

Visions of Manhood: Socialization to Masculinity and the Boys and Girls Club of  
America

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Boys and Girls Club of America has been a staple in many towns, as well as in many children's lives, across in the United States. From the beginning of the organization, its mission has been to provide an alternative environment for child and adolescent alike to engage and learn from one another. This can be seen in the array of programs and activities that are offered to its members, but to what extent do organizations like the Boys and Girls Club of America shape gender development, specifically masculinity?

This is a qualitative study that utilizes participant and non-participant observations, informants, and ethnographic style interviews to examine how the Boys and Girls Club of America is a socializing institution that is separate from the schools and family. The data source for this study comes from boys from ages ten to fifteen, who are predominantly African-American and Hispanic, and are members of a local Boys and Girls Club of America.

The objective of this paper is to understand how non-traditional socializing institutions influence gender development, specifically the development of masculinity. There are three key questions that are asked to evaluate this process. First, how do pre- and early-adolescent boys of color conceptualize their transition into manhood? Second, what role does the Boys and Girls Club of America play in the construction of masculinity? Finally, how does a local definition of hegemonic masculinity create differential outcomes for the boys of the Inspire club?

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

*[B]eing a problem is a strange experience, -- peculiar even for one who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe. It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first burst upon one, all in a day, as it were. I remember well the shadow swept across me (Bois, 1995).*

The transition from boyhood to manhood is fraught with many challenges that must be overcome. In the case of African American boys, these challenges become magnified. The quotation above from W.E.B. Du Bois was written in 1903, and unfortunately, has been the case for generations before and well after this was written. Black masculine identity, in the context of a white dominated patriarchal society, is constructed as a problem. As Du Bois discussed in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903, 1995), black men are caught in the grips of two worlds: the challenge of either remaining true to the identity as a black man or assimilating and endorsing the ways of white men. This double consciousness, as he refers to it, plagues black men and sets the tone for future interactions (Bois, 1995). The problems with black masculinity rest on the various forms of racism found throughout white dominated patriarchal society. Some of the first encounters that pre and early adolescent boys of color face is the education system (Ferguson, 2012). Because of the labeling that occurs in the public school, African American boys often find this subtle racism leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because of this many boys resort to enacting the hypermasculine stereotype as a means to establish themselves as men (Anderson, 1999; Cassidy and Stevenson, 2005).

Racial violence has been a common theme through American history. In recent years, the visibility of racial violence has steadily increased since the death of Trayvon

Martin in February 2012. Since his death, there have been many other highly publicized instances of racial violence against black men. From Tamir Rice to the recent shooting of nine church goers in a Charleston, North Carolina church, the visibility of racial violence has increased. How does one go about taking in the spike of publicized racial violence? How does a young African American boy go about his daily life when others around the same age are being killed? What options does this young African American boy have as he grows older, will he strive to be *decent* or will he succumb to the *street* life (Anderson, 1999). In some studies, this is explained as these boys managing their black identity by masking their fear with an expression of hypermasculinity (Cassidy and Stevenson, 2005). However, this only adds more fuel to the fire in that these impression management strategies only serve to validate the fears of a white dominated patriarchal society (hooks, 2004).

I propose that what is needed is an intersectional approach to the examining how boys of color see their transition into manhood. By utilizing intersectionality, there is not exclusion or delegitimization of the boys' experiences and allows for an understanding of what these boys feel is important. To achieve this, I will use a mixture of ethnographic style interviews, participant observation, and survey data.

The journey of becoming a man is one filled with challenges. One of the biggest hurdles that boys face when making this journey comes with the troubled waters of adolescence. This process is made more difficult as racism, both social and institutional, create challenges for those boys who do not fit the regional definitions of masculinity.



## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Preview

Studies that center on the construction of gender and masculinity tend to focus on two age groups: childhood and adulthood. In the instances when researchers examine adolescent masculinity they tend to concentrate on white masculine identities, and constructs black masculinity as the “other”. The problem with focusing only on these two groups is that it creates a gap in our understanding of masculine construction adolescent boys of color. Therefore, using the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and intersectionality, this study aims to fill in the gaps of the literature surrounding boys of color and their conceptualization of manhood.

### Previous Literature

#### *Child Masculinity*

The creation of gendered identity among children grounds itself on how children interact with each other. This process occurs on elementary school playgrounds, daycare centers, and after-school programs, mainly any location that afford groups of children unstructured time away from adults (Thorne, 1993). Based on the ethnographic look of gender among elementary children, Barrie Thorne’s *Gender Play* (1993) found that gender is created even at this level. She places children at the center of their gender socialization by showing that they are agents of their socialization. The process of gender development at this stage is built heavily on children playing, and through this playing they began establishing the borders of masculinity and femininity. Thorne uses the term borderwork to describe the process of children separating out into gender groups. Borderwork is a phenomenon that occurs among large groups and facilities separation

based on similar attributes. In the case of Thorne's *Gender Play* (1993), this separation is based on the gender characteristics of the children she observed.

These groups merge around a set of practices based on the expectations of either masculinity or femininity. For instance, as Thorne describes, boys will engage in play in large groups, based on competition, physical contact, and tend to be public in their play (Thorne, 1993). When girls engage in play, they tend to form smaller, more intimate groups with an emphasis on cooperative play (Thorne, 1993). These differences establish a binary that arbitrarily funnels individuals into a dichotomy that marginalizes boys and girls who may not entirely fit into these groups. The context of interactions shapes the construction of gender by allowing the creation of separate gender groups, this being facilitated by borderwork.

The social practice of coding gendered behavior and props establishes the borders between masculinity and femininity (Cahill, 1989; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Spencer Cahill (1989) describes this process as adults ascribing gender traits to children with objects traditionally seen as gendered. This gender coding comes in the form of miniaturized versions of adult clothing for infants, having infants dressed in colors traditionally seen as gendered, or other props signify gender identity (Cahill, 1989). The older a child becomes, the more they recognize gender coded presentations. They then begin to police the gender presentations of others eventually creating gender groups.

#### *Adult Masculinity*

To name all the studies that involve older men as the subject of study would be a herculean task alone, but the works mentioned center around the transition from boyhood to manhood.

In many of these studies, participants are being asked to think reflectively about their experiences of becoming a man (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 2008; Raphael, 1988). Michael Kimmel, in his book *Guyland* (2008) discussed men's experience while they lived in, what he refers to as, "guyland" (Kimmel, 2008). Guyland, as Kimmel refers to, is a new stage of development for men, mainly white middle-class, which includes the immaturity of boyhood, without the responsibility of manhood (Kimmel, 2008). The space of guyland is occupied by 16 to 25-year-old white men and is established through entitlement and middle-class privilege (Kimmel, 2008). Their social position allows for the consumption of masculine gender practices that reproduce men's dominance over women and other men that do not fit this particular mold. Much like the men that were interviewed for *Guyland* (2008), the men from Ray Raphael's *The Men from the Boys* (1988), were asked to think back to the time when they felt that they became men (Kimmel, 2008; Raphael, 1988).

Another theme that is found in the literature surrounding adult masculinity is the homosocial bonding that occurs during masculine rites of passage. Homosociality refers to connections between members of the same sex sharing non-sexual attractions for one another (Bird, 1996). The homosocial bonding that occurs in guyland, and in the rite of passage rituals found in Raphael's *The Men from Boys* (1988) shows the emotional detachment that spurs the separation from women, competition with other men to show their manliness, and the objectification of women, reinforces masculine domination over women (Bird, 1996). Examples of this behavior come in many different forms, but all perform these same basic steps. This process is about the performance of masculinity in

front of other men, and it serves as an opportunity reaffirm their masculine identity (Connell, 1995; 1987; Kimmel, 2008; Raphael, 1988).

Homosocial bonding becomes the process that establish the prevailing definition of manhood, not only for that individual but for that group. In the case of transitions to manhood, this becomes important when new unproven boys attempt to become a man (Kimmel, 2008; Raphael, 1988; Bourdieu, 2001). At the core of this process. It allows for the established men to confer the status of man onto these unproven boys. These performances of masculinity in homosocial settings occur across all ages groups,

### *Adolescent Masculinity*

In this section, I will compare the work of C.J Pascoe and Elijah Anderson that are useful to understanding the construction of masculinity among adolescents. In both of these books, masculine performance for other males can be seen in two different versions. The difference between these two works comes with the challenges that two different racial groups; black and white.

Pascoe examined the masculine practices of white adolescent boys and their use of the word “faggot”. The homophobic teasing that takes place among white adolescent boys at River High School encapsulates a new take on masculine socialization (Pascoe, 2013).The exchanges these boys have with one another are geared towards learning how to tailor their masculine presentation. When they engage in performance that is received as effeminate or unmasculine, they run the risk of being called out as a “faggot” (Pascoe, 2007). This type of homophobic teasing builds into a systematic process of masculine socialization that adolescent males must navigate to prove their gender identity (Pascoe, 2013). This relies on the boys’ performances of masculinity to be judged publicly by the

other boys. While this public judgment sounds like harsh high school memories, this, in fact, happens in day-to-day interactions with everyone. The interpretations of gender displays are “fleeting”, and only questioned when there is an issue producing an authentic performance of masculinity (West and Zimmerman, 1987). By having peers challenge effeminacy among other adolescent boys they are learning to reject feminine characteristics to claim a masculine identity (Forbes, 1997; Pascoe, 2007; 2013). On the surface, these interactions appeared to be harmless, but the tones change as they pass through racial groups.

In her analysis of black masculinity, Pascoe discusses black adolescent masculinity in the context of the predominantly white River High School. Framing her argument around attention to appearance, which among white adolescent males signifies unmasculine behavior, she observes that black adolescent males are allowed to engage in this behavior (Pascoe, 2007). However, unlike the white adolescent males who rhetorically engage in homophobic name calling to challenge one another’s masculinity the same action magnifies when directed towards a teenager who is black (Pascoe, 2007). Because of racism and homophobia, the challenge of masculinity that word “faggot” offers a threat to black masculinity that results in visceral reactions from the African-American teenagers at River High (Pascoe, 2007). Moreover, with these reactions many of the African American boys who face institutional sanctions, which their Anglo-American counterparts do not face.

To offer a contrast to Pascoe’s examination of black masculinity among adolescent males, Elijah Anderson’s *Code of the Street* (1999) offers another perspective.

In his book, Anderson provides an exploration of urban black families, and his look at the role that street code plays in the construction of urban black masculinity. We find that there are similarities between the masculine performances of Pascoe's teenagers and the teenagers from *Code of the Street* (1999). Anderson describes the code of the street being based on respect and often creates situations where individuals tradeoff between *decent* and *street* performances (Anderson, 1999). This switching between *street* and *decent* lies in the manner in which a person presents themselves. The street code of respect that Anderson discusses applies to both men and women. However, the construction of masculinity in his book heavily relies on these men and adolescent boys' ability to assert their masculine identity. Masculine presentations found here focus on being able to show that they are a man. These displays of masculinity can come in the form of showing physical prowess, the number of sexual partners that they have had, as well as the number of children these men have fathered (Anderson, 1999).

There was a different set of standards that applied to the African American boys. Unlike their white counterparts, the African American boys could pay closer attention to their appearance, and the condition of their clothing. However, the symbols that are more commonly associated with effeminacy among the white adolescences at River High are seen as status symbols for African Americans (Pascoe, 2007). The status associated with social class, clean shoes, tags on their hats, and attention to their attire were indications that they were not "ghetto" (Pascoe, 2007). In the course of Anderson's book, we have the same situation happening to the African American families. The term "ghetto", colloquially used by the African American students of River High, was a term that was used in *Code of The Street* (1999) to define street families. Anderson's use of the term,

while not referring to an exact group of people, but instead was using referring to a type of neighborhood created by institutional racism, and various illicit activities (Anderson, 1999).

In his book, there is a duality of street life that African American males navigate in order to display the correct performance they must be able to code switch between “street” and “decent” (Anderson, 1999). For Anderson, this duality revolves around the position of the family. Decent families are striving to fit the model of the standard North American family as closely as they can. This includes two parents who provide financial and emotional aid. Anderson describes the father as being the bedrock of this family type, and functions as the patriarch of the family (Anderson, 1999). Contrasting the decent families with the street families, we find a very different structure of the family. The most significant difference is the number of parents. It is typical to find a single-parent household headed by women. Anderson characterizes street families as being selfish in their interactions with other people, and the children of street families are usually left up to their own devices (Anderson, 1999). The discussion of hypermasculinity as a means to cope with “vulnerability and powerlessness they may emerge from living in dangerous, unpredictable [urban social] contexts (Cassidy and Stevenson, 2005)” shapes the masculine experiences for the men found in *Code of the Street* (1999).

In both of these books, masculine behavior is monitored by other men or boys. Referring to a recurring theme throughout the literature surrounding the construction of masculinity, groups of men serve as the social gatekeeper of what makes someone a man (Corprew, Matthews, & Mitchell, 2014). The presentations of masculinity in both books

relies on the presence of an established definition of masculinity. In the situation where individuals do not fit this model of masculinity, they may resort to expressions of hypermasculinity.

Hypermasculinity is a strategy used by men that do not fit the pattern of hegemonic masculinity and fall along lower rungs of the masculinity hierarchy. These individuals are using this as a means to manage stigma attached to them, whether it be from racial/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, or social class (Christensen and Jensen, 2014). This overproduction of masculinity is a means to prove that they are masculine (Connell, 1987, 1995). However, by overcompensating in their masculine performance, they in turn become stigmatized.

These self-perceived deficiencies that they feel result in a constant fear of being effeminate. The fag discourse that Pascoe discusses in her book and subsequent article creates a systematic push for the white adolescents of River High to show that they are masculine. While these boys engage in homophobic teasing to root out effeminacy among other boys, they continue to build their masculine identity by showing masculine traits. These masculine traits included continuing regular classes while being soiled from auto-shop, not spending too much time on the clothes that they wear, to the one-upmanship with supposed sexual conquests. Ironically enough of these boys spend considerable time explaining how not to look like a fag; they in turn spent this time considering their appearance.

Instances of hypermasculinity among the Anglo-Americans of River High are primarily centered around issues of social class. This can be seen in the time spent not



caring about their appearances, oblivious to fashion trends, and aversion to cleanliness. These actions, when combined, ensured that they would be not considered effeminate.

Instances of hypermasculinity from *Code of the Street* (1999) are intertwined with race and social class. The young black men craft their *street* presentation, in response to the condition of their environment. Rather than having the considerable protection that middle-class life has to offer they must utilize a hypermasculine presentation to navigate their environment (Cassidy and Stevenson, 2005). At a young age, children learn that violence and force are legitimate means for resolving issues (Anderson, 1999). This builds on into their adolescence, and eventual adulthood is shaping their interactions that reaffirm racist stereotypes and leads to the stigmatization poor African American/black masculine identity.

These two books create a discussion of masculinity that begins to bring into to focus what masculinity looks like when we examine the relationship between masculine socialization and racial identity. Understanding the connection between hypermasculine behavior and racial identities we glimpse the world that person of color must endure, but still are not able to examine this occurrence without problems.

### **Problem**

The goal of this paper is to add to our understanding of the construction of masculinity from the experiences of boys of color. This study examines boys of color between the ages of ten and fifteen years old. At this age range, these boys are caught between boyhood and the pressures of adolescence. In order to examine these how these boys conceptualize their transition into manhood, I will utilize two theoretical principles, hegemonic masculinity, and intersectionality.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Hegemonic Masculinity and Intersectionality*

The combination of these two theories creates a framework that has the potential to propel our understanding of gender relations with not only women but men. In many ways, R.W. Connell began to entertain the notion of intersectionality within the 2005 book titles *Masculinities*. While she does not outright refer to intersectionality, she does work with this idea in the very nature of *Masculinities* (Christensen and Jensen, 2014). Rendering down an identity to a single unit of comparison does not explore the interconnectedness and complexities that exist within identities. Using the concepts hegemonic masculinities and intersectionality allows for a more sophisticated understanding of how boys of color conceptualize their transition into manhood.

Many of the characteristics of men seems to include a monolithic definition of men. Within the gender group of men, we find that there is not a monolithic conception of masculinity. Much like any group in American society, we can see that men come in all shapes, sizes and colors. This concept is discussed at great lengths by R.W. Connell in her books *Gender and Power* (1987) and *Masculinities* (1995), as well her article revisiting her topic of hegemonic masculinity.

R.W. Connell's books *Gender and Power* and *Masculinities* offers a unique perspective when it comes to gender. In this book, Connell examines the position of men and women in society and identifies attributes that create both masculinity and femininity. In the creation of these gender categories, Connell can explore the power dynamic that exists between men and women. Rooted in the power dynamic is the space

that men and women occupy, and attached to these spaces are set of expectations that men and women are compelled to follow. This process helped to define these masculine and feminine attributes into two categories that she refers to as hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity is, in essence, a domineering form of masculinity that defines itself in relation to women and subordinate forms of masculinity (Connell, 1987; 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The domineering nature of hegemonic masculinity does not derive its domination from sheer force. Instead, this domination comes from significant amounts of the population defining and complying with a societal definition of masculinity (Connell, 1987; 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Christensen and Jensen, 2014). An efficient means of glimpsing what society sees as a man's man can be seen, in part, by the representations of masculinity in popular media. This is by no means a definitive definition of masculinity, but rather widely accepted displays of masculinity. In American society, these images included people such as actors, athletes, and, in some cases, politicians.

Juxtaposed to this creation of hegemonic masculinity is the creation of emphasized femininity. Emphasized femininity does not enjoy the same the hierarchical position as hegemonic, in regards to the gender binary (Connell, 1987). The very nature of hegemony leaves only room for one group to hold the hegemonic status. Given the gender relations between men and women, more specifically the patriarchal structure of society, women are institutionally subordinate to men. However, by appealing to the interests of hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity the dominant form femininity (Connell, 1987).

In the book *Masculinities*, Connell looks closer at masculinity but rather than the focusing a single form of masculinity she examines the subordinate forms of masculinity. These masculinities include masculinities constructed around racial identity or social class, and establish themselves as compliant, subordinate, or marginalized to the hegemonic masculinity. This book looks to understand the complexities that exist in men, and their interactions with other men. This hierarchy does not imply a *good* or *bad* attitudinal understanding of men, but a means by which to show the degree that men emulate a societal definition of manhood. These hierarchal categories represent efforts to either comply or outright reject what is defined as the hegemonic form of masculinity (Connell, 1995).

The major concept that is discussed by Connell is hegemonic masculinity. This concept represents the most dominant form of masculinity that is present not only in society but also in a given context (Connell, 1995). Understanding the importance of context is vital when looking at hegemonic masculinity. In her article with James Messerschmitt's 2005 article *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* they revisit the contextual nature of hegemonic masculinity and introduce the geography of masculinity. Geography of masculinity was introduced to help contextualize different accounts of hegemonic masculinity that were produced. This concept is a three tier typology of masculinity; global, regional and local. All of these settings define masculinity in a different way that reflect the types of interactions that are taking place (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The biggest differences and most relevant to this study, which are discussed is the between local and regional definitions. Local definitions of masculinity are more likely to be achieved than either regional or global definitions

(Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In many cases, local hegemonic masculinity is defined as being contradictory to the other two definitions of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

The irony of this concept is that while hegemonic masculinity is defined as the dominant form of masculinity it is an ideal that is rarely achieved by individual men (Connell, 1987; 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The set of social practices is such that almost no one can achieve hegemonic domination. This concept is reproduced by the men who strive to reach this level but fall short and legitimized by the women who are submissive to this type of masculinity. As was discussed above, the definition of hegemonic masculinity depends on the context of interactions taking place. The most striking examples of this process taking place can be seen on the local level studies that use ethnomethodological approaches. Examples of this can be seen in *Guyland* (2008) where the hegemonic masculinity found in this social context is a white, affluent male who binge drinks regularly and frequently hooks up with women (Kimmel, 2008). This identity would be sought after by adopting the behaviors that maximize his exposure to hypermasculine behavior.

Criticism of hegemonic masculinity are vast and cover many different facets of masculinity. These critiques that have shaped the understanding of hegemonic masculinity include the ambiguity of who can lay claim to being a part of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This ambiguity, as Connell and Messerschmidt discuss, allows for this concept to serve as a process that shows the construction of hegemonic masculinity take place via social process, rather than an

arbitrary label given to an identity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Also with the ambiguity comes a degree of overlap among masculinity groups, namely hegemonic and complicit groups. What this overlap alludes to is the nature of hegemonic masculinity and the contextually based definitions that allow this concept to reflect the changing nature of social interaction. Connell and Messerschmidt go on to discuss this as overlap as a by-product of effective application of hegemony (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This is due to the complicit group's push to emulate the image of hegemonic masculinity.

An interesting lens that adds a new element to hegemonic masculinity is adding intersectional analysis. Intersectional analysis, established by Patricia Hill Collins, examines identity and how the complex of facets, that include but are not limited to race, class, gender, and sexuality, intersect to establish an identity. These traits serve as methods in which a person can be subject to oppression, or as Patricia Hill Collins refers to them "systems of oppression" are combined and examined in an intersectional analysis (Collins, 1998). In essence, hegemonic masculinity can be greatly enhanced by the inclusion of intersectionality by helping to tease out the understanding that some may occupy more than one masculine category at a time (Christensen and Jensen, 2014). Examples of this come in the form of racial identities. A black man who is emulating patriarchal masculinity, as described by hooks (2004), looks to establish his family in the light of the patriarchal white nuclear family, which according to Black pundits represents a healthy family (Anderson, 1999; hooks, 2004). For Anderson this was the defining trait of *decent* families and made the traits of these men something to be desired in urban neighborhoods, but when they move from this context their racial identity becomes a means in which they are marginalized in white society (Anderson, 1999; Christensen and

Jensen, 2014; hooks, 2004). The stereotypical image of black masculinity in urban environments encapsulates Anderson's description of *street* masculinity. A highly selfish and violent projection of masculinity defined throughout code of the street (Anderson, 1999). The dominance of this projection prompted many people from this neighborhood to adopt a *street* image in order to avoid confrontations. This process is vitally important for the boys and men living in these neighborhoods. However, this projection of *street* masculinity becomes a stigmatized stereotype of ghetto black men that are violent and dangerous

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has evolved since its inception, and its ability to change has led to a lasting impact on the field of masculinity studies. While this concept is easy to envision, the process of establishing and reproducing hegemonic masculinity is a detailed and involved process. Many critics of this concept raise the concern that it is too ambiguous, heteronormative, and only focuses on negative aspects of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The inclusion of intersectionality to our understanding of hegemonic masculinity allows for a more detailed examination of the dynamics that exist when examining masculine identity.

### CHAPTER III: METHODS

In order to explore how boys of color conceptualize their transition to manhood, this study utilizes different methodological approaches. These approaches were qualitative in nature and consisted of participant observations, ethnographic style interviews, and surveys. By combining these methodological approaches, we can develop a picture of how boys of color conceptualize their transition to manhood. This process uses an inductive data analysis that was guided by the principles found in *Grounded Theory* put forth by Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Using grounded theory, the researcher develops concepts derived from data identified in the analysis process.

The target sample of consisted of African American and Hispanic/Latino boys between the ages of ten to fifteen years of age. There were two locations in which these subjects could be recruited; a sports league or a community organization. The location was chosen for data collection was a local chapter of The Boys and Girls Club of America. After the researcher had volunteered for a period of three months, it was determined that the Inspire club, a pseudonym, would work as a data collection site. This organization was chosen because of the availability of subjects that fall within the age range of the target sample. Participants were collected using non-probability sampling specifically convenience and snowball sampling.

The first level of contact with the Inspire club was with the Anthony, the director of this club. Once permission was given by the director, I began recruiting participants. Consent/Assent forms were placed on the front desk, and contact with parents was



initiated through Anthony. Parents of the subjects were given consent/assent forms and were asked to leave these forms at the front desk of the Inspire club. The researcher's contact information, as well as the supervising professor's contact information, was clearly listed on both consent and assent forms. As participants turned in their consent/assent forms, they would be interviewed and given a short survey.

The interview locations varied based on the needs of the Inspire club. I used a non-secluded room, and the Inspire club accommodated as best as they could. A majority of the interviews took place in the Teen room, and the rest were divided between the Computer room and classrooms at the Inspire club. Interviews were recorded and stored separately from member's identity in a password secured storage. In addition to the interview, members were asked to complete a short survey. The results of these survey were tallied and added to the participant's transcripts. Prior to analysis the recordings were converted to transcripts, and the recordings were deleted. The names of participants were replaced with pseudonyms so that their identities would remain anonymous. Participants were compensated for their time with a pizza party that I funded. This pizza party was held at the Inspire club.

The participant observation data was collected at the Inspire club and the surrounding neighborhood. The collection of field notes included a mix between mental, electronic, and handwritten notes. Given the nature of the volunteer assignment, taking notes while working at the same time was not feasible. Therefore, mental notes were written down at the end of the volunteer shift in a field journal. Electronic notes were taken when the opportunity presented itself, and done in a manner that resembled

answering a text message. These notes were taken on a smartphone and later were transferred to a master collection of field notes. This master collection of field notes consisted of the electronic, mental and handwritten notes from the field journal.

### **Biases**

Biases that I bring with me into this study includes many facets of my background and this journey to this topic has its roots in the activism of my past. The first forays into understanding the complexities of masculinity started when I joined and eventually established an organization that focused on prevention and outreach of sexual assault on college campuses. I was active in this organization from its inception to the time I graduated with my bachelor's degree. During the course of my involvement with this organization, I developed an unrefined understanding of masculinity. While this understanding was based on activism, it was not until I began my graduate career that my understanding became refined. By no means am I claiming to have a thorough understanding of masculinity, but my understanding had developed since starting. Much of this understanding comes from being able to apply what I have learned through my personal experiences.

The keystone of any qualitative research rests on the researcher's ability to understand the experiences of the group that they are studying. In order to understand these experiences, the researcher needs to understand themselves. My identity as a middle-class Hispanic cisman shapes the way that I see the world. When it came time to conduct this qualitative research, it was important to understand the influence that my background as a middle-class Hispanic cisman and teacher training had on my

perception. Since my area of focus in Sociology is gender studies, specifically masculinity, I must remain conscious of the privilege that I possess in this patriarchal society. First and foremost the perspective that I need to understand is the influence of being a man in society. Understanding the influence, and bias, that come with being a man in our society is crucial to conducting research on the construction of masculinity. This bias comes in the form of judging boys or other men that do not fit the societal definition, and delegitimizing their experiences.

It is no secret that men enjoy a position of privilege and authority in society, but in order to conduct effective qualitative research there must be a critical evaluation of my position in society as a man. There have been a number of instances where I have identified this male privilege. Some of the first instances that I noticed was in childhood. I grew up in a family of three children where I was the middle child. My older brother and I enjoyed the free fun of the ranch as we grew older. This included everything from hunting rabbits in the pasture to helping my father moving and arranging material for his budding business. There was no questioning as to what we were doing outside or even going to a friend's house. However, this story was vastly different from my sister. Granted, she was younger than me by three years, Initially, I accepted the explanation of "boys are supposed to do stuff like that and girls are not", but as I grew older that didn't seem to be enough explanation. Instances like this sparked my interests in the difference in which women and men are treated in society.

It wasn't until I transferred to Texas Tech when I realized that these differences were much larger than I had realized. This came to focus when I had helped to establish a

sexual assault prevention organization on campus. It was through this organization that I finally realized the extent to which men have power and privilege over women. While conducting outreach programs and various forms of activism I was able to see firsthand the how nonchalantly both men and women dismiss the claims of survivors and promote behavior that perpetuates rape culture. It was at this point when I was shown that men who speak out against sexual violence are pushed to outside boundaries of what society calls a man. At that point, I was exposed to societal pressures, that prior to this I had no real idea the extent of power that these forces held.

The next bias that was an active challenge to my data collection process was my background as a public school teacher. The duties attached to volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club included making sure that members followed the rules, and providing supervision during members' activities. While teacher training provides skills for performing these actions, it leads to establishing one as an authority figure. This is problematic in that my first few field experiences I ended up curtailing members' behaviors that could have provided data on members' interactions. My concern was focused on ensuring the safety of the members as they were interacting with each other. While the safety of the members is something that must be maintained at the Inspire club, it impaired data collection because it set me in the role of disciplinarian rather than a neutral observer. This was a dilemma that was difficult to resolve.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the interviews were transcribed, common themes were generated into codes for analysis. These codes were organized into categories and then converted into

concepts. Since the number of recorded interviews was twelve, and the length of the interviews averaged ten minutes, the analysis was conducted by hand.

## **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS**

There are three different research questions that arose out of data analysis. These questions range from broad conceptualizations down to the outcomes of interactions among the boys of the Inspire club. These questions are as follows: How do pre and early adolescent boys of color conceptualize their transition into manhood? What role does the Boys and Girls Club of America play in the construction of masculinity? How does the local hegemonic masculinity of the Inspire club result in differential outcomes for boys based on their presentation of a gendered self?

### **What is manhood to the boys? To the adults?**

How do pre and early adolescent boys of color that conceptualize their transition into manhood? This question is divided into two parts. This first part addresses the meaning of manhood for both the boys surveyed and the adults of the Inspire club. The second half of this question asks what this transition looks like and when it takes place.

The definition of manhood comes in many different forms. While all of these boys' answers were unique, a major theme was developed when examining their responses. For these boys of the Inspire club, responsibility was the key to their understanding of what comprises manhood. The responsibility that these boys discuss in their one-on-one interviews revolved around being able to provide not only for themselves but their future families.

These responsibilities came in many different forms that ranged from taking care of younger siblings to working part time in their father's computer shop. In the course of

the interviews, all the boys reported a level of ambivalence when asked to think about situations that make them feel older. In the quotation below is an example from the interviews where this ambivalence affects how they feel about going older.

It makes me feel good that I can babysit him, and that my mom trusts me that much, but sometimes I feel that I shouldn't be doing it because I could run into a problem and something. (Michael, Interview #3)

Michael was not the only boy to express this concern about becoming older. However, he was one of the few who articulated this sentiment. Although he was happy that his mother had given him this responsibility, the presence of doubt of being able to handle any situation is present and is related to the general feeling of ambivalence towards growing older.

Not all the boys interviewed express ambivalent attitudes towards growing older. Elijah is a fourteen-year-old African-American male and is the most active in leadership, and received the most attention from the staff members.

Let's see. My Dad and my Mom, like, they are always treatin me not like I'm grown, but like a young man. Like you know, they treat me in the right way. Not just saying that I'm a grown man, and I can do whatever I want to, I get to stay up late like it's none of that. It's just like they treat me like I'm responsible, *which I am*. (Elijah, Interview #5)

Elijah is the only subject that refers to himself as a young man, rather than a boy. In the quotation above he is describing his interactions with his parents and how they, as he feels, treat him right. The responsibility that his parents give him helps to build his identity as a young man.

*What do the adults think of manhood?*

The adults of the Inspire club had their own conception of what makes someone a man. While there was no overt discussion as to what makes someone a man, the messages as to what makes someone a man was found throughout their interactions. The most visible of these interactions came from Arnold, the teacher from Passport to Manhood.

Arnold is an older African American man in his mid-forties. He was a former officer in the military and is now volunteering with the Boys and Girls Club of America. The way that Arnold presents himself offers a glimpse into what he feels makes someone a man, and because he is instructing adolescent boys on how to become men he exemplifies this image. From his physical demeanor and speech patterns to his interactions with the boys during Passport to Manhood, the message that is being sent emphasizes control over one's emotions.

Since this was a program designed to help boys navigate the waters to manhood Arnold held these boys that were late accountable for their actions. The result was not to discipline these boys that were late, but rather to show them that men do their best to show up on time. Those who showed up late had to declare to the other boys why they were late, and after they had done this, they would be asked a question by Arnold, concerning the ethics that they have discussed previously. For Arnold being a man means accepting responsibility which also includes being punctual, having a level of emotional control, and being able to address other men.



*What and when is transition?*

As these boys accept more responsibility, they envision themselves becoming more of a man. Through the interviews, the boys expressed two types of responsibility. These forms reflect the concerns that they share about growing older. The first form of responsibility is to their family. An example of this comes in the form of caring for younger siblings and showing concern for being able to care for a future family. This concern of family was expressed by all members interviewed. The second form of responsibility was to themselves as individuals. While all members expressed having responsibilities towards their families, only a few reported that they would need responsibility to themselves to be considered a man.

Responsibility to the family was discussed by all boys interviewed. There was a mixture of responsibility to both their immediate family and their future family. Rooted in these concerns for their families is connected to the expectations of men being the provider for the family. Being responsible for a family, especially at their age, rests with these boys understanding the situation of their family. Most members that participated in the interviews were highly concerned about the financial situations, which according to Annette Lareau (2011) is indicative of a lower socio-economic class. The manner in which their concerns play out conflates adulthood with manhood. The congruency between the survey data and interviews can be seen in Michael's statement about what concerns him as he grows older.

Interviewer: Ok, so, the biggest thing that concerns that you have about growing older is pay bills, raising a child, and marriage...

Michael: Marriage Problems.

Interviewer: Marriage problems, and gas for the car. All right, can you tell me why these things are such a big concern for you?

Michael: "Because like if you are having to pay bills, you don't know when you're going to get fired or anything. You could get hired like one day, and the next day they can say, "you're fired." Get your first payment, and buy a house, but then not make a payment. If that happens, then you don't have money to pay the bills. Then you would have to live with somebody, and like, raising a child is like hard. If you have a job, and your wife has a job, she's going to have to go to work, you may not find someone to watch the child. And, marriage problems people can get into arguments and want divorces, and other stuff. Having gas for the car, you never know. You could just go on the road to where you run out of gas, and the phone could be dead. Stuff like that.

Interviewer: Now are these all things that men should be worried about?

Michael: Yeah.

(Michael, Interview #3)

The concerns that Michael expresses encapsulates what the rest of the boys from the sample feel about responsibility towards family and the connection between adulthood and manhood.

The second form of responsibility found in the survey data focused on the responsibility to themselves. An example of this responsibility to one's self can be seen in the quotation below.

Because I'm going to have to pay bills. I'm going to have to get a job and make money. I can't depend on my mom to give me money. She could help me out, but she can't always give me money. Getting a car, bills and doing all that. Sharing some of that, I don't know. It's going to be kinda hard." (Javier, Interview #8)

Javier's response focuses on the needs that he will have in the future. This includes being able to pay bills, providing for their needs when they grow old. He goes on to detail that

he does not want to live with his parents all his life and that he looks forward to going to college. These are continued examples of responsibility to themselves. The other boys that reported this type of responsibility shared the same feelings as Javier.

The increase of responsibility that many of these boys mention in their interviews have been factors that contribute to ambivalent attitudes of becoming older. The increase of responsibility means an increase in expectations. This increase in expectations can be seen in the breakdown of what they consider to be both adults and men. Out of the twelve boys that were interviewed all agree that when someone becomes an adult he becomes a man (Table 1.1). These two concepts share the common point of having a job. However, this was not replicated when the same question was asked about what makes a woman. The responses given over womanhood were geared more towards domestic divisions of labor (Table 1.1). In essence, these boys are claiming that to having a job makes someone an adult, but also a man.

**Table 1.1 Survey Results**

<i>Life events</i>	<i>What makes you and adult</i>	<i>All that make you a man</i>	<i>All that make you a woman</i>
Having a job	12	12	5
Being in a Relationship	1	1	1
Having Money	8	6	3
Having a Car	9	6	4
Going to College	7	7	3
Having Children	3	3	5
Being Married	2	4	4
Raising Children	6	6	9

*Source:* Collected Survey Data, n=12, frequencies

All twelve of the boys interviewed claim that having a job makes you an adult, as well as makes them a man. When asked the same question concerning womanhood only five of the boys said that having a job makes someone a woman. The connection between having a job as an adult, as well as a man, is indicative of traditional gender expectations of men being the breadwinners/providers.

Accepting responsibility is this transition into manhood. The member that most encapsulates this is Elijah. During the interview, he reports that he has both types of responsibility, but that he accepts them as well.

Like, they ask me to do a thing, and I can do it. You know, there is no conversation where I say no I can't do it, or I don't care. You know I can do it. (Elijah, Interview #5)

He is demonstrating that unlike other boys who do not have responsibility, or actively choose not to accept it, he confidently embraces responsibility. This responsibility is not only tied to what his parents have given him but also for his actions and the consequences that they bring.

Like, it's another thing why they always think I'm responsible. Because, like, I'm real dedicated to everything that I want to see in my future. Like basketball, I am dedicated to that so what helps me to lead there is my grades. So I always make A's and B's, and I'm always on the honor roll. So, that's another reason why they call me responsible (Elijah, Interview #5)

For Elijah, basketball has an important meaning to him, and it was rare to see him outside of the gym while he was at the Inspire club. The connection between his grades and

playing basketball has been in part established by public school policies regarding the requirements to play athletics. He knows that to play basketball with any legitimacy that he must do well in school. In a conversation outside of the interview, Elijah hopes to play basketball in college someday. Playing basketball is important to Elijah, and, therefore, his motivation to embrace this increase of responsibility.

When the question of being treated younger than fourteen was asked to Elijah, he responded that he does not feel that he is being treated younger. This could be due to him embracing responsibility. When the question of feeling younger was posed to the other boys, they expressed numerous instances where they felt younger. These instances tended to center on negative sanctions towards their behavior. In short these boys reported the feeling of being treated younger than their age when they did not act their age. The quotations below covers the feelings that were expressed by most of the boys in one way or another.

Interviewer: Okay, can you tell me about a situation where someone has treated you younger than you are now?

Peter: My mom. Like she yells at me, instead of explaining to me.

Interviewer: Okay. Would you prefer? I guess when you do get in trouble, would you rather have an adult yell at you or explain what you did wrong?

Peter: Explain.

Interviewer: Okay, that makes sense. Why would you rather have them explain that?

Peter: Because when they explain to me, I know not to do it again. Because she told me what I did wrong, and when they yell at me sometimes I don't know what I really did.

(Peter, Interview #9)

In this interview Peter, a Hispanic boy, explains that when his mother yells at him he feels younger. This yelling, for Peter, represents being treated like a kid. His response to what makes him feel older consists of his grandmother explaining what he has done wrong, and what those consequences would be when he becomes older. It is not until his competence of handling responsibility, or masculinity by extension, is questioned that he feels younger than his current age. Many of the other boys echo a similar sentiment when asked the same question about feeling younger.

When the question of what does it mean to be a man was posed to these boys, their responses came in many different ways, but they all revolved around the central concept of responsibility.

You don't have to have a car to be a man. You could still ride a bike, as long as you are still responsible, and make sure that you are still doing the things that you need. (Javier, Interview #8)

Being accountable for one's actions are what these boys consider making someone a man. Whether it is taking responsibility for grades so that they may play basketball or thinking about caring for other people. The quotation above encapsulates these boys' understanding of what it means to be a man. For many of the boys interviewed there is a nuanced expression that these responsibilities were thrust upon them. Whether this thrust of responsibility came from having to care for younger siblings or working in their father's shop, they are being pushed into taking larger roles in their social spaces.

The presence of responsibility to indicate adulthood and manhood can be considered to be a universal characteristic. However, looking at the concept of masculinity can sometimes be considered white-centric, and implies that the experiences

of men can be approached as a monolith. A more inclusive means of studying this concept comes in the form introduced by R.W. Connell book titled *Masculinities* (1995). Pulling from Connell's book we find that the experiences of men do not always fit the defined hegemonic masculinity. These *masculinities* are constructed based on the relative experiences of different groups. The primary research question asks about the conceptualizations of manhood from the perspectives of boys of color from the Inspire club. In the case of the Inspire club with the majority of the members being African American, the concept of masculinities becomes important to understanding how these boys conceptualize their transition to manhood.

Throughout the interviews, the boys that participated in the interview process did not indicate any overt experiences related to their racial identity. However, looking at the socialization that takes place at the Inspire club I could see that there is a nuanced way in which these boys are receiving messages about the behavior of African American boys. The factor that plays the biggest role in the socialization these boys of color to men of color was the program Passport to Manhood. The goal of this program is to prepare boys for the challenges that they will face when as they journey through adolescence, and the role that plays in shaping these boys perception of masculinity is big.

The prevailing theme taught to these boys was emotional control. Not only as means of exercising masculinity, but also the implications of doing so as some with a darker skin color. This message of emotional control is rooted in managing a stereotypical racial identity that is often placed upon them by society. We do not have to go far to see how stigmatized African American racial identities can be. We can simply

look at the representation of African American boys and men in media to see these stereotypes (Guerrero, 1995). Looking at minority masculinities, such as African American masculinity, we find that it tends to have more stigma associated with their identity. Also understanding W.E.B Du Bois's concept of double consciousness helps us to understand the two separate worlds that black men must navigate.

The discussions that Arnold would hold during the hour-long session of Passport to Manhood focused on these boys learning to manage themselves with both their gender identity and racial identity. This was especially apparent after a fight at the Inspire club. Fights were not a common occurrence at the Inspire club. In fact, based on the reaction of other members that were present that day, physical violence was seldom seen. The staff's reactions were direct, and their response was to ban one boy, and a short suspension for the other. Shortly after this incident had happened, Arnold had brought the suspended boy, who was African American to a session of Passport to Manhood. While the fight was not based on race, the lesson that Arnold was teaching to these boys revolved around controlling yourself. He explained that losing one's cool does not make you macho, it gives other people power over you. This lesson is one repeated by many boys who are on their journey to becoming men. However, for the African American boys at the Inspire club these lessons may do more than build their identity as young men.

For many of the boys interviewed, what concerned them about growing older were matters that could be shared with grown men. The concerns ranged from a general care of their immediate family to more detailed explanations of being able to pay bills, rent, going to college, and caring for a pregnant girlfriend. Except for one participant,



most of the boys were ambivalent towards becoming older, yet all of the boys agree that the more responsibility you have, the more like a man you become. Their understanding of becoming a man is spurred by the messages of emotional self-control they receive from programs like Passport to Manhood. The Passport to Manhood program teaches these boys how to become responsible for their actions. This leads them to conceptualize manhood as being a someone who is responsible not only for themselves but those that are under their care.

### **Role of the Club**

What role does the Boys and Girls Club of America play in the construction of masculinity? How does the Inspire club shape the construction of masculinity? This question is broken down into three subsections that look at the athleticism, role models and embodiment of masculinity, and then the actual club itself.

#### *Athleticism*

An emphasis on activity and sports that is being promoted at the Inspire club is also a means of constructing masculinity at the Inspire club. Athleticism marks the foundation of masculinity at this location. It is important to keep in mind that the goal of The Boys and Girls Club of America was to provide space for young boys to develop into young men. At the Inspire club, sports are used as a way to provide these boys with a means of developing a masculine identity. The members that focus on sports tend to receive more attention from the staff, specifically from Anthony, who is also the director of the Inspire club, and who spend the majority of his time running the activities in the gym.

The gym is located on the backside of the building requiring members to travel through the game room to reach the main door. Inside is a regulation-size basketball court with space on the far side for two sets of bleachers. In addition to the two main basketball goals, there are two additional ones mounted on the same wall with the double doors leading to the game room. Along the wall that is opposite of the double doors, there is a doorway that leads to a storage closet. This closet holds all of the game equipment for the games in the gym. These items included basketballs, volleyballs, hula hoops, cones, jump ropes, and bicycles.

The types of games that were played varied depending on the needs of the staff members at the time. This need was most evident while the Inspire club was operating school year hours. Typically as the members begin to flow in, it could be considered a free-for-all to find space to play in the gym. This unorganized activity was the norm for the first hour after the club has opened, but soon after a staff member or volunteer would start a game of dodgeball, basketball, or kickball.

At the Inspire club, there are many activities that are geared to make the members active. Whether it be games, which require members to be standing in the game room or games that can be played in the gym. On the other hand, if we look at the number of activities that revolves around computers or television we can find that those are far and few in between. There are a number of factors that contribute to the lack of technology at the Inspire club, but the fact remains that all members are active while they are there at the Inspire club.

At any point during the activities, whether during the school year or over the summer months, you can see that the boys are more involved with what is happening in the main area of the gym. Consistently there would be more boys playing athletic games, whether they were organized or not, and the girls typically would be off to the side on the bleachers playing their games. The games that they played usually involved chasing one another, this was the younger girls that engaged in this type of gameplay, and the older girls would stay on the bleachers and gossip with one another. At times, this would they would tease a boy, but they typically stayed to themselves. The boys would typically keep to themselves on the gym floor. However, there were instances where boys and girls would cross gender boundaries.

Most of the male staff at the Inspire club have an athletic build. The only exception to this would be a heavier set staff member named Earl. Even with Earl's atypical body frame he is still outside leading sporting activities. All the male staff members at the Inspire club spend their time leading sporting activities with none of them leading any of the academic or arts and crafts activities. While this is the main form of masculinity, the athlete, that is being promoted at the club there are some members who do not want to participate in athletic activities. The enthusiasm for sports and related activities vary greatly, but the athletic, masculine paradigm is the majority and the dominant form that can be found. Those members who are not wanting to be involved in these types of activities are given the option of either participate or to sit on the sides of the activities. This option is more likely to be extended to the girls, but the boys were strongly encouraged to participate in the activity.

The gym itself afforded numerous instances where the construction of masculinity could be observed without much intrusion. The performances of gender were highly visible, and this applied to both femininity and masculinity. As the members would be left in the gym with unorganized activities, they would tend to separate out into gender groups. Thorne (1993) points out that when children are placed in large groups they tend to separate out between boys and girls

The environment that can be found at the Inspire club is one that promotes and perpetuates societal definitions and expectations of men and women. These expectations are further facilitated by the continued borderwork that is present at the Inspire club. This border work certainly serves a function to help define the roles of men and women for these children, but there it also serves as a means of establishing the hierarchical structure found in masculinity.

### *Role Models*

#### The Boys & Girls Club Code

I believe in God and the right to worship according to my own faith and religion. I believe in America and the American way of life...in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. I believe in fair play, honesty, and sportsmanship. I believe in my Boys & Girls Club, which stands for these things. (Our Mission, 2014)

The presence of masculine role model that these boys can emulate is important to the construction of masculinity at the Inspire club. All of the male staff members were African American, but the two men that impacted these boys the most were Anthony and Arnold. Men like Anthony and Arnold embodied these values, seen in The Boys and Girls Club Code above, of what this organization attempts to transmit to its members. In the case of Anthony, his position as the director had shown these boys that someone who

looks like them can achieve a position such as director of a Boys and Girls Club. The image that he presented at the Inspire club is congruent with the values presented by the Boys and Girls Club. After the morning announcements and just before he had everyone line up for morning stretches, Anthony would ask everyone to remain silent so that he can recite a brief morning prayer. While this did not extend to all his interactions of the Inspire club, this process was followed as a morning ritual. When members would come to him to resolve issues between them, he would treat all members involved with respect, and would fairly apply sanctions to inappropriate behavior. For Arnold, the impact that he made at the Inspire club was different from Anthony. While he was not a staff member, his presence portrayed greater emphasis on masculine socialization. His role as a guide to the boys of Passport to Manhood provides a model of masculinity that is mixed with values projected by the Boys and Girls Club. This projection is seen in the way he interacts and demonstrates to these boys' demeanor and presentation.

The roles that Anthony and Arnold play at the Inspire club are different from one another. On one hand, Anthony represents the full range of values advocated by the Boys and Girls Club, and on the other we have Arnold to offer a model of masculinity that is being transmitted through Passport to Manhood. What unites both of these images together is that they are African-American in leadership positions. They represent the embodiment both the values and masculine construction of the Inspire club.

### *The Inspire Club*

On a warm and windy spring day in Texas, local schools have recently been dismissed. A good number of the students go home with their parents, some take the bus to their house, other car pool with friends, and some go to the local Boys and Girls Club.

This particular Boys and Girls Club is located on the outskirts of a neighborhood. This neighborhood would not necessarily be considered as impoverished, but it is a lower socioeconomic neighborhood. This is determined by the property prices of the surrounding homes. They range from forty-nine thousand up to one hundred thousand (Homes, 2015). As we travel the neighborhood, we find a wide range of external appearances in the houses. The one thing that these houses have in common is the presence of fences around the front and backs of their property. The fences vary just as much as the houses themselves. On one street we come to a house that was recently renovated, one could tell with all the building material still located in the front yard along with the contractor's business sign, and had new stucco and a wrought iron fence. One that very same street we can also find houses that were little cared for on the outside.

Along the west side of this neighborhood runs one of the major roads that cover this city. On the other side of this street, in sight of the Boys and Girls Club, is one of the premier golf courses in the city. The rest of the neighborhood can see the high chain link fences and tall trees that make the perimeter of this golf course. In the approximate area of this neighborhood and the Boys and Girls Club, we can see the wide range of socioeconomic level within this city.

On the northern and northeastern portions of the neighborhood are three schools, two elementary, and one middle school. The members of the Inspire club, come mainly from these schools. Members are bused to the Inspire club either by the school, or the Boys and Girls Club bus. In addition to the members that lived in this particular neighborhood, a few of the members came from other neighborhoods throughout the city.

The Inspire club is a local branch of The Boys and Girls Club of America and is housed in a building that has had for some considerable time spent functioning as a public building. There is little to no grass around the immediate surroundings of the club. On the back side of the building is there is an open playing field that has the structures to play soccer and baseball. As we continue along the backside of the building we come across an outdoor basketball court, and a bus that they use to pick up members at the end of school day. As we continue through around the building, we come to one of the exits of the gym. Just outside this exit there is a makeshift playground that younger members can play on when the weather is warm enough to be outside. The playground equipment that is here shows years of heavy use. As we continue our path around the Inspire club, we finally come to the main door.

The doors to the Inspire club are large metal doors that are painted a rich blue. All over the door you can see chips in the paint where the door has been hit. Along the edges of the door, you can see how daily use shows itself with thinning paint down to the metal of the door. As we move through the threshold, we come into the foyer with another set of doors before you can go into the club itself. Inside this foyer area, there are numerous papers that have been posted on the back of the outer door and the front of the inner doors. These papers are reminders about rules, due dates for membership paperwork, notifications for upcoming field trips, and a reminder that the Boys and Girls Club is not daycare. Just past the foyer we come to the entrance of the Inspire Branch.

Opposite the front of this display case is the front desk of the Inspire Branch. This is the nerve center of the entire club. The front desk sees a high volume of traffic on a

daily basis. Members and volunteers must sign in at the computer stationed at the desk. Business such as membership forms, field trip permission forms, or surveys that the Boys and Girls Club have are distributed here. There is a phone that is often used by members to contact parents; that is if the member doesn't have a cell phone and is the general phone used by the staff of the Inspire club. At any given time, there is a host of people around the front desk, but depending on the time of day it will range from members to parents to volunteers. Typically, when the Inspire club opens, members are clamoring over one another to be the first one to sign-in. It isn't until an older female member will step in and begin to ask members for their numbers to sign them in. After about an hour, the mass of member signing in dwindles only to have them replaced with those curious about the volunteers coming in that day. Towards the end of the day, parents begin to trickle in to pick up their children. In most cases, members will remain at the Inspire club until they give the "pick up" call to the member. The "pick up" happens thirty minutes before the club closes. Typically there is one staff member, or during the summer a junior staff member, who is stationed at the front desk. As we move past the front desk, we come into the Game room, the central room of the Inspire Branch.

The Game room is a large rectangular room filled with a number of table top games, cubby holes for members to place their backpacks in while they are at the Inspire club, and several doors leading to other rooms. The types of games that are present in the Game room range from traditional pool tables to foosball to bumper pool. In order for members to play these games, they must go and request the necessary equipment from the front desk. While school was in session a simple request to the staff member working



at the front table sufficed, but during the summer months members had given a member I.D. card to check out the equipment.

All of these tabletop games have a considerably high level of wear. There are scratches on the felt of the pool tables; the bumper pool tables were missing bumpers on the two of the pegs on the table. The cue sticks that the members play with are missing the pads at the end of the cue, and a few of them are split. The pool tables themselves have the features of coin-operated machines that are now removed for free play. Oftentimes there are more than two members that are wanting to play the same game. When this situation arises, members are required to share the game. If members refuse to share, they are removed from the game, and could be placed in time out. The games all had lines of members waiting to play them, but there is one game that consistently had long lines to play, foosball.

Out of all the table games in the Game room, the foosball table sees the highest level of traffic. Boys are by far the ones that spend the most time playing foosball, but there were some girls that would play this game as well. The boys who mainly played foosball were younger African Americans, no older than ten years of age. There were high levels of competition between the boys that played foosball. Out of all the table top games that members could play with, the foosball table where we can find masculinity embodied. Male members showed high levels of competitiveness when playing this game. This competitiveness was to the point that they would begin yelling at one another if they felt that the other was cheating. Although this was a masculine game, there were some girls who played foosball. The girls who played foosball were older than the boys

that typically played foosball, but they did not exhibit the same level of competitiveness or aggression during the game.

In addition to the table top games, there is also the cubbies storage for the members to place belongings while they are at the Inspire Branch. There is only one large set of cubbies, but this was not enough to accommodate all of the members, especially during the school year. Backpacks would be placed in the cubbies, but when those spaces were full, the members would pile their bags in front of the cubbies. Members were not allowed to carry their bags with them while they were at the club. The only instances where they could carry their bag was to the program "Power Hour". During the summer, many members did not really bring any bags with them. If a member did bring a bag with them, it was because they were going on a field trip that afternoon.

Looking around the Game room we can see that there are three smaller rooms attached to the Game room; the Teen room, Kids' Cafe, and the Computer room. The Teen room and Kids' Cafe are located along the long wall of the Game room in opposite corners from one another. These rooms have some glass windows in the walls, as well as doors allowing each room to be completely cut off from the Game room.

The Kids' Cafe resembled a school cafeteria. There is a mixture of booths, and picnic style tables for members to sit and eat their food. During the school year, the Inspire club served a meal to its members. This meal was referred to by the members as lunch, but it was served around four in the afternoon, and resembled what one would find in a school cafeteria. All members have the opportunity to have this meal, but it was mainly the younger members that would eat. When the announcement that the meal was

ready, members would line up outside the door of the Kids' Cafe and sign-in. As a rule members are not allowed to have any food or drinks outside of the Kids' Cafe. If they bring outside food, this happens often, they must go into the Cafe to eat. This eventually became an issue because of the snack bar that was in operation in the gym.

The snack bar was typically open soon after the club opened, and would sell candies, soda, and various bags of chips. Most members would purchase their snacks then go to the Kids' Cafe to eat, but there was one instance where the director of the Inspire club, Anthony, found that the Power Hour room, a classroom that is attached to the gym was littered with candy wrappers and chip bags. Upon this discovery, the director closed the snack bar, and it remained closed for the duration of data collection.

Along the same wall, but in the opposite corner of the Kids' Cafe is the Teen room. The Teen room, like the Kids' Cafe, has windows on the walls. Unlike the Kids' Cafe, there is more exclusivity about who can go into this room. Only members that are twelve years or older are allowed to be in this room. While it was observed that members younger than twelve years of age could be seen in the room, it was later determined that these younger members were associated with a teenager that was in the Teen room. Because this room serves as space for teenagers to separate themselves from the younger members, it was rare to see these instances of younger member intrusion.

In the room itself there are two table top games, pool and foosball, and a computer. The condition of the pool table and foosball table are in much better condition than the table top games located in the Game room. There is significantly less traffic that moves on these tables, but the same cannot be said for the computer that is in this room.

Throughout the day, there are at least two teenagers on the one computer constantly. Typically, it was the same two members on the computer. Both of these members were Caucasian males that appeared to be thirteen years of age. The space of the Teen room is one that allows for adolescent masculinity to flourish, in that all the activities contained masculine traits.

The condition of the Inspire club reflects the neighborhood where it is located. As was mentioned earlier, the surrounding neighborhood is a mixture of lower middle class to working class families. As we travel through the neighborhood, we found a wide range of external appearances in the houses and it was common to see wrought iron or chain-link fences that would encompass the entire property. The conditions of houses also ranged in their conditions as well. On the same street, it is common to see a house with recent renovations, as indicated by either left over material or a contractor's sign prominently displayed in the front, and a house that have gone far beyond the need of renovations. These children that are members of the Boys and Girls Club come from this social setting.

### *School vs. Summer*

The passage of time through the school year and the eventual excitement of summer is a transition that almost every child looks forward to, and the Inspire club is no exception to this transition process. At the end of May, the Inspire club moves from school time hours, three thirty to six o'clock in the afternoon Monday through Friday, to their summer hour's eight o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the afternoon. During the summer months, the Inspire club is host to a summer program that it operates the majority of the day. The activities that the Inspire club offered over the summer differ

from what they offered during the school year. The activities that the Inspire club makes available to its members during the school year focus mainly on the academic success, whereas, in the summer, the activities that were offered emphasized character and athletic skill development.

While school was in session, an activity that was highly advised by the staff for members to take advantage of was "Power Hour." Power Hour is a program that is offered by the Boys and Girls Club of America that is intended to assist members with their school work. For the Inspire club, the room that was utilized for Power Hour was organized to resemble a school classroom. This includes having school desk, which had a considerable amount of wear and tear, bookshelves filled with encyclopedias, workbooks, and textbooks. Around the walls of this room, there were placed visual aids for members to look at for quick reference of multiplication tables, geometry equations, and the alphabet.

Unlike what its name implies, Power Hour was not limited to being only an hour it was open for as long as members need assistance on their work. The assistance that was offered includes time to finish up work homework, and if need be tutoring on specific subjects. The staff and volunteers that worked in Power Hour all had some background in education. Ms. Sosa, a Hispanic women in her thirties, is a teacher at a local school, and some the volunteers either were working on their public teacher certification or were recently certified.

This program was created to offer to members a means to build their academic success during the school year, but as the summer months began to roll around the Power

Hour program was not offered. In its place was established the Inspire club's summer recreation program.

*Summer*

The Inspire summer recreation program affords its members a chance to stay physically active over the summer with the chance to perhaps learn a new set of skills with the camps for various sports. The focus of the activities offered at the Inspire club shifted from academic to more character and physical development. In addition to the activities offered in the summer, members had the opportunity to go on field trips. Despite this shift, there were still a number of minor activities that had their roots in education, but those activities were minor ones at best. All the activities that were available were centered on the development of the member's character.

The Inspire club changed its daily routine and was open the majority of the day. Doors opened at eight in the morning and was hosting members until six in the afternoon. The activities that they offered included a basketball and football camp, arts and crafts, and academically inspired games.

As the Inspire club opens at eight in the morning members are free to roam the Game room until they open the gym. Members are not able to check out any equipment for the table games, so they are typically sitting along the wall, with sleepy looks on some of their faces, and others attempting to coax the staff member at the front desk to allow them to check out a set of billiard balls. After about an hour, the staff members open up the doors to the gym, and the day's activities begin.

As the members show up the Inspire club they are directed to the gym, from here they are instructed to line up on the gym floor according to their age. There are four lines that stretch from one end of the gym to another, and most age groups are mixed with another group that is close to the same age range. Once all the members are in their line, a process that usually takes a bit of time, Anthony, the director, begins going over the morning announcements. These announcements were usually reminders of the rules concerning food, reminders about upcoming field trips, and weekly competitions that are taking place that week. As the announcements finish, Anthony will ask any of the members if they can recite the Boys and Girls Club code, listed below, from memory.

I believe in God and the right to worship according to my own faith and religion. I believe in America and the American way of life...in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. I believe in fair play, honesty, and sportsmanship. I believe in my Boys & Girls, which stands for these things. (Our Mission, 2014)

Members would take turns holding up their hands attempting to recite the code. After a few attempts, they would move to daily warm-ups. The warm up consisted of the members doing basic stretches, calisthenics, and some wind sprints in the gym.

As this process concludes, the staff announces where everyone should be for their morning sessions. The activities of these sessions are based on the location in the Inspire club. For members that remained in the gym, they were separated by gender and placed on different ends of the basketball court. They would focus on skills need to play basketball. The members that were sent outside played and worked on football skills, and the members that when to the Game room made arts and crafts. The oldest of the members started out in the gym and worked on basketball skills. The gym was divided,

and half of the court was for the girls, and the other half was used by the boys. The vast portion of observations consisted of the gym. This was done because of the versatility of this room, but also the popularity of basketball that the members and staff have for the game.

Apart from the athletic-based activities during the summer, they also offered a few academically based activities. They were minor at most and were often conducted with volunteers or junior staff members. A popular that game was played resembled group catch. This game consisted of tossing a soccer ball with the names of states written the polygons outlined by the stitches of the ball. Once a player caught the ball they would have to name the capital of the state that their thumb was placed. The number of activities that the Inspire club offered over the summer that was rooted in education was far and few in between. There was, however, a week-long program, a vacation bible school, that was congruent with the code of the Boys and Girls Club of America. This program lasted for a week, and their activities revolved around character building in the religious sense. This program lasted for a week and happened during the morning sessions, once finished the afternoon session would resume at their normal times.

As the morning sessions passed, and the lunch time approached, members will again gather in the gym. Before the afternoon sessions begin, Anthony, the director, will call all the members into the gym and call out the members that will be going on the field trip for that day. Field trips occurred on a weekly basis, usually mid-week, and were often time to the public swimming pool that is located two blocks to the south of the Inspire club. Other locations that the Inspire club has visited have been the local civic center and



a larger water park that is located in the city. The basic requirements that members need to fulfill is to have a permission form signed by one of their parents, and money for admissions fees. An additional requirement, but one that is not enforced until a member crosses the line, is good behavior. This requirement is only enforced when a member's behavior becomes disruptive or inappropriate. If a member's behavior becomes disruptive, then the staff can disallow that particular member from going, or if the infractions were minor, then that member would have to sit in timeout once they arrived at the destination. This was particularly effective when members would be traveling to the public swimming pool.

Members that either did not want to go or that did not meet the requirements for the field trip would continue in the afternoon sessions. These afternoon sessions had slightly less organization than the morning sessions. Because of the number of members that would travel on the field trips, the afternoon sessions had less structure than the morning sessions. What would typically happen was that the staff and volunteers that would stay would gather the remaining members and organize kickball, dodgeball, or games of knock-out. As the field trip ends and members began returning to the Inspire club parents, begin to come and pick up their children. During this process, parents are interacting with staff members, learn about the next field trip, and being reminded about renewing memberships. These interactions with parents and staff were often brief and to the point. The times that parents would come and pick up their children was around four-thirty to five o'clock in the afternoon.

This becomes the context in which masculinity is constructed at the Inspire club. The combination of space to engage in athletics, the availability and representation of role models, and the Inspire club itself allows for the social practice that creates masculinity to be present.

### **Differential Outcomes**

How does the local hegemonic masculinity of the Inspire club explain differential outcomes for boys based on their presentation of a gendered self? To address this question, we will first need to understand how the Inspire club creates the local definition of masculinity. Then we will explore how this locally defined definition of hegemonic masculinity affects individual members of the Inspire club.

#### *Local Hegemonic Masculinity*

The concept of hegemonic masculinity, developed by R.W. Connell, examines masculinity from a structural point-of-view. This approach enables the creation of hierarchies not only within the gender binary but specifically among men. The conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity requires a number of factors to be present for it to be established (Connell, 1987; 1995; 2005). What must also be recognized in this concept is the ever changing nature of hegemonic masculinity. R.W. Connell discusses in her book *Masculinities* (1995) that there is never one set standards for hegemony, but rather it relies on the social context to derive its meaning.

In the case of the Inspire club, there is a contextually defined hegemonic masculinity that is constructed based on athletic ability and color of skin. Unlike what can be found in mainstream society, which values “whiteness” as the dominant racial identity, the Inspire club offers a subverted form of this dominance by having a darker

skin tone that is seen as the dominant racial identity. Having a darker skin color meant that the risk of being teased for whatever reason was diminished and that boys who either had a lighter skin tone, in the case of Eric or were white, as in the case of Richard, faced the potential for stigmatization.

The Inspire club has, in essence, creates a local definition of hegemonic masculinity. It does so through the presences of two factors; athleticism, and positive representation of African American masculinity. The first factor that shapes this local hegemonic masculinity is the presence and value of athleticism. Many of the members enjoyed playing in the gym during open times. Games consisted of playing chase, four on four basketball games or sometimes volleyball. For those members that did not wish to play in these games, there were other forms of entertainment to be found sitting in the bleachers, and interacting with friends. Having open time at in the gym was supervised by a volunteer running the gym. This, however, was a different story when Anthony or Redd was running gym hours, and this included organized sports.

The main sport played was basketball, and was popular with all members of the Inspire club. Most members wanted to shoot the ball around; Eric was one of these members, but other members were wanting to play some form of a game that stressed skills used in basketball. Over the summer months, the Inspire club held a summer basketball camp that was intended to teach members of all ages the fundamentals of basketball. All of the members participated in this summer camp, but there was special attention to the older boys who played. These older boys who formed a smaller group of boys with Elijah as the leader of the group received the most attention from Anthony.

With Anthony, being the director of the Inspire club, his time was occupied with running the Inspire club, but he would put aside time to work with the members during the basketball camp. The members that were scheduled to be in the gym for the camp were divided into two groups based on age. The older members ran their camp with Anthony, and the younger members worked with a volunteer. The older group of boys would spend their morning session working on basketball drills with Anthony. The end of the week culminated in a half-court basketball game among themselves. Much like the open hours in the gym, the members that were not interested in participating in basketball camp stayed on the bleachers. These members tended to receive little to no interaction with Anthony.

The Inspire club strove to have its members to be active throughout the time they were there. There was very little space for seating areas; these areas were limited to Kids' Café and the bleachers in the gym. Because of this there is a value placed on being active, but specifically athleticism. The small group of boys that Anthony works within basketball are seen as the dominant group of boys at the Inspire club. Elijah is a part of this group and in most instances is the one that corrals the other boys into Passport to Manhood or organizes the basketball games. Eric, on the other hand, represents a group that is not entirely athletic. He likes to play with the basketballs, but would rather stay out of the organized games. Because of this he was teased by other members in the gym. This teasing came in the form of other boys stealing the ball that he was playing with, coupled with name calling when he sought out a staff member to settle the incident. Even though Eric faces teasing in the gym, he still contributes to the same system of teasing. He routinely teased Richard for not being athletic and wanting to spend time sitting in the

bleachers with the girls. In Richards's case, the entertainment that he enjoyed in the gym was primarily located on the bleachers and spent more time interacting with girls, rather than with the other boys at the club.

The second factor that shapes this local hegemonic masculinity is the representation of African American men in leadership roles. Much like was discussed earlier, the roles that Anthony, Arnold, and other African American men play at the Inspire club is critical to shaping the local definition of hegemonic masculinity. It is because these men are role models at the Inspire that they are seen as the forms of masculinity to emulate by these boys. These boys appropriate the masculine characteristics of these men and reproduce them through their gender performances.

The representations of African American men at the Inspire are different from the types of representation that they may see outside of the Inspire club. When we look at the imagery surrounding African American men in popular media, these boys are exposed to hypermasculine representations of African American men. These images are often filled with stereotypical portrayals of African American men and tend to be stigmatized (Guerrero, 1995). When looking at the construction of hegemonic masculinity at the Inspire club we find that there is a subversion of mainstream hegemonic masculinity.

These factors that create this local hegemonic masculinity, in turn, structures the hierarchy of masculinity based on the racial identity "black" at the top of this hierarchy. This inversion brings into question the status of white racial identity. Recalling the experiences of Richard and the bullying that he faced from both boys and girls shows the stigmatization that is faced with his white racial identity. He was not alone in being

stigmatized Tom, another white boy, was subject to teasing in similar ways to Richard. Eric faced similar experiences to Tom and Richard, but he was also a part of the group that perpetuates this local image of hegemonic masculinity. At the top of this masculine hierarchy, we find Elijah. Among the boys, he represents the image of masculinity that they Inspire club looks to create.

### *Differential Outcomes*

The Inspire club has created a local definition of hegemonic masculinity. This defines the hierarchy of masculinity at the Inspire, and, therefore, there are instances where individuals face different outcomes in interactions. Looking at the hierarchy of men as described in *Masculinities* (1995) there are three additional forms; compliant, subordinate, and marginalized. The key to understanding this hierarchy rests on the image of hegemonic masculinity. Men who are in the compliant group are considered to be close to, but not exactly what is defined as hegemonic masculinity. These actions and presentations of men within this group will align with hegemonic masculinity. This group also works to reinforce these dominant notions of masculinity. The next group, the subordinate group, is found in the third rung of the hierarchy, and does not align with defined hegemonic masculinity. However, they will continue to reinforce these notions of hegemonic masculinity simply by remaining subordinate to both the hegemonic and compliant groups. The last group in this hierarchy exists outside of the concepts of hegemonic masculinity. The men within the marginalized group, typically, choose not to participate in this model of masculinity.

Many of the boys that interviewed fall within the compliant group, but not all find themselves in this position. Their closeness of alignment to the hegemonic form of

masculinity dictates the degree of the differential outcome. For some boys at the Inspire club, their interactions were filled with little stigmatization, and for other members their interactions faced considerable scrutiny by all other members of the Inspire club. The following boys represent the most visible observations of differential outcomes in interactions. Their names are Eric, Richard, and Elijah. All of these boys have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Eric is a small, light-completed, African American boy that is twelve years old and lacks the same athleticism as the other boys of the Inspire club. His experiences at the Inspire club is something that he reported as being "dumb." Eric's complaint is mainly centered on the other boys his age are not acting like he expected them to act. Eric was often the center of teasing by the other boys. This teasing included name calling such as cry-baby, and tattle-tale. The boys that would tease Eric would be more athletically inclined, and would originate from something that Eric had done while in the gym.

The position within the hierarchy of masculinity, put forth by R.W. Connell (1987; 1995) that Eric occupies is the along the border of compliant and subordinate. Along this border, Eric is subjected to the stigmatization of not emulating the idealized version of masculinity at the Inspire club. There could be a connection between the amount of time that Eric was there at the Inspire club and his social standing there. He had recently become a member when data collection had begun and had perceptions that only good kids went to the Boys and Girls Club.

Eric also participates in this reinforcement of hierarchy with another boy at the Inspire club. Richard is a Caucasian male, tall, lanky, and exhibits little to no athletic

ability. He does not fit the defined conception of masculinity at the Inspire club. Eric's participation in the reinforcement/reproduction of the hierarchy of masculinity came in the form of name-calling and teasing. By doing this, Eric is managing his stigmatized identity by using Richard as a common target of unmasculine behavior. This, in turn, becomes a sense of homosocial connections between Eric and the other boys at the Inspire club. Unlike Eric, Richard suffered the full stigmatization by not managing his masculine identity to match the defined version of the Inspire club. Unlike wider society, which values white skin color as an attribute of regional hegemonic masculinity, at the Inspire club this was not the case. Richard was very clearly in the minority at the Inspire club and was often the target of ridicule by both boys and girls at the Inspire club. Unlike Eric, whose teasing was centered on name calling, Richard's teasing was more along the lines of appearing to be unmasculine. While he was never directly called a fagot, he was certainly teased for a presentation of unmasculine behavior (Pascoe, 2007; 2013).

Unlike the vast majority of boys at the Inspire club Richard had a large number of friends that were girls, and spent the majority of his time with groups of girls. This is no indication of his sexuality, but in the performative nature of gender construction, especially at this stage of life, his lack of friendship among boys made him suspect with the other boys at the Inspire club. It was too many of the members surprise when they learned that Richard had formed a relationship, or as Throne (1993) would put "was going with," with a girl. Many members did not believe, and would mockingly ask him questions about the girls he was "going with." This astonishment that members had felt came from Richard's perceived status as gay. Unlike Eric, who was on the border of compliant and subordinate, Richard can be found well within the subordinate group.



Because he was not athletic, African-American and other members perceived a questionable sexuality from him Richard faced considerable stigmatization from everyone else at the Inspire club. This stigmatization that Richard faced is rooted in his masculine presentation. His unmasculine performance was policed by both boys and girls at the Inspire club because he was not easily placed into the local gender system at the Inspire club.

These two boys represent forms of masculinity that are not in dominant positions of the hierarchy of masculinity found at the Inspire club. While Eric has footholds in both the compliance and subordinate groups, he still suffers the stigmatization of not striving to emulate the idealized form of masculinity among the boys at the Inspire club. This idealized form of masculinity makes up the localized hegemonic masculinity, and nowhere was this more visible than the gym.

The one boy that could be identified as an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity was Elijah. Elijah is a fourteen-year-old African-American male that is highly athletic, and that is highly visible at the Inspire club. He was the member that would round up the other boys when it was time for Passport to Manhood to start and was seen interacting with all members, as well as staff. Elijah and the other boys that are long the high rungs of the masculine hierarchy all exhibited the same characteristics that construct the definition of hegemonic masculinity at the Inspire club.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

At the beginning of this research project, the initial goal was to develop an understanding of the values placed on rites of passages to adulthood between Caucasian and Hispanic/Latino early adolescents. However, because of limitations of time and availability of subjects this question evolved into exploring the ways in which the boys of color that were sampled conceptualize their transition into manhood. At the end of data analysis, two additional questions arose from the data. It was clear that understanding how the Boys and Girls Club of America impacts the construction of masculinity, and the differential outcomes for some of its members also play a role in how these boys conceptualize their transition into manhood. These three questions combine to create a snapshot of these boys' lives while they spent time at the Inspire club. The implications associated with research rests with the broadening of the literature surrounding masculine socialization, more directly the conceptualization of manhood by pre and early adolescent boys of color who create a local definition of hegemonic masculinity.

The role of rites of passage at the Inspire club was not as significant as was originally thought. In the literature surrounding masculinity, a factor that contributes to a "so-called" crisis of masculinity rests in the anxiety of not have a ritualized means to become a man. The goal of such rituals is have established men bestow upon young men-to-be the privileges and expectations of manhood. In organic societies, this becomes difficult because of the diffusion of social solidarity creates a lack of reliance on rigid structures in society. Many individuals are left to navigate these waters by what they create for themselves. In most cases, as Kimmel discusses in the first half of his book

*Guyland* (2008), men just realize at some point in their life that they are doing all the things their fathers were doing and assume the mantle of manhood. In other cases, individuals strive to create these rites of passage on their own. These can come in myriad forms. A narrative that is readily accessible to people would be an older adolescent enlisting in the armed forces and, after facing the tribulations of a total institution, returning home as a man. This example marks a highly visible example of this process and is by no means diminishing the scope of possibilities. In fact, the data collected at the Inspire rests on this understanding that in American society there is no uniform rite of passage that either applies to all men within society.

These rituals, whether formal or informal, were not present at the Inspire club. The members that were interviewed shared what they felt was important when becoming a man, but there was not an indication of a singular event that could be considered a rite of passage to becoming a man. Instead, these members revealed that what they felt was important to becoming a man. In many ways, perhaps being a member of the Boys and Girls Club of America could be considered a rite of passage, however, in the context of this paper that is not the case. In becoming a man, these boys' path to manhood varies just as much as each of them that were interviewed. The common denominator among all of these boys is the increase of responsibility, but after that their paths vary. Much like what is discussed in the literature of men looking to establish their rites of passage, these boys are looking to define their path to manhood.

The ritualized transitions into manhood serve as a line of demarcation between being a boy and being a man. When we look back to the literature surrounding masculine

socialization, we can see that this goal of proving one's status as a man and maintaining such a status is a constant process for boys and men in society. The challenges that many boys face in contemporary society is determining when they have achieved this status. For the boys at the Inspire club, there was no singular moment when they would consider themselves a man. Although the age of a person bestows upon them the status of an adult, the question of their manhood remains. The definition of manhood is a process that is constructed based on the local context of interactions. The importance of the local context of masculinity is crucial to understanding the experiences of these boys of the Inspire club. How these boys of color see themselves becoming men is heavily influenced by their social class. When we look back to Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods* (2011) and her discussion that social class has on the role of parenting, we can see that there is a connection between the subjects of her study and the subjects that participated in this study. They are highly aware of the financial situation of their families, which according to Lareau is an indicator of a lower socioeconomic level. The boys' responses during their interview reflected Lareau's social class indicator. However, the most telling evidence of their social class was the nuanced themes of capability found in their responses. Concerns about being able to take care of their family, to provide for a pregnant girlfriend or caring for a child the undercurrent of being capable lies just beneath the surface. In essence for these boys, the conversations of being responsible are tempered with the capability of filling the provider role that is associated with masculinity in a patriarchal society.

The monolith of men and manhood will, at times, create expectations for men to engage in a set of practices that run contrary to local standards of masculinity. This

“cookie cutter” socialization places boys in a particular situation that tells them that they must experience certain checkpoints that comply with the monolith before they can be considered a man. This was seen at the Inspire club, but these boys have taken this process and have made their own. What the data suggest is that rather than there being a singular moment that a boy changes into a man, it is instead left with each boy to quest for their meaning of manhood.

A large factor that influences how these boys of color conceptualize their transition into manhood is the context that these interactions are taking place. Through observations, it was discernable that the Inspire club was located in a neighborhood that was not the lower level of the socioeconomic scale. The condition of the Inspire club itself was also indicative of social class. These would receive the messages two-fold of what is important to them. Understanding that if they are to climb the social ladder then they must prove themselves capable in whatever they are doing.

Another factor that shapes the construction of masculinity is through the peer-to-peer and adult-youth interactions that the members develop. Through these connections, members are learning behaviors and social practices that socially acceptable (Klau, 2007). In the context of gender relations, this location serves as a laboratory that these members are learning how to act as either a woman or a man. As Barrie Thorne describes in her book, *Gender Play* (1993), we can see members engaging in borderwork. Members create gender groups through their interactions with one another. This gender separation was further legitimized when structured time was separated out by gender groups as well. Even though the Boys and Girls Club is not a school, the nature of organization such as

this share common elements with schools that in turn allows them to provide similar environments. To further add to the reinforcement of gender separation, programs such as Passport to Manhood serve as an institutional socialization tool designed to teach them how to be men. Many of these topics aim to shape these boys socialization in very specific ways. A way in which these values are transmitting, specifically those concerning masculinity, are done through the adult-youth relationships built during programs like Passport to Manhood. It is at this point the influence that the Boys and Girls Club has on the construction of hegemonic masculinity comes into focus.

The construction of hegemonic masculinity is built on a set of standards and social practices surrounding masculinity that a group of people consider to be an idealized definition of masculinity. This form of masculinity in turn becomes the dominant form of masculinity in a given context. The complex connection between these socially defined traits of the hegemonic masculinity and men's attempts to achieve this status ensures that this form of masculinity stays dominant. At the Inspire club, the factors that contribute to the creation of hegemonic masculinity take on a unique turn. Rather than a definition that resembles the larger society, the Inspire club has a local definition that subverts regional hegemonic masculinity. As Connell describes in her updated article over hegemonic masculinity, there is a facet of masculinity that takes into account the different levels of society. This geography of masculinity, as she puts it, includes three levels; global, regional and local. These levels have definitions of masculinity rooted in their context. The construction of hegemonic masculinity at the Inspire club is an example of the geography of masculinity, specifically the local version.

The roles that Anthony and Arnold play at the Inspire club, and the values of the Inspire club that they embodiment helps to construct the locally defined hegemonic masculinity. The adult-youth relationship that they form with the boys from the Passport to Manhood program shows these boys how men are supposed to act. These values, in turn, are emulated by these boys and reproduced through their peer-to-peer relationships. Elijah, the member that most resembled this, served as an example of this local hegemonic masculinity for these boys. This locally defined hegemonic masculinity subverts the regional hegemonic masculinity of the larger society in that members who have a lighter skin tone are more likely to be stigmatized and challenged on their masculinity. While this concept of localized hegemonic masculinity has been addressed by a number of other studies, this paper brings this unique type of gender analysis to organizations like The Boys and Girls Club of America.

In addition to the Inspire club, as a whole, having a localized hegemonic masculinity the geography of masculinity can be tied to physical location in the Inspire club. While the dominant version of masculinity that is constructed at the Inspire club includes athleticism and racial identity, there are different versions of this dominant form found throughout other locations of the Inspire club. These variations differ only slightly but are still very close to the definition being constructed at the Inspire club.

The construction of masculinity at the Inspire club does not occur in a vacuum. The racial and ethnic backgrounds of members that attend the Inspire club has an impact, however, to separate their gender and racial identity would be difficult to say the least. Endeavoring to do so would diminish the relationship, but discredit the experiences that

these boys. Intersectionality, a concept introduced by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, addresses this complex combination of gender and race, and can be seen at the Inspire club. While looking at the connection between the masculine and racial socialization are intertwined at the Inspire club. This was seen in the way that Arnold would lead the sessions in Passport to Manhood. Calling back to the instance of the fight and the aftermath that ensued, we can find nuanced messages on how to navigate situations of high emotions. The challenge with this is the closeness in which the masculine and racial socialization are intertwined. By isolating one aspect of this event at the Inspire club threatens to remove the impact that with race or gender played in these experiences. Rather than diminishing the impact of one identity, we take and look at this situation as a whole. By doing this, we can see the complexities of the lesson that Arnold was attempting to instill in the boys of Passport to Manhood.

### **Implications and Limitations**

On the larger scale, these boys and young men are defining their paths to manhood. This has and will continue to create masculine identities that reflect the diversity found in society. This raises the question of what is influencing these boys in regards to their transitions into manhood. Through the course of this paper, the main argument that was constructed was based on the racial influences on gender development. This question, hard enough by itself, is being affected by not only racial identity but also a major disembodied factor present at the Inspire club. The role of social class is one that cannot be ignored. Throughout the literature surrounding masculinity, we find a constant ebb and flow between race, social class, and sexuality. Looking at Michael Kimmel's *Guyland* (2008) we can examine how social class fits into transitions to manhood. Elijah



Anderson is examining how social class impacts not only race but gender as well. R. W. Connell looks at how these differences are creating hierarchies of masculinities and how work to define one another. All of these works attempt to isolate aspects identity rather than approach them as one single identity. By utilizing intersectionality, this study attempts to approach the experiences of these boys of color as a set of experiences

This triangle of social structures, gender, race and social class can be found in almost every type sociological research, and fine-tuning this to focus on the Inspire club and its members has been a daunting task. The limitations almost seem boundless when considering the constraints surrounding this project. The first of these constraints was the time spent in the field. While the researcher spent six months at the Inspire, there was only so many data that a single researcher can collect. Perhaps the additional time on location could change these outcomes, but this is pure speculation. Another limitation that was constantly present during data collection was access to subjects that wanted to participate. Even though full access was granted to the researcher by Anthony, who was the director, the number of interviews that were collected were merely a fraction of the overall membership of the Inspire club. This, however, seems to be the nature of qualitative research with a highly protect group such as children. Another aspect of qualitative research that directly applies to this project is generalizability. The generalizability of this project can only be extended to the members of the Inspire club.

Changes to future research would include additional Boys and Girls Clubs to see if these constructions of masculinity are occurring in other locations, the inclusion of a full survey administered to all members, and more accounts from the staff in regards to

their interactions with the members. When including additional locations for future research, it would be ideal to choose locations that vary in their racial/ethnic make-up, and social class demographics. This would allow for hypothesis testing to see the extent that social class and racial identity affect these boys transition into masculinity.

Qualitative methodology is typically the most efficient means of examining the social influences affecting gender construction. However, there may be more data available when triangulation is used. This project utilized a small survey attached to the one-on-one interviews, but this was limited only the responses of these twelve boys. By opening the sample size of the survey, this will pull into focus attitudes of gender construction from the entire location. After seeing the extent that adult-youth relationships have in shaping these boys understanding of manhood, it becomes important to explore the ways in which the staff members view and understand gender construction themselves. These changes should be kept in mind for any future research concerning masculine construction and organizations like the Boys and Girls Club of America.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

At the onset of this study, there was the fundamental question of what makes someone a man. There have been many different iterations of this question, but all remain a pertinent question regardless of race, class, and ethnicity. This basic question evolved into three precise questions that sought to explore how boys of color conceptualize their transition into manhood, how the Boys and Girls Club of America shape this conceptualization, and finally how a locally defined hegemonic masculinity causes differential outcomes based on their masculine presentations.

These boys that were surveyed at the Inspire club reported that their understanding of what it means to be a man rests on becoming responsible. This responsibility was reported in two different forms; to themselves and their families. For these boys, the transition process was a matter accepting the responsibility that were given to them. These boy's conception of what it means to be a man is shaped by the social context that the Inspire club offers. This context includes the goal of the Boys and Girls Club of America to have its members remain physically active while they are at their local club. The continual physical activity allows for members that exhibit athleticism to be held in high esteem, than those members who do not exhibit athleticism. Much like the boys of River High, the boys of the Inspire club engage in the fag discourse. The targeting of effeminate members, such as Richard and Eric, provides a systematic means masculine socialization that exists among these boys. This process spurs the creation of a local definition of masculinity. This feeds into the types of role models that are found at the Inspire club, namely Anthony and Arnold. These two men

embody the values of the Boys and Girls Club of American, and because they embody these values, their masculine presentation becomes appropriated by these boys. From here the context of interaction becomes important to the construction of the Inspire club's local definition of masculinity. This local definition of hegemonic masculinity implies that the creation of a hierarchy of masculinity that places all the boys at the Inspire club within this hierarchy.

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