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Masculinity, Leadership, and Liberatory Pedagogy: Supporting Men Through Leadership Development and Education

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In this chapter, the authors make the case that leadership educators can support boys and young men by examining the intersections of the socialization of masculinity and leadership through the use of liberatory pedagogy.

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In his 2008 book, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, Michael Kimmel follows over 400 men through adolescence into adulthood through in-depth interviews. Kimmel highlights the implications of the “Guy Code,” a set of rules understood by men regarding interactions and relationships with other men. What Kimmel refers to as “Guyland,” is both a developmental stage and a social space. “Young adults, age 16–26, are taking about a decade longer to complete the transition to adulthood than did their parents and especially their grandparents” (Jaschik, 2008, para. 2). The “Guy Code” is rooted in sexism and defiantly goes against being politically correct; for example, Kimmel (2008) highlights “Bros Before Hos” as the motto of Guyland. In an interview with *Inside Higher Ed*, Kimmel stresses that “campuses and the local communities must identify what the issues are and collectively begin to talk about these issues” early in adolescence with young men and develop programs on college campuses (Jaschik, 2008, para. 7). Therefore, when considering leadership development for adolescents and college students who identify as men, one must critically think about how the “Guy Code” influences building leadership capacity for these students.

This chapter offers a brief overview of what we currently know about boys and young men and leadership, specifically the connections between leadership and gender and the leadership development of men. We then offer contemporary concepts of masculinity and the role of masculinity in young men’s experiences with leadership development. The chapter includes essential considerations for leadership educators working with young men as well as exemplary programs around the nation geared toward
young men and their leadership development to highlight powerful practices contributing to young men building their leadership capacity. Finally, we call for leadership development curriculum and programming that engages young men in liberatory pedagogy, defined as approaches to teaching and learning “intended to raise learners’ critical consciousness concerning oppressive social conditions” (Sayles-Hannon, 2007, p. 34).

**Leadership as a Gendered Concept**

Over the past 20 years, the growing interest in studying leadership from a gendered lens has continued to increase. Yet, as noted in Chapter 1, often work on gender has been conflated to looking at the experiences of women, with gender and women used synonymously (Bannon & Correia, 2006). This is particularly true when looking at the literature on leadership and gender. Scholars have documented research on the limited number of women in leadership roles in business and government—especially related to glass-ceiling effect and style suitability (Catalyst, 2000; Nierenberg & Marvin, 2006). Because the recent focus in leadership development and education literature has been on women when considering the discussion of gender and leadership (which we firmly support as feminist men), we aim to focus specifically on the less examined experience of how men develop as leaders from adolescence to adulthood and what societal factors contribute to this development.

Historically, many organizations have supported and rewarded stereotypical masculine values in leadership and behaviors that conformed to gender-based values (Catalyst, 2000). Changes are slowly occurring, considering many organizations are still structured to protect dominant power structures and reward masculine behaviors such as analytical rationality (O’Neil, 2008). Furthermore, gender-based stereotyping and the closed circle of what is referred to commonly as the old boy network are strong social forces that are stubbornly maintained (Oakley, 2000). This old boy network is rooted in hegemonic masculinity, sexism, patriarchy, and misogyny and continues to perpetuate oppressive forces, which often privilege individuals that identify as men, particularly White men (Harris & Barone, 2011). Hegemonic masculinity is a concept Connell (1987) introduced and is understood as the behavior and practices that promote the dominant social and political position of men over women. When hegemonic masculinity is applied to leadership, the dominant forms and characteristics of masculinity are honored (i.e., executive decision making, assertiveness, manipulation) while eschewing more feminine leadership characteristics (i.e., collaboration, empowerment of others). This type of thinking has a connection to many of the findings in the current literature on the leadership development of young men, which is discussed in this next section.
Leadership Development of Boys and Young Men

The literature on gender and leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003) generally supports a female tendency toward relational, collaborative, and democratic models, although much of the research conducted on gender and leadership does not specifically focus on students nor does it use theoretical measures created for students. Additionally, the literature on gender and leadership has widely focused on women and their leadership practices, with relatively little focus on men and even less on high school boys or college men.

The limited research on college men provides insight into their leadership efficacy, styles, and behaviors. Some studies examined college men in comparison to college women on leadership outcomes. These studies revealed that male college students reported higher self-assessed general leadership abilities than their female counterparts (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000) and overall higher self-efficacy in their leadership abilities (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Additionally, although the effect sizes of the differences were small, college men reported lower self-assessed levels of socially responsible leadership than women, characterized by collaborative, democratic, and process-oriented leadership behaviors (Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2008). These studies highlighted the confidence and efficacy college men have in their leadership capacities yet may suggest their approaches to leadership are less collaborative or democratic than college women.

Of the existing studies focusing specifically on college men and leadership, a number examine fraternity men (Byer, 1998; DiPaolo, 2002; Sutton & Terrell, 1997). The research on men engaged in fraternity leadership suggests several findings related to men’s leadership. Through their involvement in their fraternities, as well as other campus involvement, young men came to view leadership as relational and collaborative (Byer, 1998; DiPaolo, 2002) and expressed developing greater goal-setting and interpersonal skills through their involvement (Byer, 1998). Further, through participation in a fraternity-based leadership institute, participants in DiPaolo’s (2002) study embraced values-based leadership and service to others through their leadership practice. Sutton and Terrell (1997) found that African American college men involved in leadership roles in their fraternities reported a number of positive outcomes, including increased interest in both cultural and noncultural student engagement opportunities, higher levels of agency and self-efficacy, and stronger rates of engagement in campus-wide student organizations. These findings reinforce the commonly held belief that young men can benefit greatly from involvement in student organizations, particularly through positional leadership roles; however, a critique of these studies is that each is nearly 20 years old.

A more recent study by Tillapaugh and Haber-Curran (2016) endeavored to understand how a small group of college men in positional leadership roles led their organizations and how their leadership practice was
influenced by gender norms and expectations. They found five main themes: (a) demonstrating balance between task and relationship-building leadership styles; (b) understanding the distinction between power and influence; (c) having a desire to do better as leaders; (d) viewing leadership as a generative process; and (e) resisting the masculine/feminine leadership dichotomies (Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016). Of particular interest was the fact that each of the participants critiqued the gendered perspectives of leadership; rather than relying solely on leadership approaches that would be characterized as masculine, these men tapped into leadership approaches (either masculine, feminine, and/or androgynous) depending upon the context of what they were doing and the particular audience. For instance, instead of upholding gendered notions of leadership, the men often emphasized approaches that were either about task or relationship. When facilitating a project reliant on collaboration the men would focus on empowering others (typically seen as more feminine) while also being cognizant of the need for efficiency (typically seen as more masculine). Balancing this connection between task and relationship became important for the men and served as an opportunity to reject hegemonic ideals around leadership practices. The participants argued that masculinity and gender norms for men often felt restrictive, but they had learned through their experiences at home and in college that maintaining a balance between task and relationship led to increased effectiveness as leaders (Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016).

In examining the research on college men, there are a few key takeaways that can influence leadership education practice when working with college men. The existing research suggests that men embrace a range of leadership approaches and perceptions, reflecting both masculine and feminine leadership styles, rather than solely the hierarchical and authoritative behaviors often dubbed as masculine (Byer, 1998; DiPaolo, 2002; Dugan et al., 2008; Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2016). Additionally, it can be inferred that the traditional conception of men as leaders may not be as relevant for young men today based on the findings of these studies, particularly findings from Tillapaugh and Haber-Curran’s (2016) study. These insights can encourage leadership educators to recognize and support leadership approaches for men that draw upon masculine as well as feminine approaches, challenging the outdated notions that leadership behaviors and practices are gendered in a particular way. That being said, it is important to understand that masculinity, particularly hegemonic masculinity, is deeply embedded in the lives of boys and young men and can inevitably influence their leadership practice and perspectives. We discuss this in the following section.

**How Masculinity Influences Boys’ and Young Men’s Lives and Leadership Development**

Within our society, very little attention has been paid to the connections between masculinity and leadership among boys and young men. Studies
on the gender identity development of college men conclude that masculinities have noticeable influences on how men experience college (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper & Harris, 2010; Harris, 2008). Harper and Harris (2010) argued that men are affected by the model gender majority myth; they explained that although historically men are the dominant group in terms of gender, very little research on gender has in fact examined men and masculinities through the lens of gender. Only recently has the connection between college men’s conceptualization of masculinity and their gendered behavior been explored empirically in the higher education literature (Dancy, 2011; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper, 2004; Harris, 2010).

Although an overwhelming majority of studies examining the development of masculinity in college were conducted on White students, newer studies have used more diverse participants from multiple racial/ethnic groups (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010) or solely African American students (Dancy, 2011; Harper, 2004; Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011). McGowan (2013) found several influences that shaped how African American men conceptualized and negotiated relationships with other men prior to their enrollment in college including parents, mentoring programs, sports, and male peers. These precollege influences socialized participants to subscribe to traditional expectations of masculinity, which subsequently influenced how they developed interpersonal relationships with other men (McGowan, 2013). Given the emphasis on connection with others, these findings may offer opportunities to engage African American men in leadership, given the emphasis on more relational leadership practices. Harris (2010) found that masculinities that encouraged college men to develop their competencies in multiple domains, like leadership and academics, may offer some potentially promising starting points for educators to encourage men to engage in campus service activities and pursue nonhierarchical leadership opportunities. Further, some participants in Harris’ (2010) study of college men and masculinities focused on the ways in which their leadership and involvement allowed them to perform traditional expectations of masculinities such as “being respected,” “assuming responsibility,” and “embodying physical prowess” (p. 297), whereas others discussed how their involvement provided opportunities for meaningful interactions with male peers from different backgrounds and encouraged them to be more accepting of masculinities that were different from their own. This could suggest that peer-to-peer engagement through leadership may be a valuable intervention in opening up men’s ideas about masculinity and gender. Participating in student organizations’ boards and committees and attending campus retreats with men who represented different backgrounds provided these cross-cultural engagement opportunities (Harris, 2010). Men in the Harris (2010) study confirmed that had it not been for their involvement in activities outside of class, it was unlikely that they would have had opportunities to get to know men who were different from them in some meaningful way. As a result, involvement in student organizations, particularly in
positional leadership roles, has been shown to serve as positive factors around young men of color making meaning of their conceptions of masculinity and leadership.

Similar to the emergent work on men of color and their masculinity, new work has been conducted investigating the experiences of sexual and gender minority men and their masculinities, which also have a connection to leadership. Tillapaugh (2015a) found that involvement in student leadership experiences for sexual minority men became salient for students’ making meaning of their multiple identities. Those involved in leadership had greater exposure to social justice and increased understanding of how power and privilege play out in their lives, leading to greater self-awareness (Tillapaugh, 2015a). Similar to Harris (2010), some of the participants in Tillapaugh’s (2015a) study upheld notions of hegemonic masculinity, viewing leadership and power as synonymous. In his research on transgender men in college, Catalano (2014) found some transgender college men were more engaged through leadership around their transgender identity, which included serving on speaker panels around gender identity and engaging in positional leadership roles within lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans* student organizations. However, some participants experienced increased burnout from their involvement and others encountered difficulties among the tensions between subgroups of students (i.e., lesbian, gay, or bisexual students versus transgender students) or a reinforcement of the gender binary within student organizations (Catalano, 2014).

These findings highlight both the positives and negatives involved in emphasizing involvement in positional leadership roles for students from historically marginalized populations. Across the various identities of young men, masculinity is deeply rooted and affects their lives, whether consciously or not; as a result, leadership educators need a great deal of forethought in considering how to best support young men and their leadership. In the next section, we highlight important considerations for leadership educators to support young men and their leadership development.

Key Considerations

As both leadership educators and researchers, we outline the following key considerations for others to keep in mind when working with boys and young men and leadership. In our work as leadership educators, we often draw upon liberatory pedagogy as a powerful practice for students’ transformative learning. By drawing upon liberatory pedagogy practices, leadership educators can help provide meaningful transformative learning experiences for high school and college men to use their leadership to make positive social change. The key considerations that follow are rooted in liberatory pedagogy in order to reflect on the ways men can engage in discussion and education programs that challenge them to think about how they lead or can lead in a more socially just and intentional way.
1. There are multiple ways of performing masculinity and understanding the multiplicity of masculinity—from hegemonic to healthy ones. We need educators to “call in” or challenge boys and young men who are performing hypermasculine and oppressive forms of masculinity and ask these men why they are choosing to engage in these ways that often marginalize others. By “calling in” men through liberatory pedagogy, radical change in the power relationships that show up in leadership can be acknowledged and named in order for boys and young men to develop personal strategies to address oppressive forms of masculinity in their own lives.

2. It is essential to create a culture where men can help build up other men and their capacity for leadership. This can happen through mentoring programs, such as faculty and staff mentors to young men or even peer-to-peer mentoring. In particular, findings from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership show a direct connection between students’ leadership capacity and the amount of contact that they have with a mentor on campus (Dugan, Kodama, Correia, & Associates, 2013). Additionally, programs, workshops, and retreats that allow men to connect with one another vulnerably and authentically can also help build community. For example, the documentary, The Mask You Live In (Congdon, Anthony, & Newsom, 2015), highlights the power of one-on-one conversations between men as a means for teaching boys and young men how to grow into their authentic selves. We encourage leadership educators to consider showing this film or using relevant articles or book chapters within their programs to open up meaningful dialogue between men to help support one another.

3. Leadership educators can help young men play a role in addressing the systemic issues in our world. We encourage leadership educators to help men to problematize hegemonic masculinity and other forms of hegemony that have typically privileged men. This allows men to become more socially just and engage in new ways of being, thinking, and doing around social justice work and leadership. Engaging young men in liberatory pedagogy requires that we encourage men to move from theory to praxis, meaning once men understand their privilege and can identify toxic hegemonic masculinity, we must then challenge young men who are interested in being leaders to take action against this toxicity.

4. Leadership educators need to critique leadership models and theories as well as programs that are embedded in hegemonic masculinity and genderism. Programs and models that promote gender role expectations that are rooted in the gender binary of man/woman and that reinforce constricted notions of masculine (and feminine) approaches to leadership practice need to be modified to be more inclusive for all students. For example, leadership development programs for men should not reinforce hypermasculine expectations but
should introduce young men to building meaningful and lasting relationships with their peers of all gender identities. Leadership programs only for “men” or only for “women” must also be critically examined in order to identify who is being excluded on the gender continuum and what is being reinforced by this exclusion. Using a liberatory pedagogy approach allows leadership educators permission to greater ways of teaching and learning. This teaching and learning permit educators to critique theory that views gender through the binary in order to think critically about society, encourage our students to have an active role in their own learning, and apply social justice to their understanding of leadership.

5. Leadership educators must maintain critical examination of themselves and their own perceptions, stereotypes, and biases around gender as a whole, but also masculinity (see Chapter 6 in this sourcebook for a discussion of self-work). Unpacking and unlearning masculinity and its impact on our work, particularly with college men, is extremely important for our work in the field. In order to facilitate liberatory pedagogy, educators must be able to acknowledge the role toxic masculinity plays in all aspects of their own lives.

Exemplary Men’s Leadership Programs

In connection to the existing research on men and leadership, there are a few exemplar models of men’s leadership programs designed for high school or college students that demonstrate powerful practices for men’s development and learning. In this section, we outline central components of each of these programs and their curriculum.

**Center for Leadership Development.** The mission of the Center for Leadership Development is to foster the advancement of minority youth in central Indiana as future professional, business, and community leaders by providing experiences that encourage personal development and educational attainment. Project MR (Male Responsibility) is a program for 7th- to 10th-grade students who identify as male that enables participants to discover the values, skills, lifestyle choices, and work ethic needed to achieve their goals. Participants learn how to make a difference in their lives, in their families, in their neighborhood, and in the world. Participants also discover how to handle peer pressure and cope with challenging situations. The curriculum is unique because of the role of community and business leaders in empowering participants to understand their personal values and the contributions they would like to make to the community where they are a member. Through the curriculum, young men are encouraged to develop greater self-awareness, self-efficacy, and empowerment. For more information, see [https://cldinc.org](https://cldinc.org).

**The Mizzou Black Men’s Initiative (MBMI).** MBMI is a leadership development program provided by the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture
Center at the University of Missouri. The program’s goal is to address the issues of homesickness and being a student in a predominantly White environment, which leads to the program assisting in the successful transition of Black freshmen men into the collegiate environment. There are three pillars that guide the operation of the program: support, development, and involvement. Students are supported through one-on-one meetings with professional staff members and peer mentors to allow time for goal setting, academic monitoring, and social support. Leadership skills are developed through the Student Success Center 1150 course, participation in leadership activities, and service learning opportunities. Students are encouraged to get involved through various campus lectures, campus resources, and networking events with faculty/staff and community leaders. The program has increased the retention rate for Black men at the University of Missouri from year one to year two and participants have provided feedback that the program supported their decisions to engage in campus and leadership and serve as peer mentors to other Black men (J. McElderry, personal communication, June 2, 2015). For more information, see https://gobcc.missouri.edu/mbmi/.

Men’s Leadership Retreat at Bridgewater State University. Bridgewater State University’s Men’s Leadership Retreat was designed for college men to develop their leadership skills and practices. The purpose of this program is to situate one’s leadership practice as it connects to participants’ identities as men. The weekend off-campus retreat centers on engaging individual and group-based leadership, diversity issues, contemplative practice, consensus building, and conflict management. The goals of the retreat include connecting with community members and expanding the students’ network within the campus community. In assessment of the program, participants have indicated the value of affirmation of one’s leadership strengths and an increased confidence in being a leader on campus (C. Kane, personal communication, July 26, 2015). Additionally, participants gained valuable skills in managing conflict and understanding the importance of diversity within groups (C. Kane, personal communication, July 26, 2015).

Additional Resources. We recommend the following resources that are specifically geared to men, masculinities, and/or leadership. These resources may be helpful in gaining additional information for your use as leadership educators:

- **ACPA: Coalition on Men and Masculinities**: http://www.myacpa.org/scmm
- **The Good Men Project**: http://goodmenproject.com
- **Human Rights Campaign: Men & Leadership Retreat**: http://www.hrc.org/resources/men-and-leadership
- **LeaderShape: National Session for African American Men**: https://www.leadershape.org/Institute/Engage
Concluding Thoughts

We firmly believe in and value interweaving issues of social justice, identity, inclusion, and equity within leadership development, education, and training. Particularly in framing conversations for our students who identify as men, this work becomes even more crucial, given the important empirical outcomes identified that students engaged in social justice and diversity work have greater efficacy for socially responsible leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Mayhew and his colleagues’ (2016) research supports this notion given their recent finding that the “leadership skill difference between students who had interracial interactions very often versus rarely was .43 of standard deviation....[therefore,] the more students engage diversity, the better prepared they are as leaders” (p. 209). We believe there is a great deal of possibility and self-discovery by using intersectionality as a lens for leadership to help our students understand how their multiple identities as well as the systems in which they are a part play a role in their leadership practice (see Chapter 2 of this sourcebook for further discussion of this). As Tillapaugh (2015b) reminds educators, there is an imperative need to “continue disaggregating men as one singular monolithic identity. Instead, it must be understood that one’s maleness or one’s masculinity is just one part of one’s larger holistic identity” (p. 137).

Leadership programs, courses, and services have the potential to provide greater self-awareness in our participants, their peers, and the systems of which they are a part. Educators must help men in high school and college engage in ongoing work to gain greater self-efficacy for leadership while also understanding complex issues of power, privilege, and oppression. Engaging in liberatory pedagogy through leadership development, training, and education may be a useful tool for leadership educators to help students understand these issues of social justice and examine how they affect their leadership practices as men. Wagner’s (2011) work on social justice education through liberatory pedagogy has clear connections to reaching and inviting college men to consider how issues of race, class, gender, and other identities play out in their lives. Leadership educators are encouraged to seek out resources on liberatory pedagogy to consider the ways that they can engage and invite men into dialogues around who they are and how they lead in order to promote greater benefits for themselves, for others, and their communities. This work is necessary and transformative for all of our students but particularly so for our young men engaging in leadership.
References


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