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College Men's Experiences as Men: Findings and Implications from Two Grounded Theory Studies

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Problematic behavioral issues involving men have been well documented in the published discourse on college men and masculinities. Yet, empirical explanations as to why these issues persist and what educators can do to address them are largely absent from this discourse. Shared findings that emerged from two grounded theory studies of college men's gender identity development are presented in this article. Based on these findings, recommendations for supporting college men's gender identity development are offered.

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, a body of higher education and student affairs scholarship that considers the gender-related experiences and challenges of college men has emerged (e.g., Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper & Harris III, 2010; Harper,

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Harris III, & Mmeje, 2005; Harris III, 2008, in press; Harris III & Struve, 2009; Kellom, 2004; Kilmartin, 2001; Laker, 2009; Sax, 2008). This scholarship represents a turn in the published higher education and student affairs discourse on gender which, up until recently, focused almost exclusively on the experiences of college women in an effort to understand and address structural inequities in colleges and universities (Harper et al., 2005). Most classic student development theories were developed from andocentric points of view that prioritized the experiences of White men (McEwen, 2003). Davis and Laker (2004) argued that these theories were not developed with a gendered lens—that is, they did not seek to understand men as gendered beings. Consequently, the student development theories that arose from these approaches offer little to enhance student affairs educators' understandings of gender as it is expressed by both men and women in college. Moreover, classic student development theories ironically serve to reify patriarchy and reinforce male privilege by rendering men's experiences as the norm (Davis & Laker).

The emerging research on the experiences of college men has been both necessary and worthwhile in revealing a host of troubling trends in men's attendance, success, engagement, well-being, and behavior in college. For example, in a large longitudinal study of gendered differences in college student outcomes, Sax (2008) found that, in comparison to women, the men in the sample skipped class more often, and spent more time partying, drinking, and watching television. Likewise, undesirable outcomes related to men's health and wellness, conduct, and campus engagement were reported throughout Kellom's (2004) edited volume. However, despite these and other important insights that are offered in the recently published research on college men, several knowledge gaps persist. First, this research has focused mostly on destructive behaviors, such as sexual assault and alcohol abuse, and a narrow range of men's subgroups, notably fraternities and men's sports teams. Second, with few exceptions, the emerging scholarship on college men has generally been limited by its general lack of consideration of men of color, gay and bi-sexual men, and how the experiences of these students differ from the larger population of college men. Third, this scholarship has been predominantly conceptual rather than empirical, often missing the voices of college men themselves. Rocco Capraro (1994) and James O'Neil (2004), two of the most prominent scholars of college men's issues, have called specifically for qualitative explorations of college men's gender identity development from a social justice perspective.

Consistent with Capraro (1994) calls for more qualitative research on the experiences of college men as gendered beings and in response to the aforementioned gaps in the published higher education and student affairs scholarship that considers gender, we conducted two independent qualitative studies to examine college men's experiences as men. The primary purpose of both studies was to propose a theoretical model of college men's gender identity development that was grounded in the experiences of men who represented diverse backgrounds and social group identities. In this article we summarize the two models that

emerged from the studies, discuss the key findings that resonated across both studies, and offer implications for facilitating gender identity development among college men.

Theoretical Perspective

The two studies on which this article is based were grounded theoretically by the work of scholars who view gender as a socially constructed identity (Kimmel & Messner, 2004; Weber, 2001). Following feminist scholars' model of examining the patriarchal construction of gender that has resulted in women's subordination and men's domination (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Butler, 1990; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984), men and masculinities theorists have described the dominant culture's view of what it means to be a man as the traditional hegemonic definition of masculinity (Connell, 2005). This traditional definition of masculinity is hegemonic in that its central organizing principle is placing men above women and some men (e.g., White, able-bodied, educated, heterosexual, middle and upper class) above other men (e.g., men of color, [dis]abled, gay, bisexual, low-income). This definition of masculinity relies on misogyny and homophobia as its primary means to enforce rigid and limited gender norms for men (Connell, 2005; O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986). This hegemonic traditional definition of masculinity results in the oppression of women, marginalization of some men, and limitations for all men. Critically examining college men's experiences through a gendered lens and from a social justice perspective has the promise to not only help address the critical issues facing college men but also to address patriarchy, sexism, and male privilege (Brod, 1987; Davis & Laker, 2004; Davis & Wagner, 2005).

Research Methods

In this article we describe the findings and implications drawn from two independent studies of men's gender identity development in college (Edwards, 2007; Harris III, 2006). We conducted these studies separately and were each unaware that a similar study was being conducted elsewhere. Grounded theory methodological approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 1998) were used in both studies to develop theoretical understandings of college men's gender identity development and specifically sought college men from a variety of social identity groups and college experiences. Despite these general similarities, we used different approaches to grounded theory, different data collection methods, and conducted the studies at two different institutions in separate regions of the country. The findings described in this article are those that were consistent across the participants' experiences, underscoring the credibility and transferability of the findings.

Edwards used a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000) as gender is a socially constructed concept (Weber, 2001). In addition, Edwards approached the study using a social justice theoretical framework (hooks, 2000), which recognizes the patriarchal context in which gender is constructed and intersects with other hierarchical social

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structures based on other social group identities such as race, class, and sexual orientation (Bell, 1997). This constructivist grounded theory approach uses more flexible and less rigid grounded theory methods compared to more objectivist approaches to grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The Edwards study was conducted at a large public university in the eastern region of the United States. The participants for this study were 10 college men selected from a group of over 100 participants nominated by faculty and staff members on the campus. Edwards selected 10 participants who reflected perspectives from different social identity groups with a particular focus on race, sexual orientation, class, and a variety of college experiences including men involved in service, a scholarship football player, a fraternity president, leaders of racial/ethnic student organizations, a resident assistant, and a sexual assault prevention advocate. Each of the 10 participants were involved in three open-ended interviews to explore what it meant for them to be a man, how their understandings of what being a man meant changed over time, and the influences that prompted these changes. Using the transcripts of the interviews as data, initial, focused, axial, and theoretical grounded theory coding processes (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used to deconstruct the interviews and reassemble them into a coherent theory telling the story of the participants collectively. Using the constant comparative method of grounded theory, Edwards collected and analyzed data in a cyclical process until saturation was reached. Member checking, peer debriefers, reflexive journaling, an inquiry auditor, and a detailed audit trail were used to establish trustworthiness (Fassinger, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Like the Edwards study, the Harris study was informed by a social constructivist theoretical perspective, but used a more traditional grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 1998). The Harris study involved a total of 68 men who attended a large private institution in the western region of the United States and represented a range of backgrounds, identities, peer groups, and experiences (e.g., racial/ethnic minority men, student-athletes, fraternity men, Jewish men, and gay and bisexual men). Harris collected data in two phases. In phase 1 face-to-face, semistructured individual interviews with 12 men were conducted. The concepts and categories that emerged from phase 1 of the data collection were used to develop the protocol that guided the inquiry in phase 2. During phase 2, Harris convened nine focus groups with a total of 56 participants. Using transcripts from the interviews and focus groups as data, Harris used open, axial, and selective coding as well as the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) for data analysis. Trustworthiness was established in the Harris study by way of researcher reflexivity, member checking, peer debriefing, and the triangulation of data.

One challenge that we encountered as we extrapolated and analyzed the data was presenting findings that were consistent across the two studies while also maintaining the integrity and contextual specificity of each study. To do so we consistently exchanged our

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interpretations of the data, challenged and confirmed each other's interpretations, and constantly compared the data across the two studies. In addition, we shared a complete draft of the manuscript with three colleagues who were very familiar with the original research on which this article is based and had expertise in college men's gender identity development. We asked these colleagues to offer feedback on our synthesis of the findings and clarity in the presentation of findings in the article.

Findings

The findings presented in this article reflect the experiences of college men who participated in the Edwards and Harris studies. We begin with a brief overview of the theoretical models that emerged from each of the independently conducted grounded theory studies. We then focus on the shared findings that are common across both studies. These congruent shared findings were found in either both studies or one study and were not contradicted by the participants' experiences in the other study.

Theoretical Models

Consistent with the grounded theory approach, a theoretical model that captured the participants' gender identity development and related influences was developed through the research process of both studies. Because these studies were conducted and analyzed independently by two separate researchers, different theoretical models emerged from each study. We became aware of each other's study at a national conference for student affairs educators. We realized that although our ways of thinking about the participants' experiences were different, the experiences we captured in each study would have fit into the theoretical model of each other's study.

The Edwards study. The Edwards study's theoretical model is organized around the metaphor of a mask. The participants described learning about external expectations of them as men their whole lives, including both dominant and subordinate cultural norms about what it means to be a man. The way the participants described feeling pressure to perform to these expectations and how they performed was as though they were putting on a mask. They felt a need to wear a mask to simultaneously cover up aspects of their true selves that did not conform with what they believed was expected of them as men and to portray to the world an image of themselves that met these external expectations. As college men they described having to prove their manhood by partying and not preparing for class. They described the expectations of college men specifically as having competitive heterosexual sex, drinking to excess, doing drugs, breaking the rules, and not caring about or putting work into academics. The participants described consequences of this performance that fell into three categories: misogynistic relationships and attitudes toward women, limited relationships with other men, and a loss of self. Finally, the participants described how they tried to

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accept the ways they did not meet the external expectations. They also described critical influences and incidents that helped them take off the mask so that they could be their authentic selves in certain situations.

The Harris study. The theoretical model that emerged from the Harris study comprised three key variables. First, the central phenomenon that emerged was the meanings the participants ascribed to masculinity and reflected the attitudes and behaviors they associated with men. Primary examples included "being respected," "being confident and self-assured," "assuming responsibility," and "embodying physical prowess." Second, the participants described contextual influences that shaped, reinforced, and challenged these meanings of masculinity and influenced how they expressed themselves as men in the campus context. This variable included influences on pre-college gender socialization, such as messages from parents, peers, and involvement in youth sports. The men described being influenced by their perceptions of campus culture (e.g., "diverse," "patriarchal," and "competitive"), campus involvement that provided meaningful interactions with college men from diverse backgrounds, and salient academic interests. For example, some of the men made connections between their interests in traditionally masculine fields (e.g., law, medicine, real estate, and engineering) and their motivation to fulfill the traditional "breadwinner" role associated with culturally defined notions of masculinity. Finally, the participants were influenced by masculine gender norms that emerged as a result of interactions between the meanings they ascribed to masculinity and the contextual influences discussed above. Binge drinking, playing video games, watching and discussing sports, and sharing the details of sexual relationships were consistently noted by the participants as activities in which they regularly engaged with other college men. As a result, a set of context-specific behavioral norms for college men was identified and reflected in the model that emerged from the Harris study. These norms included "working and playing hard," hypermasculine performance (e.g., misogyny, alcohol abuse, and homophobia), and male bonding.

Shared Findings

These shared findings are organized around three themes that were consistent across both studies—each of which reflected the participants' gender-related experiences and development in college, and challenges relating to hegemonic masculinity: (1) external pressures and expectations to perform hegemonic masculinity, (2) consequences of hegemonic masculinity, and (3) efforts to transcend hegemonic masculinity. In this section, each theme is discussed and supported with quotes and reflections from participants in both studies.

External pressures and expectations to perform hegemonic masculinity. Participants in both studies confirmed that they arrived at college having already been socialized to embrace traditional hegemonic masculinity as a cultural norm. The men embraced limited and narrow concepts of what it meant to be a man, which included being

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competitive, respected, in control, self-assured, aggressive, tough, and in positions of authority, to name a few. The participants also defined masculinity in terms of what they thought a man should not be, specifically not gay, effeminate, or vulnerable.

Participants in both studies recalled the sociocultural factors that influenced their conceptualizations of masculinity, notably parents, coaches, teachers, media, and sports. Parents, especially fathers, socialized the participants to behave and interact in ways that were deemed acceptable by traditional expectations for men by expressing masculinity through toughness and physical aggression. Youth sports and other activities in which boys learn masculine values (e.g., martial arts, Boy Scouts) provided a context in which these expectations of performing masculinity were practiced and celebrated when performed successfully during the participants' pre-college gender socialization. "You want to be the kid who beats your rival team in lacrosse, drinks that night to celebrate, and has sex with a girl" recalled Chet [all names are pseudonyms] a fraternity president and participant in the Edwards study, when he reflected on how expectations of performing gender influenced his ideas about masculinity in high school.

External expectations for performing masculinity became more restrictive as the participants grew older. The expectations during their early childhood years (elementary and middle school) were relatively simplistic and focused primarily on exhibiting toughness, participating in the right kinds of activities, and disobeying the rules. For example, Aaron, an Asian American participant from the Harris study, described the expectations of masculinity that were reinforced among the boys in his elementary school peer group.

> I looked to [peers] for any sense of what a boy is supposed to be. I've learned predominantly through them that [to be a boy] you're going to play football and you're going to curse [use profanity] and that's what all the other guys are doing, so you should be doing that too.

In college, the external pressures and expectations of performing hegemonic masculinity became more intense and potentially more destructive. Much of the external pressure the participants felt to perform hegemonic masculinity was grounded in their interactions with other college men. Participants in both studies discussed their efforts to perform masculinity in ways that would not result in having their sexual orientation questioned by peers; in other words, being seen as actively heterosexual was critical to how participants felt they had to prove their manhood. The participants described learning that they could prove their manhood by engaging in competitive heterosexual sex with multiple women, breaking the rules, making misogynistic comments about women, drinking to excess, doing drugs, and pretending not to care about academics.

The campus cultures of the institutions where the studies took place also reinforced external expectations of performing hegemonic masculinity. For example, Harris participants

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described the campus culture as competitive. Consequently, these men disclosed that they invested significant energy into performing masculinity in ways that would be deemed acceptable within the cultural context of the campus. In discussing the competitive nature of the campus culture and the ways in which it influenced his experiences as a man on campus, a Jewish focus group participant in the Harris study shared the following reflection:

> When you have to sit down and take a test and be like, "I'm counting on doing better than these guys so I'll get a better grade and do well in life, this is like what I have to do to succeed in life." It's not like a joke. It's not a game of horse that you're playing outside. This is for real. That's the competitive nature of [the institution]. I think that spills over into a lot of other things and you kind of want to compete with people.

The competition among men was not restricted to outperforming each other on exams, as described by the participant in the quote above. Who could consume the most alcohol in a given night, whose fraternity hosted the best parties, who could "hook up" sexually with the most women, and who could accumulate the most desirable material possessions (e.g., money, cars, expensive clothing) were offered by the participants as other areas of competition among men on their campuses.

Participants in both studies admitted, to varying degrees, that they were insecure about themselves as men and that they could not truly live up to the external expectations of performing masculinity. This insecurity resulted in participants putting on a performance, like wearing a mask, to cover up aspects of themselves that did not live up to external expectations.

Some of the participants indicated that they felt like less of a man at times because they did not embody certain physical and personal characteristics that are socially constructed as masculine, such as having a large physical stature, attracting a lot of attention from women, and being unemotional. Jason, an African American participant in the Edwards study, shared the fact that he enjoyed and often listened to rhythm and blues (R&B) music when he was home alone, but when his roommates were around or when friends came to visit him, he made sure he turned off the R&B music and put on what he described as hardcore or "gansta" rap music out of fear that his manhood would be questioned. A student-athlete in the Harris study disclosed that he felt more confident walking around campus and attending parties with his teammates than he did alone.

> I think there's a confidence about hanging out with guys on the team. Like I know that when I go out and I walk around on my own, I don't have the same confidence as I do when there are other members of the team around. I mean, there's really no basis in me feeling less confident because they aren't around, but I don't know, it's just the way it is.

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Noah, a scholarship football player in the Edwards study, summarized it this way, "I think people definitely put on a guise of some sort. People definitely put on a front a lot of the time, just to act tough. Just to act big or ya know."

For other participants, performing hegemonic masculinity became a strategy to recapture a sense of manhood that had been lost as a result of the emasculating aspects of racism, classism, and homophobia they experienced. In the Harris study, some of the more rigid conceptualizations of masculinity were expressed by the African American and Latino participants. For example, regarding the issue of heterosexuality, several of these men declared that it was very important for them, as men of color, to not express their gender in ways that could be perceived as feminine or gay. They rationalized this perspective by stating that the norms for men of their race, ethnicity, or religion required that they convey a very strong or dominant masculine presence. For instance, the African American participants consistently asserted that "being gay was really looked down upon in the Black community." Likewise, the Latino participants believed that femininity was inconsistent with the image of "a strong Latino man." These participants also shared that their parents had raised them to be "strong Black [or Latino] men" so they would be prepared to overcome challenges related to racism they would likely face as adults.

Other participants from marginalized groups who felt they could not live up to societal expectations of masculinity dealt with this conflict by distancing themselves from these expectations. Robert, a White gay transgender participant in the Edwards study, recognized that being an ethnic minority man makes meeting external expectations of performing masculinity difficult for some men: "As far as racism goes it kind of mitigates your ability to be fully a man. But being gay just completely disqualifies you." Robert further explained that gay and transgendered men like him often find ways to redefine what it means to be a man and come up with their own ways to express their identities as men. For these men, expressing masculinity according to societal expectations would be "too much of a performance," as described by Daniel, a White participant from the Edwards study who was also gay. A participant from the focus group with gay and bisexual men in the Harris study held a perspective that mirrored Daniel's.

> Well, I think I developed my own notions on what a male should be. I decided that I was going to stop trying to pretend to be something that I wasn't. Like I was just so much more comfortable just being who I was rather than trying to pretend to have a deeper voice all the time, dress a certain way, walk a certain way. Like you just come to be a lot more comfortable with yourself and you just accept yourself for who you are and you don't feel like you have to fit into a certain type of mold.

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Some of the men of color and men from working class backgrounds in the studies sought to redefine masculinity by serving their communities, helping to take care of their families, and serving as positive role models to their younger siblings. For these men, expressing masculinity in these ways afforded them masculine identities that were deemed acceptable by societal standards but grounded in productive, rather than destructive, actions.

Consequences of hegemonic masculinity. While conforming to hegemonic masculinity affords college men the acceptance and credibility many desire, doing so comes with consequences. The participants described several consequences they experienced as a result of their efforts to perform hegemonic masculinity. For example, one of the most acceptable ways of affirming masculinity in men's peer groups was to express demeaning and degrading attitudes toward women. Consequently, engaging in sexist exchanges in which they objectified women typified many of the participants' interactions with other men. The participants offered numerous examples of discussions with peers that centered on physical attributes of women that made them sexually desirable or women with whom they "hooked up" sexually. Interestingly, participants in both studies acknowledged that these attitudes and behaviors did not always reflect their authentic beliefs and feelings about women. But they were not compelled to challenge their peers because they did not want to disrupt the dynamics of the group; nor did they want to have their statuses and acceptance within the group taken away. As a consequence of these interactions, participants in both studies found it difficult to be open with other men about their interests in having genuine, rather than exclusively sexual, relationships with women. In fact, some participants shared the fact that their romantic relationships with women were authentic, fulfilling, and offered some respite from the pressure they experienced in their interactions with men.

Limited connectedness with other men, notably fathers and close friends, was another consequence of the participants' conforming to hegemonic masculinity. Societal expectations around emotional expression among men served as barriers for participants who desired genuine friendships with other men. For example, Nicholas, a Latino participant from the Edwards study, feared that "letting down [his] guard and showing emotion" in the presence of other men would result in others assuming he was "weak" or "vulnerable."

In discussing the ways in which hegemonic masculinity limits genuine interpersonal contact with other men, participants in both studies expressed frustration about the constrained relationships they had with their fathers due to socially prescribed expectations of performing masculinity. Being "pushed too hard" in sports, being expected to pursue certain majors, and restricted emotionality were offered as examples of issues that challenge their relationships with their fathers. Phillip, a student-athlete in the Harris study, said that he and his father routinely argued over his involvement in sports: "My dad's biggest argument was 'don't be a quitter,' so we got into many arguments when I told him, 'I'm getting burned

out,' but I just think it was just the pressure not to be considered a quitter." Similarly, Aaron from the Harris study reported that his father constantly challenged his decision to pursue a political science degree rather than a degree in business.

In both studies, participants shared the fact that their fathers expected them to dress (e.g., "not wearing earrings") and act (e.g., "not crying" and "not acting like a girl") in ways that were consistent with stereotypical norms of performing masculinity, which also constrained their relationships. The participants spoke of their desires to make their fathers "proud" and "not disappoint" them. Thus, the pressure they felt to perform masculinity in ways that would meet their fathers' approval and the anxiety they experienced when they were not able to do so were, at times, overwhelming. In addition, several participants talked about never seeing their fathers cry, never hearing their father say "I love you," or being uncomfortable hugging their fathers.

Finally, as a result of the constant pressure they felt to perform hegemonic masculinity, many of the participants reported feeling inauthentic and disconnected from their "true" selves as men. This perspective resonated most strongly among men in the Edwards study, but was also reflected among the Harris participants. These men had internalized hegemonic masculinity to the point where they rarely reflected on the consequences of their actions until much later. As a result, they found themselves behaving in ways that were consistent with external expectations of them as men, even when doing so conflicted with their beliefs and values. Some of these men reportedly felt "phony" and "disingenuous" after having compromised certain values that were important to them.

Efforts to transcend hegemonic masculinity. Despite pressure to perform hegemonic masculinity to fulfill external expectations, there was some evidence of the participants' efforts to transcend these expectations and express their gender in more authentic and less stereotypical ways. The men in both studies recalled and shared several experiences and influences they believed were reflective of their ongoing struggles to perform masculinity in ways they deemed appropriate while also maintaining a sense of dignity and respect as men. Kumar, from the Edwards study, described this process as "a general progression where you start to think about yourself [and eventually] you start to think about why you are trying to be something you are not." Some participants were at the very early stages of learning to define themselves as men according to their internal standards, while others were further along in this process.

Older men who modeled well-rounded concepts of masculinity were identified by a wide range of men in both studies as having significant influences on their conceptualizations of masculinity. The participants shared stories about teachers, parents, coaches, and historical figures, who openly challenge traditional norms and expectations of expressing masculinity while still being respected as men. Ben, a student-athlete in the Harris study,

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discussed his relationship with a high school English teacher who modeled the values of faith, fairness, and setting life goals:

> I learned a lot from him about fairness and life, having [a] vision, and utilizing your resources around you to achieve those ends and just being a respectful guy. He was a literary guy. Never an athlete or anything like that but nonetheless, he had a lot to offer and I had a lot to learn from him and so we established a good relationship as well.

Much like Ben, other participants in both studies shared stories about men they appreciated because of the values they not only espoused but also consistently modeled. For example, both of the African American participants in the Edwards study reported that Malcom X was an important figure in their lives because of the principled stances he took and because he constantly grew and evolved as a man. Chauncey explained:

> He was always honest and like really out there. Like, he put out there that like, "Yeah, I was a hustler when I was younger. That is what I did. And yes, I did go to prison. I am not gonna hide that."... Like, when he converted from the Nation of Islam to traditional Islam and saw what he was doing back in the Nation of Islam days was terrible [and] contributing to the problems of this country.

Having meaningful and sustained cross-cultural interactions with other men on campus who represented diverse backgrounds and experiences was another critical influence in helping participants transcend hegemonic masculinity. The participants in both studies talked about times in which they interacted with men who were different from them in some meaningful way (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, athletes, and non-athletes) through courses, study groups, and student organizations, for example. Having the opportunity to interact with these men not only challenged long-standing stereotypes participants held about certain groups of men but also helped them to expand their own ideas and concepts of masculinity. Several participants in the Harris study reported being "more open" in their interactions with openly gay men and learning that all student-athletes are not "dumb jocks" as a result of their cross-cultural engagement.

Engaging in critical reflection and dialogue about gender and masculinity were also identified as important experiences in the participants' efforts to transcend hegemonic masculinity. Participants in both studies talked about the significance of having the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which they defined masculinity, the strategies they relied on to express themselves as men, and the consequences or outcomes of their masculine behavior. Hegemonic masculinity was very pervasive and, as a result of the very nature of social privilege, unrecognized in their daily lives and interactions as men. Therefore, opportunities to stop and think about the consequences of hegemonic masculinity were scarce. Several

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participants recalled key moments in which they reflected critically about hegemonic masculinity and the impact doing so had on them as men. For instance, Chet, from the Edwards study, recalled hearing the experiences of several women who were raped by members of his fraternity. As a result, Chet helped to get the men removed from the house and decided to run for president of the chapter so he could change its culture. Chauncey, who also participated in the Edwards study, shared his experiences in an intergroup dialogue course, which he attributes to expanding his ideas about gender and masculinity:

> The class was a real moving experience for me . . . It forced me to [recognize] sexualities, different identities, different races, different, ya know, perceptions. And I had to like confront them myself and see how I felt about these certain issues, which before I never really like, discussed . . . Just from an African American perspective. But taking that course or taking that dialogue made me see things from [a] White woman's perspective or a homosexual male's perspective or a White male's perspective . . . And since that course I have been like, always trying to be cognizant of . . . how different groups [have different experiences and perspectives].

A student-athlete in the Harris study shared a similar experience from a gender studies course he had taken:

> I took this feminist class and realize that I kind of fulfill all the [male] stereotypes [and] the ideology of what is the masculine form in American society. I am muscular, athletic, fairly successful, all these sorts of things. I kind of fit the mold so . . . but that's all a socially constructed thing. I don't think that is necessarily the essential component of being a man.

Being involved in these studies also provided an opportunity for the participants to reflect critically on their experiences as men. The interviews facilitated the participants' recognition of the ways in which expressing hegemonic masculinity was detrimental to themselves and others who were important in their lives. One of the participants in the Edwards study, Jason, likened the interviews to "going to church." He explained that through the interviews he was able to describe the kind of man he wanted to be and following the interviews he would be better at living up to his aspirations. But after a few days he would fall back into meeting the external expectations of men, evidenced by the ways in which he "treated women" and engaged in "smoking and drinking." He would then return to the interviews and again leave recommitted, only to find himself assimilating to the masculine scripts he endeavored to overcome. He appreciated the interviews because they were constant reminders that he needed to live up to his aspirations. He left the interviews wondering how he could find a regular place to talk about masculinity—or as he said, "go to church for being a man."

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Lastly, perhaps the most simple, yet profound, insight participants offered with respect to transcending hegemonic masculinity was to let go of the insecurities that resulted in the men putting on a performance and just "be yourself," as Kumar suggested. Across both studies, participants reported being most successful in transcending hegemonic masculinity when they honored themselves, stayed true to their values, and did not allow others to decide for them what constituted "appropriate" expression of their identities as men.

Discussion and Implications

As faculty and administrators in institutions of higher education continue to see troubling trends among college men, the shared findings of these two studies offer insights that may help facilitate men's development and address some of the ways in which men negatively impact campus communities. The findings suggest that college educators can support college men in their growth and development by giving them permission to be themselves, fostering critical self-reflection, and developing the competencies of faculty and campus administrators to effectively engage men.

It is tempting to assume that college men who disrupt campus communities and embrace hegemonic masculinity need to learn different ways of being a man. However, our participants, even those who readily acknowledged engaging in behaviors that were destructive to themselves and others, already understood that there were more desirable ways of expressing themselves as men. However, external pressures and expectations to perform hegemonic masculinity, which were learned and internalized during periods of pre-college gender socialization and reinforced in college, ultimately prevented them from being the men they truly aspired to be. Instead, our participants were looking for someone to give them permission to stop being the men they felt they *had* to be and needed permission to be the men they *aspired* to be.

The meanings and conceptualizations the participants associated with men and masculinity were indicative of the traditional hegemonic definition of masculinity described in the theoretical perspective section of this article. The men were socialized and learned to embrace hegemonic masculinity as a cultural norm for men. Thus, pressures to perform masculinity in ways assumed to be acceptable or desirable for men were reflected throughout the participants' gender-related experiences in college—namely in their peer interactions, social and leisure activities, their campus involvement, and their academic experiences. In response, the men enacted a range of strategies. Nearly all, at times, conformed to societal expectations by "wearing a mask," as described in the Edwards model, and pretending to be men they were not. At other points in their development, men sought guidance and insights from more informed perspectives on masculinity, such as role models and older men who seemingly overcame external pressures to perform masculinity in narrow ways. These strategies reflected

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the participants' efforts to transcend hegemonic expectations and achieve some congruency between who they were and the men they desired to be. That said, the participants' efforts to overcome hegemonic masculinity must be understood in relation to larger social contexts—peer groups, campus culture, and masculine gendered norms—which mediate the extent to which they were successful in achieving some authenticity as men. The latter point helps explain why nearly all of the participants, to varying degrees, engaged in behaviors that contradicted their values. Reflecting on those behaviors, the men in these studies described feeling insecure about themselves as men, putting on a performance in an effort to prove their masculinity to themselves and to others in the moment, and then feeling embarrassed and ashamed afterwards. It is also important to acknowledge that men are afforded privilege and affirmation, most notably from other men, when they conform to hegemonic masculinity. The payoff for men who embrace hegemonic masculinity is a privileged status that positions them above women and above men who do not perform masculinity according to traditional expectations.

Expressing outrage and frustration toward men who behave in undesirable ways may seem like an effective strategy for student affairs educators. However, participants in these studies reported that doing so often left them feeling emasculated and they developed a need to further assert their masculinities according to the same destructive external expectations. Instead, based on the findings of these two studies, we suggest that communicating disappointment with the student's behaviors while affirming who they really are can help men understand the conflict between their authentic selves and their actions. This approach can help men let go of their need to perform, give voice to the impact of their behaviors, and recognize the disconnect between their performance and their authentic selves. As Laker (2009) suggested, an important outcome in working with college men is to "challenge [problematic] behavior and ideologies without diminishing individual male students, who themselves are unwitting products of [men's gender] socialization" (p. 1).

Given the impact that critical reflection had on the participants' efforts to transcend hegemonic masculinity, providing opportunities for men to think about their experiences, beliefs, and assumptions about masculinity may also be an effective strategy for student affairs educators who work with college men. Due in large part to the social privilege that being a man grants men, our participants had not spent enough time thinking about what being a man meant to them. However, after some initial hesitation during our discussions with them, they shared very insightful and poignant thoughts regarding their identities and experiences as men. In this way, their privilege was like an eggshell. It appeared firm and impenetrable, but once it was cracked everything inside of them, including dissonance, shame, hope, vulnerability, pain, and aspirations, poured out. Even though they had not previously discussed their gender and masculinity in any great depth, they were highly engaged in the conversations. In conducting both research studies, we found that the simple,

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open-ended questions were very effective in getting the participants to talk about their gender and experiences as men.

- "What kind of man do you want to be?"
- "What does it mean for you to be a man?"
- "How does society define being a man differently from how you define it?"
- "What are some of the things you believe you have to do to be seen as a man by others?"
- "What are the consequences of behaving in these ways for you and the important people in your life?"

There are other ways to engage college men in critical reflection about masculinity. Recall that campus involvement emerged as a key variable in the Harris model. Participants connected their involvement to opportunities to engage masculinities that were different from their own. Thus, campus involvement experiences and activities designed and focused around issues of gender can be powerful. With appropriate professional facilitation, retreats, camping trips, community service, living-learning communities, student organizations, and alternative spring break trips that are focused on exploring issues of gender and masculinity can be powerful venues for men to connect with others and explore their identities as men.

Some of the participants in these studies also attributed their self-reflection and transformation to academic courses—particularly those offered in gender and ethnic studies departments—that allowed them to critically examine the social construction of gender and other social identities. Faculty can foster this kind of reflection in their courses through class assignments, class discussions, readings, media analyses, and guest speakers that help men understand the consequences of subscribing to hegemonic masculine norms. Similarly, faculty who teach service-learning courses, particularly in sociology, psychology, social work, and related disciplines, could consider critical reflection on gender as an outcome when designing their courses and choosing project sites.

Mentoring and support from father-like figures who modeled well-rounded conceptualizations of masculinity were also as critical in the participants' efforts to transcend hegemonic masculinity. Coaches, faculty, work-study supervisors, counselors, student leaders, and deans were all described as playing key roles in the men's growth. Facilitating these types of connections and relationships for undergraduate men could benefit their growth and development as men. Alumni and community partners can also serve in mentoring capacities and partake in institutional efforts to support undergraduate men. This may also be an effective strategy for involving student-athletes and fraternity members in mentoring initiatives as they may find it easier to connect with alumni who were once members of their teams or chapters.

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Based on the findings in these studies, we also suggest offering professional development opportunities to help faculty and campus administrators learn about effective approaches for understanding, engaging, advising, and relating to college men. Developing educators' competencies in working with a privileged group, such as men, may seem counter-intuitive, but understanding the ways that men from a variety of backgrounds are socialized to communicate, respond, and express themselves is essential in institutional efforts to support men (Liu, 2005). Likewise, it is also important for faculty and campus administrators to be reflective about their own gender identities and consider the extent to which their beliefs and assumptions about masculinity allow them to work effectively with college men.

Finally, it is critical that institutional efforts to support men in overcoming the challenges of hegemonic masculinity do not detract attention and resources from the issues that challenge college women. Institutional leaders should regularly assess the extent to which efforts to support the men and women on their campus are equitable and effective. If women's centers are expected to reach out to and serve men, appropriate resources should be infused to ensure that doing so does not diminish the efficacy of the supports services that are available to women.

Conclusion

The recently published higher education and student affairs scholarship has drawn attention to deep concerns with college men's success, behavior, and well-being. The issues facing college men are not only impacting college men, but also broader campus communities, especially college women. The findings of these two studies, conducted independently but both examining college men's experiences as men, offer insight that can inform individual and institutional approaches to fostering college men's success and development. These initiatives have the potential to help men transcend the external expectations of hegemonic masculinity that foster healthier and less oppressive gender expression by college men.

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