that role but that are unclear or hidden to those outside of that culture (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). An artifact of organizational culture, storytelling provided a natural lens through which to view “football culture.” Interchangeable with the term “narrative” (Riessman, 2008), storytelling through interviews provided “members a vehicle for dramatizing organizational life . . . [which glorifies] organizational experience” (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p. 138). By listening to stories about participation on an athletic team, important aspects were revealed that aided in explaining shared cultural elements. When understood as conversational performances, the ways individuals talk and the manner in which they act have a great influence on organizing groups of people (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001).

Because performances are artifacts, the accounts of those performances provided insights into the social expectations of that athletic team. Furthermore, the silenced aspects of a group also offer the potential for emotional insights into the meanings that certain performative roles play. The interconnectedness between performances, norms, expectations, and storytelling with the use of metaphors provided insights into the different traits shared by group members that participate on college football teams.

Although individuals are bound within the threads of their own culture, there is an ongoing and complex connection between experience, action, and resulting behavior and how communicative actions influence those around them both positively and negatively. Undoubtedly, individuals continuously face varying degrees of cultural, personal,
historical, and personal demands. At times, these demands might be in conflict with or contradict one another (see Mead, 1934). The ways in which they approach these moments carry influential and symbolic meanings to the larger group in which they are involved. The following section addresses how storytelling served as symbolic vehicle through which college football players communicated their experiences during interview sessions.

*Stories and Culture*

This section will reveal how stories are both important cultural elements and valuable ways in which to understand the culture of a sports team. Stories can arise in any situation for any purpose. The following sections will discuss the multiple forms that stories can assume. First, a discussion of Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo’s (1993) work will be presented followed by a discussion of the sensemaking value that stories provide to organizational members (Weick, 1995). Each was deemed to be important to recognize throughout the analysis.

There are three general stories that arose in the interviews and were incorporated into this study. Each type of story provided unique insights into how groups or organizations respond to the demands of daily life. Such responses can informed an understanding of the goals of the group and how members individually responded to situations, and how others (i.e., non-group members) responded (in)appropriately as well. The three general forms stories that arose in interviews took the form of personal, collegial, and corporate stories (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983).
Personal Stories

Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo (1983) stated that personal stories are narratives told by the individual about the self and serve as a representation of one’s place in the organization. These stories are “often accompanied by an underlying tone of one-upmanship, which embellish organizational identities” (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p. 138-139). Personal stories provided evidence as to how organizational members both identified with a culture and how individuals experienced the meanings of participation within sport across a lifetime.

One such example of a personal story was documented by Sabo (1994) when he provided a narrative that detailed his personal experiences and subsequent struggles with playing football since the age of eight. In this essay, he began by making the claim that he started playing in order to change his (bodily) image from a child with freckles to a “manly” athlete. His desire was to build more of a masculine representation of himself as dictated by dominant societal preferences. Sabo expressed how football taught him to ignore pain and to, instead, inflict pain on others. After playing for a Division I football team, his career eventually came to an end, but the lasting implications of playing such a masculine and violent sport produced potentially life-long effects as a result of ignoring the pain. Playing football for all of those years left him with a bad back which eventually caused him to endure a spinal fusion in order to alleviate the discomfort that he felt. Through Sabo’s narrative, it is apparent that he came to the conclusion that football was not worth playing as he had experienced significant negative consequences that he attributed to his participation in the sport.
In general, it is easy to see how personal stories are structured to argue and persuade the audience to believe them through historically contextualized accounts of the narrator’s experience (Riessmann, 2008). If Sabo’s story were told to another individual who had not experienced the culture of football, that individual would still be able to understand the story because of its presentation. Riessman (2008) stated that “in everyday oral storytelling, a speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story” (p. 3). It is easy to assume that any story that is communicated to others is purposefully selected, organized, and connected, and is perceived as being meaningful to the audience (Riessman, 2008). Such stories saturated interview sessions.

Collegial Stories

Collegial stories are those stories told about others in the organization and include anything from amusing newcomer socialization stories to frightening accounts of accidents or terminations. These stories were be used by participants as methods for communicating examples of (in)appropriate behaviors and experiences of other organizational members. For instance, organizational members shared stories about heroes (past or current) in the organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). These stories helped to communicate the expectations that organizational members have of each other. These stories were also told about stigmatized individuals (Goffman, 1963) that defined how organizational members should not behave or act. In sum, when stories about organizational members are discussed, those individuals being spoken about have the potential to become a symbol of that organization, representing some deep meaning reflected and embraced by that culture (see Geertz, 1973). When stories are circulated
about others in the organization, those stories have the potential to reflect the values of the group and influence subsequent behavior. Interviewees were capable of recalling such stories and used them as representative examples of other teammates.

One such story that represents a potential organizational hero can be seen in the story of Sam Maresh, a Minnesota football player (see Scoggins, 2008). Sam was an outstanding high school athlete who was recruited by several Big Ten schools. However, upon reporting to summer football camp in Minnesota, Sam found out that he had a heart condition and needed surgery. Before his surgery, he was quoted as saying, “I’m going to play . . . I honestly feel that way. With family and everyone supporting me and praying for me, I feel like I will play again” (p. 1A). Even with a potential career-ending ailment and a pending surgery, Sam was determined to continue playing. Maresh recovered from his surgery, but found out that he had a benign tumor in his left calf that caused him pain when running (Youngblood, 2009). The pain was later found to be caused by scar tissue in his calf (Brackin, 2009), but the pain persisted.

Sam’s coach was quoted as saying, “He doesn’t have limitations, per se . . . there’s still an issue with his calf . . . but he’s able to try to play through it . . . Obviously we’re all pulling extra hard for Sam” (Brackin, 2009, p. 5C). Because the team wanted Sam to play, Sam became a focal point for his teammates. Stories, such as Sam’s, that demonstrate overcoming severe obstacles (heart surgery) and playing through pain (calf issue) can be circulated among athletes on the team and create understandings for how athletes are supposed to approach setbacks in their careers.
Corporate Stories

Corporate narratives are the symbolic stories told by upper management to employees and are meant to reflect the norms of organizational life and serve as methods to symbolically define an organization. In sports teams, corporate stories would be those stories told by the coaches on such occasions as before games, serving as motivational tools for competition. In retrospect, some individuals believe that these stories reflect more of the coach’s desires than the desires of the players and go as far as to say that, while participating in sports, the players are, in fact, “fighting the coach’s war” (Sabo, 1994, p. 88). Moreover, coaches often return to the sport in which they used to be successful and exert the same competitive spirit (Messner, 1985) while holding an important and influential leadership role on the team. Calhoun (1987) provided the following account that reflected the expectations the coach had of athletes as reflected in a player’s interaction with a football coach:

[A high school senior football player] had been sick with flu, which had not kept him from his daily spring practice. In the spring intrateam game he was so sick that he threw up at the half. His coach held him out of the second half but told him later that he could have done better if he had tried – presumably like another top player who had played the whole game with a severely congested chest. (p. 15)

In such an example, the coach used a story of another player who had successfully competed in a game to motivate or “teach” the player with the flu about what is expected of a successful athlete. Such communicative actions by coaches have the ability to be highly persuasive and influential to the culture of a sports team. Such stories like this are
common as football “coaches [take] notice of animals [which] meant being fanatically aggressive and ruthlessly competitive” (Sabo, 1994, p. 84) and communicate in ways that promote this value. Such expectations were communicated through the idea of corporate stories during interview sessions which were embraced and repeated by football players during interviews.

In sum, personal, collegial, and corporate stories have the potential to be influential to athletes and became the types of stories shared during interview sessions. These stories are important to understand in the context of making sense out of one’s surroundings and provided great value to understanding the cultural influences of being a member of a college football team. They helped to construct, provide, and communicate meanings for the role of the athlete and therefore, represented the identities of individuals within that culture (i.e., football culture).

Stories and Organizational Sensemaking

Weick’s (1995) sensemaking approach to organizations expands the previous discussion of personal, collegial, and corporate stories. Weick proposed that stories which circulate within an organization provide a framework for organizational members as a method to make sense of an organizational phenomenon (something that happens). Most often, these notions position stories as sequential events placed (told) in a coherent pattern providing several functions for organizational members, including 1) a means of comprehension, 2) a means of implying cause-effect, 3) a method of connecting historical accounts to the present, 4) a means of reconstructing earlier events, 5) a means of guiding members’ behaviors and actions, 6) a means of cataloging experiences, and 7) a means of conveying common morals/values and significance. However, Weick also asserted that
“when stories overstate the strength of causal ties, they simulate the effects of tight coupling in a complex world” (p. 130) where “cause” and “effect” might not actually be so tightly connected. Whether tightly connected, loosely connected, or only connected in the minds of organizational members, stories serve as a sensemaking tool for members to find out what went wrong or to fix problems before they damage the organization. For instance, an athletic team might blame an unsuccessful game on poor practice the week before or not being physically/mentally tough enough during the game. Causally tying an event to previous actions (through narrative) is how Weick approached sensemaking in organizations. In sum, some of the stories told during interview sessions reflected teaching/learning tools that athletes were capable of sharing.

Overall, storytelling served as an act of sense-making, self-making, and self-presenting (Bruner, 2002; Riessman, 2008) that provided valuable insights into culture and cultural identity (Riessman, 2008). Within narratives, aspects of the inherent connection between the individual, culture, and personal experiences were (re)constructed by athletes through the telling of stories. Reissman (2008) furthered this notion by stating that “individuals and groups construct identities through storytelling. . . . In a word, narratives are strategic, functional, and purposeful . . . to foster a sense of belonging” (p. 8). In sports, stories can be brief, but are dense with information that helps to inform others in a way that collectively shares meanings created in experiences and expectations (Silvennoinen, 2006). Because of this, narrative analysis has been taken up by several researchers as an important object of analysis within sport (Heywood, 2005). This includes examining anything from personal stories shared between teammates to media representations of athletes. Taken together, these overarching stories
within the context of competitive sports create an attractive and powerful image of an athlete (Silvennoinen, 2006). When individuals are continuously exposed to stories communicating similar themes, the stories work to establish expectations for self and other among individuals who aspire to be known as legitimate athletes.

To a large extent, stories serve several functions for individuals and organizations that help individuals make sense of their surroundings and determine how to interact and behave within those environments. However, when understanding narrative in the context of organizational life, storytelling must be recognized as emerging out of both the processes of organizational life and from one’s socioeconomic background, experiences, and interpretations (Conrad & Haynes, 2001). During interviews, the teller’s personal connections to the stories were important to consider. These connections included the ways in which individuals dramatize and experience those events.

Such methods proved useful in answering each of the research questions. Storytelling provided insights into the world of others that would not have been known otherwise. A narrative approach added breadth and depth to understanding the personal experiences and shared understandings of others. In a way, storytelling during interviews represented organizational life from the individual storyteller’s view which served as a way to understand and make sense of the life of the athlete. In the following section, I discuss how each research question was specifically addressed. By examining the stories that individuals shared, I was able to draw connections among similar narratives in order to illuminate common themes.
Addressing Each Research Question

Addressing each research question involved analyzing the accounts of college football players. In doing so, my own personal experiences with playing college football aided in understanding the stories told by participants and how those are similar across individuals. Throughout the interview and analysis process, researchers and participants co-construct meanings within interview sessions. Foss and Foss (1994) stressed the importance of recognizing the researcher’s own experiences throughout the process of research. Researchers value personal accounts equally in terms of what they suggest about the experiences reported, they discriminate among them as they choose what to study, select the kinds of personal experiences that best will allow an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, find participants, and collect personal narratives. . . . . [Furthermore, researchers] share interpretations and seek confirmation for their interpretations from participants, explain their choices about which stories to include and which to leave out, and continually remind themselves and participants that the research product is a joint construction of the participants’ experiences and interpretations and researchers’ presentational expertise. (pp. 40-41)

The nature of this dissertation is embedded in my own desire to understand the social experience of athletes on college football teams. My own subjective experiences come forward in everything from the research questions I posed, to the discussions I had with interviewees, to how the data is presented. In the process of answering each research question, it is important to note that, although my personal background and experiences
are not shared in the analysis, how I address and present each research question is wrought with my shared understandings and previous experiences. Although this research does not intend to present the stories the participants deemed most valuable, the stories and themes that are presented are believed to most effectively illustrate the experiences that they shared and speak to the research questions guiding this work. The following paragraphs illustrate how each research question was addressed.

*Research question one* explored how individuals represent what it means to be a football player through storytelling. Such answers originated in the communication that occurs before a game, on the field, or during social outings. Explanations and accounts of the team were communicated through the use of metaphor (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Schein, 1992) which represented how the athlete positioned themselves in relation to larger social structures.

Individuals are capable of understanding and interpreting metaphors that are embedded in stories from childhood (Waggoner, Messe, & Palermo, 1985) and continue to be used through adulthood where they become embedded in accounts of organizational life (see Waggoner, Meese, & Palmero, 1985) as ways of dramatizing events (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). Metaphors and stories are conceptually different artifacts, but metaphors that occurred within narratives added depth to the understanding of one’s experience within a group culture.

Metaphors provided an important comprehension tool by representing the common ways organizational members understood their (and other’s) experience. Metaphors allow people to better relate to one another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For instance, two popular metaphors that have been discovered in organizational research and
literature are the “organization as sport” metaphor (Gribas, 1999) and the “organization as the military” metaphor (Winsor, 1996). It is easy to see how the military metaphor influences organizational membership and frames perceptions of how the group operates (i.e., being at war with other organizations or performing with urgency as if at war). In short, this metaphor frames how organizations structure and form expectations about relationships and how individuals are supposed to interact with others inside of the organization as well as the relationship that their organization has with other organizations.

Apparently, sports organizations have the ability to adopt and use metaphors. Reflected in the language used between members to explain experience, and promote a common connection, metaphors proved to be a valuable method for understanding the experiences and expectations associated with what it means to be a member of an athletic sports team.

Although metaphors occurred through stories during interviews, insights which inform how gendered identities are maintained or managed on sports teams (Kassing et al., 2004) also became a topic of conversation. In Chapter Two, research was presented that linked masculinity to creating a schema for appropriate male behavior, or a cultural script to which one adheres. Scripts can be viewed as stereotyped forms of interaction (Ginsburg, 1988). Because perceptions of the self in relation to others is an ongoing force in social interaction (Laing, Phillipson, & Lee, 1966), stereotypes of football players (as experienced by the self and how others experience him) became apparent in the storied accounts of interviewees. Montgomery and Baxter (1998) acknowledged the ability for one’s notion of self to be developed through the interactions with others. The
authors connect the works of Bakhtin and Mead to create the understanding that the self is both “distinctively realized and . . . reflected by the other” (1998, p. 166). By understanding the existence of such representations, a more informed picture of the meanings of being a college football player were developed.

*Research question two* focused on how athletes view the expectations they have of themselves (and others) in relation to the team. Expectations, in this sense, came from others in the group and the role one plays within the group. Roles are associated with “individualized expectations of each member by the larger group” (Johnson & Long, 2002, p. 35). By thematizing the accounts of participants, a general impression was formed as to the expectations associated with the role of the athlete on a college football team.

Such thematized answers connected to previous research that states that athletes are competitive (Verser, 1981), non-emotional (Balswick, 1981), chauvinistic (Carter, 1981), aggressive (Kassing et al., 2004), tough (Balswick, 1981; Trujillo, 1994), and strong and courageous (Kaufman, 1987). Such masculine values were expected to occur in the interviews that are part of this research as such answers have been reflected in countless descriptions and critiques of football. Although these were expected to occur across participants, the possibility exists that deviations could exist. If there were accounts that reflected values not characteristic of others’ views of an athlete (such as elements acknowledging “feminine” qualities or an understanding that these expectations are potentially harmful), such stories would be considered counter narratives and worthy of mention.
The dominant views expressed by participants about the self and others aided in understanding the expectations held by others associated with the team, thus informing the concept of Mead’s (1934) “generalized other” used for analyzing the individual-generalized other level of dialectical tensions (Johnson & Long, 2002) which occurred through the analysis of research question three.

Research question three focused on how athletes experience the by-product of participating in a contact sport. By exploring stories of the injury(ies) of the participant and how the interviewee views injuries while playing football, evidence was derived that supported the existence of dialectical tensions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 1998; Johnson & Long, 2002) on college football teams when a particular individual or a teammate becomes injured.

As detailed in Chapter Two, tensions between the individual-generalized other (Johnson & Long, 2002) became apparent through discussions of injured athletes. By utilizing the conclusions of research questions one and two, the interviewer was able to develop an understanding of how athletes view their role and the role of others on the team (as expected by teammates) when one becomes injured.

To Mead (1934), the idea of a generalized other is a powerful force in creating the experience of a social environment. Mead stated the following.

It is in the form of the generalized other that the social process influences the behavior of the individuals involved in it and carrying it on, i.e., that the community exercises control over the conduct of its individual members; for it is in this form that the social process or community enters as a determining factor into the individual’s thinking. . . . And only through the taking by individuals of
the attitude or attitudes of the generalized other toward themselves is the existence of a universe of discourse, as that system of common or social meanings which thinking presupposes at its context, rendered possible. (p. 155-156)

How an athlete thinks, feels, and behaves during the experience of injury creates understandings of the self which are derived from his social environment. Such experiences can come from previously learned behaviors or the responses of teammates towards the athlete. How the athlete responds determines his role in the group and has the ability to influence the connection to the team.

The identity of college football players is, disputably, connected to their ability to participate. Because the injured athlete enters into a role that has, perhaps, never been experienced (at least by him), this has the potential to bring a novel view to his life as an athlete. Because the athlete can no longer participate, the possibility exists that he might become more aware of the responses of others towards his condition. This new awareness calls for the management of the individual-generalized other group dialectical tension.

In the process of forwarding claims that address each of the aforementioned research questions, I will rely on certain criteria for considering qualitative data as evidence. Fitch (1994) asserted that the researcher needs to be 1) deeply involved in the context while 2) being distant enough to allow participants to express themselves without hindering that process, 3) present claims that are seen throughout the data, and 4) should include “consideration of inferences and interpretations . . . [because] humans are social beings with memories, motivations, plans, and sometimes shared history” (p. 36). I propose that my previous involvement with football makes me deeply involved in the
context but will rely on individual’s excerpts to justify claims, and thus, not obstruct the experiences and views of interviewees. In the next chapter, claims will be presented in such a way that is reflective of Fitch’s criteria.

Summary

Three separate groups of participants were gathered from three different levels of college football. Interviews were conducted to gather stories of the lives of those college athletes. Although no two experiences are similar, connections among interviewees can generate valuable understandings. Through the close examination of participants’ accounts, conclusions were drawn that showed the connections shared between the social experiences of athletes. The following chapter represents an analysis of each research question derived from the interpretations of the researcher and are supported through interview excerpts.
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

The chapter explores the emergent themes in the interview data. Each research question will be introduced. The participants’ accounts and stories associated with playing football at the college level will then be presented as each research question is answered. Emergent themes will be presented and illustrated through participant experiences and explanations.

As an initial observation, I think it appropriate to note that, because of my history playing college football, I was able to understand and relate to the participants in a unique way. This allowed me to create quick rapport with the participants and relate to their experiences. At the end of Josh’s interview, he stated:

When I got that email that said you played, I was like, I want to come meet this guy because you can relate. It’s almost like you know what we’re going through and that’s something too, like all the athletes here hang out together because a normal student just can’t quite understand what we’re doing. Like last night, I had SI at 8, a supplemental instruction [tutoring], and I hadn’t ate dinner, and I picked a girl up and since it was raining we drove over there and I was like, “man I’m so hungry, I haven’t ate dinner” and she was like, “What have you been doing all night that you haven’t had dinner?” It’s much easier to hang out with other athletes because they understand. . . . I feel that any athlete can relate, especially with playing in college, that kind of thing.

Josh not only highlighted my assumed ability to quickly relate to what a college football player experiences within the organization, but also stressed a perceived connection that he had with me when I initially contacted him. During other interview sessions, athletes
hinted that, because I shared a similar background, they considered the interview a safe environment to share stories without being judged.

Undoubtedly, because my experiences with playing college football influenced my interpretation of accounts conveyed during the interviews, I was careful to ask for clarification when and where it was needed so as to minimize the risk of “filling in blanks” or offering insights where those insights might not have been relatable to the interviewee’s experience. Moreover, seeking common linkages between the participants and using quotes to illustrate these connections provide a level of authenticity for the claims I forward in this chapter.

Research Question #1

The first research question asked, “How do football players’ stories [narratives] construct what it means to be a college football player?” Several themes emerged that provide useful information to address this research question. First, participants used metaphors of football as a job and football [team] as a family throughout the interviews. Second, issues of stereotypes associated with football players, although not solicited, emerged during the interview sessions. The participants stressed the difficulties they experience when having to deal with these stereotypes as well as ways that they attempt to overcome stereotypes off the field. Finally, the participants discussed several benefits and drawbacks to playing college football that provide insights into their daily lives. Each of these themes will be discussed in turn.

Metaphor Use

In this section, participants’ accounts and explanations of what it means to be a college football player will be discussed through reference to the metaphors that they
used to explain their lived experiences of being involved with a college football organization. Specifically, the metaphors of football as a job and the football team as a family emerged through the conversations. Such metaphors are important to recognize because they serve as resources upon which, in this case, an athletes’ experience as a college football player is drawn (Werry, 2005).

Football as Job

From the recruitment process to the responsibilities associated with being a college football player, participants used the metaphor of football as a job to explain their experiences of what it means to be a college football player. For instance, several of the participants reported that one of the major reasons they chose a particular institution was because of the connections they felt with the coaches during their recruitment visit. When asked to explain how they came to play football at their given institution, Doug reported the following story, “I sent them my tapes and they all seemed interested, but [NAIA school] was the most interested and I really liked the coaches and the school, so that’s why I decided to go there.” Similarly, Jay provided the following:

I came up here. I first met my position coach at camp. During the camp, usually, coaches are just observing, but the coach was actually like teaching at the camp, so I knew he was a good teacher; that’s why I came here. Then [Division I coach], came to my school a couple of times, and I felt that I really connected with him.

Stories such as these reflect the notion of football as being a job through a couple of connections. First, sending game films from high school football games serves as a type of résumé. College football players frequently send highlight tapes from high school
football games in order to gain the attention of prospective colleges. Depending on the coaches’ reactions to these tapes, potential athletes are invited to those colleges in order to meet the coaches, meet other players on the team, and visit the campus. Secondly, because the players will be working closely with these coaches, it is important that they make a connection in order to decide if the school is a “good fit” for them. Interview excerpts such as these depict the initial link between moving from playing high school football to playing college football.

Most of the participants interviewed were on scholarship. These individuals often spoke of playing as a useful way of paying for their education.

I thought about it, and said that I was blessed to play this game, and I looked at it, I was going to have to take out loans to pay for school. And my family’s situation, I am the youngest of 9. There’s just no way that we’re going to be able to put me through school. So I was like, all right, I’m going to sacrifice 2 years at [Junior College] and play and did my best and just have someone pay for my education and knew that, wherever I needed to be, that’s where I need to be.

In this excerpt, Logan, like others, commonly referenced the monetary benefits that come with playing college football. For some, college football was a job that they took on willingly and was something that they had been preparing for throughout high school.

Although getting paid to play football was a major factor in making the decision to play at the college level, some individuals stated that they wanted to play because they had been doing it all of their life and would essentially be “lost” without it. Eric stated, “I think I started [playing] when I was like 5 . . . That was my goal or my dream was to be a
college football player.” Bobby, who shared a similar dream, had decided to walk-on at his particular institution:

It’s always been my dream. [I] like college football. I didn’t like being in college [as a regular student]. I knew that I had the athleticism, I guess, and just wanted something to do basically. It’s always been a dream of mine, really. . . . I’m not getting paid here. But if I had the option of, hey you’re getting kicked off the team, or you need to pay $1000, I’d pay the money.

Even though most of the interviewees discussed the financial help associated with receiving scholarship money, others expressed how it was deeply embedded in their identity and daily lives.

In addition to emphasizing how important football is to his identity, the player just quoted also makes reference, through mention of being paid, to the occupational connection associated with playing football. Along with accounts such as these that linked playing football with aspects of a job (e.g., schedules, responsibilities, payment), participants provided stories of how experiencing injury can bring forth a series of feelings within the organization reminiscent of many organizational structures that view their constituents as being replaceable. This replaceable feeling is prominent in the accounts of injury provided by participants. However, Mark’s particular explanation highlights this connection. He stated:

Yeah, basically, it’s like a business. So, if you’re injured, you know, they’re just going to bring somebody else up to replace you. That’s how I look at it all the time. . . . There’s a difference between being hurt and being injured. Being hurt
is like you get hit real hard and you feel it and it’s like, “oh man, that hurts.” But being injured is like when you tear something.

Statements such as this call forth several important aspects of the job metaphor. Feeling replaceable was a pervasive theme in this individual’s account of being a college football player. Everyone on the team is just as good as the next athlete. Dedication and commitment are required to maintain one’s position on the team as ways to continue to their “job.”

In summary, the metaphor of football as job was evident across interview participants. From the recruitment process to how athletes view their role on the team as similar to jobs, their statements indicated that many view their participation in college football as a job or an occupation. Although this theme was present, the theme of football as family was also discussed and was often mixed in the interview sessions. Jay stated, “To me, it’s a job. Like, it’s how I’m paying for my school. And then it’s like being part of a family, basically, because you see the guys on the team every day.”

Attention is now turned to the theme of football as a family.

Football as a Family

Through practice, games, team activities, and socializing, college football players commonly refer to the team as a family. Because athletes associated with a particular sport spend a significant amount of time together, they tend to conceptualize their team as a family with similar feelings about and duties associated with family life outside of their sport. When Logan was asked about the mixed metaphors he was using in the interview session, he seemed stunned by my question, and it took some time for him to thoughtfully develop an answer.
Family and job, I gotcha . . . Um, well, hmm, I hear what you’re saying, but more so not a job, maybe your duty because you figure a father, a dad figure’s duty to his family is to take care of it, to run the house, the mother’s to be the motherly person of comfort, the emotional part of the kids, at least that’s the stereotypical type family. And the older siblings help the younger siblings. Everyone has a part in the family and we all have our part. So maybe, it’s not so much a job, but it is our duty, I guess.

In a way, the explanation given by this participant addressed the notion of family and having similar duties to that of a job. The participant related the role of the coaches to that of the traditional stereotypical father. In addition, this participant stressed the role of all family members as being supportive of one another (“mother’s role”). This was the vision of the “ideal team” that he described throughout our discussion where members are focused on each other’s well-being and support one another throughout long practices, difficult games, and injury.

Another important connection to family that was discussed in the above quote was that of the team being “brothers” where the older members of the team do what they can to help the younger, more inexperienced players to adapt to college football and college life. This was echoed by Vick who stated, “It’s a great honor to be a member of the team and to be with a group of guys who are talented and want to win and have the desire to, and just to grow as a family.” Tony also noted how he keeps in touch with former players on the team because of the “brotherhood” bond created on his team. The connection between teammates and brotherhood was stated across interview sessions and
seemed to be how the participants stressed the intense bond experienced across teammates.

Perhaps due to the fact that this bond is extremely strong, teammates tend to socialize with each other outside of their duties as football players. Players stressed that they would frequently do team bonding activities and other rituals to promote this bond. As stated earlier, the common bond of playing and going through similar experiences creates a feeling of similarity (even between individuals who played for different colleges/universities and at different points in time from each other). It is possible that, because of its intensity, this bond creates an in-group climate which excludes other individuals and reinforces the stereotypes that athletes commonly experience. In interview sessions, participants often brought this up and discussed what they experience as stereotypes and how some try to overcome unfair assumptions.

**Stereotypes**

Stereotypes can be beneficial or, depending on your perspective, counterproductive in answering the research question of what it means to be a college football player. In this section, those stereotypes will be presented and discussed from the perspective of the participants.

Although beneficial from the point of view of the researcher, stereotypes proved to be counterproductive to the identity of the college football player. Because of stereotypes, interviewees often discussed the ways in which they try to keep the fact that they play college football hidden from outsiders. Apparently, they do not want to be viewed as football players. Common stereotypes that football players had of themselves emerged in the interviews in descriptions of college football players as individualistically
oriented, cocky, in trouble all of the time, and being a “meathead” or someone who does not take school seriously and wants to flaunt his masculine physique. Most of the discussions with the research participants surrounded the tendency of college football players to put their whole identity into being a football player.

Most participants stated that they hate the stereotype. Logan stated, “But there are guys who really take full advantage of being a football player on this campus, thinking that ‘I can get away with this; I’m good; I can do whatever I want; I can say whatever I want because of who I am.’” This statement was given in the context of those teammates that have an individualistic orientation as opposed to a collectivistic orientation to being a member of a football team. Logan used the term “disease” to describe the individuals who have the previously stated mindset. To Logan, they are the people who give the team, and football players in general, a “bad name.” He elaborated on this by offering the following:

Some guys, like I said with football and the stereotype, they like to fit in with the stereotype, because they’re so content, so comfortable with it; they’re so content. That’s where the whole, “I’m going to get mine cause I’m hard”; “I’m a football player”; “I’ve got to be hard”; “I’ve got to put up a front.” You know what I mean? But like, who are you being hard for? You’re in college?! . . . Because you’re not only representing yourself as a terrible person outside of football, you are representing everyone else in that locker room who doesn’t complain and perseveres and does all of the right things, which is very slim; it’s a very slim portion of those guys.
Logan’s account provides an example for how most college football players are viewed by others. Acting like you are tough and confident on the field is, arguably, something that is needed for game-days. However, taking this attitude off the field has been something that has had a negative effect on how athletes are viewed. Steve’s example of tying one’s identity too closely to football reflects Logan’s sentiment. Steve stated, “There’s guys that think they’ve found their identity in whatever makes them happy, whether it’s football, alcohol or drugs, the women they sleep with, how well they perform [on the field].” Whether it is getting into fights or trouble off the field or acting superior to others, this stereotype is a pervasive influence in the lives of college football players. For this reason, many try to hide the fact that they are football players or take measures to combat this stereotype.

For instance, Jay stated that, when he meets someone for the first time, he never mentions that he is a football player. He said, “When I go up to someone to greet them for the first time, it’s not really going to be, ‘yeah, I’m on the football team.’ I’m going to introduce myself, start talking. I mean, if it comes up, it comes up.” Similarly, Stan stated, “If I could meet that person and [he/she] didn’t know I was a football player, it would be great because I didn’t want that perception.” Many go so far as to make attempts to not wear their apparel to class or around campus. For instance, Josh stated, “Only if we had to travel that day, I wore [my football attire] because I can’t go back home, but I would like try to limit myself to wearing that stuff because I didn’t want that perception put onto me.”
Statements such as these support the idea that some college football players make attempts to hide their identity of being a football player. Others, such as Logan, go so far as to try to dispel some of the stereotypes placed on college football players.

You know, like, I’m in that fight right now. I’m out doing my best. I’m affiliated with [a group of students who all sit in a particular section of the arena and root for the university’s team at basketball games]. I’m dead center. . . . I remember the first time I did it and they [the other students] were like, “[Logan], like is this some sort of stunt? Are we getting punked or is this some PR thing?” Do I have to be there? No. I’m solely here to have fun. I love cheering, heckling the other team. . . . So I consistently kept coming and I got to meet a lot of them [other student members]. I see them outside, I’m like “Hey, what’s going on with you?” That stereotype [of unapproachable or “different from” other students], I hate it! It’s such a pain in the ass. I can’t think of a better word, yeah. . . . I know that whenever I step outside in the public, I’m a representative of the football team at [my institution]. . . . So whatever I can do for this school, I do to put a little light in.

This is just one instance where an interview participant spoke directly about the things he did to try to combat stereotypes associated with being a football player. Walking together out of the building after our interview, a smaller male who was obviously not a football player spoke to Logan. I did not catch the content of their discussion, but waited for Logan so we could continue to walk out together. He walked up to me with a smile and said, “See, that’s what I’m talking about. How many other guys would feel
comfortable coming up to a football player like that?” This reinforced the testimony he provided, and he obviously felt delighted that I could see his work in action.

Overall, college football player stereotypes play a major role in how athletes conduct their day-to-day lives. Many actively try to hide the fact that they play football, while others take steps to overcome the stereotypes associated with their status as athletes. The participants in this research noted that, ultimately, they believe their behavior (as well as the behavior of others) is a reflection not only of the team, but of the other individuals on the team. Because athletes feel the need to combat these stereotypes, one of the meanings constructed revolves around dealing with the existence of stereotypes and the choice as to whether or not to overcome those stereotypes.

Summary

Several different conclusions were derived from the analysis and interpretation of participant interviews. First, college football players used the metaphors of football as job and football as family to describe the experience of what it means to be a college football player. It was evident that these metaphors were used to elucidate the bonds that athletes experience. Second, when an athlete becomes a college football player, it means that outsiders will attribute stereotypical college football player qualities to him. Apparently, there are athletes who, through their intentional or unintentional communication actively support the stereotypes that surround being a college football player. However, the participants in this study were more likely to voice frustration with, rather than support, those stereotypes.
Research Question #2

In this section, the expectations that athletes have for each other will be examined. This section addresses the research question: What are the cultural expectations involved in being a college football player?

Interviewees communicated the expectations of fellow team members in several different ways. Athletes communicated these expectations when they spoke about what it means to be a football player, providing stories that illustrate those learned values. In addition, they provided stories and descriptions of both heroes and foils on the football team. Their statements constructed a continuum of expectations ranging from most valued (or appreciated) to least valued (or unappreciated). The following paragraphs illustrate those themes by using representative participant accounts to highlight the claims.

In general, participants emphasized the need for newcomers to learn what it means to play college football. These athletes noted several differences between high school and college football and the necessary learning that takes place upon entering a college football environment. For instance, Jay stated that he did not need to practice hard in high school due to his natural athletic ability. Upon entering college, however, he learned that being a member of the team meant something different. He stated, “In high school, I really didn’t practice because I was naturally good, but I had to learn how to practice when I came up here.” Jay further noted that he needed to learn how to best help the team in practices and during games. Entering his sophomore year, Jay stated that he learned the following after becoming a member of the team:
Just making sure that the person in front of you is going hard because if the person in front of you is not going to play well, then the team’s not going to do well. . . . You’re going as hard as you can, so they’re going to perform well or you’re going to move up and take their spot. We just compete at everything we do . . . competition is always healthy.

In Jay’s case, it was necessary for him to learn how to practice at the college level and how that was different from high school where his skill level surpassed most others. Here, connections can be made to the value of teamwork and participating within a highly interdependent organization. In similar respects, Josh commented that “it was something that you kind of have to get here to find out kind of thing. You kind of learn as you go, but I think . . . the expectations are for you to do well” at everything.

Ultimately, through those socialization processes, individuals learn the standards that are upheld by the other members of the organization. Josh stated that you learn “by being around other guys. And it seems to be like, well this guy’s doing it, and well, I’ll do it too.” The proper script for what it means to be a legitimate, appreciated member of the team is acknowledged through learning new roles and new ways of participating on a college football team. By adhering to these standards, a participant can earn trust and can become someone who is looked up to or respected on the team. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the importance of trust and how individuals can either gain trust or lose trust.

Importance of Trust

Trusting each other was an important concept developed through the participants’ accounts of involvement in college football. Even though participants talked about
spending a significant amount of time together, to some athletes, this was not enough to build trust in or earn trust from others. Instead, trust is built through one’s actions. During a discussion of people Frank respected, he stated, “Not to call it war, but it’s intense out there. I’m not going to go out there with some guy I can’t trust.” From Frank’s position as a quarterback, he needs to be able to trust his receivers, linemen, and running backs to do their jobs. He went on to say, “I want a guy that has been doing everything that I’ve been doing to get ready to prepare for this game.” Frank expressed the desire for everyone around him to work as hard as, or harder than, he does in practices, watching film, and being physically prepared for a game, regardless of the individual’s natural athletic ability.

*Playing Through Pain*

In addition, it seems that a big part of building trust rests in the ability of the athlete to play through pain. Bobby stated the following in relation to how trust is built on the team:

Well, I mean football is a tough sport. To be playing at any college level you need to be tough, so it’s just one of those things that classifies football players is toughness. You don’t want to be seen as some guy that’s going to sit out and be weak I guess. Because you never know how people think about injuries, you know.

In Bobby’s experience, those individuals who do not push through minor pains and choose to opt out of practice and games in order to heal are not considered tough. Toughness is a masculine trait that is appreciated by members of a football team.
Embodying this masculine trait is associated with being trustworthy. Duke appeared to agree with this sentiment. He explained:

I always looked up to those guys that were warriors on the field—that would play through pain and sacrifice and do all those things that it took to be great. Just the guys that were tough and the guys that would walk the walk and talk the talk, that kind of thing. Just those kinds of guys that you know you want to be on their side. . . . Yeah, I think it’s trust and they’ll respect you for not being a pansy about everything and letting little injuries keep you out of the game and keep you out of practice and stuff like that.

Duke’s quote best illustrates the masculine traits recognized by other participants. The individuals who are able to sacrifice their bodies for the team and do not complain about minor pains are those who are most trusted and respected on the team. Most participants follow this line of thought and behavior. Trustworthiness is, therefore, associated with displaying masculine traits, such as fighting through pain for the good of the team.

Although teammates have the ability to communicate this preference to others, coaches play a significant role in this process as well. For instance, Mark stated that his coach gave the team a couple of “ground rules” for playing. Because these rules are discussed by the coaches, they become institutionalized and practiced by the members of Mark’s team. As Mark stated:

There’s one coach that always jokes around about injuries and gives kids a hard time for having injuries. It’s the defensive coordinator and he’ll just be like, his rule is that you can’t get injured. He’s like, don’t mess up, don’t do anything stupid, don’t get injured . . . if you get injured, then you’ve messed up. . . .

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There’s a rule on our team, there’s a difference between being hurt and being injured. If you’re only hurt, you better be playing because everyone’s hurt. If you’re injured, then you’ve got to take time off. Mark’s excerpt illustrates the toughness component embedded in being a participant on a football team. If a teammate is hurt, he needs to play through the pain and demonstrate mental toughness. This way, the individual is proving himself to be a legitimate (trustworthy) member of the team and continues the football as job metaphor that was previously discussed. Ultimately, maintaining a “position” requires that the athlete persevere through minor injuries (being hurt) and continue to play. The desire to continue to play was illustrated through an interviewee’s account where he reported observing others come to the sidelines to throw up because of a concussion and immediately go back on the field so they would not lose their position to a teammate who was perceived as being equally talented. For players, the desire to maintain their position and continue to do their “job” is a powerful, illustrative force behind the metaphor of football as job. Becoming injured disrupts an athlete’s ability to embody this metaphor.

Playing through pain is such a powerful element in the life of the athlete that players play through concussions and broken bones to fulfill their roles on the team. In a story about continuing to play in a game after breaking his ribs, Frank explained his desire to play by recounting that “my team needed me at that point. We were not winning, but I felt obligated to play.” This obligation comes from Frank’s desire to earn the trust of fellow teammates which was a major theme during his interview. Recalling a previous injury of his, Rick echoed this sentiment when he stated, “You know, a lot of guys, they’ve got a sprained ankle, too. So that makes you feel like you’ve got to play”
even you have a sprained ankle. If a teammate has a similar injury, and is able to play, it creates a situation where any athlete with that same physical ailment is viewed as being merely hurt as opposed to being injured. If one is hurt, one can still play. If one is injured, then one cannot play.

In addition, Mark’s previous account of his coach illustrated the importance of playing smart. Unfortunately, this does not mean that the athlete needs to take care of himself. Instead, this means that injuries are a result of not properly performing a job on the team. If the athlete becomes injured, then that athlete is not doing something correctly. This could include many things required for sufficient game preparation, such as taking practice seriously and being physically prepared for competition. Interviewees commonly stated that “doing the right thing” was a major component associated with being a respected member of a college football team.

Doing the Right Things

Team captains are often selected by teammates because they embody the characteristics of what a college football player should represent. Tony stated, “As a captain in general, I think that you are looked up to on the team especially, when you are a captain, but also make plays on the field and are vocal in the locker room.” Frank recounted Steve’s role as a defensive team captain on the team and described him as “a guy that you look at and say that this guy always does the right thing, no matter what.” However, Steve did not see himself as fitting the stereotypical role of a team captain or, as he labeled it, “hero”:

See the problem with me is that I always wanted to be the hero type person, but I don’t think I fit it, but um, I’m not the type to get in a person’s face when they’re
screwing up. I probably should have more often because I was probably, I don’t know what it was, but I didn’t really hang out with the guys enough on the team. Um, which is something that I wish I would have done more of. But the problem was that the things that I valued or were important to me were totally different than what they did. Their bonding experience was let’s get wasted and go to the bars.

Steve’s definition of being a team captain requires that he is a leader on the field in addition to socializing off the field. Steve’s quote illustrates how leaders on a football team are commonly viewed as the team members who are extremely vocal, motivating teammates by yelling at them when they mess up. Instead, Steve viewed his role as being that of a supportive leader who tries to “encourage, to build up guys because, so often, they get put down when they screw up.” It was apparent that Steve felt most comfortable with being a supporter and providing encouragement. Because Steve did not bond that often with teammates through social activities, he might not have felt comfortable with any other role besides that of being a supporter on the field. However, because Steve did all of the things expected of a team captain (as evidenced by the fact that he was voted into that role by his teammates), he was considered a respected leader on the team.

The notion of having respect for and trusting individuals who do the right things is evident across interview participants. For instance, Mark’s explanation of why Tony was a defensive captain on his team highlights the perceptions that others had of Tony:

[Tony] doesn’t miss tackles at all. I’ve never made [Tony] miss. [Tony]’s not that fast, but when the ball’s in the air, he played safety for us, he’s the fastest player on the field. . . . He’s the cornerstone of our defense. . . . How he prepares
himself for games is unbelievable. He knows what the offenses are doing before they even know. . . . He watches a lot of film . . . he sees people’s tendencies.

He’s just real smart; he just knows.

Because the team trusted Tony so much, it was devastating when he tore his meniscus when an opposing player hit him in the knee after a play was over. At the time, there were three games left in his senior season. Even though Tony had a significant injury, causing him to limp noticeably, this did not keep him from playing in the last game of the season. Tony said that the coaches had told him that they had a hard time getting the players motivated for the games when he had to be sidelined. Tony came back for the final game of the season, and Mark said it was “like we had our head back on our defense.”

Not only did Tony play an important role on the defense by calling defenses and making great plays, his role was also symbolic. Participants commonly stated that the teammates they respected the most were those with great athletic ability who helped the team win games as a result. However, the ability to play well and participate in games is not the only thing that teammates respect. Steve asserted that one does not need to be a starter to be a respected member of the team.

There’s one guy I can think of that was a great guy that was looked up to and respected. He was our third string quarterback. He was a senior and was voted as a captain. He came in the class with me and he worked hard and he was good; he was a good quarterback, but they just brought in a true freshman to be the backup. So on games, instead of putting him in, they would put the freshman in to get some playing time. And it was just like, why isn’t this guy playing? So it was
really hard for him to take and understand. But I mean, you know that’s one person you would look at and it says a lot if your third string quarterback is voted a captain.

Similarly, Logan stated:

The guys I respect so much—these are the guys that come in to get the job done and never get recognized. Some of my teammates don’t even know who they are. They’re not the starters, they’re not the guys in the papers, the guys in the interviews after practice, or the ones that the coaches come around and talk to. These are the guys that just come and do [their given role]. And these are the guys that have my most respect. Because how hard is that? How hard would that be that you put in all this time and effort and you are not even getting playing time for it? But they don’t complain. They persevere and they continue on.

Steve and Logan’s quotes represent how individuals who do not have a starting role on the team can still be respected by others. While many participants, such as Stan, stated that respect “comes down to your performance [and one’s ability] to go out there and out perform people [because] they’re more physical, naturally more gifted,” the aforementioned quotes indicate that exceptional talent is not always needed to earn the trust and respect of your teammates. Instead, trust seems to be earned through doing what is considered to be “the right thing” overall.

*Organizational “Foils”*

Trust can be lost by not adhering to the above roles one is socially obligated to assume on college football teams. Participants commonly discussed individuals whose demeanor ran counter to that of the expected role of the athlete. These stories were used
in support of the dominant view of the athlete. Garner and Poole (2009) stated that one can “establish his or her legitimacy [by] responding to the problematic actions of another group member, a ‘foil.’ The actions of the foil can either derail a group or threaten its ability to function effectively” (p. 228). The illustrations that were representative of these types of individuals represent the frustrations that can exist with these teammates. The “foils” discussed by individuals were labeled by participants as “diseases” and “game day leaders.”

The complaints that participants had about such individuals were centered on the perceived self-centeredness that interviewees attributed to other athletes’ actions. Logan labeled these individuals “diseases,” a term which he also used to describe the stereotypical football player. He explained how diseases affected the team while attempting to describe how the culture of his team had changed over the years once some of those undesirable players (or “organizational villains”) had been eliminated from the team:

So we did the best that we could and tried to change the system, but we still had guys who were well–influenced by the diseases, like that ain’t cool, that ain’t cool. Like we were going to set up a Wii tournament, and we did, and it was kind of successful. They said like, “I don’t want to do this thing.” That was the attitude. It’s not the fact that you don’t want to; it’s the fact that you get the opportunity to get to play with a guy that you don’t even know. . . . I’m sorry man. Now I remember how I came up with injuries, what causes someone to keep going forward, you know. So like if you want to be that individualistic team that we were that year before, you’re not going to get encouragement by your
teammates, you know? Because they’re so individualist in what they want. Their mindset is, “I’m just here to get mine; I’m just here to do me; I’m just here to get to the league, bla bla bla; I’m going to put all my eggs into this basket.” So you’re injured and I’m your teammate, but they’ll say, on the real, that’s all I am to you; I’m just your teammate, you know, good luck with your surgery, see you back. That was the attitude and that’s what was so mind blowing, like that’s crazy to me.

Logan’s statement provides evidence that members of a college football team who choose to be self-centered and not acknowledge the “No ‘I’ in Team” attitude of many football teams tend to have a negative influence on members. Having an individualistic mindset has the ability to place that individual outside of the group; as such, he might be considered as untrustworthy. In Logan’s example, such an individual is not there for the team; instead, he is using the team to further his own goals. Similarly, Steve stated that some “have the mentality that the team is there to serve them.”

Another important component to Logan’s example of what constitutes a “disease” is an individual who is always complaining. He elaborated, “There’s always going to be that kid that’s always complaining and I just don’t know why—just shut up and do it.” In Logan’s experience, complaining off of the field during team activities, in addition to complaining on the field and being absent during practice, is viewed negatively. In other athletes’ examples, however, the development of a negative identity is primarily built on the field during practice and during game days. An important moment when one’s dedication to the team is called into question occurs when a teammate experiences a minor injury (becomes hurt) but the problem does not require surgery. Because this
individual still has the ability to be present during practice, film sessions, and games, it is expected that he will be present and involved with the team. If he is not, this has the potential for a negative image of the athlete to develop on the team.

Organizational foils are those who do not respond to (minor) injuries in a manner that is beneficial to the team. When an individual is perceived to be faking an injury or milking a pain he might have in order to miss practice, Steve said, “it bothers me because they’re cutting us short; they’re selling us short not being out there participating . . . those guys that are always injured Monday and will be back for the Saturday game.” This sentiment was echoed by many of the participants. Jake, a non-scholarship running back, noted being especially upset with how some individuals on his team take advantage of the fact that they are on scholarship. He said that these individuals act as if they “can do what they want; they think that they can skip a meeting” or practice. Because Jake is at every practice and works hard in the hopes of obtaining a starting position, this seems to frustrate him. When talking about his experiences with the other starting running backs, he provided:

It honestly seems like they’d be hurt almost every other week. Just something little, maybe an ankle, maybe a groin, and they were quick to play but they’re just like you said, would milk it because they know they can milk it all they want because they know they’re still going to play [because they are on scholarship].

Because such individuals are arguably needed during practice to be fully prepared for the game on Saturday, Jake felt as if these individuals were not being “team players.” In addition, the argument could be made that individuals such as this are not respected
because they are not putting in the effort to make the team better. Steve reflected this attitude when he talked about “game day leaders:"

The one thing is in dealing with the guys that are game day leaders. Those drive me nuts. The guys that aren’t really there and don’t work during the week, but game days, they are the loudest guys out there—“follow me!” Follow them? Dude, you haven’t played all week. Why would I follow you on game day, you know? Dude, those always bug me, man. I call them game day leaders.

The individuals viewed as “game day leaders” are perceived as those who do not put in the desired amount of energy towards the team throughout the week. On Saturdays, however, those same individuals who were absent during the week are trying to get people prepared and motivated for the game. Because teammates demonstrate a lack of respect and trust for these players, they are viewed negatively when they attempt to be a leader that one day of the week.

Because players who do not respond in a manner that is congruent with the values of the team have the potential to create frustrations among other players, these individuals are often talked about negatively and used as an example of how not to be a valued teammate. Stan’s illustration speaks to this point:

Um, I just think that, you know, um, you might talk amongst your friends about how this player is just not doing what they’re supposed to do or [is] doing stupid things. I don’t know. If you’re doing something that you’re not supposed to be doing in terms of making the team better, we’ll know that and they might talk about that behind your back. . . . I have definitely approached people I know, and
coaches constantly probably approach people, captains absolutely approach people. That definitely happens.

Stan’s remarks focus on the ability of teammates to critique each other’s dedication and connection to the team. The social aspect of being a teammate is reflected in the ways in which people can critique the behaviors of other teammates and take steps to correct undesirable actions. Discussing the undesirable behaviors of others and seeing coaches or other team leaders approach or react negatively towards those players has the potential to serve as learning moments for freshmen on the team and reinforce the values held by the football team.

Summary

In the above sections, the importance of gaining trust among teammates was used to illustrate the expectations teammates have for each other. Trust is arguably an important component to any group or organization where there is a high degree of interdependence, especially college football teams and other team-oriented athletics. If teammates expect a particular performance, and this performance is not congruent with the values held by that team, then trust is lost. Such foils could potentially become labeled “diseases.” In the case of college football teams, diseases are those who metaphorically destroy the perceived health of the team by not contributing an appropriate amount of energy towards the team and creating a situation where others have the potential to adopt a similar mindset if that behavior is not addressed.

Trust has been presented as an important component of building a collective team identity. In order for a teammate to contribute to that collective identity, he needs to personally respond to situations in ways that are considered culturally appropriate by
other members of the team. When presented with a situation connected with the team, the ability to respond in a way deemed masculine by the team dictates a certain level of appropriateness. As described above, these moments were illustrated through participant’s stories of self and others responding to an injury in appropriate ways, doing the right things, and not complaining about the accepted practices of being involved with college football. By maintaining these appropriate performances, individuals not only reinforce the values of the organization, but also serve as symbolic heroes as illustrated through the accounts of people who are respected amongst those teams. Most of these respected individuals are elected into the role of team captain.

The ability to perform in ways that are expected of college football players builds trust among fellow teammates. By doing so, these performances, as told through the above storied accounts, reflect the expectations of a college football player. Whether experienced through others’ accounts or through the responses of others towards one’s own reactions or performances, these have the potential to be influential components in the everyday lives of college football players. They ultimately shape the perceptions and scripts teammates have of each other and themselves.

In summary, being a trusted member of a college football team is associated with working hard, performing well, not complaining about team activities or pains, and pushing through injury. All of these are connected to masculine traits. The ability to build the trust and respect of others comes from how athletes respond to the daily routines and demands of being a college athlete. If they do not respond in appropriate ways, they can become identified by other individuals and treated as a type of organizational villain. Individuals make sense of their individual and collective identities
by monitoring their own actions as well as the actions of others. In order for teammates to identify others as trustworthy, trust must be gained within college football organizations.

Summary - Research Questions #1 & #2

Several themes were derived from the stories college football players provided about their everyday experiences with the team. Most interviewees referred to being a member of the team as being part of a family, yet also referred to playing as a job. Although possibly divergent perspectives, these metaphors reveal that a strong degree of desired interdependence among teammates. Participants also referenced stereotypes associated with being a college football player, including ways in which teammates feel comfortable with and embody that identity and how other teammates try to overcome such unfair perceptions. The possible presence of an in-group/out-group mentality due to the large amount of time teammates spend together could be associated with the establishment of those perceptions among individuals outside of the organization.

Because a high degree of interdependence exists with teammates, trust emerged as an important component through which one can build a positive image with teammates. Through the participant’s accounts, trust is established and judged primarily by how teammates respond to daily organizational demands. Such demands include how individuals should “do the right things” by way of responding to circumstances in ways that are considered culturally appropriate. “The right things” include 1) responding to an injury in an appropriate (i.e., masculine) manner, 2) not complaining about practice or team activities, and 3) being team-oriented as opposed to self-oriented. These themes are interpreted across interviewees.
The culture of college football shares similar values across institutions. Among the most pervasive values are masculinity and collectivity. Although the argument could be made that sacrificing the self for the betterment of the group is a feminine trait, this does not seem to be the case on college football teams. Instead, the collective team influences appropriate demonstrations of masculinity and those demonstrations (self-sacrifice, for instance) reinforce one’s value to the team. When team members do not perform their roles in appropriate ways, they are viewed negatively by others. These negative perceptions can result in talking negatively about the teammate or approaching the individual to correct the undesired behavior(s). These connections demonstrate the desire of teammates to maintain some continuous, culturally acknowledged, or appropriate behavioral structure for the benefit of the organization.

Research Question #3

This section will address how college football players communicatively represent becoming injured during athletic participation. Participants were asked to provide stories that illustrated times when they, or others on their team, had experienced bodily harm. These illustrations centered around two general stories: stories of significant injury, and stories of experiencing pain but continuing to play hurt. In the previous sections, I provided explanations as to how athletes conceptualize being injured as opposed to being hurt. In general, their interpretations center around the perception of whether or not one is able to play. If a teammate becomes injured, he cannot play, whereas being hurt means that he could still play. This research question asked: What dialectical tensions exist that illustrate college football players’ experience of injury during athletic participation?
After careful reflection and analysis of the interview sessions, one major dialectical tension emerged through my interpretations of the two general sets of stories. I have labeled this dialectical tension participation versus exclusion. On a basic level, this tension is demonstrated through a participant’s need to continue to be part of the team, yet having the experience as if he is no longer a participating member through personal beliefs or the responses of others.

Traditionally, dialectical tensions have been applied to interpersonal relationships. However, scholars acknowledge that similar tensions can exist between individuals and organizations because, after all, organizations consist of collections of individuals (see Jameson, 2004; Johnson & Long, 2002). Therefore, a dialectical form of analysis is appropriate. The following sections will explore the dialectical tension of participation and exclusion associated with the experience of a significant injury.

The tension of participation versus exclusion can be discussed in terms of simultaneously occurring, polar oppositions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 2000) that will be presented individually. This dialectical tension consists of what Baxter and Montgomery consider functional oppositions. Functional oppositions are different from logical oppositions in that logical (negative) oppositions are identified as the absence of each other (i.e., participating versus not participating) whereas functional (positive) oppositions “are distinct features that function in incompatible ways such that each negates the other” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 8). Participation and exclusion are functionally incompatible—one cannot participate if he/she is excluded. However, because the onset of an injury creates spaces where the injured can continue to participate in different ways, it is not logical to use the term “not participate” in opposition to
“participate.” The athlete is both called to participate and become excluded from participation which satisfies a both/and perspective.

For each tension, there will be a discussion of the factors that “pull” the college football player in a particular direction. A similar approach was taken by Prentice and Kramer (2006) when reporting their findings as to students’ experiences of dialectical tensions in the classroom. With each tension, they identified factors that supported the existence of that tension. In isolation, these factors might be interpreted as causal, but that is not the purpose of the following presentation. Rather, these factors are merely intended to illustrate and explain the tensions as interpreted by the author.

To college football players, injury is an accepted part of the game. Many interviewees willingly provided explanations for how they made sense of becoming injured or getting hurt while playing football. For instance, Stan stated:

If you play enough, you’re going to get hurt; you’re going to get injured. It just comes with the game. You hope and you pray that it’s never too severe. But it’s just something that, I guess, whenever you’re playing a contact sport, it’s there, and you know, you’re probably going to get affected by it one way or another.

You just hope that it’s never too serious.

Statements such as this highlight how pain and injury are an expected part of the game. College football players accept this as both an inevitable outcome of playing the game and something that has the potential to harm their bodies permanently.

College football players repeatedly provided descriptions for the permanent injuries that athletes experience. Some provided anecdotal evidence while others cited conversations they had engaged in either with doctors or with trainers. For instance,
while talking about his experience with bodily harm, Logan stated that, “any athlete, if you look at their knee, they’re going to have major cartilage damage. . . . I just feel the 13 years of football coming into my life and it’s just horrible.” Similarly, while discussing the problems he was experiencing with bulging disks in his back, Steve stated, “My trainer tells me that if we [football players] get an MRI, every football player will have at least one bulging disk in there because of the contact [involved in] the game.” Illustrations such as these demonstrate athletes’ accumulated knowledge of the damage football brings upon their bodies. It became apparent that this knowledge comes from their involvement in the sport through personal experience, interactions with doctors/trainers, and witnessing others’ struggles.

The experience of bodily harm is an accepted part of the game and is acknowledged by participants as something that can happen at any time. However, the experience of injury is something that the college football player can feel unprepared to handle for several reasons. Not only is there a change in the role that one needs to assume (active participant to bystander), but there are also changes in how they conceptualize their own masculinity (Gerschick & Miller, 1995). Because such an experience can provide a time for reflection and readjustment, it makes sense that young athletes need to cope with the onset of a new role and the dialectical tensions they experience as a result. The following tension of participation and exclusion is presented below.

*Participation*

The tension of participation has been noted in other areas of research. For instance, in the context of interpersonal relationships, Rawlins (2009) noted that
“Participation seeks connection with others, assumes responsibilities of becoming part of something larger than ourselves, embraces identity as part of a collective and notions of integrity based on interdependence” (p. 29). In *The Compass of Friendship*, Rawlins placed participation in opposition to individuation when discussing the overarching dialectical tension of autonomy and connection within friendships. Rawlins’ definition helps to inform the reader of the ethos of this similarly-named tension.

Because any team-oriented sport requires that the athlete expend large amounts of time and energy for the benefit of the team, the athlete can begin to identify with others who are on the team or are part of the organization. As noted in the previous research questions, college football players identify with masculine characteristics and experience closeness through the collective nature of being a member of a college football program. When such athletes experience injuries that inhibit them from playing, their subsequent actions and communication are symbolic performances of their continued dedication to (or separation from) the team.

There were several factors that can lead athletes to feel the desire to continue participating. While some of these factors might originate from individual sensemaking processes (see Weick, 1995), others are derived from observing current participants on the football team and learning from the outcomes of their behaviors. The prominent factors that pull individuals toward the desire to participate include 1) the desire to return to play, 2) the desire to retain the trust of teammates, and 3) the desire to maintain one’s masculine identity as a football player. Although somewhat interrelated, a division and discussion of each factor helps to inform and support the tension of participation.
Factor of: Desire to Return to Play

Throughout the interview sessions, college football players stressed how an underlying desire to play is indicated by merely being a member of the team. During a discussion with Bobby about teammates faking injuries in order to get out of practice, he explained his frustration with that behavior. He stated:

I don’t see why a lot of these kids, why would you work your butt off and then play Division 1 sport, or college football, and then sit out? It just doesn’t make sense. You know what I mean? If you want to quit, just quit. I don’t see why somebody would just—I don’t understand why someone would sit out because they’re not forced to be here.

Similar to the sentiments of other participants, Bobby’s excerpt is important for a couple of reasons. First, football requires a large amount of time and energy. Large investments are made from high school through college in order to establish and maintain one’s status on the team. For Bobby, this investment acknowledges an intense desire to play. Secondly, it assumes that, if someone is able to play, then that person will. Jake supported this assumption when he stated that, when injured, “you’re wanting to get back in and you want to be a part of the team; you want to go through everything and do what everyone else is doing.” The desire to be a contributing member of the team is obviously an important factor.

The desire to return to play was also apparent when players spoke of injuries as being missed opportunities to play. To support this notion, some acknowledged the unlikelihood that they would be able to continue to play after college while others cited
the physical limitations of their bodies after years of playing such a physically demanding sport. While discussing the risk of injury and its association with football, Mark stated:

We’re just playing to win here because we have however many reps in us. It’s not about, if I get injured now, what am I going to do for the next however many years. You’ve just got to go. It’s my senior year coming up now, so it can’t be allowed. . . . Kids want to play; you’ve only got so many games left.

Mark recognized the limited time he has to play football. After college, Mark thought it would be unlikely that he would go on to the next level because of his small size. For this reason, he undoubtedly viewed becoming injured during his senior season negatively (i.e., as a potential end to his playing days), although he acknowledged the possibility.

In addition to acknowledging the limited time one has to play football and the desire to get back onto the field, injuries can provide moments of reflection when athletes realize how much they actually like the game. In these moments, college football players might realize that they have taken the sport for granted. For instance, Steve had to sit out in order to heal an injured shoulder. He recalled what he felt during his time on the sidelines.

The hardest thing is just realizing how many things you take for granted, like practice and wanting to be back out there, you know? And so, just like with anything, you take it for granted until it’s taken away from you and you realize you wish you would have looked at it from a different perspective and would have given more to it.
Steve’s reflection shows his desire to return to play. Through the recognition that he took playing for granted, Steve expressed his desire to get healthy so that he could return to the field and participate in practices as well as games.

In sum, the factor of the desire to return to play is exemplified through several different avenues. First, there is recognition that the need to sit out and heal after an injury is an undesirable condition because everyone wants to play. Second, athletes referenced their limited time with playing football where an injury would take away from the time they had left. Third, an appreciation for the game is stressed during times when one’s body becomes injured and is limited in its ability to perform. Overall, the desire to return to play is a factor that influences and supports the tension of participation.

**Factor of: Retaining Trust**

An additional factor that pulls individuals toward the desire to participate is the desire to retain or maintain the trust of one’s teammates. In previous sections, the importance of trust was discussed as an essential component in the communal lives of college football players. In addition, the importance of doing what is expected of a college football player was discussed. Embedded within each of these components (i.e., importance of trust and importance of doing what is expected) are masculine ideals.

Becoming injured is an accepted, but unwelcomed, byproduct of playing football. How teammates respond to injury determines how others within the organization view the injured player. After the onset of an injury, athletes feel that there are certain actions that teammates should take. Arguably, by taking these actions, trust is maintained on the team as the injured player demonstrates a certain level of dedication to becoming well. So, although not a participating member of the team, a person who is injured still feels
compelled to participate and belong to the organization. Retaining the trust of teammates is achieved through taking care of and legitimizing the injury (through the credibility of trainers and doctors) and by not complaining about being injured.

Making the injury legitimate and following through on the advice of the trainers in order to get well is, obviously, one way of demonstrating a continuing desire to be a part of the team. Mark discussed this concept while talking about his experiences with being injured.

You’ve got to go to the trainer. You can’t just take time off. You tell the trainer what’s going on. We’re serious about kids faking injuries in that we go through enough routines to make sure a kid’s not faking.

These routines, as Mark described them, involve getting checked by the trainer where the trainer will excuse the injured player from practice if the injury is such that he should not participate. Through the trainer, some measure of credibility is established. However, some athletes claimed that the decision as to whether or not one can participate involves a collaborative effort between the trainer, coach, and the player. For instance, Steve recalled the following from his past:

I can’t remember specifically, but it was more along the lines of, you know, you probably shouldn’t practice, so don’t practice and probably shouldn’t play, but if you feel like you can play, you can. They put a lot of it into your hands because we’re the only ones who can truly know about our bodies and how much pain we’re in. They can tell you what they think, see, or know, but you’re the one who knows how much pain you’re in. If you think you can go, and they’ll see if you can actually do it, and support that. And then my position coach was, “we want
you to get healthy; we don’t need you for this game, and it’s not like your spot is going to get taken from you.” It was one of those things where I had the support and didn’t have to worry about if I miss this week, am I not going to start any more. So it was good having his support that I didn’t have to worry about my position when I came back. It’s going to be right there for me. And the head coach just seeing how I’m doing, and the trainers being supportive, asking how I’m feeling every day and if it’s not there, don’t rush it. It was a collaborative thing. But ultimately I’d say that it [the decision as to whether or not to play] came a little bit more from me, but I felt some of the influence from them that I didn’t feel the pressure to play, which helped out.

Steve’s example happened during a time when he was experiencing severe pain in his shoulder every time he made contact. Going to the trainer and opening up lines of communication with his coaches allowed Steve to maintain his status on the team. Although he claimed that it was his decision to miss a week of practice and the following game (which was against a lesser opponent), he maintained the trust of others and his position as well.

After the onset of an injury, getting healthy is the obvious next step. Throughout the interviews, participants recalled their frustrations with other teammates who did not respond appropriately to an injury. An “appropriate” response includes doing the necessary things to get better and not complaining in the process. Logan expressed both of these concerns during his interview.

There’s one thing having an injury and being in pain and dealing with it and then there’s another one where, “oh man, my knee bla bla,” always complaining
about it. I know your knee’s hurt. What are you going to do about it? What’s
your next play? What’s your next move? You know what I’m saying? I have
those teammates, I have those guys, like “oh man, oh, I just don’t know man, my
knee!” You know! You DO know! . . . You know what’s up. You know that
they told you 4 weeks or 6 weeks, whatever. So the matter of the thing is, don’t
be stupid about it; take care of it so it’s not 8 weeks. Complaining is not going to
ger you better. Those are just words. They can’t physically do anything for you.
The above statement illustrates that individuals can lose trust in a teammate. Because it
is assumed that everyone wants to play, football players believe that all of one’s energy
should be focused on returning to the field. While doing everything possible to
rehabilitate an injury is considered positive, communicating one’s level of pain is viewed
negatively. Steve stated, “I think that a true measure of a man is how he is, how he
conducts himself when things are going bad.” Symbolically, the meanings behind actions
and behaviors demonstrated after an injury are known/recognized by others on the team.

In sum, the factor of retaining trust is demonstrated in a couple of different ways.
First, the organization employs individuals (professionals) to assess injuries and help
athletes recover. By utilizing these resources, the credibility of an injury is established
and communicated to others on the team. Secondly, taking care of oneself in order to
return to the field of play and not complaining about the injury in the process are viewed
positively by teammates. Although not participating in the daily activities of other
teammates who are healthy, the desire to participate in other ways (getting healthy) exists
and is maintained through the communicative activities of everyone involved with the
team.
Factor of: Maintaining Identity with the Team

Although an injury keeps individuals from participating as they would if they were healthy, college football players maintain the desire to continue identifying with their team. Because the athlete needs to assume a different role (moving from active participant to bystander), he must find ways to still participate in team activities so as to maintain his identity with the team as a football player. Connected to continued participation and maintaining trust, the desire to maintain one’s identity with the team was a continuing theme across research participants.

Not only do college football players have the appropriate size and physical ability to play at the college level, but they typically have accumulated knowledge of the sport over many years of playing. Most players reported having begun to play football before high school and some reported that their parents had played in college and even in the NFL. Therefore, some have built their lives around the sport. As an example, Duke has played football since he was 5 years old. While talking about a career-ending injury during his senior year, he discussed his connection with football over the years. He stated that football was “what I based my life around forever, you know? I worked out and I planned my schedule and life around football, so I mean, it was everything to me.”

Football has the potential to be the driving force in players’ lives. Routines are built around the sport. The routines are influential in the daily lives of the players. Once these normal routines are taken away due to an injury, the athlete still feels a connection to the team and the desire to maintain the identity of a teammate and football player. For example, while discussing a member of the team whom he respected, Jake recalled how
one individual demonstrated the desire to be a part of the team after experiencing a career-ending injury.

We had some kid, I think he tore his ACL this year, and he’s a senior so he can’t come back, and it was a career ending [injury]. So it was really bad. So he’s a senior, and it was horrible for him at first, but he, talk about dedication, he didn’t have to really get up at the 6ams, but he did and would still go and show his dedication and constantly just be watching film still, and everything, and a lot of people looked up to him. He knew that he was never going to play again and still, he got up with the dedication at 6ams running and he’d still go and [help] coach us and all that stuff. A lot of people looked up to him.

Although the individual in the above account could not physically play, he still had the desire to continue his association with the team. He still attended early morning workouts, watched film, and attended practice in order to be part of the team. In doing so, Jake stated that a lot of teammates looked up to that individual and respected him. Somewhat of a role-model, it is possible that the actions of the injured senior would be modeled by others.

Although limited in their ability to be on the field, most of the participants who had experienced an injury stressed that, by being physically present during practice, they satisfied their desire to continue to participate on the team. Other players discussed how “cheering the team on” was a new role that they found themselves acquiring. While discussing a career-ending injury with his knee, Rick stated the following:

So I was just hopeful that it was just a slight sprain, but in the back of my head, I’ve known so many of my buddies that tore their MCL and all of them were out 4
to 6 weeks. I’m thinking, if I’m going to be back any time soon, it would be, it had to be a very slight tear. So then my next thought process would be that we had 3 games after that, so I’m going to cheer them on the best I can so we can make the playoffs and I can play in the playoffs.

Rick’s example illustrates his thought process in the midst of experiencing a significant injury. He knew that if it were too severe, the injury would end his career because of the number of games left in the season. At the time, regardless of his ability to play later in the season, by wanting to continue to support the team (cheer), he demonstrated his desire to be a part of the team.

Overall, the desire to participate can be discussed in terms of players demonstrating the desire to return to play, maintaining trust of teammates, and retaining an identity associated with the team. Although interrelated, each factor provides individual support for the existence of a personal desire for continued participation with the team. I argue above that these factors are created and maintained through organizational membership as noted in the injury stories of players.

Although narratives of participation are evident even though the athlete cannot participate in the manner he would like, there were also stories of exclusion that can be interpreted from the narratives of the same players. Undoubtedly, college football players continue to feel the desire to participate in order to maintain their symbolic position with the team. Similar to the experience of continued participation, messages that are sent from the organization remind athletes that they are no longer a contributing member of the team. Because injury can be such a turbulent time in the lives of football players, accounts of exclusion are also likely to be a pervasive theme.
Exclusion

The dominant narrative of football teams revolves around being an active participant. The above tension of participation is built upon the socialized expectations of college athletes. Because such expectations (e.g., working hard, pushing through pain, maintaining practice rituals) are continuously practiced and reinforced, the role of the active participant is communicatively and performatively emphasized. However, the “non-active” participation role is rarely rehearsed, even though it is witnessed, by football players when an injury occurs. The absence of such a script intensifies feelings of exclusion and offers a position that is juxtaposed to that of an active participant.

In the context of experiencing an injury, exclusion is set in opposition to participation. Just as there are invitations for athletes to continue to participate, there are also invitations and messages that college football players receive that remind them, throughout an injury, that they are no longer participating members of the team. The following sections include “factors” that influence injured football players’ experiences of the exclusion tension. These factors are 1) feeling disconnected from the larger group, 2) losing one’s identity as a masculine football player, 3) feeling outcast as a result of receiving critiques from teammates, and 4) coaches’ critiques or ignoring of the injured athlete.

Factor of: FeelingDisconnected

Several participants explained how they felt disconnected from the rest of the team when they were injured. Although these stories were somewhat varied, there were common traits throughout. The most notable of these traits was the tendency of players to experience a disconnect from the team when they first experienced an injury. Players
felt as if, because they were incapable of playing, the game or practice should be “paused” until they were ready to go back in. As one player put it, he just “felt on the out.”

Rick articulated this experience quite eloquently. After injuring his knee, he was taken to the sidelines to be evaluated. During this evaluation, several thoughts went through his mind, including the feeling of being disconnected. He stated:

It’s weird because I’ve never really had that happen and you just think that, I don’t know. I almost thought everything would just stop. But it doesn’t. Everything just keeps going. So you’re in there, you’re part of it, you just intercepted a pass and then you just think, because you’re hurt, everything should stop, but it doesn’t. Everything just keeps moving at a fast pace. I understand that it’s not going to, but I just felt like that. . . . Then just like, give me a second, but it wasn’t like that. Everyone, coaches had to coach, I didn’t even talk to any of them to after the game because they had to coach, players had to play. I was just like, I was just part of it, and then just all of the sudden, you’re not part of it, really.

During moments of injury, athletes commonly acknowledged that they wished the game could just stop so that they could regroup and go back in and participate. In Rick’s example, he understood that the game needed to continue and everyone needed to perform their normal duties. Rick’s story illustrates the immediate alienation that one can feel.

This alienation was evident in others’ stories as well. After experiencing an ACL tear in his knee, which ended his career his senior year, Duke explained his rehabilitation
process and the connection he felt with the team. However, there was some measure of negativity in Duke’s story when he described returning to practice and games as an observer.

Um, it was pretty rough. I wasn’t real happy about it, I guess. I was just kind of there. It wasn’t one of those things that I wanted to be there. I just showed up and went through the motions. Just tried to do a little bit of rehab and strengthening stuff with [the trainer]. I basically then just went out and watched practice. It was kind of depressing, really.

Duke’s discontent with being present during team activities represents his simultaneous feelings of the need to be present and the negative reactions of feeling disconnected while there. These reactions are not uncommon and represent personal sensations of disconnection with the team.

From a teammate’s perspective, however, the experience of the injured athlete is not always acknowledged. During games, for instance, there is a need to continue to do one’s job and not dwell on the injury of a fellow teammate. Josh provided the following example:

For the guys that are playing, it’s kind of like, you just move on to the next thing, kind of, and you’re not concerned. It’s kind of weird because, you know, if a guy gets [injured], they just get him off the field and you just keep going.

From an injured player’s perspective, he wants the game to stop. From an outsider’s perspective, however, there is a need to ignore what happened and continue to play. In fact, some participants acknowledged that dwelling on an injury or the potential of injury can inhibit one’s performance on the field because players become tentative about
contact. Regardless, the above excerpts support the idea that football players can experience novel emotional responses following an injury that concerns one’s connection to the team in addition to the obvious physical pain that accompanies an injury.

In sum, athletes demonstrated how they experienced a disconnect from the team after the onset of a significant injury. Both emotional and physical separations are evident in the data. This was evident in the frustrations of the college football players.

Factor of: Loss of Identity

The onset of a significant injury obviously keeps individuals on the sidelines. Although athletes take steps to maintain their connection with others, there exists the potential that their identity as a football player can be lost in the process. Athletes approach this loss of identity in different ways. Some speak of it in terms of losing their position on the team (as noted in above excerpts) while others stress the importance of placing one’s identity in something beyond football, such as religious beliefs. Two different interview participants, Steve and Logan, stressed how football players often put too much of their identity into being a football player and how that can bring hardships for individuals who experience an injury.

For those who identify too strongly with their performance on the field, Steve stated that he has seen individuals encounter an identity crisis once their ability to play has been taken away. He noted that, although these individuals are physically on the sidelines, they are part of the team, but yet, they are not part of the team. When asked how he personally identified with being a football player, he provided the following:

Football’s going to end someday, no matter how good you are. . . . And then your performance on the field, I mean, you perform bad one day, you’re tore up by it.

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You can’t do anything. Then, they start to perform well and they get cocky, what we talked about. And then nobody likes to be around that kind of person. And that’s a big thing of why they do that. And why I’m going into ministry is because to provide something that they can put their identity in that lasts forever. Something that’s eternal, in Christ. Something that, no matter, doesn’t care how well you play, doesn’t care about any of that stuff. He does [care] to the extent of what kind of person you are, but he cares less about the wins and losses, but the person you are while you are doing it. Those things are what matters and it doesn’t matter what’s going to impact today or tomorrow, but what’s going to impact the rest of your life and past your life. . . . The different ways that I look at injury, shoot, I’ve been injured, but the problem with that is that I had a different perspective with injury because I did not find my identity in sport, so it didn’t rock me as much. Sure, I hated not being out there to play, but it wasn’t the end of the world. If we lost a game, yeah, I hated it, but was it going to destroy me? No, because it wasn’t about winning and losing.

Steve’s excerpt illustrates how football players can put too much of their identity into sport. To him, when others experience an injury, loss, or poor performance, that experience disrupts how they view themselves. A way to counteract this is to craft your identity in line with a larger presence or more enduring “value”. In Steve’s case, that larger presence was found in Christ. Because playing football is a temporary point in one’s life, it makes sense to him that players should put their identity into something that is eternal. By doing so, one’s identity can be maintained regardless of experiencing an injury or the end of playing a sport.
Similarly, Logan reflected much of Steve’s sentiment, but through the teachings of the Samoan people, the Fa’a Samoa. During the interview session, he described this in-depth.

I’m Samoan, and every Samoan you meet, we all have the same fundamental teachings that are given by our parents and that’s your faith, family, humility, and respect. And like, if I go without my arm, at least I’m going to remember the four most important things I’ve been taught and those four things right there is what helps me get through every day.

The four core values of faith, family, humility, and respect are eternal concepts to Logan. That is where he places his identity. To him, football is just another place where he can practice these core values. When asked about how injury plays into these values, he stated the following:

If I get hurt, I get hurt [injured]. I’m going to have to deal with it, but I’m still going to have the bare necessities. . . . I’m still alive, still breathing. I’m going to keep going. That’s the best way I can say it. I’m still alive, still breathing and if [my arm] gets ripped off, crap, like that sucks, but you know, in a simple sense, I’m still alive, I’m still breathing. Whatever happens tomorrow, the next day, whatever has been put in front of me that I have to take the opportunities, I’m going to take them and as long as they’re good opportunities, and I see them as good opportunities and I’ve been blessed for it. I’m not going to let this—this is not stopping me from still being alive, still having my family, still having everything I have that I’ve been blessed with in my life. It’s not going to stop me from being who I am. It’s not going to stop me from what I’m about. It’s not
going to take away my values or any of those morals I want to uphold. It’s not going to hinder any of that, and if it doesn’t hinder any of that, I’m still alive, still breathing. And wherever I am in life, I’m doing it.

Both Steve’s and Logan’s solution for the possible experience of a loss of identity is to place their identity in another area besides football. By placing one’s identity in areas that are eternal to the human experience, players can bypass the negative effects of losing their identity as a football player once the ability to play football is lost. This demonstrates their knowledge of the limitations of playing football and associating too closely with the sport.

In sum, college football players acknowledge that some individuals tend to identify too closely with being a football player. Indeed, participants reported how some actually like to “fit the stereotype.” If this is true, the onset of an injury has the possibility for intense negative effects on someone who identifies too closely with the sport. Some reported being “bummed out” or “devastated” by the onset of an injury. To Logan and Steve, this effect could have been softened if those who were injured were to place their identity elsewhere.

Factor of: Critiques of Teammates

In addition to the feelings of being disconnected, athletes receive continuous reminders of their injured state from teammates. Interviewees repeatedly referenced how teammates cannot feel the pain of others who are missing practices or games because of an injury. Mostly discussed in the context of teammates who always seem to be injured (which is apparently frustrating), interviewees acknowledged that they often want to know what has happened to keep a teammate from being involved in practices or games.
Mark stated, “It’s tough to judge. Is this kid really that injured? Does it hurt? Does it not hurt? The only person that can really feel it is that kid.” Regardless of whether or not the concern revolves around questioning the individual’s level of dedication, fellow teammates still express the desire to know. Steve elaborated on this aspect when he spoke of an injury with his shoulder and the desire of others to know what was wrong with him. He said: “when you are on the sidelines, everyone always asks, what’s wrong, what’s wrong? And I hate repeating stories; it drives me nuts. But it’s just like I do that to people all the time.” Although Steve reported his frustrations with repeating the story of his injury, he acknowledged his tendency to do the same to others because of the desire to understand what happened to keep the teammate from participating.

Because teammates tend to question the dedication of individuals who miss practices or games, the need to justify to others why one is not participating is apparently a driving force behind many of those sideline(d) interactions. A number of participants noted how playing through pain was an expected part of the game. To some, merely sitting out to rest is not acceptable. For instance, Frank stated:

I think my impression would be if a guy in practice has an ankle sprain, and he can run, but yet, he chooses to sit out, I don’t take that too well because I know we are all hurting. And you are going to sit out on this because of some injury you believe [you have]?

Being out of practice and games causes players to question a teammate’s dedication when they know there is no need for surgery or there is no visible sign of injury. Duke stated that, “you see guys walking on the sidelines and they say they’re hurt, but yet, you see them doing everything else, walking around and they’re normal and you kind of question
how tough they are.” These items support the notion that being injured is reinforced through the actions of teammates and the expectations that come with being a football player.

In sum, college football players are continuously reminded of their state of injury. Through the need to justify why he is not actively participating, an athlete is made aware that he is not as much a part of the team as he was when healthy. In addition to having teammates emphasize this point, coaches were reported to communicate in similar ways.

Factor of: Critique of Coaches

Coaches act in similar, yet different, ways towards injury. Although some participants stated that coaches were “pretty understanding of injuries,” others stated that they can be less sympathetic. This was highlighted in a story Frank told about separating his ribs during a game.

My freshman year, we were playing [a team] and I caught a pass and was running down the sideline and this dude hits me and cracks my ribs, sliced them right down the middle. And I get up and can’t breathe, or whatever. So I finish playing the game, but I’m in pain. So the next week, we play [another team], and I can’t even go, like I’m just hurting that bad, I can’t go, or whatever, so I end up sitting out. So like, it kind of took—maybe some of the coaches didn’t think I was tough or something like that because they thought I should have just played, something like that.

I asked Frank why he thought the coaches felt he should have played.

Because, usually, they would talk a lot to me. Like, “Hey Frank, what’s going on? How you feeling? Ready for this week?” They didn’t even talk to me, didn’t
say a couple words to me, nothing. Kind of like I was stale, like you’re not even here anymore. Basically, until I got back healthy again, and played the next week against [team, but] I didn’t even play, they didn’t even put me in. They kind of like sat me there. Kind of like, this is what happens [if you can’t play]. I think I only played like one snap. And I usually took like 50 plus snaps a game.

Frank’s example is reflected in the attitudes of other participants where they feel that the interactions with the coaches have been altered due to their injured state. Although Frank’s example represents his resentment with how he was treated, Rick acknowledged how that might be true of some coaches, but not of others.

I think that some coaches do a better job of handling that, making them [injured players] feel a part of it, than others. But I think, some coaches, they’ll stop talking to you, which I think that’s insane. It’s like you’re no longer part of the team. They don’t say anything to you. The pressure comes from, you’re not really good to us now, so let me know when you’re healthy and we’ll start talking again.

Coaches obviously have the potential to make one feel separated from the team during times of injury. This has the potential to make individuals feel excluded even though they are still present and participating with the team, albeit in a different capacity.

In sum, the communication from both teammates and coaches has the potential to make college football players feel excluded from the team. Regardless of whether this is because others are questioning one’s level of pain or utility to the team, the communication (or absence of communication) is a factor in making athletes feel excluded from the team.
Summary: Participation and Exclusion

In conclusion, the above sections demonstrate how athletes who become injured feel a tension between feeling the need to participate while simultaneously feeling excluded. While the experience of an injury carries the need to sit out and get well, it also carries the need to maintain a connection with the team. The personal stories of becoming injured, as well as the stories where others have become injured, have provided valuable insights into how athletes experience this dialectical tension.

In the above sections, supporting illustrations for these tensions have been labeled as factors. I argue that college football players experience the ongoing need/tension to participate through their desire to return, their desire to retain the trust of teammates, and their desire to maintain an identity as a football player. Conversely, athletes experience feelings/tensions of exclusion through a disconnection with the team, loss of identity, and the skepticism of teammates and coaches. Overall, the experience of participating is accompanied with an experience of being excluded physically and emotionally. The messages athletes receive from others on the team have the potential to reinforce or intensify those tensions.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Purpose of this Study

In general, the purpose of this study was to illuminate the organizational lives of college football players. Initially, an argument was constructed that stresses the ability for storytelling on college football teams to be an important factor for creating and reflecting cultural understandings among football players within college organizations (see Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Heywood, 2005; Kassing et al., 2004; Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Riessman, 2008; Silvennoinen, 2006; Weick, 1995). Several research questions were asked to specifically address how college football players communicate and create their understandings of playing college football with others on the team. The following paragraphs elaborate on the purpose of the research questions used in this dissertation.

One purpose of this study was to listen to the stories of athletes in order to uncover what it means to play college football. Specifically, examining how individuals use storytelling to construct what it means to be a college athlete was one goal of this research (RQ1). What individuals communicate and how they communicate organizational stories has a significant impact on organizational life (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). For this reason, understanding how athletes represent their lives as part of an organization is important for better understanding how sport is a social construction (Kassing et al., 2004) which has implications for cultivating masculine identities (Sparkes & Smith, 1999) and can have lasting implications for athletes (see Messner, 1985).

The second purpose of this study was to better understand the ways in which athletes communicatively construct expectations for teammates (see Jablin, 2001;
Arguably, athletes’ communicative behaviors and symbolic actions serve to create an awareness of what it means to be a college football player. These are communicated, through stories, across members in athletic organizations (Kassing et al., 2004). By listening to the stories athletes tell about participating on those teams, dominant expectations can be derived from listening to stories of respected individuals on the team and contrasting those with other, unappreciated members. Such expectations become prominent on teams and have the ability to socialize individuals into “proper” organizational roles (Messner, 1985; Sabo, 1994; Silvennoinen, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 1999) or behavioral scripts (Ginsburg, 1988).

The third purpose of this study (RQ3) was to develop a better understanding of how athletes address, manage, and conceptualize injuries in relation to others on the team. Because injury is commonplace in football (Sabo, 2004b, 1994) and because dialectical tensions are permanent fixtures in the social lives of individuals (Baxter, 1988; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 1998; Johnson & Long, 2002), it is important to explore the existence of such tensions that occur, during injury, for personal and organizational reasons. Better understandings of how athletes manage tensions that arise during a potentially life-altering time are worthy of exploration (Erbert, Mearns, & Dena, 2005).

In sum, the purpose of this research was multifaceted. First, the study sought to achieve a better understand how college football players’ stories create and reflect understandings for what it means to be an athlete. Second, the dissertation explored the expectations that exist for college football players and how those expectations are communicated across athletes. Third, by developing an understanding of the organizational life of the athlete, dialectical tensions were explored through moments of...
injury. The following sections elaborate on the conclusions and implications of this study and offer future areas of inquiry.

Summary of the Results

This section addresses the conclusions and implications of this study. The answers to research questions one and two provided a contextual framework which informed the conclusions that emerged from research question three. The first two research questions are important because they acknowledge how athletes make sense of life as a college football player. As a result, common experiences can be used to forward arguments that establish the importance of group norms and expectations. Ultimately, these findings served as a basis for understanding how athletes manage dialectical tensions upon becoming injured. Johnson and Long’s (2002) level of individual-generalized group dialectical tensions helped provide insights into college football players’ experiences upon becoming injured. Each research question will be presented individually along with the thematized data offered in Chapter Four. With each research question, I will connect my findings with prior research and theory where appropriate.

Primarily, each research question utilized storytelling to convey a picture of the world in which the athlete belongs. Schiffrin (1996) eloquently noted the importance of storytelling and its position in social inquiry:

To use a visual analogy, we can say that telling a story provides a self-portrait: a linguistic lens through which to discover peoples’ own (somewhat idealized) views of themselves as situated in a social structure. The verbalization and textual structure of a story (analogous to the creation of form and composition in a portrait) combines with its content, and with its local and global contexts of
production, to provide a view of self that can be either challenged or validated by
an audience. . . . Of course it is hardly surprising to say that language displays
social identity and relationships. (p. 199)

As a result, narrative accounts display individual identities, social structures and
relationships, and how the individuals providing those accounts see the self within that
structure. Furthermore, if individuals are capable of describing their place within a larger
group, they are also capable of articulating other’s accounts within that social group. For
these reasons, using narrative as a means of understanding the experience of the self and
other proved quite rewarding in answering the research questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked: How do football players’ stories [narratives]
construct what it means to be a college football player? To answer this question, I relied
primarily on the stories athletes provided to illustrate their daily lives as athletes. Within
these stories, I paid close attention to metaphor use and other dominant expressions of
how athletes represented and situated themselves in their environment. Two pervasive
metaphors were used by participants to illustrate their experiences—football as a job and
football (team) as a family. In addition to the metaphors used to describe their
involvement, athletes commonly acknowledged the traditional “jock” stereotype as being
something that they have to continuously manage with others outside of the team.

Football players commonly referred to their role on the team as being a job. They
did this through a variety of ways other than saying “it’s my job.” Athletes commonly
referred to their roles on and responsibilities to the team and tended to reference their
coaches as serving as authority figures capable of providing either rewards or
punishments. This is not surprising given the scholarly connections between sports teams and the workplace (see Young, 1993) and other representations of sport (as business, see Jarvie, 2006).

For those who are on an athletic scholarship, this connection is more apparent. The athletes recognize that they are, in essence, being paid for their skills. During high school, most played football to the best of their ability in order to be recognized by college recruiters and receive a scholarship to play at the college level. Now that those individuals are in college, they continue to view their connection with the team as being a job where they are being compensated for their time and energy.

Athletes also recognized themselves as being replaceable, much like that of a job one might have in any other organization. Because players are aware that becoming injured is common to the sport, they know other individuals of comparable skill levels are able to fill any position that is left vacant. Once this occurs, however, one’s usefulness to the team is called into question (by the self, teammates, and coaches) which creates a sense that the athlete is no longer a contributing member to the team. In a way, it is much like being “laid off” or “fired.”

College football players also referred to their connection to the team as akin to being part of a family. To express the bonds, athletes commonly used terms associated with brotherhood to describe their relationships with others. As with many family atmospheres, the individuals who compose a football team spend large amounts of time together and endure the same rigorous demands that allow them to identify closely with one another. This strong connection creates opportunities for them to serve different supporting or mentoring roles for one another.
It has been argued that both metaphor uses (job and family) share similar elements. Most notable within these connections is the shared sense of identification. One way that groups preserve a sense of collectiveness is through the use of ritual (Hermanowicz & Morgan, 1999). Because athletes endure countless activities and required “team building” events together, it is not surprising that this results in perceived bonds similar to those of a family. Furthermore, Hermanowicz and Morgan (1999) provided the following in relation to how ritual builds collective bonds.

But note that not all institutions affirm the same sacred features of their everyday lives. . . . Where customary practices of a group are rooted in the sacred, affirmation offers a way to reinforce commitment to values both among members and for observers who choose to notice. Identity affirmation calls attention to shared values and expresses the desire of the group to maintain those values in its everyday life. (p. 212)

By participating in each football-related event, there is a tendency for individuals to re-affirm their connection to the team. This creates spaces where individuals can reinforce or negotiate value systems and establish a strong in-group climate. Such a strong bond also has the potential to create a strong out-group climate. Perhaps, this creates and reinforces outsider’s stereotypes towards football players as others are not aware of this different culture.

Although both metaphors promote a strong in-group out-group climate, these metaphors contain differences. Most striking is the permanence of family as opposed to the transient nature of a job. For those individuals who presented their experience as that of a job, there exists a notion that it is a temporary position, as opposed to using another
metaphor, such as that of a career. For others who used a family metaphor, they often stressed how they maintained relationships with others who had graduated, or left the team. Although these two metaphors share some similarities, there are differences that are worthy to consider.

Additionally, stereotypes often circulated in the meanings of being a college football player. As stated in some of the interviews, the participants reported a perceived inability on the part of others to understand what it is like to be a college football player. This was echoed in participants’ desires to meet with me and accounts of other college students who are not on the team. Being a college football player means being forced to deal with stereotypes placed upon them by other college students. Although a couple of interviewees stated that some like to align themselves with the stereotypes and, as a consequence, promote the stereotypes, others attempt to break down stereotypes by incorporating themselves into social groups around the school. The mere acknowledgement of stereotypes by football players and the lengths to which some go to overcome these stereotypes provide evidence that stereotypes are a powerful presence in the football player’s life. Off the field, this creates assessments that are perceived of as being “unfair” to athletes which are addressed in different ways across individuals.

The varying nature of how individuals respond to stereotypes (accept/reject) can be based in communication and perception. Laing, Phillipson, and Lee (1966) stated that “through my behavior, I can act upon three areas of the other: on his [sic] experience of me; on his experience of himself; and upon his behavior” (p. 22). In other words, individuals communicate based on others’ (outsiders/non-team members) reflections or impressions of the individual. If outsiders interact with athletes with the expectation that
they (the athletes) have certain qualities, this creates a situation where the athlete has a choice as to whether he accepts or rejects communicating in a way that confirms/disconfirms the outsiders’ beliefs. For this reason, it is no surprise that some individuals prefer to conform to stereotypes while others try to combat those perceptions which are perceived to be incorrect.

In sum, interpretations of college football players’ stories revealed that athletes tend to construct what it means to be a college football player through the metaphors of football as job and football as family. Participants also tended to reveal stories that emphasized stereotypes as being something that individuals either felt the need to combat or how other teammates embodied the stereotype. Each revealed themselves in multiple ways.

*Research Question 2*

The second research question asked: What are the cultural expectations involved in being a college football player? Through the interview sessions, athletes provided a wealth of information related to being a college football player which contains its own culture, which is separate from but related to, American culture. Individual accounts of previous experiences and the actions of others on the team provided valuable insights. In order to answer this question, I listened to how the participants described the expectations associated with being a member of the team. These expectations were communicated in a variety of ways. In particular, impressions were formed through the stories surrounding individuals they admired on the team, i.e., team heroes. The accounts of organizational heroes served to establish the expectations that teammates have for each other. In addition, by asking participants to reflect on personal stories, interpretations of what other
teammates expect of them were obtained. Together, these create arguments about proper behavioral scripts for the athlete which are connected to those (cultural) expectations. Even though athletes from different schools were interviewed, there were strong similarities across the three football teams represented in the data.

Results circulated around the ability to trust teammates and the related issues of how trust can be built, maintained, and/or damaged. Arguably, having the ability to trust others is extremely important in college football. In order to gain the trust of others on the team (and the coaches as well), players must exhibit behaviors deemed masculine. Because masculinity has been accepted as the dominant value in reference to football (see Chapter Two), this outcome was not surprising. Following the script of a masculine individual is the dominant, master narrative of football players.

On a college football team, it is expected that individuals represent themselves in masculine ways in order to be deemed a legitimate, accepted member and, thus, gain and maintain the trust of one’s colleagues and coaches. Throughout the analysis, playing through pain proved to be a dominant theme. Pain, to Scarry (1985), is a complex phenomenon. On the one hand, the ability to express pain puts the individual in a powerless position. On the other hand, the inability to express pain reinforces a power structure which, additionally, places the individual in a powerless position. On football teams, the desire to bypass each of these issues associated with pain can be seen through the collective silences where 1) individuals do not discuss pain and 2) the desire is to play to the best of one’s ability even when one is experiencing pain.

By playing through pain, a teammate can prove to others that he is tough. By playing through pain, the player gains the trust and respect of others on the team,
especially when those others have (or have had) similar injuries yet continue to play. Thus, any resulting action the athlete takes becomes symbolic of his belonging to the team. Although playing through pain is important to others, the manner in which one conducts himself during those moments is seen as equally important.

Team captains are chosen because they serve as symbolic leaders of the team. Captains are not only chosen because they are gifted athletes, but are chosen because they are respected and serve symbolic functions. Being chosen by the group (team) means that the individual embodies characteristics deemed “heroic” of the group. Captains are those who not only push through the pains of participation, but also serve as motivators through providing support and encouragement, or through their actions on the field, or through demonstrating dedication to the team. Each of these functions reflects symbolically communicative behaviors that serve as expectations that the group has for its individual members.

Overall, the expectations developed among teammates on football teams revolve around the notion that others need to embody traits deemed masculine by the group. If individuals do not respond to the daily demands of being a college football player in ways that are deemed appropriate, they are viewed as negative contributors to the team and the team’s atmosphere. These individuals can be labeled “foils” whose actions are perceived to run counter to that of the group’s goals (Garner & Poole, 2009).

Using the language of one participant, the individuals who do not embody the behaviors sanctioned by the group were labeled “diseases” to the team. Diseases are those individuals who are self-centered and do not think about the impact their behaviors have on the team. Being self-centered means that these individuals complain about
things associated with being a member of the team, such as team-building activities or practices. According to participants, the diseases have the ability to influence the negative behaviors of others on the team. This particular metaphor illustrates how individuals can damage the “health” of the team if they do not contribute to the “healthy functioning” of the group.

Additionally, “milking” an injury to get out of practice, for instance, is something that is undesirable to the team, but benefits that particular individual. Such individuals could also be considered “diseases,” but another participant specifically labeled these teammates “game day leaders.” He explained that game day leaders are individuals who are hurt each week, but return for game days and try to motivate others during the game. It is easy to see how the behavior of game day leaders can create resentment and lead to a fragmented group.

Narratives concerning diseases and game day leaders run counter to the expectations that others have of respectable, trustworthy teammates and serve as organizational foils. Diseases and game day leaders are reported by participants as being those who complain, are self-centered, and/or do not push through pain, miss practice on a weekly basis as they attempt to rehabilitate their (perceived) injuries. Such actions are viewed negatively by the group and obviously have the potential to create a negative image among those athletes who follow group sanctioned normative behaviors.

If such sentiments are shared by others on the team, as it seems to be the case, then the group lacks cooperative activity. Barnard (1968) stated the following in regards to cooperation and coordinated activities of organizations:
Organization, simple or complex, is always an impersonal system of coordinated human efforts; always there is purpose as the coordinating and unifying principle; always there is the indispensable ability to communicate, always the necessity for personal willingness, and for effectiveness and efficiency in maintaining the integrity of purpose and the continuity of contributions. (pp. 94-95; italics in original)

If the efforts of some run counter to the organization, there is no coordination of activities and no common purpose towards a shared goal. When individuals step outside of their normal roles on the team, this is seen by others as being something that can hurt the team or interfere with the team’s goals. From the perspectives of college football players, some behaviors are beneficial to maintaining a sense of unity and purpose whereas other behaviors are deemed to be unhealthy.

Overall, the meanings and expectations with being part of a college football team are similar across college football organizations. From the interviews, I was able to interpret two main values. These values were masculinity and collectivity (team-orientation). Because the desire to be associated with a larger collective is strong, individuals support and promote various notions of masculinity. For instance, when one’s value to the team is based on how well one contributes (regardless of position or role), as long as these efforts are deemed masculine by the group, the player is viewed as being a legitimate, respected member of the team. When one does not adhere to those norms and standards, then teammates have the ability to question or correct that player’s actions to the extent they (the teammates) deem appropriate. As a result, one’s symbolic actions, behaviors, and communication within the organization serve as focal points.
where masculinity and value to the team can be judged for the perceived benefit of the team and their purpose.

Conclusions such as this build a framework upon which research question three is directed. Because college football teams desire to maintain culturally approved and harmonious behaviors, this represents how those value structures are inherently tied to group norms. To Johnson and Long (2002), norms are “commonly characterized as implicit or explicit guidelines that establish limitations for group members’ behavior” (p. 31). Moreover, norms are continuously evolving management techniques with respect to the dialectical tensions experienced by the group. When individuals encounter situations where either they, or the group, call into question either their dedication to the team or their masculinity, such tensions become apparent and require subsequent management techniques.

*Research Question 3*

The third research question asked: What dialectical tensions exist that illustrate college football players’ experience of injury during athletic participation? This research question was answered by listening to the stories individuals told about injuries on college football teams. Both individual accounts and narrations of others’ experiences with injuries provided valuable information for this research question.

Athletes represented the experience of injury through a dialectical lens that highlighted the tension between participation and exclusion. This tension can be understood as emerging from Baxter and Montgomery’s (1993, 2000) overarching tension of stability and change. To Baxter and Montgomery (1998), “stability-change is a process that weaves throughout [relationships.] . . . [i]t is the interplay or tension of
opposites that results in ongoing fluidity for any relationship” (pp. 6-7). To the authors, it is a metadialectic that acknowledges continuous change. For the athlete (and his teammates), moments of injury can be a moment where drastic change is experienced both physically and psychologically.

In relation to injury, it is obvious that a change occurs where one cannot participate. This not only changes the individual, but the group to which this member belongs. For this reason, I argue that injury can be considered a potential turning point that brings a “dialectical moment” (Erbert, Mearns, & Dena, 2005) to one’s attention. The subsequent communicative behaviors of the affected individuals and group members demonstrate a recognition of a tension between this change and the desire for stability in the group.

I argue that the tensions associated with participation and exclusion occur simultaneously, yet mutually negate one another during the time an athlete is experiencing an injury. The existence of this tension, which lies between the individual and the group, can be seen through two separate lenses. First, the individual’s feelings and subsequent communicative actions can be seen as illustrating tension-management techniques between the self and the group. Secondly, the communication that the individual receives from the organization can be interpreted as the tension management techniques where others are addressing a change in the state of an individual in relation to the rest of the team.

Participation

Although the onset of an injury creates a situation where athletes cannot physically participate as they would like, the athlete still does what he can to continue the
dominant masculine narrative to which he is accustomed to performing within the group. Results indicate that football players continue this narrative for several different reasons including 1) the desire to get better and return to play, 2) the desire to retain and maintain the trust of fellow teammates, and 3) the desire to maintain their identity and association with the team. These factors are interrelated and reflect the pressures or tensions placed upon individuals who become injured.

Upon experiencing an injury, athletes commonly referenced the stress that comes with the inability to play and the desire to return to the field of play. Most recognized that an injury places one in an undesirable state because everyone wants to participate. Because a good majority of participants in this project did not see themselves playing football after college, the recognition of their limited time playing created additional stress during times of injury. Together, these reasons have the ability to create a renewed appreciation for the game.

Individuals reported the desire to retain trust with others on the team. Although this can be done in various ways, participants reported that injuries are legitimatized through the athletic trainers or specialists on the team. These individuals have the opportunity to assess a player’s injury level and provide opportunities for the athlete to recover and become a contributing member once again. Associated with “doing the right thing,” the participants in this research reported that those who complain about injuries are viewed negatively, supporting Sabo’s (2004a) notion of collective silence among athletes concerning injury. Overall, the desire to retain the trust of the group was illustrated through getting better and not complaining about one’s present injured state.
Maintaining one’s identity with the team was the third theme that informed the existence of this tension. Athletes managed their new state by continuing to participate in team-related activities. Some accounts provided evidence that at least some players were continuing to go to team meetings and even cheering the team on by being on the sidelines during games and practices. Much like individuals with disabilities, these athletes tended to “subscribe to the ‘person-first’ ideology, . . . [placing] the common ground of personhood before the not-so-common one of disability” (Michalko, 2002, p. 10). Because athletes closely identify with the team regardless of their level of participation (Messner, 1985; Sparkes & Smith, 1999; Young, 2004), it is not surprising that injured athletes continue to be present and attempt to participate in team activities. By doing so, the athlete maintains his connection and identity with the team.

Exclusion

The dialectical tension of exclusion exists in direct, simultaneous opposition to participation during the time an athlete experiences an injury. To both the individual and the group, the desire to participate is obviously an ongoing factor in the life of the athlete. However, the individual and the group have the ability to send messages that also reinforce the notion that the athlete is no longer participating and is, thus, excluded. Similar notions are expressed through individuals with disability in society (Michalko, 2002).

Although not in direct opposition to the reasons for the existence of the participation tension, there are related reasons why athletes experience an exclusion from the team. These reasons are 1) feelings of disconnection, 2) losing one’s identity with the
team, 3) receiving critiques from teammates, and 4) receiving critiques from coaches. These themes are discussed below.

For most, it is obvious that football players feel disconnected from the team where they cannot continue to participate in practices or games as they have grown accustomed. Athletes were able to articulate both physical and emotional connections and disconnections through their illustrations. For those who identify too closely with the team, this can have more intense effects. At least two of the participants stated that football players place too much of their identity in the sport. Because they (the two participants) had witnessed the intense, negative effects of injury on those whose identity was embedded in football, they felt as if their experiences with injury were mitigated by their ability to place their identity in other areas and not just football.

Other interesting evidence of the exclusion tension arose out of the critiques injured football players received from both teammates and coaches. The ability for others to critique the state of teammates brings forth the idea of group sanctioned norms or normal modes of behavior. Whether it is out of genuine concern for the athlete or questioning one’s level of injury, the reminders about an injured state of being are continuously reinforced by teammates. In a way, athletes are continuously called to validate their non-participative state which potentially reinforces their role as “the other.” Although the intent behind such questioning can vary between, for example, an athlete who always “seems” hurt and another whose leg is in a cast, reminders that one is different or separate from the group carries personal and emotional consequences.

Coaches were also reported as frequently critiquing players through a variety of means. Most dramatic, yet implicit, is the potential for a coach to change his
communication patterns towards the injured player. Players reported being “shunned” by coaches. It is not possible, within the constraints of this research, to determine whether that shunning is an intentional or an unintentional consequence of a coach shifting attention from the injured player to that player’s replacement on the team. However, such a dramatic shift in communication style has the potential to make the athlete feel as though he is not of any use to the team. In combination with teammates, the changes in communication from coaches have the potential to make the athlete feel excluded.

**Research Question 3 - Summary**

The injured football player enters into a role in which he is not accustomed and the resulting communication patterns represent opportunities for new performative scripts to emerge which may challenge the interactional patterns to which one is accustomed. Both the individual and the group respond to the new demands of the participation vs. exclusion tension in a variety of ways. Overall, the dominant desire of injured athletes was to continue to perform whatever role they could in order to maintain their association with the group. Football players reported taking measures to rehabilitate the injury and continue to participate in practices and games; these resulting patterns can be seen as dialectical tension management techniques in direct response to the desires of the group. Because organizations and groups have an important influence on the behaviors of individuals, this outcome was not surprising.

**Discussion**

As previously stated, this dissertation set out to accomplish several goals with the intent of better understanding the lives that football players experience in competitive college organizations. Although much of the research confirms previous findings, much
can be taken from this study. Overall, this dissertation adds value to areas of research that intersect organizational communication and sport communication.

The Meaning of Being a College Football Player

Although football players provided a variety of stories that illustrated and dramatized their involvement in a football organization (see Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983), metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Schein, 1992) were embedded during these storytelling events. The use of metaphor not only helped to communicate the life of the athlete, but also aided in understanding what it means to be a college football player. As stated previously, the metaphors of football as a job and a family illustrated the close, in-group climate of college football players.

One’s identity is not a static entity (Howard, 2000). Stets and Burke (2000) noted that one’s identity is “composed of the self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular groups or roles” (pp. 225-226; italics in original) which stem from the knowledge that one belongs to a particular group while others do not. The research provided in this project brings forth notions of an in-group and out-group. Both metaphors of family and job place the individual in a role or position that is unlike that of other college students who are not on the football team.

Because of the climate that has been presented through the use of metaphor during narrative illustrations, it is possible to see how stereotypes can be constructed as a result. In cognitive structures of identity, “group schemas (analogous to stereotypes) include organized information about social positions and stratification [issues] . . . Because the societal positions we occupy have immediate consequences for our sense of
self, group schemas play a major part in the processes of identification (Howard, 2000, p. 368). Arguably, because other college students are not part of the team environment, stereotypes are constructed. Several athletes mentioned such stereotypes through the interview sessions as something that athletes are either called to manage/dispel or follow. In general, this portion of this project informs what it means to be an athlete (Kassing et al., 2004), and specifically, part of a college football team.

The Expectations of Being a College Football Player

Organizations do not have a culture; an organization is a culture. Embedded within a culture are norms, or understood rules for interaction. These social guidelines for interaction were examined through the stories college football players told about their experiences with playing the game. This research aimed to inform how those expectations are created (Jablin, 2001) and how the stories of self/others offer insights into proper scripts of participation (Kassing et al., 2004; Sparkes & Smith, 1999). Although this research did not uncover how such expectations are formed, results offer value to understanding how the stories of others formulate guidelines for participation and how the unsanctioned communicative behaviors of others marginalize those teammates.

Because of the perceived close-knit climate that is created through a team oriented sport such as football, it is important that members of the team are trusted. In this context, trust is earned through communicative displays of masculinity. This was not surprising given the amount of research on football and its reification of masculine values. What proved surprising, however, was the ability of individuals on the team to
not meet the expectations of the group and how fellow teammates responded to those individuals.

Teammates who complained or did not participate because of a minor injury were recognized by the group as not meeting the expectations set forth by the group. In a way, the group marginalizes those individuals and does not respect them as contributing to the team. Such individuals are perceived as being “weak” or only playing football for personal reasons which does not support other teammates’ beliefs about how a trusted team member should behave.

Because there are examples of dominant organizational scripts and “foils,” it is logical to assume the existence of counter narratives (Nelson, 2001) as well. With respect to the individuals interviewed in this project, no narratives emerged that could be claimed as a counter narrative. However, future research should certainly remain open to the possibility of their existence.

Overall, this research benefited from using storytelling during interview sessions. This method provided individuals to discuss organizational “heroes” and “foils.” With each type of individual, the athlete provided lengthy elaborations and detailed examples of what they expect from other teammates in order to contribute to a positive team atmosphere.

The outcome of this research helped to inform the concept of Mead’s (1934) generalized other. In this context, the generalized other is used as a concept that points to an individual’s understanding of the group to which he belongs. Social actors are knowledgeable and capable of understanding the expectations and norms of the group in order to communicate and behave (“appropriately”). This informs the notion that
individuals communicate with other group members in ways that are accepted by the group and how, through the responses of group members, the individual can edit his behavior.

*Injury and Dialectical Tensions*

Violence and injury are ongoing components to one’s participation in football (Sabo, 2004a, 2004b). Numerous researchers have acknowledged (and continue to recognize) the dangerous aspects connected with the sport (see, for instance, Messner, 1992; Naess, 2001; White, Young, & McTeer, 1995; Young, 2004). In any sport, the body is used as an instrument for success (Dworkin & Messner, 1999; Trujillo, 1994) but is also at continuous risk of injury which could render the athlete incapable of participating. Because this can be a significant shift in the athlete’s life, it was important to explore the dialectical tensions that arise during these moments (Erbert, Mearns, & Dena, 2005). By taking a dialectical approach, researchers can better understand the actions and experiences that drive individual or group behavior (Simon, 1979). By taking a dialectical approach, this study was able to illuminate the “communicative behaviors, motivations, perceptions, and feelings of group members” (Johnson & Long, 2002, p. 38).

While healthy, the college football player experiences some stability in that he knows how to be a legitimate part of the team and maintain the trust of others. He has an understanding of what others expect of him, follows the appropriate script for a member of that group, and knows how to participate even if in pain, for example. However, once the athlete becomes injured and needs to miss practices or games, the dialectical tension
of participation and exclusion becomes a powerful force to manage both personally and socially with teammates.

Johnson and Long’s (2002) level of individual-generalized group dialectics proved helpful in examining this tension. Upon becoming injured, the athlete expressed behaviors, motivations, perceptions, and feelings indicative of their personal experience and how others in the group responded to them during this time. Although most of the testimonies originate through personal stories, similar tensions were expressed through the collegial stories of others. For this reason, multiple examples of factors that influence the management of each tension were offered.

In related research, the tension between individual participation and exclusion is an important factor. For instance, Michalko (2002) saw contradictions in the life of disabled people. He stated that

The key to this seeming contradiction is that while disabled people do participate as full citizens, we do not participate (real or imagined) in the way nondisabled people do. Thus, what is at issue is the way disabled people participate and are included in society and not participation and inclusion per se. (p. 147)

Because this research shows that the athlete is not comfortable with being excluded, he generally continues to manage the tension between participation and exclusion by attempting to continue the masculine script of the “participating” athlete through, for example, attending team functions and cheering on the rest of the group.

Ultimately, any behavior intended to manage the tension between participation and exclusion by both the group and individual has ongoing consequences for the team and athlete. The desire of the group to maintain traditional masculine values and norms
in relation to the team’s standards can be seen in the management techniques of both individuals who experience an injury and the group in response to that injury. Thus, the team responds to a change in their environment in a way that stabilizes the norms and expectations of others.

Although this approach proved beneficial for this line of research, other approaches that speak to the experience of organizational paradoxes or contradictions differ from organizational dialectics in their approaches. For instance, role conflicts describe the contradictory messages (explicit and implicit) that are sent “downward” in organizations and that put members in positions where they are told to do one thing, but cannot—for instance, being told to produce but not having the means or power to influence production (see Putnam, 1986). This can be seen in the current project with the desire of the athlete, other teammates, and coaches, to push the athlete to participate, but he cannot. With views such as this, the paradox is one at the organizational level. Tracy (2004) proposed that paradoxes embedded in the communicative practices of organizations exist at the individual level where the member is able to frame those messages as being “simple contradictions, complementary dialectics, or pragmatic paradoxes” (p. 141). Because organizational dialectics tends to focus on the relationships between the self and others in the organization (Johnson & Long, 2002), stresses the ongoing turmoil between such organizational elements across contexts, and considers tensions as being managed rather than ever completely resolved (Baxter & Montgomery, 2000, 1996), a dialectical framework proved more appropriate and revealed the complexity involved in the life of the athlete.
Limitations of the Study

With each interview session, I was able to form an immediate bond with participants that I would not have been otherwise capable of doing had I not also played college football. We discussed a breadth of topics related to their experiences with football. Some interviews lasted for hours as we shared similar stories with each other. These conversations, in particular, provided a great deal of depth to my interpretations. Although these interviews provided a wealth of information, there were some limitations to my approach that are worthy of noting and can be taken up in subsequent research that stems from this project.

First, my subjective background with college football provided insights and interpretations in places where others might not be able to draw such inferences. One possible concern is that others who have had no previous history with the sport might not have made those same connections or drawn the same inferences, if any. This creates an interesting situation where my strengths in conducting a study such as this might have also served as a limitation to some.

Second, football players from various teams were interviewed in order to create an interesting, yet complex, understanding of how college football players interact. Although, as I argued, college football players interact and communicate in similar ways across organizations, it is intuitive that organizational culture varies from institution to institution. Even though some institutions can share similar values, the importance placed upon these values and the intensity with which they are experienced and reinforced are have the potential to be different.
Third, although the focus of this study was on the experience of injury in the context of playing college football, I was limited in my ability to acquire participants who were currently experiencing an injury. Because of the limited number of individuals who responded to my attempts, I had to rely on stories about previous injuries and the interpretations of what others had endured. Different stories could have been told and different conclusions drawn if all of the participants had been in a current state of injury. Furthermore, the intensity of an injury could have played a role in the accounts given by participants and the subsequent perceptions of communication patterns from teammates (Malinauskas, 2010). Due to the tendency of storied injuries to vary, this undoubtedly had an effect on what stories were told and how they were told.

Fourth, a researcher’s ability to draw conclusions relating to the tensions experienced at the individual-generalized group level poses unique challenges in relation to the traditional, interpersonally-oriented approach to studying relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 2000, 1996). When placed in a multiple-person environment, it is obvious that dialectical tensions can be experienced, and thus managed, in a variety of ways. Stating, as in this research project, that any tension is managed based on the expectations and attitudes of the generalized other (Mead, 1934) and neglecting other forces (demands) originating outside of the group or other demands that originate from personal goals or desires, can seem one-dimensional. Focusing on individual actions and interpretations and tying them to group norms or standards could be, to some, a little misleading given that so many other factors have the potential to play a role in how individuals behave and communicate in groups.
In addition, stating that only one tension exists at this level can limit scholars’ understandings of relational dialectics if they do not know that dialectical tensions are ongoing and simultaneously multiple (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 1998). Furthermore, the management techniques that individuals and group members use to manage these tensions can also vary and depend on the current state of the individual or group. Here, the limitation is that this study represents only one tension at one level of interaction.

Overall, the limitations listed above acknowledge the incomplete nature of any study. Other arguments can be made that the number of participants, the diversity of schools and the level of football, and the variation in their experience with playing football all pose limitations for the conclusions I have drawn. It is the goal of future research to carry on this discussion and amend some of the limitations to this study. Some directions for future research are discussed below.

Directions for Future Research

It is obvious that the aforementioned limitations to this study can help direct scholars in attempts to more clearly direct future lines of research in this area. Instead of focusing attention on those areas in this section, I will propose directions for future research that will help to enrich other focal areas of this scholarship.

First, exploring dialectical tensions within group and organizational interactions is a relatively new area of study and one that should be continued by other researchers. An individual-generalized group dialectical tension proved fruitful in analyzing the tensions experienced by football players as they manage injury physically, emotionally, and socially. Although this framework fit the general aim of this project, other scholars might find it useful to explore interpersonal level dialectics, group level dialectics, or external
level dialectics (Johnson & Long, 2002) in relation to sports. For instance, understanding the role of managing stereotypes with others outside of the organization would further understandings in this area of sport communication. Future areas can explore these tensions through a variety of methods including interview and ethnographic methodologies.

Second, it is possible that many other dialectical tensions are embedded in this study and are worthy of further exploration. Furthermore, the management techniques used to negotiate tensions between the individual and the group are worthy of future examination. The ongoing nature of dialectical management techniques could be examined through more longitudinal studies of individuals currently managing the new demands placed upon them during the onset, progression, or continued experience, of an injury.

One such dialectical tension that is worthy of exploration is openness-closedness (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 2000) through Sabo’s (2004a) concept of “collective silences.” Collective silences point to the tendency of football players to neglect speaking about pain or injury because it is an undesirable intruder in a culture where masculinity is a pervasive theme. By using Johnson and Long’s (2002) individual-generalized group level of dialectical tensions, the tension between openness-closedness in relation to collective silences could be further advanced.

In addition, one’s identity in relation to the team-individual dialectical tension (see Barge, 1994) would be worthy of future exploration. Because this dissertation draws attention to the identity of the student-athlete, future research should explore how one’s identity as an athlete is managed through different management techniques resulting from
other dialectical tensions. Howard (2000) noted that “Identities are relational, defined by their difference from something processual, and multiple” (p. 386). Individuals have an understood idea of the self but are capable of being imposed upon by others which creates the potential for multiple idealized selves. In this context, moments of injury would be quite valuable to explore, but because identity is continuously managed by self and others, there are countless opportunities to enrich this area of research. For instance, understanding identity in relation to stereotypes of athletes and how different athletes manage those stereotypes would be a valuable addition to research.

Furthermore, because of the nature of this project, it was unclear as to whether or not college football players identified more closely with the organization or with being a participant in the sport of football (i.e., being a football player). Similar distinctions have been noted in previous research. For instance, Russo (1998) proposed that individuals might identify more closely with a profession than they do with the organization to which they belong, creating an interesting relationship between the individual and the organization where one’s membership in that organization serves as the avenue through which one can practice a trade. This creates an interesting area to explore as identity can be placed in multiple areas simultaneously but, perhaps, with varying degrees of intensity.

Fourth, the research presented in this project can be of value to other scholars exploring non-contact sports, women’s sports, or other recreational sports. Within each of these areas of competition, various levels of dialectics, dialectical tensions, and management techniques exist. Each area poses unique contexts to explore with potentially differing intensities of group orientation, competitiveness, investment, and
norms bringing notions of “foils” to the surface as well. Undoubtedly, the narratives
offered by athletes have the potential to differ. Understanding what is expected of
athletes in each context can provide valuable insights to understanding the proper
behavioral roles of “teammates.”

Fifth, although injury is a somewhat obvious area to explore where powerfully
novel tensions can arise, one must acknowledge that dialectical tensions are continuously
being managed by organizations, groups, and individuals in groups. For instance, the call
to manage new, previously unnoted tensions can occur when the team gains new athletes
or when a coach attempts to change a familiar practice structure. In college football, a
seemingly infinite amount of relationships and events that are worthy of exploration and
can provide valuable insights for coaches, players, and college administrators alike.

Finally, this research brings forth questions as to what defines being hurt as
opposed to being injured. As athletes, trainers, and scientists can have conflicting views
of what constitutes injury (e.g., concussions), it will become increasingly important to
incorporate how different communities define injury into both academic discussions and
organizational policy. Whereas an athlete may define an injury as something that keeps
him/her from playing, scientific researchers may define injury in other ways which has
the possibility to include moments where the athlete “pushes through the injury” because
he/she only experiences discomfort and neglects the probability of negative bodily
consequences as a result.

Final Thoughts

This dissertation provided me with an opportunity to connect various aspects of
my life. From the age of ten, my life was consumed by football. It was not surprising
that I closely identified with being a college football player through the continuous praise of coaches, peers, and parents. Receiving a scholarship to play college football, I identified more closely with being a football player than a student because playing college football had always been my goal. Witnessing countless injuries of others, and experiencing a few myself, created internal questions that revolved around the basic query: “Is it worth it?” Because of this question, I was more prone to observe how others managed their injury, but still questioned why players were relentless in their pursuits to return to the field of play. Slowly, I began to see the paradox embedded within football and simultaneously began to identify more with being a student than an athlete.

After completing a masters program in communication and completing PhD coursework in communication, this project allowed me to return to those initial questions I had about injury and football. The results of this study are not personally groundbreaking as I witnessed the same trends over the four years I played. In undertaking this project, however, I was better able to make sense of my own experiences and others’ experiences with playing college football. For this, I am thankful and hope that some of the insights presented in this research help inform other areas of research.
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APPENDIX A: OU IRB FORM

OHIO UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
PROJECT OUTLINE FORM

Title of Research Proposal  The Communicative Constructions of Athletic Expectations: Narrative Analysis of Culture, Consequences, and Collective Silences

Investigator(s) Information
Primary Investigator
Name  Kenneth M. Sibal  Department  COMS
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Training Module Completed?  ☑ Yes  No

Co-investigators
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Training Module Completed?  Yes  No

Advisor Information (if applicable)
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Training Module Completed?  ☑ Yes  No

Research Assistants
Name  n/a  Department  n/a
Training Module Completed?  Yes  No

Name  n/a  Department  n/a
Training Module Completed?  Yes  No

Name________________________  n/a  ____________________________  Department__n/a__

Training Module Completed?  Yes  No

Name________________________  n/a  ____________________________  Department__n/a__

Training Module Completed?  Yes  No

Anticipated Starting Date__Upon Approval__  Duration  6  mos  0yrs

(Work, including recruitment, cannot begin prior to IRB approval. This date should never precede the submission date)

Funding Status

Is the researcher receiving or applying for external funding?  Yes  ✓  No

If yes, list source______________________________

If yes, describe any consulting or other relationships with this sponsor.

n/a

Is there a payment of any kind connected with enrollment of participants on this study that will be paid to persons other than the research participants?  Yes  ✓  No

(If yes, describe.)

Review Level

Based on the definition in the guidelines, do you believe your research qualifies for:

✓ Exempt Review  Category _______ 2

___ Expedited Review  Category________________

___ Full Committee Review

Recruitment/Selection of Subjects

Maximum Number of Human Participants _______ 20-25 _______

Characteristics of subjects (check as many boxes as appropriate)

___ Minors ___ Physically or Mentally Disabled ___ Elementary School Students

✓ Adults ___ Legal Incompetency ___ Secondary School Students

___ Prisoners ___ Pregnant Females ___ University Students

✓ Others (Specify) ___ football players_____

Briefly describe the criteria for selection of subjects (inclusion/exclusion). Include such information as age range, health status, etc. Attach additional pages if necessary.

The participants for this study will be solicited from individuals who
participate, or have participated on Ohio University’s football team. Participants will initially be gathered from undergraduate classrooms and through snowball sampling. Only those individuals that are over 18 years of age will be interviewed. Because this is a specific population, all information will remain anonymous including the participant’s names, the name of the sports organization, and the name of the institution.

How will you identify and recruit prospective participants? If subjects are chosen from records, indicate who gave approval for the use of the records. If records are "private" medical or student records, provide the protocol, consent forms, letters, etc., for securing consent of the subjects for the records. Written documentation for cooperation/permission from the holder or custodian of the records should be attached. (Initial contact of subjects identified through a records search must be made by the official holder of the record, i.e. primary physician, therapist, public school official.)

No specific recruitment techniques that will be used other than through volunteers.

Please describe your relationship to the potential participants, i.e. instructor of class, co-worker, etc. If no relationship, state no relationship.

No anticipated relationships.

Attach copies of all recruitment tools (advertisements, posters, etc.) and label as APPENDIX B

None

Performance Sites

List all collaborating and performance sites, and provide copy of IRB approval from that site and/or letters of cooperation or support.

No performance sites. I do not intend on doing any field research.

Project Description

Please provide a brief summary of this project, using non-technical terms that would be understood by a non-scientific reader. Please limit this description to no more than one typewritten page, and provide details in the methodology section.

This project will explore how athletes communicatively construct expectations for themselves and others on a sports team. A wealth of information can be derived by examining the storied experiences of being an athlete. Specifically, accounts and stories of being an athlete will be the main focus of this study.

This study argues that important communicative processes that help to
form expectations for the athlete emerge through the stories individuals tell about themselves and reveal about each other on the sports team. By exploring the interactions that take place within a sports team, and the stories that individuals tell about their participation, several important results will emerge. These results will provide insights into how athletes construct and perceive their masculine identities and masculine ideologies. Other results will provide a better understanding of how athletes perceive the risks, benefits, and drawbacks of being an athlete.

Please describe the specific scientific objectives (aims) of this research and any previous relevant research.

The aim of this study is to explore how the culture of a sports team (re)creates expectations for its members. Although this study looks at a “culture” in one moment of time, previous research offers some continuing masculine qualities that athletes will display such as being tough and able to play with pain (Balswick, 1981; Trujillo, 1994), competitive (Verser, 1981), aggressive (Kassing et al., 2004), non-emotional (Balswick, 1981), and chauvinistic (Carter, 1981), which is displayed across male sports-team cultures. There is a continuing need to examine narrative accounts in sports because of the value they add to cultural understandings (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983) of what it means to be an athlete (Kassing et al., 2004). Communication research recognizes that there is a continuing need for scholars to utilize storytelling as a method for understanding techniques of motivation and successful performance within the communicative activities of individuals in sports organizations as a means to understand how gendered identities are created (Kassing et al., 2004). One potential outcome of such a method is a better understanding of “what it means to play” (p. 400).

In the pursuit of winning, athletes can perceive the body as a tool for success and abuse themselves (and others) physically and emotionally as a result (Naess, 2001). It has been proposed that an important part of athletic culture silences injuries (Sabo, 2004) because injuries become commonplace and are expected during athletic competition (White, Young & McTeer, 1995; Young, 2004).

In sum, this study will attempt to understand what it is like to be an athlete, from the participant’s perspective and how constructions of masculinity influence common aspects of participation, such as becoming injured. By listening to the stories that participants voluntarily provide, several important research questions can be answered. Those proposed questions are listed below:

RQ1: How do male members of a sports team use storytelling to communicatively construct the meanings of what it means to be an athlete?

RQ2: What are the cultural expectations involved in being an athlete?

RQ2a: What counter narratives exist that defy those cultural expectations?

RQ3: What do the cultural expectations associated with being an athlete reveal about the culture of a particular athletic team?

RQ4: How do athletes communicatively deal with injuries during athletic participation?
The references for the previous literature (mentioned above) are listed below:

Methodology: please describe the procedures (sequentially) that will be performed/followed with human participants.

For the purposes of this study, interviews will be conducted. Within these interviews, participants will be encouraged to provide personal accounts and stories that define their lives as athletes and as members of the OU Bobcat football team. In these interviews, the invitation to provide lengthy responses will hopefully provide rich data and will lead to a better understanding of what it means to be a competitive athlete through storied accounts. Narratives include short stories about an event or a lengthy account of an important part of one’s life (Chase, 2005) and often arise in interview sessions when least expected, such as instances where yes/no questions have been asked (Riessman, 2008).
Narrative accounts and storytelling can provide valuable insights into what it means to be an athlete (Heywood, 2005; Silvennoinen, 2006) as narrative communicates the point of view of the narrator (Chase, 2005). Storytelling in
interviews serves as a retrospective act of sense-making as well as self-making and self-presenting (Reissman, 2008) which, through communication, allows individuals to develop and articulate expectations for how things unfold, the way things should occur, and the way things should be (Bruner, 2002). After transcribing the stories, the stories will be explored for common traits. In attempts to answer the proposed research questions and to draw connections among stories, a thematic analysis of storied experiences is appropriate. Such thematic interpretations are a valuable way to make sense of how individuals interact with each other and rely on examining the recurrence of information, repetition of that information, and the connections between the reported experiences and perceptions of participants to make sense of those storied understandings (Owen, 1984). Using the suggestions of Riessman (2008), themes will be derived by looking at each story and drawing similarities and differences between them in order to answer the research questions listed above in this Project Outline Form. The themes will be highlighted by using specific examples that arise out of the interviews.

The references for the above citations are listed below:

Describe any potential risks or discomforts of participation and the steps that will be taken to minimize them.

None. The participants will be assured that their responses will remain confidential. Only those that are willing to participate will be used in this study. Pseudonyms will be used in the final product where specific stories will be used to highlight the themes that I derive. All data will be kept by the researcher in a secured area. No information will be shared with individuals outside of the research team.

At the advice of my dissertation committee, steps were taken to inform the athletic administrators of the intent of my study in order to circumvent any questions they may have about my research.

Describe the anticipated benefits to the individual participants. If none, state that. (Note that compensation is not a benefit, but should be listed in the compensation section on the next page.)

The participants will not receive any anticipated benefits. Although, the possibility exists that the interviews may be therapeutic in nature.
Describe the anticipated benefits to society and/or the scientific community in lay language. There must be some benefit to justify the use of human subjects.

As stated before, there is a lack of research in organizational communication that understands how athletes communicate expectations of each other on sports teams. The results of this study will help provide descriptions of how this is done. Other critical communication scholars may gain some additional insights into how dominant constructions of masculinity are not “healthy” for some individuals, thereby providing alternative interpretations to how individuals experience pressures to perform on athletic sports teams.

Please discuss the confidentiality level for the data collected. For example, indicate whether records will be labeled with the subject’s name, or whether they will be labeled with a code number. If code number used, provide detail about the key that links name and code number (where stored/when destroyed, etc.).

The participants will be assured that their responses will remain confidential and that pseudonyms will be used to protect their identity in the final product. They will also be informed that I will not communicate any of their responses with their coach or any other member of the football staff. The data files of the recorded interviews will remain on the researcher’s computer as well as the transcribed interviews in a folder locked in a secure location.

With whom will identifiable data be shared outside the immediate research team? For each, explain confidentiality measures.

I will be the primary researcher on this project. However, as I am being guided by my advisor, it is possible that I may share transcribed information from the interviews with her in order to construct a final product. If this does occur, I will remove the names which will enable the participants to remain anonymous. (If that’s what you mean by identifiable data).

Will participants be: Audiotaped? ☑ Yes ☐ No

☑ Yes ☐ No

Videotaped?

If so, describe how/where the tapes will be stored (i.e. locked file cabinet in investigator office), who will have access to them, and an estimate of the date they will be destroyed.

After the interviews have been transcribed, the audio recordings will be destroyed (deleted). The transcriptions will remain on the researcher’s computer in a locked folder for an estimated time of 1-2 years for future
research purposes. If the researcher decides to use these for another purpose in the future, proper IRB protocol will be followed.

**Will participants receive any compensation (money, course credit, gifts)?**

There is currently no anticipated compensation. The possibility exists that some may receive course credit if an instructor of that undergraduate requires it for class in order to gain experience in conducting communication research.

**If so, please detail amount/session and total compensation possible. Additionally, describe what compensation amount is paid to participants who discontinue participation prior to completion.**

None

- If University funds are used to compensate participants, minimally, the name and address of participants will need to be provided to the Finance Office at OU. If participants will be paid $100 or more in a calendar year, participant social security numbers must be provided to Finance. The consent form must reflect this.

  None

**Instruments**

List all questionnaires, instruments, standardized tests below, with a brief description, and provide copies of each, labeled as APPENDIX C.

As previously stated, interviews will be used to answer the research questions of this study. Only brief demographic information will be asked in order to categorize participants and look for any interesting combinations among responses. The semi-structured research protocol that will be used to answer those research questions are listed in APPENDIX C.

**How will the data be analyzed? If applicable, state the hypothesis and describe how the analysis of the data will test that hypothesis.**

The proposed research questions are:

- **RQ1:** How do male members of a sports team use storytelling to communicatively construct the meanings of what it means to be an athlete?
- **RQ2:** What are the cultural expectations involved in being an athlete?
- **RQ2a:** What counter narratives exist that defy those cultural expectations?
- **RQ3:** What do the cultural expectations associated with being an athlete reveal about the culture of a particular athletic team?
- **RQ4:** How do athletes communicatively deal with injuries during athletic participation?

Interviews will be conducted in order to guide storied accounts of individuals in order to answer the research questions. After transcribing the
stories, the narratives will be explored for common traits. In attempts to answer the proposed research questions and to draw connections among stories, a thematic analysis of storied experiences is appropriate. Such thematic interpretations are a valuable way to make sense of how individuals interact with each other and rely on examining the recurrence of information, repetition of that information, and the connections between the reported experiences and perceptions of participants to make sense of those storied understandings (Owen, 1984). Using the suggestions of Riessman (2008), themes will be derived by looking at each story and drawing similarities and differences between them in order to answer the research questions listed above in this Project Outline Form. The themes will be highlighted by using specific examples that arise out of the interviews.

**Informed Consent Process**

Are you requesting a waiver or alteration of Informed Consent?  
Yes ☑  No  
(If yes, check one, and answer a - e)  

Waiver of signature  
Deception (incomplete disclosure)  
Complete Waiver of consent

a. Provide justification for the waiver.  

n/a  

b. Describe how the proposed research presents no more than minimal risk to participants.  

n/a  

c. Why will a waiver of informed consent not adversely affect the rights and welfare of participants?  

n/a  

d. Why is it impracticable to carry out the research without a waiver or alteration of informed consent?  

n/a  

e. How will pertinent information be provided to participants, if appropriate, at a later date?  

N/A, but if they ask for the results of the study, I will gladly provide them with a copy of my results.

**Even if waiver of written informed consent is granted, you will likely be**
required to obtain verbal permission that reflects the elements of informed consent (if appropriate). Please specify below information to be read/given to participants.

In order for the participants to give their informed consent, necessary information will be given to participants in both written and verbal form before the interview.

Attach copies of all consent documents or text and label as APPENDIX A. Please use the template provided at the end of this document.

Informed consent is a process, not just a form. Potential participants/representatives must be given the information they need to make an informed decision to participate in this research. How will you provide information/obtain permission?

General information stressing such things as the confidentiality of the interview will be provided to the participant before the interview session takes place. Once a meeting time and place has been established, and the researcher and participant meet face to face, the participant will receive more thorough information contained on the informed consent document which will be explained in detail before the interview begins. This way, the researcher will be certain that the participant knows the purpose of the interview and how their anonymity will be protected.

How and where will the consent process occur? How will it be structured to enhance independent and thoughtful decision-making? What steps will be taken to avoid coercion or undue influence?

As stated before, participants will be notified beforehand of the study’s intent and direction. If the participant chooses to participate, a more thorough explanation of the study will be communicated before the interview takes place in both written and verbal form. Before the interview, the participants will be required to sign the informed consent sheet. Their signature and participation will imply informed, uncoerced consent.

Will the investigator(s) be obtaining all of the informed consents? ☑ Yes ☐ No

If not, identify by name and training who will be describing the research to subjects/representatives and inviting their participation?

Will all adult participants have the capacity to give informed consent? If not, explain procedures to be followed.

Yes, all participants (18 or older) will have the capacity to give informed consent. The participants will go into the interview with a general understanding of the study and the steps that will be taken to protect their anonymity. If they choose to not participate in the interview, they will be free to leave.
If any participants will be minors, include procedures/form for parental consent and for the assent from the minor.

n/a

Will participants be deceived or incompletely informed regarding any aspect of the study? Yes ☑ No

If yes, provide rationale for use of deception.

n/a

If yes, attach copies of post-study debriefing information and label as APPENDIX D. Additionally, complete the questions related to a consent form waiver or alteration on page 9.

n/a

Investigator Assurance

I certify that the information provided in this outline form is complete and correct.

I understand that as Principal Investigator, I have ultimate responsibility for the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, conduct of the study and the ethical performance of the project.

I agree to comply with Ohio University policies on research and investigation involving human subjects (O.U. Policy # 19.052), as well as with all applicable federal, state and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects in research, including, but not limited to the following:

- The project will be performed by qualified personnel, according to the OU approved protocol.
- No changes will be made in the protocol or consent form until approved by the OU IRB.
- Legally effective informed consent will be obtained from human subjects if applicable, and documentation of informed consent will be retained, in a secure environment, for three years after termination of the project.
- Adverse events will be reported to the OU IRB promptly, and no later than within 5 working days of the occurrence.
- All protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. Research must stop at the end of that approval period unless the protocol is re-approved for another term.

I further certify that the proposed research is not currently underway and will
not begin until approval has been obtained. A signed approval form, on Office of Research Compliance letterhead, communicates IRB approval.

**Primary Investigator Signature**_________________________**Date** _______

(please print name) ___________________________________________________________________

**Co-Investigator Signature**_________________________**Date** _______

(please print name) ___________________________________________________________________

**Faculty Advisor/Sponsor Assurance**

By my signature as sponsor on this research application, I certify that the student(s) or guest investigator is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human subjects and has sufficient training and experience to conduct this particular study in accord with the approved protocol. In addition:

- I agree to meet with the investigator(s) on a regular basis to monitor study progress.
- Should problems arise during the course of the study, I agree to be available, personally, to supervise the investigator in solving them.
- I assure that the investigator will report significant or untoward adverse events to the IRB in writing promptly, and within 5 working days of the occurrence.
- If I will be unavailable, as when on sabbatical or vacation, I will arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence.

I further certify that the proposed research is not currently underway and will not begin until approval has been obtained. A signed approval form, on Office of Research Compliance letterhead, communicates IRB approval.

**Advisor/Faculty Sponsor Signature**_________________________**Date** _______

(please print name) ___________________________________________________________________

*The faculty advisor/sponsor must be a member of the OU faculty. The faculty member is considered the responsible party for legal and ethical performance of the project*
Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: The Communicative Constructions of Athletic Expectations: Narrative Analysis of Culture, Consequences, and Collective Silence

Researchers: Mr. Kenneth Sibal (& Dr. Claudia Hale)

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

The aim of this study is to gather your perceptions of and stories associated with being a college athlete. This study will explore your expectations of being an athlete and how athletics has influenced you throughout your life. Specifically, I would like to gain a better understanding of how expectations of being an athlete are formed on sports teams and how those expectations influence how you deal with relationships on the team, injuries, etc. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to engage in an interview session which may last between 30 minutes and 1 hour depending on how much you are willing to provide. PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY and you can stop at any time you wish.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no inherent risks or discomforts associated with this study. All information will be voluntary given.

Benefits

There are no apparent benefits with this study. However, you may find that telling stories of your experiences therapeutic or exciting. In addition, your participation will help to enrich the aspect of Communication Studies that focuses on sports.

Confidentiality and Records

You will not be personally identified in any reports based on this research. If portions of your stories are required to highlight significant findings in this research, a false name will be inserted in the place of your name in the final product. Details of some stories might be altered in insignificant ways that further insure your anonymity. The researcher will be the only individual that has access to the data you provide in your interviews. The researcher will not share your information with anyone and will be kept in a safe place. All that is required is your honest answers.
Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:
  * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
  * Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

[Insert sponsors of the research, if any, who will have access to identifiable data]

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact
Kenny Sibal – ks386806@ohio.edu – 740.597.3022
Dr. Claudia Hale – hale@ohio.edu – 740.593.4825

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

• you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions
• known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
• you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol
• you are 18 years of age or older
• your participation in this research is given voluntarily
• you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature________________________________________________________ Date________

Printed Name______________________________________________________
A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2 - research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

**Project Title:** The Communicative Constructions of Athletic Expectations: Narrative Analysis of Culture, Consequences, and Collective Silences

**Primary Investigator:** Kenneth Sibal

**Co-Investigator(s):**

**Advisor:** Claudia Hale

(if applicable)

**Department:** Communication Studies

Rebecca Cale, AAB, CIP
Office of Research Compliance

Date: 01/08/10

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
APPENDIX C: OU IRB AMENDMENT

Ohio University
Institutional Review Board
Project Amendment/Revision Form

Federal regulations require IRB approval prior to implementing proposed changes to research projects. Such changes include any change to the originally approved proposal, including, but not limited to changes in number of participants, changes in recruitment/research procedures, and changes in supporting documents (consent form, debriefing form, questionnaires, advertisements, etc.)

Please complete this form, and attach all revised documents or supporting information.

Proposal # | 10E007 | Date | 1/08/2010
---|---|---|---

### Proposal Title
The Communicative Constructions of Athletic Expectations: Narrative Analysis of Culture, Consequences, and Collective Silences

### Principal Investigator Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Kenneth Sibal</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Communication Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Lasher Hall - 43 W. Union Street - Athens, Oh 45701</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Ks386806@ohio.edu">Ks386806@ohio.edu</a></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>859.494.4814</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Study Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X Active (currently in progress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project on Hold (pending approval of this amendment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project not yet started (no participants enrolled)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed to new participant entry (data analysis/intervention occurring)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Describe the proposed changes and why they are being made.

There is just one change being proposed. Currently, the previous IRB states that I will be interviewing student athletes (football players; 18 years of age and older) at Ohio University. I would like to extend this participant population to include football players at other colleges and universities.
These changes are being made mainly out of convenience as new populations elsewhere have acknowledged an interest to help in my research. These changes will not influence the direction of my study or the interview protocol to be used. Upon approval, I will interview these additional populations.

2. Describe how, if at all, the proposed changes affect the risks of the study.

The proposed changes will not pose any additional risks to participants.

3. Describe how, if at all, the proposed changes affect the benefits of the study.

There will be no additional benefits associated with participating in the study.

4. Does the revision affect the consent/assent document(s)?

a. If yes, will any participants need to be re-consented as a result of the changes? If so, please describe process to be used. Include two copies of the revised consent/assent documents, one with changes highlighted, and one without highlighting.

Principal Investigator Signature

Date

Advisor Signature

Date

If new investigator is added, a revised page 1 of the project outline form, a signed signature page of the Project Outline Form, and proof of training is required.

Please note that approval of an amendment does not change the expiration date of the study.

Please return this form to: Office of Research Compliance
117 Research & Technology Center
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701-2979
The amendment, detailed below, and submitted for the following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University.

Project: The Communicative Constructions of Athletic Expectations: Narrative Analysis of Culture, Consequences, and Collective Silences

Amendment: Expand Recruitment to Other Universities

Primary Investigator: Kenneth Sibal
Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Claudia Hale

Department: Communication Studies

Rebecca G. Cale, AAB, CIP
Office of Research Compliance

03/04/10
APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player*</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Division I</td>
<td>Linebacker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Division I</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Division I</td>
<td>Quarterback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Division I</td>
<td>Running Back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Division I</td>
<td>Wide Receiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Division I</td>
<td>Tight End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Division I</td>
<td>Defensive Back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Division III</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Division III</td>
<td>Wide Receiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Division III</td>
<td>Running Back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vick</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Division III</td>
<td>Defensive Back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>NAIA</td>
<td>Defensive Back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>NAIA</td>
<td>Wingback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>NAIA</td>
<td>Defensive Back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>NAIA</td>
<td>Defensive Lineman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pseudonyms are used as opposed to participant names. These pseudonyms appear in Chapter 4.
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

**Preliminary Questions:**
1. Name (pseudonym will be used in the final report), Position, Year, Years playing football, Awards, Other sports?

**Main Questions:**
1. Tell me how you came to play football here.
2. Tell me how your team did this past year.
3. Tell me how you did this past year.
4. Tell me what you would have done differently this past year. Why?
5. Tell me what being a member of the team means.
6. Tell me how most players get prepared for a game; practice/pregame. (Coach-stories; motivation?)
7. Tell me a story of when you became injured while playing. (Is there a story you commonly tell?)
8. Tell me why you did/not continue to try to play (overcome?)
9. Tell me how your teammates reacted.
10. Tell me how your coach reacted.
11. Tell me a story about another teammate that became injured in a similar way and how they were (un)able to overcome their injury.
12. What kinds of injuries are commonly experienced? What kinds are expected?
13. How do you tell if you can continue to play or not?
14. Tell me about someone that is commonly looked up to on the team. What qualities do they have?
15. Tell me about someone that is looked down upon on the team. What qualities do they have?
16. What expectations are associated with being an athlete on the team? How do you think others personally feel about these standards?
17. Describe what happens when someone does not meet those standards? What do others say to them? How are they treated?
18. From a personal standpoint, how do you think playing football has helped you develop as an individual?
19. Tell me the benefits/drawbacks that are part of playing football.
20. Anything else?