Next we have Michelle Fretwell with *Sexist Technologies Elevating Masculinity* in Neoliberal Higher Education. Michelle Fretwell is a researcher focusing on gender inequality in higher education. Her research examines how sexist technologies elevate masculinity in neoliberal higher education. She described her methods, which involved collecting quantitative data from 47 student participants over a year-long study in the Intermountain Social Research Lab. The researchers interviewed the students for 60 to 90 minutes and paid them $5 compensation.

Michelle Fretwell then discussed the impact of neoliberal economics on higher education, where universities now view education as a product, students as customers, and revenue generation as their top priority. Football, a sport cherished at Boise State University, has been promoted above academic pursuits. Masculine appraisal has become the norm, with football seen as the pinnacle of the academic institution.

Michelle interviewed Devin, a 22-year-old white male, about why engineering is dominated by men. Devin explained, "I feel like engineering is just one of those things that attracts more guys. Just like computers, I don't understand why like zero women are interested in computers, but that's just the way it works." This explanation reflects the gender segregation observed in STEM fields.
as nationally occurring while also minimizing the women who are in engineering and computer science. For another example, Ryan, a 20 year old white male, gave us his reasoning as to why women are under-represented in math intensive majors. "From girls I know, they just hate math. Probably 'cause- I don't know, there's a lot less room for error 'cause it's like numbers. There is an answer. Versus like other things. Like, a lot of degrees like communication, there is no direct answer for a lot of things. It's more like talking through things." The belief that women and men inherently think different was nearly unanimous among the students. I found it interesting that even though math intensive STEM fields were regarded as challenging and prestigious students relate them to simple thought processes and oppositely the humanities are regarded, or perceived, as majors suited for women as they are easy yet complex.

[Laughter]

Although these ideologies are repeatedly challenged why is it that Boise State students persistently believe that males should naturally dominate the higher status STEM fields? I argue that the university's promotion of male-dominated STEM-football, er male-dominated football and STEM programs associates masculinity with success causing students to internalize a gender hierarchy. Boise State's reliance on football turns this hypermasculine sport into a symbol of success. In the higher education market universities must maximize prestige in order to gain potential students and donors. Boise State does this by boasting its football team above, or as its main attraction above all else. Students and faculty are fully aware of the disproportion of attention and resources given to the football program but rather than protest they offer justification that lie with the misconception that the football program brings money and recognition to the university to benefit their education and career expenses or experiences. So Aaron a thr-- 38-year-old white male insisted that the university needs the football team because it is the biggest money maker on campus. While many students believe this to be true the economic reality is the opposite. Despite the athletic department's $6.24 million contract with Nike, hundreds of students’ tuition dollars are allocated towards athletics every year. James a 20-year-old Asian-Hispanic man justified that it's fair that football gets a lot of media coverage because everyone wants to watch football. From these students responses we see that football transcends a--from a university value to a hegemonic cultural value. In telling us his opinions about the football team, Devin told us that Boise State had a pretty bad freshman graduation rate, a terrible orientation process, students felt isolated, and whenever anyone questioned anything they always somehow turned it back into the football team and was like "well, have you seen our blue turf and our football team?" Devin acknowledges a tendency of the university to inflate the football team as symbols of pride success and masculinity to oppose relative status to other public universities. Despite strides in Boise State's academics, football remains the focus of the university's marketization. Most of the students
felt disassociating from athletics would be a terrible move, to quote James. Ryan concluded, "I wouldn't like that, even though I don't like how much my money goes to athletics. I really enjoy it. If we didn't have sports teams, I don't think I would go here." The common fear that the university would be significantly harmed by the loss of athletics eliminates the university's dependence on this obscured association of masculinity to success. Through advertisements football is further incorporated into the narrative of the ideal college experience and therefore the ideal student. Despite receiving research funding and large donations for these programs, Boise State's expenditures consistently surpass this budget. So the university speechlessly pedestals the football and STEM programs other--over other disciplines and programs to attract new students and their tuition dollars. James explains the potential impact of the loss of the football team. "In terms of student wise, you would definitely see a demographic switch from like, people who are here to get a degree, but also have the college experience, like they are maybe willing to try out for sports, or do all of these activities, it would be a lot more like you go to school, you go home. Work, work, work. It would make it harder for a lot of buildings, you need different donors, and all sorts of things to keep a university running." If the university were to disassociate from athletics then the student body would be comprised mainly of non-ideal students who are not interested in athletics, the college experience, or getting involved on campus. This would make it harder to keep the university running. Students comply with the structure and the method of the institution regardless of demographic. Male and female students alike adhere to a masculine standard of success. As neoliberalism values the individual over the collective, Neoliberal institutions provoke a competitive market mentality. James went on to explain that women need to adapt to the masculine as culture of STEM to be successful in male dominated engineering classes. "I would just say, stand out in a good way, if that makes sense. Not stand out and use the fact that they are female to stand out, just show that they can think just as well. It sucks to say, but maybe prove themselves."

[Audience member chuckles]

Students attribute the ability of success in STEM classes in the sense of meritocracy backs the psudological masculine standard that has been established in male dominate arenas. Women must develop masculine character traits such as assertiveness and competitiveness to prove themselves. This is exhibited by the performative maleness carried out by women in high status positions. Many have adopted this fix. The women approached that women should have more masculine qualities in order to succeed. To give another example, Alice a 36-year-old white woman told us that [Pause] "Those women"--

[Laughter]

-- "who are in the field feel that they must mask their femininity. They're like 'no, I'm just one
of the guys', so they have to sort of take on that identity." These discourses are rooted in the contradiction that women must be mentally masculine, but physically feminine in order to achieve success as a woman. This underlying trend of gender-blind sexism reinforces the established masculine standard while simultaneously excluding individuals who do not comply with the feminine-masculine binary. Due to the disproportionate promotion of STEM the achievements of women that have come to surpass those of men are hidden, despite women representing over half of the undergraduate student population men continue to dominate stuct-r-dot-masculine STEM fields such as engineering, computer science and business, and the 2016-17 academic year women earned 28% of the STEM bachelor's degrees here at Boise State and 7% of the STEM doctorate degrees. The women who do progress through the sexist climate within STEM fields are tokenized and put on display. These women continue -er become very visible in contrast to the large population of men yet are still thought to be less employable and are often caught in this paradox of visibility. While their token status increases their visibility their visibility is decreased as they assimilate to the dominant culture by adhering to hegemonic norms and expectations. Ryan shared his observations of the climate in engineering. "There are very few outspoken women in engineering. There are definitely more outspoken guys. Overall, I would say there is a trend that all the girls are kind of silent and for the most part keep to themselves. But all of them, even we are in groups, they will talk through things. But like, they won't try to step on other people's toes while the guys are like, 'You did this wrong.' and they will cross it off or tell you how you did it wrong 'Cause you are wrong and I am right." When the common social perception is one that believes competition is inherent in masculinity and competition is necessary for success femininity is then deemed unsuccessful. So long and short, the promotion of football as a revenue generator incorporates masculinity as a key element into the framework of success. By linking football to the ideal college experience masculinity becomes a new element of the ideal student. By merging football with other status promoting tools the university establishes a masculine standard in academia. The promotion of male-dominated STEM programs delegitimizes female success in higher education, and all of these variables lead to students internalizing a neoliberal gender hierarchy that holds lower performing men over higher performing women. Thank you.

End of Transcript.