

# MMKC

**MEN & MASCULINITIES KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY**

**FALL 2013**



# A MESSAGE FROM THE MMKC CHAIR

Here we are again. Another term. Fall. Football. Sweatshirts. Changing foliage. New students. Amazing campus leadership programs. This is by far my favorite time of year!

Along with all of the sights, sounds, and smells that I love about fall come some other, more negative realities as well. Poor student decisions. Faculty and staff bickering. Open enrollment and benefit reductions. Committee meetings that seem to go nowhere.

These joys and frustrations coexist for all of us. Our lists will be different, but the common factor is that people are involved. Humans. Individuals. And when students get caught in the crossfire, that is when the alarms go off for me. I can take the punches in meetings and via email because I understand that we as a people are fallible. I make mistakes. Others make mistakes. Competing priorities can be unwieldy. I get that. But I draw the line when students are disrespected.

I may just be venting here, but I'm tired of selfish and hurtful comments about transgender students and how the needs of the many are more important than the needs of the few. I'm exhausted from men not giving women room to speak in meetings, workshops, and classes. I've had enough of people thinking that what the Gender Center says about our institution's stance on anything gender-related isn't valid.

There are many reasons to be happy and excited this fall. Even so, let us not miss out on opportunities to educate our campus communities about the fact that gender is a salient identity for so many of our students.

Be well and at peace,

Patrick Tanner

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



At the time of writing this “Letter from the Editor,” September has passed and October is just beginning. I have finally finished my first full year of graduate school and I’m one month into my second and final year. Internship, two jobs, and a whole lot of leadership experiences and extracurricular activities are just a part of my weekly schedule.

With Fall comes transitions. Transitions into new roles, new student populations on campus, and new schedules. It’s hectic, but for me, it’s nice to know I can remove myself, even for a little bit, and find times to do other things to maintain some kind of work life balance. Before this year, I really did not know how important some kind work life balance is to my personal health. Because I live right in the middle of Boston, and within walking distance to so many institutions of higher education (and where I see busy students who are stressed out), it makes me more conscious of my own work life balance and time management.

This August, I started a new position as a Resident Advisor for a fraternity at MIT. I essentially live with around 35 male undergraduates in what I sometimes like to refer to as my own classroom—a living-learning lab of sorts. My job description boils down to being a mentor and role model to the undergraduate students, all of whom are studying a variety of STEM subjects (science, math, engineering, and technology). To say MIT has a rigorous academic climate is an understatement.

However, what I have noticed so far is the young men use the fraternity house living experience as a way to unwind, relax, and remove themselves from the very high stakes environment of campus. This is their work-life balance.

Their relaxed nature has taught me some important lessons as a graduate student and soon-to-be new professional (and I have already thanked them for teaching me some interesting lessons, but thought I would share them here):

1. **It’s okay to come home and relax.** Work can be done at work and school can be done at school (besides studying). Period. These young men are professionals at separating school and personal life and I have slowly learned to follow their lead on this.
2. **Find time to be social and see friends.** The fraternity I live in is a social fraternity. It’s time I put down the books and work for a change and carve out time to cultivate relationships with people that matter to me.
3. **Fitness and exercise matter.** Many of the young men in my house are very athletic and use this to balance out their stress levels and school work. Honestly, this is something I’m still working on, but it’s making me realize that my health (physical and mental) should be a priority if I aim to be an effective mentor and role model to an entire fraternity and an effective student affairs professional.

I could go on and on about how many things I have learned about so far, but then there’s only so much space. What this all sums up to is that I’m so thrilled that I get to live in an environment where I can both observe and learn about college men. Being part of the MMKC has provided me another resource to support all of my male residents and I’m always excited to read submitted articles that might provide me with potential programs or resources to pass to students. This month’s articles are great and I hope you read each one and think about them the way I do. Whenever I finish an article, I always think about how this might or might not apply to my students. If I find something useful that might help someone else, I pass the newsletter on.

With that, I hope everyone has a great start to the academic year! Don’t forget to check us out on our Social Media below!

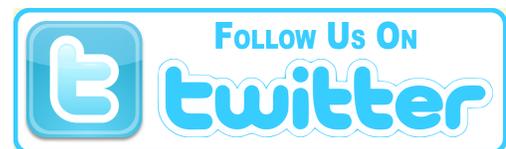
Cheers,

Jack Korpob

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# ABOUT MANHOOD: FRIENDSHIPS, DECISIONS, AND CHARACTER IN COLLEGE



surfaced as their understanding of the role of college in manhood. First, male friendships are essential to the understanding of manhood while young men are in college. Second, the ability to make wise decision is a vital skill that must be understood and nurtured. Last, but not least, college is the most critical time in one's building of his character.

## Male Friendships

David Smith, author of *The Friendless American Male*, states, "One serious problem is the friendless condition of the average American male. Men find it hard to accept that they need the fellowship of other men." Each young man that I spoke with discussed the importance of healthy friendships in their lives. Matt Tornquist, a student from Mason City, Iowa said, "The people you hang around will determine your actions towards others." In addition, these young men stated that a friend is "someone

As a young boy, I learned many valuable lessons that would prepare me for manhood. Being raised in a household with my mom, grandmother, and aunt, these lessons came from men mostly outside of my family. While I learned things in my boyhood and teen years that I will use for a lifetime, the characteristics of manhood were not learned until my years as an undergraduate student at Mississippi State University.

John Eldredge, author of many faith based books regarding masculinity and manhood states, the "masculine journey is a process, a quest, a story that unfolds over time;" however, after thinking about my own experiences, I can't help but wonder if there is something special about the college years that initiates a young man into manhood and defines his understanding of it. Realizing that there was some value in strongly pursuing a better understanding of the role college plays in defining manhood, it came through a conversation with a young man, Rylen Kirk, a sophomore from Richmond, Indiana. In this conversation I asked Rylen three fundamental questions. First, "Since you have been in college, what have you come to understand about manhood?" Second, "Since you have been in college, who has helped you understand what manhood is?" Finally, "What impact has this understanding of manhood had on you?" At the end of the conversation, Rylen stated that he felt "lost and had never thought about manhood this way before." This awakened a deeper, more meaningful approach to my interactions with the young men I work with.

In Student Affairs we often discuss helping students "find their way." As we help young men make sense of the paths they are on, understanding the characteristics of this initiation into manhood is central to the development of college men to become the leaders that today and tomorrow need. I spoke with several college men, asking them the same three questions I asked Rylen. In speaking with these young men, some who have "found their way," others who have struggled with direction, three common themes

you can trust," "someone who has the same values as you do," and "someone you seek out when making a choice."

Unfortunately, social media and society's overuse of the word "friend" has caused it to lose much of its meaning. Individuals are connecting with one another, but relationships are not being formed in the process.

Many people can remember meeting a person for the first time, and almost always the conversation included, "You should add me as a friend on Facebook." In my conversations with the young men I spoke with, they yearn for relationships that will comfort them in their time of need, convict them when they have done wrong, celebrate with them in times of triumph, and challenge them in their decision making. This is the essence of true friendship and there is a strong desire to live this out with other men. Nichol Wuertemberger, a junior serving as the Residence Hall Association (RHA) President, stated, "The maturity that happens at the point of college allows for meaningful structured friendships." It is in these friendships that young men settle into who they are and are freed from the pressures that others place on them. This freedom allows for them to make decisions in their lives that others can look up to, can trust, respect, and honor.

## Decision Making

Today's generation of college students have grown up in a culture where they have many options and more often than not, they choose to have all of them rather than choosing between them. This creates an unrealistic view of the world, as students grow to believe that the best choice is not to choose at all. This has led many young men to find themselves in situations where they must choose between upholding their values and seeking to be valued by their peers. This is best described as passivity. In his book *Fathered by God*, John Eldredge discusses how passivity impacts a man's journey. He states, often "we look for the path of least resistance, and that is rarely the right path to take." College, with its many options, is a time for young men to understand this and

weigh the impact of their decisions, and how these decisions speak about who they are and what they believe.

### Character Building

"It's all about character building." Brandon Trammel, a junior from Atlanta, Georgia, states this and goes on to say, "It means being able to make sacrifices, having goals, and being a leader." Several of the young men I spoke with mentioned actions toward others and hard work as essential characteristics to manhood. College is an ideal time to understand these two concepts as students live on their own in community in our residence halls, fraternity/cooperative systems, and off-campus housing. In my discussions, three specific traits regarding character building were mentioned. First, students spoke about the ability to work hard and persevere after their goals. This I have defined as resilience. Dr. Don L. Werden, Assistant Director of the Counseling and Psychological Services Center at Purdue University, says, "Our resilience is bigger than our greatest fear, stronger than our deepest shame, and the most untapped power we possess." Next, students spoke about the importance of showing respect to others. As they learn about the differences of others in their communities, students recognize the value that each person brings to that community. Finally, these young men discussed servant leadership and the role it plays in the journey of manhood as they learn to sacrifice for others through their experiences in college.

As these conversations took place, I recognized that these discussions were challenging the young men in their growth and development. Understanding that many young men are at the same place that Rylen found himself at, I asked these students what could be done to help men more during their time in college. Overwhelming, they agreed with Kevin McKeon, a junior from Texas, as he says, "Every young man needs to have a conversation like this. The problem is that we feel no one is willing to engage us in challenging conversations." So I call Student Affairs professionals to ask your young men these questions:

- 1) Who do you want others to see you as and what impact do you want to have on them?
- 2) What decisions do you need to make and what lifestyle do you need to live for others to see this?
- 3) Who needs to be in your life that will support these decisions and challenge you? What role do your male friends serve in helping you accomplish this?

We often think there needs to be a dramatic intervention to help others understand the path they are on, when in reality, the power of conversation is all it takes. For young men in college, these conversations draw to the fact that this is the most important time of their life, and now more than ever, their friends will impact their decisions, which ultimately will define their character.

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## MAN DOWN: PROVIDING PARACHUTES TO HELP MALE STUDENTS SUCCEED



I have been working in higher education for two years now and in my initial observations I have noticed diminishing numbers of male college students. According to the US department of education data, females, on average comprised 56% of applicants to four-year colleges for fall 2010 admission. Fewer men are graduating from high school and more are considering the immediate

workforce or military. The gender gap will continue to grow if some form of action is not put in place to stabilize the college gender gap.

There are questions we need to address with the decreasing amount of college men. What changes do we need to make in high school? What changes do we need to make once these men enter college?

In high school there needs to be more encouragement and support for young men to apply and go to college. Strategic recruitment and visits with student groups and organizations in high school could help young men consider college a more viable option. Success communities could have a positive role in high school men as well. A curriculum built to support growth and development among male students. In this group, the school system could train upperclassmen to mentor younger male students in making smart choices to better prepare them for the college application process.

This system is slowly starting to gain popularity in higher education. Living learning communities and success programs are having a positive influence in male college student populations. In some initial research, I discovered two programs that I believe are having a positive impact on the male college students. Two groups that are taking strides in helping young men include: The Man 2 Man Community at Fairfield University and the Minority Male Student Success Programs at Community Colleges across the college. The Man 2 Man Community assists first-year males with their transition to college. This program is for males in need of a community of brotherhood that they have either enjoyed in high school or want to be a part of during their college years. Male students form a community with upper-class mentors and male faculty as they explore issues around masculinity. There are bi-weekly meetings available to engage in conversation with peers about these issues, social programs, opportunities to meet with staff and faculty, experience an active and supportive residential setting, and build strong relationships with men who share similar interests in aspirations.

(Continued on Page 20)

# DOES ANYBODY WANT ME HERE?



In today's society education is progressively becoming equivalent with success, with increased access to college and more emphasis put on a college education by our government, the media and other informational platforms. From as long as I can remember, college was and expectation to attend and necessary in order to be successful by my family standards.

our campus what do we do to keep them here? In my experience as a student, we had an office of multicultural affairs which served as a "one stop shop" to go and get help with various campus issues for those who were in a similar situation as mine. I was a first-generation college student, and I was living on a college campus in the middle of nowhere as opposed to the city lifestyle I was accustomed to. Luckily, I was outgoing enough to seek and find those services, such as academic advising, working with financial aid and using the office of multicultural affairs as a tool to help me get adjusted to this new college journey. Unfortunately for some students this is a difficult step for them to take to seek resources to help them be successful because of the initial culture shock.

There is research that has shown that African American Males are disengaged and underrepresented. There has been a large amount of attention devoted to the circumstances of Black students at predominately white colleges and universities. Often times, these students feel isolated, marginalized, and excluded at predominately white institutions. It can be difficult for them to adapt to the academic and social culture on these campuses. This is largely due to the chilly campus racial climates (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). Also, Black male college completion rates are lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in the United States higher education (Strayhorn, 2010).

As a first-generation college student, and an African American male studying on a predominantly white campus, culture shock is an understatement. Walking on a college campus for the first time was more than a shock for me coming from an urban community where everyone had very similar lifestyles and educational background. As a student affairs professional, I see the same cycle repeating itself year after year with minority men attending college.

There are two quotes that inspired this article about this topic. Harper and Quayle stated, "Weak institutions are those that expect students to engage themselves" (p.6.). Astin's (1984) research emphasizes the importance of student involvement and engagement in higher education. Harper and Astin both suggest that involvement leads to greater academic success, lower dropout rates, and the development and enhancement of leadership skills.

Both of these quotes speak to importance of having student engagement, but how can we engage African American males when there are few programs specific to recruiting and retaining African American Males? Examining the research from Harper, Astin and a couple others about engagement and how is it usually tied in with student success stimulated me to examine my experience as a student. I am able to relate more deeply as a professional because of my own personal experiences with this topic and this type of student.

As a student affairs administrator at a predominately white institution, I have witnessed institutions recruit potential students from very "urban" or "low income" areas, or in other areas of the United States where students have no clue that our school even existed. I assume that these recruiting efforts are meant to increase diversity on campus. We begin to throw words at them such as "scholarships", "degrees" and "diversity" to help them make the decision to enroll in our institution however, the question we should be asking ourselves is once they step foot on

In 2002, Black men comprised only 4.3% of students enrolled at institutions at higher education—the same exact percentage as in 1976 (Strayhorn, 2010). This research from these studies along with a host of others suggests that colleges are failing at providing services for African American males to be successful and to stay at our institutions.

From Harper (2012), we see an excellent frame work for things to consider when working with African American Males in relation to college achievement. While looking at factors outside of class room engagement, classroom experiences and enriching there educational experience, and some of these things are tied to the overall goal of graduation. Harper states, "The framework inverts questions that are commonly asked about educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition" (p.7). This framework creates a template for student affairs professionals to begin asking questions about their experiences.

For purpose of this piece, I focus on one research question from the study, on anti-deficit achievement: what compels Black men to take advantage of campus resources and engagement opportunities?

I believe at the core, student affairs professionals have to get back to a more logical way of thinking. Instead of focusing on job security and personal financial gain, as student affairs professionals we could put more emphasis and effort on student success and support programs to help our students be more engaged in our perspective campuses. In order to solve this problem with minority males being engaged and retained on our college campuses we need programs that will help them be successful.

Harper (2012) stated, "Those who are interested in Black male student success have much to learn from Black men who have actually been successful" (p.1). This is the perfect opportunity for a paradigm shift and how we look at minority male success by using research and learning from those past students who have been successful.

I suspect many minority males at predominantly white institutions are asking themselves the same question I posed to myself, does anybody want me here? We have seen that some institutions have programs in place to help with retaining our students our students of color, but as the research suggests, one of the possible ways to get minority male students to engage is to have more faculty, staff and administrators of color that have been successful so they can learn from them. Having programs to support, engage and uplift students in their initial transition from high school to college and from college to graduation would be most beneficial.

There are numerous research studies that provide evidence that indicates students that are engaged typically do better in all areas of their college experience as stated in early parts of this article. Consequently, we must compare the research on engagement for students of color and the factors that influence success for minority male students to identify new strategies for student affairs professionals.

The real question that should be addressed is not what our institution can do to get these minority men to enroll but, how do we make them feel wanted and create an environment to help them be successful?

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## NASPA Region 1 Drive In Conference: Trouble Man/Troubled Man: The Intersection of Male Student Health, Wellness and Conduct Issues

Co-Sponsored by the NASPA Region 1 Men and Masculinities Knowledge Community and the Maine Association of Student Affairs Professionals.

Friday, October 4, 2013 - 10:00 AM-4:00 PM  
University of New England - Biddeford, ME  
Register [here](#) or visit the NASPA Website

The intersection of gender, wellness, and student conduct is complex yet fascinating. Why do universities consistently see more men cycling through the conduct system? How do gender dynamics connect with student affairs programming? How can we encourage men on our campuses to engage in pro-social behavior, critical thinking, and connection with their emotional health? Please join us for this interactive one-day conference where we will explore these important questions, and leave with practical solutions.

### Featuring Keynote Speaker Matt Vogel.



Matt Vogel holds both his bachelors and masters degrees from Central Michigan University. He currently works at Southern Oregon University as a Health Promotion Specialist and an Adjunct Instructor for the Department of Psychology. Prior to working at SOU, Matt worked at the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse in a similar capacity.

Matt has presented at several conference and college campuses on issues such as alcohol/drugs and college life, harm reduction, communication, masculinity/gender roles, sexual violence prevention, and prescription drugs.

### Registration Fees (Late Registration Fees in Effect)

\*Please see the included links or the NASPA Region 1 website for more details on current registration fees.

Early registration ends on **Sep 20, 2013**.

Regular registration starts on **Sep 21, 2013 and ends on Sep 26, 2013**.

Late registration starts on **Sep 27, 2013**.

Register [here](#)

Special thanks to our host institution the University of New England. For more information contact MMKC Region 1 Representative Shane Long at [slong@smccme.edu](mailto:slong@smccme.edu) or 207-741-5544.

## MEN AND FEMINISM: EXPLORING HOW THE SHOE FITS

“Walk a mile in my shoes, walk a mile in my shoes. Hey, before you abuse, criticize and accuse, walk a mile in my shoes” – Joe South

There are many songs that suggest walking in someone's shoes will allow us to understand his or her experiences. However, rarely do the songs address what happened before or after a person walked the mile. These songs simplistically suggest that the act of walking a mile in someone else's shoes will somehow lead the wearer to no longer criticize the other. Rarely do these songs encourage exploration of what led to those shoes belonging to one person instead of another, or what happens if the two don't understand each other better after walking in the same shoes. Feminism has sometimes been framed this way as well...if men and women could only experience each other's lived experiences, everything would make sense and there would no longer be abuse, criticism or accusations. However, history shows us it's not that simple.

As a doctoral student exploring how men negotiate social expectations through friendships, I have had many opportunities to reflect on feminist ways of making sense of the world. I use feminism as an umbrella term for a broad array of social movements and theories championing equality across a wide array of identities. I label myself as a feminist because I advocate for equality by critically engaging with others to demonstrate how gendered expectations and social practices have changed throughout time, and are largely based on social and cultural beliefs more than biological differences. Simply stated, the purpose of this essay is to encourage equality advocates to consider using pro- feminist and anti-feminist literature to create opportunities for men to critically explore gendered social practices. Not only do I want equality advocates to work with men to walk a mile in others' shoes, I want them to encourage men to think about the shoes, the walk and what happened before and after they've finished the mile.

Feminist scholars have engaged in critical explorations of men's relational social positions since the 1970s. Even after 40 years of empirical explorations, many still question how much awareness most men, especially Caucasian and straight men, have about their own gendered positions in the United States. Simply stated, for those men who meet social expectations related to bodies, genders and sexualities there may be little pressure or reason to question gendered hierarchies in social practices. When men are not provided spaces to interrogate social practices they are denied opportunities to build relationships with feminism. When men are provided with opportunities to acknowledge that they, too, have been privileged and oppressed by social expectations



they are better able to be empathetic and critical in examining how social practices affect others.

Relationships between men and feminism have at times been contentious, and there seems to be a revival in thinking that the United States is experiencing a cultural war on men. I recently read two books commonly cited as evidence of this cultural war: Smith's (2013) *Men On Strike: Why Men are Boycotting Marriage, Fatherhood, and the American Dream – and Why It Matters*, and Venker's (2013) *The War on Men*. As I read these books I was surprised, and saddened, by how often the authors employed statistics and empirical studies to argue that feminism is oppressing some women and virtually all men. What saddened me was that there was little to no conversation in either of these books about how the authors chose to interpret statistics or empirical studies they cited as evidence. Often absent from these books were conversations about how feminism may have affected individuals who do not identify as either men or women, or individuals who do not view romantic interests as fundamental aspects of life. It saddened me that the authors positioned men as victims unable to negotiate their own environments. Smith (2013) wrote:

Colleges have now become privileged finishing schools for girls. Except rather than teaching manners, they teach women that men are the enemy and men are treated as such on campus, unless they go along with the program that keeps them cowed or striking a PC position. Many men have just decided that they don't belong in college and are going on strike, consciously or unconsciously (p.75).

The anti-feminist arguments suggested that gains made by some women in regard to opportunities for education, employment and reproductive rights have led to the development of laws, policies and social practices that oppress other women and most men.

These are my take-aways from these books; however, I strongly encourage anyone interested in feminism and men's social positions to read them for themselves.

After nearly 40 years of research exploring gendered expectations and social practices, educators and activists have far richer resources, both theoretical and applied, with which to foster meaningful discussions about men and different streams of feminism. In an attempt to help equality advocates create spaces that facilitate men's awareness about gendered inequalities, I would like to offer some suggestions to be used in conjunction with Smith and Venker. Books have been written championing ways that feminist efforts toward gender equality can, and have, benefitted men. Noted theorist bell hooks' (2004) *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*, is an excellent exploration of intersections between men, patriarchy, feminism, and hooks' thoughts on ways to achieve equality. Connell's (2005) *Masculinities* is often used to highlight specific institutional and social practices that influence men and their interactions with others. Addis (2011), Kimmel (2008), and Messner (1990) have also written extensively about ways gender equality could improve men's physical, mental and emotional health across a wide range of lived experiences.

Creating opportunities for men to read and critically engage with pro-feminist and anti-feminist positions are ways to facilitate men's inclusion in discussions about social practices and equality. It is a practice that introduces men to feminism and explorations of their own gendered positions in social practices. It offers an avenue for allowing men to reflect on not only their experiences, but also the experiences of others. It allows men opportunities to critically consider not only what it might be like to walk in someone else's shoes, but to really reflect on what their own walk is like. It guides them to ask where the shoes were before they put them on, what type of terrain is being walked over, and where do they want the walk to end.

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## MOVEMBER: CHANGING THE FACE OF MEN'S HEALTH

As a Latino male, I understand how important health concerns are. They are not only important to the Latino and Black community, but to men in general. When thinking of health concerns, they go beyond chronic or physical diseases or issues. There are many mental and psychological portions of our health that are not always given the attention they need. "Women have the tendency to band together, and they are more vocal and expressive about emotions and other aspects of their mental health. As a result, women seek health care in much greater proportion than men.

Men, on the other hand, traditionally shy away from the health-care system" (Franek, J., n.d.). Some of these non "physical" concerns can manifest themselves in the forms of depression, alcohol or drug abuse, anger, or body-image disorders, just to name a few. Although the scope of this article alone could not tackle all of the health concerns that impact men, hopefully shedding light on an organization that focuses on this topic can be the start of a conversation that folks seem to shy away from.

Movember, not to be confused with "No Shave November," is an independent global charity and movement to raise awareness and raise funds for men's health issues. In the United States, Movember partners with The Prostate Cancer foundation and LiveStrong Foundation. "Globally, the funds raised support world-class men's health programs that combat prostate and testicular cancer and mental health challenges. These programs, directed by the Movember Foundation, are focused on awareness and education, living with and beyond cancer, staying mentally healthy, living with and beyond mental illness and research to achieve [their] vision of an everlasting impact on the face of men's health" (About Movember).

After hearing a pitch like that, how could someone not want to be interested in an organization like Movember. In order to get directly involved, you have to register at [Movember.com](http://Movember.com). For the men involved, you would start the month of November clean-shaven, then grow out and groom your mustache for the remainder of the month.

Most people just grow a plain mustache, but others have created designs with their facial hair to be more creative. During this time, you would ask family, friends, co-workers, and anyone else who is able, to donate money to you via your page. This unique philanthropy literally brings attention to and "changes the face" of men's health in a fun way.

Women are also encouraged to get involved as "Mo Sistas" (Mo is slang for Mustache in Australia, where Movember originated back in 2003). "[They] are an important part of Movember's success. Once registered, Mo Sistas raise funds and encourage the men in their lives to get involved." "In 2012, over 1.1 million Mo Bros and Mo Sistas around the world joined the movement, raising USD \$147.0 million. In the US, over 209,000 Mo's raised \$21.0 million" (About Movember). Various cities also host Movember Galas at the end of November, beginning of December, and the website has more information about the locations and times.

(Continued on Page 20)

# BLACK FATHER'S PARENTAL HABITUS AS A PRACTICE AND STRATEGY IN HOME AND SCHOOLS

The role of Black fathers in home and school has rarely been examined except from a deficit perspective. Black father parental habitus is proposed as a strength-based framework which can help understand African American fathers' positive effects on children's lives and educational success. The goal of this article is to demystify African American fathers' participation in home and education.

## **Black Family Involvement and Academic Achievement**

Findings from several scholars acknowledge the relationship between parental involvement and achievement (Barnard, 2004; Jeynes, 2003; McWayne et al., 2004). Overwhelmingly, their work suggests that academic achievement is significantly higher among children whose parents are actively involved in their education. But references to parental involvement and student achievement are most often focused on children in highly-educated, White, middle-class, 'intact' families (Polite & Davis, 1999). Literature on Black fathers indicates that some Black fathers are absent from school-related involvement due to a number of societal forces that have undermined their role as economic provider. Negative stereotypes, educational challenges and residential circumstances can also hamper Black fathers' involvement in their children's lives (Davis, Reynolds & Jones, 2011). Perhaps for these reasons, the Black mother has often been the focus of prior research on the linkage between family support and academic achievement among Black youth (Rodney & Mupier, 1999). Few studies have examined the paternal side of the effect of parental involvement on student performance (Hofferth, 2001).

It is estimated that, in a typical year, more than one-third of all Black children will not see their fathers due to various circumstances (Mirande, 1991; Polite & Davis, 1999). High incarceration rates among African American men (Green, 1991) have caused a shift in parental responsibilities to Black women who, far too often, serve as heads of households (Gadsen & Hall, 1996). As such, Black women serve two primary functions: rearing their children and serving as primary providers (Mincy & Pouncy, 1997). National estimates suggest that 27 million children live apart from their fathers (Hernandez, 1993).

Since the early-to-mid 1980s, the role fathers play in children's well-being and academic development has been scant in parent research. Irregular and non-existing involvement patterns have resulted in deficit perspectives on Black fathers. Unfortunately, society is conditioned to stereotype Black families as consisting of a sole parent (the mother), while Black men are symbols of fatherlessness. This image has shaped the debate regarding "deadbeat dads" in the African American community, suggesting that Black men do not care about their children. For some Black men, societal barriers serve to limit the expression of their love for their children (the expression consisting of actions, behavior, involvement, etc.) as they negotiate their lived socio-cultural realities. A review of the literature on Black fathers reveals an unbalanced and incomplete record about their attitudes towards their children (Hofferth, 2001; Reynolds, 2010). But it is important to note that involvement should not be equated with

commitment, as research has shown that the love a father feels for his children is a commitment that is not devalued by the numerous societal barriers he may face. As evident here, fathering and involvement patterns are complex topics.

## **Fatherhood and Involvement in Schools**

Given the prevailing deficit language and perspectives in the literature concerning Black men, I strive to provide language and a framework that shift the discourse on Black fathers and their involvement to a strength-based perspective. In part, my work has been informed by Harper and Kuykendall's (2012) work on successful Black male initiatives. Their writing has aided in shifting the literature on Black men in higher education from a deficit focus, which perceives Black men as failures, to an anti-deficit (high-achieving framework) that highlights the triumphs of Black men in education. From this perspective, Black high-achieving men are used as the reference point to discuss challenges facing Black men. They are also extolled as a crucial source for insights and recommendations that can influence educational policy and practice. I propose we bring this paradigm shift to bear on Black fathers of K-12 children. This is a group of Black men who have also been overwhelmingly perceived from a deficit perspective. My research extends the concept of parental habitus, which describes the ability of Black fathers to successfully provide natural provisions (i.e. stable environment conducive to learning and academic development) in the face of complexities and unpromising circumstances. When education researchers discuss habitus, there is an immediate connection to the work of Bourdieu (1976; 1977) on habitus and multiple forms of capital, namely, cultural and social capital. These terms were used by Bourdieu (1977) in *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction*, where he defined cultural capital as forms of knowledge, skill, education, etc., in short any culturally advantaged information people have that gives them higher status in society. Social capital can be accumulated when people interact with other families in schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, local associations, and a range of informal meeting places.

## **Black Fathers' Parental Habitus**

Black fathers exhibiting parental habitus, provide their children with cultural and social capital, including attitudes and knowledge that will empower them to navigate educational terrains. However, I do not see the capital provided by them to their children as assuming a position of hierarchy, authority, or power, as typified in Bourdieu's work; nor communitarian focused as styled in Tara Yosso's (2005) work on community cultural wealth. Instead, Black parental habitus occupies a unique space in the sociology of education, one which: a) resituates a focus on capital from the receiver (the student) to the giver (the father); b) acknowledges the importance of the experiential knowledge Black fathers have in navigating hostile social landscapes; c) focuses on the individual exchange between fathers and their children; d) recognizes the unique challenges faced by Black children and their fathers in society; and e) considers high-achieving Black fathers' habitus as a way of being that fosters, expects, and is fueled by resiliency and critical agency.

Black parental habitus as a concept, practice, and strategy relevant to Black fathers is needed, as research has rarely documented specific strategies and practices among involved Black fathers. For example, Boyd-Franklin (1989), Clark (1983), and Ford (1993) noted that previous studies on achievement orientation told "little about what happens educationally in the homes of Black children" (p. 59), which makes it difficult for some policy makers and educators to understand how to nurture and teach Black children. Thus, an understanding and description of the role that African American fathers play for their children in the home will be of critical importance, and especially with respect to their sons.

In studying Black parental habitus, there are a number of domains that must be considered. High-achieving fathers teach their sons and daughters how to manage responsibilities in academic, personal, workplace, and familial realms. These fathers' help their children strategize on how to overcome barriers and become assets to their communities (i.e. religious and academic institutions). In so doing, they affirm the importance of using reason and experience to predict outcomes and consequences. Thus, they help their children gain analytical skills, which enable them to gain more control over their life trajectories, with an emphasis placed on the development of differentiated meta-strategies for problem solving. These fathers imbed in their children progressive values of social justice, respect for human dignity, and emotional presence. These progressive values serve as a life framework for future commitments. All of the aforementioned teachings (e.g., managing responsibilities, strategizing, theorizing, and progressive values) serve Black sons and daughters in both an educational context and in other socially stratified institutions (e.g., churches, political organizations, government, workplace).

One of the primary goals of this work is to give Black fathers a deliberative space to author their own experiences, to name the challenges that they have interacting with school officials, and to recognize the steps that they take to be active participants in their children's educational endeavors. The importance of centering involved Black fathers' voices within the social science discourse on parental involvement is critical, as these voices counter dominant master-narratives about Black paternal deficits. A strength-based examination of Black Parental habitus is an explanation for understanding why, despite every conceivable barrier, many Black men succeed in being highly engaged in the lives of their children, to magnificent mutual benefit.

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## FRESHMEN COACHING FOR MEN OF COLOR: "PAYING IT FORWARD, REALIZING ASPIRATIONS & POTENTIAL"



The Men of Color Initiative (MOCI) started more than two years ago at the University of New Mexico to increase access and success for Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Latino and Native men at the university and in the educational pipeline. MOCI's programs engage and support men of color through academic support and career planning, coaching and mentoring, community engagement, graduation, leadership, wellness as well as research and assessment. This year MOCI is collaborating with the UNM Office of Student Academic Success on the second year of the Freshmen Coaching Initiative to both recruit first year male students of color and volunteer coaches who are undergraduate and graduate male students of color because as one volunteer coach summarizes, "I want to help another Native student succeed and graduate."

While 90.2% of UNM first year students return for the spring semester, fewer students of color and even fewer men of color are retained. Knowing how important the first year is for students to graduate from college, the Freshmen Coaching Initiative is "designed to offer academic support services to students on academic warning with less than 26 credit hours. Each student is assigned an academic coach. The coach and student meet initially to assess the individual's academic strengths, weaknesses and factors that impede academic progress."

The Office of Student Academic Success requires volunteer coaches to attend a workshop to learn tools for successful coaching. The workshop covers establishing the coaching relationship, expectations, communication and how to coach versus mentor, helping the student identify and accomplish goals by asking powerful questions and referring students to resources on campus and in the community. The workshop also uses roleplaying for coaches to practice communicating and goal setting with first year students. One of the volunteer shared, "seeing other men of color wanting to help first students achieve made me happy, not only for our Latino students but all men of

color." Academic coaches also track communication, meetings and progress made towards goals using online reporting systems.

With lower retention rates for men of color than other freshmen students, MOCI wants to build coaching relationships between men of color students to promote educational success. In 2013-2014, twenty five first year men of color will be paired with an academic coach who is a undergraduate or graduate male student of color. One of the current MOCI coaches suggested that "during the freshmen and sophomore years the social transition from high school to college can be difficult especially for students of color, and I want to give back some of the resources and mentoring I received." He also said that "mentors helped me realize my potential and aspirations" and, "seeing Black males who successfully transitioned from undergraduate student to graduate and professional careers helped me see that accomplishing my goals was not far-fetched and encouraged me to pay it forward for the race and next generation." Another volunteer coach also commented that, "it's important for the Native student to connect with and hear our struggles and success."

Preliminary data from the first year of the coaching program suggests men coaching men produces successful results. MOCI is excited to see the results from the new collaboration for men of color to be coaching other men of color. You can learn more about MOCI at [menofcolor.unm.edu](http://menofcolor.unm.edu) or [menofcolor@unm.edu](mailto:menofcolor@unm.edu).

<sup>1</sup> <http://registrar.unm.edu/reports--statistics/spring2012oer.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://success.unm.edu/programs/>

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# MASCULINE IDEOLOGY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

In 2010, Hanna Rosin began an article entitled *The End of Men* with a statistic: "women have become the majority in the workforce for the first time in the history of the United States" (Rosin, 2010, p. 1). Connecting this idea to higher education, Rosin (2010) highlighted the fact that for every two men who are admitted into college this year, three women will do the same. What should be attributed to women's growing success in the labor force and education? Is it a woman's natural capacity with regard to "social intelligence, open communication, and the ability to sit still and focus" (Rosin, 2010) that renders her more capable to adapt to the perpetually changing challenges of today's workforce? Should we be concerned about factors contributing to the achievement rates of men?

As student affairs professionals, this is a problem that warrants our attention. I am referring, in part, to the growing achievement gap between women and men in higher education to which Rosin (2010) addresses. Women are also graduating more often than men. The U.S. Department of Education (2012) presents a glaring disparity in persistence toward graduation across all racial categories and all degree types for more than a decade (Blount, Weddington, & Weddington, 2012).

As educators, how do we respond to these statistics? It may be tempting to accept the biological assumptions of Rosin's article. By entrenching the issue as a biological imperative rather than a set of modifiable behaviors, the theory relinquishes all sense of responsibility in those that teach, advise, and model behavior because it assumes incapacity rather than an expectation of improvement. Are men hearing that they are biologically inferior to women academically? Rather than teaching and expecting men to modify debilitating behavior, the message is rooted in toxic soil that mitigates positive growth.

Residual animosity is fostered in this stance as well. The Rosin article is combative and cultivates the idea that one gender is better-equipped than the other. It perpetuates an *either us or them* mentality, or what is sometimes called a *zero-sum game*. To put it plainly: *One gender must fail for the other to succeed*. Does this perspective fit into our student affairs philosophy?

It serves educators well, in the heat of this argument, to be reminded of one of our major guiding principles as student affairs professionals. According to the *Student Personnel Point of View*, "... the college or university should provide services through which the student may require the skills and techniques for efficient utilization of his [sic] ability (American College Personnel Association, [1937] 1949, p. 22). In the spirit of the student affairs profession, we can and should seek to support all learners under the assumption that our students will, under the right conditions, be self-determining in their own pursuits.

So, what are the ideal learning conditions for men? What factors hinder men and what factors aid them? A discussion follows that will address how men's debilitating thoughts and behaviors are experienced in an effort to inform and guide student affairs professionals.

In a landmark study related to masculine identity development, Pleck (1981) defined masculine ideology as a "belief about the

importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards for male behavior" (p. 19). Current research has sought to describe the various ways the individual is limited from being a fully functioning human being (Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009). In research by Edwards and Jones (2009), ideas related to "not preparing [for class]" (p. 214), "proving manhood" (p. 214), "expectations to party" (p.216), and "not studying or pretending not to study" (p. 216) surfaced as recurring negative themes associated with masculine ideology. College-aged men also reported behaving in ways that were incongruent with their true selves. Gender expectations made men feel as though they were putting on a performance that was "narrow, rigid and limiting" (Edwards & Jones, 2009, p. 214). Participants in both studies reported a "fear of femininity" as a prominent factor that debilitated them in the college setting (Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009). Finally, it should also be noted that a sense of "challenge without support" (Davis, 2002, p. 228) was a prevalent theme as well. It seems that vulnerability is one of those aspects men are often most afraid to express, yet, ironically, is one of the most important prerequisites to receiving the support so desperately needed.

As educators, trust can serve as one foundational piece to helping men navigate masculinities. Males have indicated a need to hide their identity, which surfaced in the literature as a feeling of "wearing a mask" (Edwards & Jones, 2009, p. 215). Men feeling a need to hide from their authentic selves serves as a clue that they feel some sense of fear and confusion with respect to their true thoughts and feelings. Therefore, intimate and group conversations should be empathic and supportive in order to provide space for men to find and be themselves. Ideas that reflect masculine ideology can be questioned, but only in a safe place that offers both time and space for self-exploration. In addressing questions around masculinity in a group atmosphere, males will have the opportunity to observe and learn from each other.

The idea that men fear femininity (Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009), however, should inform educators' approaches on leading discussion related to masculinity. Conversation and self-exploration may be seen as typically feminine, so seeking various traditionally masculine ways to initiate a conversation may provide a less-threatening environment. Davis and Laker (2004), for example, recommend action-oriented activities like playing catch as a way to alleviate potential stress that may come from what some men might view as a typically feminine practice.

By examining ways in which other groups are supported on campus and heeding research related to masculine ideology, we may find clues for how best to advocate for male students. The prevalence of many existing centers devoted to supporting women and under-represented populations may serve well as a design for student affairs professionals to follow in creating men's centers on campus. This will provide both a physical place and a symbolic message that men, willing to step away from wearing a mask of masculinity, are worthy of being supported on campus. Mentor programs within these centers, in addition, could serve to recognize, celebrate and help redefine what it means to be a man in our society.

(Continued on Page 21)

# A CREATIVE SPACE TO CHALLENGE TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY

Progressive Masculinities Mentors (PMM) is a multicultural group of individuals at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale who are concerned about traditional gender scripts. Instead of remaining in the traditional "man box", PMM attempts to move outside of it to communicate love, vulnerability, compassion, hope, and respect. Recent SIU graduate Spencer Tribble shares, "I see PMM as a safe and diverse space that creates a social platform for dialogue and education about masculinity. PMM has taught me that I don't have to conform to society's standards of what it means to be a man." As Spencer suggests, PMM is a wonderful space for college men to learn civic responsibility, community service, and personal development. Moving men out of the box is the primary focus of PMM, as graduate student Alexander Martin offers: "Being involved with PMM has made me more comfortable within the context of my own masculinity. I don't feel like I always have to prove myself to my peers or display random acts of hyper-masculinity to get the approval of others." We are a "new generation of men" who welcome other men and women to join our movement.

The group works closely with the local Women's Center to address gender violence issues. After completing the "Sexual Violence Prevention Training for Male Allies," PMM members join The Women's Center's staff in providing anti-violence teaching and mentoring to college peers and students in local middle and high schools. For six years, the group has met consecutively on Thursday nights to address key issues in masculinities. "It's encouraging to see 20 to 25 college-age men come together each week to discuss both problematic and positive masculinity, as well as strategies to address these issues" said Megan Jones-Williams, coordinator of the Rape Crisis Services Program at The Women's Center. Jones-Williams has been a vital component of the group, regularly attending the weekly meetings and serving as a mother figure and educator to the young men.

Out of these weekly sessions, many SIU male students have learned valuable skills, have participated in important gender justice work on campus, at conferences, in the surrounding communities, and have gone on to pursue an academic career in gender and masculinities studies. "PMM has influenced me to challenge myself about how I perform my masculinity. It has motivated me to step up and be a better man. I've learned that it will take a new generation of men in order to ultimately stop violence against women" states Benjamin Smith, who is a junior at SIU and a student leader for the group." Recent graduate Calvin Zimmermann is now in graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania studying gender and masculinities through a fully funded five-year fellowship. Zimmermann shared: "PMM challenged me to think deeply and progressively about issues



**PMM member Calvin Zimmermann stands beside a poster he constructed of PMM at a McNair Scholars Research conference.**

related to gender and masculinities. From questioning traditional masculinity such as being "macho" and "cool," and to embrace a more humanistic form of masculinity that is loving, caring, and vulnerable." He went on to add that PMM help move him out of his comfort zone and presented him with opportunities to dialogue with the other members as well as lead sessions. Another PMM member agrees with Zimmermann about developing transferable skills. Nick Bates, who now serves as an assistant hall director for SIU Housing, shared that he is prepared to work with students in a residential setting due to the training he acquired from PMM sessions and trainings. "Progressive Masculinities Mentors has revolutionized the way I think about the privilege of being a man, and has extended my manhood further than I would have ever conceptualized it," stated Bates. As a labor of love, PMM was the focus of my dissertation, which chronicled my journey as an activist in creating this anti-gender violence college men's group.

So how did PMM start? On October 19, 2007, I met with fifteen men to discuss the issue of male partner violence. We all convened to show our unified support of the local Take Back the Night event, which was held by The Women's Center in Carbondale, IL as part of an international campaign to raise awareness about violence against women. The Women's Center had held the event for over twenty years and thought it would be good to have men involved. At the time, I was serving as a violence prevention graduate assistant for Southern Illinois University in the Wellness Center, a division of Student Health Services. Having worked with The Women's Center as a prevention educator, I was asked to hold a men's discussion group as a partnership between The Women's Center and the university to show support for the march. Along with fellow graduate students from the Department of Speech Communication and several younger male students, we met in the SIU's Student Health Center

auditorium an hour before the actual Take Back the Night event. We spoke the entire hour about the issue of violence against women and what men could do to assist in the fight for gender equality. I shared my experience working in the men's anti-violence cause at the University of Northern Iowa, and they found it fascinating. After the lively and passionate conversation, we agreed to meet the following week to continue our discussion. We then joined the march as we listened to the stories of survivors at the speak-out session of the rally. This too, encouraged us, as men, to address this issue year round.

For the rest of the Fall 2007 semester, this group of men met every Friday night to discuss issues such as male privilege, sexism, sexual assault, and gender violence. I noticed during discussions that most of us struggled with the way we had been socialized to think about women, violence, other men, and most importantly, about ourselves as men. The group was very excited about the spring semester and desired to be active participants for social justice on campus and in the community. We moved towards designing our weekly discussions on masculinity around popular culture. Once we established a core base of fifteen to twenty PMM members, it was my intention to provide more formal structure for the loosely defined roundtable talks. After each meeting, group members wanted to know what we were discussing the next week. Someone would always say, "Hey, what are we going to rap about next week?" There was no topic off limits; the only requirement was that we attempt to explore it through a progressive masculinities lens. I began calling the weekly meetings "RAP Sessions" to play off of members' usage of the word "rap," as well as to indicate to other men that the weekly discussions were a space where men could speak openly and frankly about masculinities issues. We wanted the term "rap" to capture our objective of progressive thought, so I came up with the acronym: Raising Awareness Proactively.



*PMM members working in the middle schools.*

I borrowed the idea of open rap sessions from the feminist movement where women would gather to lift each other's spirits, provide a supportive network, educate each other, and simply enjoy engaging in conversation and consciousness-raising. The RAP sessions became a place for me to build strong relationships with the young men. We do not turn away anyone who wants to participate in our sessions, but it is important to keep some level of intimacy between the young men who attend. Women are always welcome at our sessions and some have attended on occasions, but I have found that men speak more candidly when only other men they trust are in the room with them.

Through open discussion, the men have trusted me with very personal situations in their lives and I listen closely without judging, just offering support. The key components of the sessions are to facilitate honest dialogue among the young men, and advance our thinking through the transformative practice of asking critical questions about traditional male scripts. Due to the confidential nature of the sessions, the group agrees to "keep the conversation in the room" as a way to protect individuals who would like to speak openly about an issue. As a trusted mentor to so many of the PMM members, I choose not to share our most intimate discussions, yet I feel it is important to express just how transformative these sessions are for those involved. We often disagree and challenge each other while actively encouraging and providing a supportive network for group members. "The man who views the world at fifty the same as he did at twenty has wasted thirty years of his life" is our inspirational quote taken from a 1975 interview with former boxing heavy weight champion of the world Muhammad Ali (Torricelli, 2001, p. 9).

People often ask: what keeps college men returning each week to discuss masculinity? I often reply that we are a group of individuals concerned about the traditional gender scripts currently being offered to men. Due to this, we seek to develop beyond such boundaries so as to find progressive ways to express who we are. We simply refuse to be men at the expense of women, children, and other men through exploitation, violence, control, sexism, homophobia, and domination. Each member sees himself or herself as a work in progress, constantly striving toward the goal of transformation through deep introspective questioning. We promise to share our knowledge, ideas, and time with others who also want to move beyond traditional notions of masculinity. PMM has a commitment to mentoring the next generation of men so that they may find it easier to stand as a progressive individual who is socially responsible and supports their community. We are a new generation of men; we are the Progressive Masculinities Mentors.

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## TELL ME WHO I'M SUPPOSED TO BE: MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF MEN AND THEIR BODY IMAGE

Whether it is how we should dress, how we should act or how we should look, we are being bombarded with media's portrayal of who we should aspire to become. As a Latino male, I find it hard not to notice the messages delivered by the media of my ideal image. This image tends to be one of a stern, fit, good-looking man. The protagonist of the latest television series, soap opera, the artist chosen to be on the cover of *Men's Vogue* and *GQ* are all depictions of what men determined by the media.

At age 16, identifying such depictions of an unattainable persona was not so easy to understand. Back in high school, I remember wanting nothing more than to be loved and

liked by my girlfriend at that time and liked by my peers. I remember hearing girls talk about the guys they liked, they would mention names of singers, and actors and various other artist they felt would be the perfect man. Looking at my reflection I was nowhere near to looking like those images girls carried on their folders. At my heaviest, I weighed in at 222 pounds. Disgusted, ashamed and unhappy with the person I saw in front of the mirror were some of the emotions that ran through me as I stared at that hideous scale. It was there and then that I made a choice to change something. I decided that I wanted to be "them." If that's what it meant to be liked, what it meant to be a man then that's what I wanted. I joined a nearby gym and remember going to 3-hour gym sessions. I would do non-stop cardio; my primary goal was to loose weight. After a week or two I remember losing some weight and then decided to take it to another level. I began to skip meals and suppress my hunger by eating carrots and finally eating nothing at all but ice cubes. This combined with intense cardio led to rapid weight loss. People at school began to notice, and comments like "Angel, you're losing so much weight, you're looking good," began to motivate me to continue my unhealthy habits.

After being ridiculed most of my life because of my weight and having the media blast at my face from all over how I should look, compliments like such were hard to ignore and not use as motivation to continue my weight loss. I lost a total of 60 pounds within the span of 3 months and got to weigh 158 pounds at my lowest. I would say I starved myself for that time just to reach my goal. It is here when I recognize I had problem. I began to search



online various ways to contribute to such rapid shedding of pounds like throwing up and wearing a waist belt when working out. With such thoughts in my head there, was a definite problem.

I never told anybody the problem I faced with anorexia because I was ashamed about it. Until today, I've battled with keeping a steady weight while not falling back down to such dark hole I was once buried in. I have chosen to share this because it is important for us to stand up and recognize the self worth we have as individuals. Anorexia amongst men is not something that is highlighted much, but is important to note that it exists. Reasons to revel such illness can be directly related to the media portrayal of men being tough and strong. Accepting such problem and seeking help can be perceived as weakness in the eyes of many men. In my experience it was something very difficult to come to terms with and seeking guidance on what to do was out of the question. Luckily, I was able to overcome such illness before any health issues arose.

Today more than ever, media infects youth's minds with images of what they should desire to become. No one should define what beauty is and what is labeled as beautiful or how anyone as a female, male, trans or whatever you might identify should look like. For the men out there who have faced this or continue to do so, remember you are not alone and there is a way out.

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# DECONSTRUCTING THE IDENTITY OF MASCULINITY THROUGH HIP-HOP

## Introduction

The processes involved in the development of an individual's identity, as well as their way of both being and becoming, are constructed through life experiences and influences (Ibrahim, 1999). A central component of identity, how one views and acts out gender is critical in their development (Pleasants, 2007). As a construct of gender, masculinity is fabricated under social standards and rules (Brackett, 2012). In turn, norms frame ideals of what does, and does not, constitute manhood and one's identity becomes situational. It is within these definitions that hip-hop simultaneously reinforces and counters mainstream principles and perspectives of masculinity, manhood, and identity. Offering references to multiple components of masculinity, hip-hop offers practitioners avenues to integrate culturally relevant praxis and pedagogies into their work to promote effective, effectual developments of individual and group identities.

## Hip Hop

Unquestionable in its impact (Ogbar, 2007), hip-hop has become both a mainstay and scripter of influence (Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2012). Embedded within this influence are attributes of opportunity for practitioners to utilize in their work on college campuses. With higher education responsible for serving for the public good (Figueroa, 2003), and hip-hop both a cultural phenomenon (Tyson, Duongtran, & Acevedo, 2012) and marquee of influence (Baszile, 2009), it only makes sense that the two serve as partners of educational praxis. As an entity within the constructs of society, the culture of hip-hop presents a multitude of opportunities to connect curriculum with student engagement, identity, and success. At the forefront of such opportunities is an inherent link between hip-hop and masculinity. Regardless of the specific focal points targeted, definitions, behaviors, and ideologies of masculinity are embedded into the psyche of the hip-hop culture. Violence (Ogbar, 2007); sexism (Rose, 2008); sexual dominance (LaBoskey, 2001); racism (Ogbar, 2007; Hurt & Berg, 2007); and sexuality (McCune, 2008) highlight a few of the prevailing characteristics within the content, context, and culture of hip-hop.

Although a powerhouse in communicating ideas and perspectives of culture (Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2012) linked to portraits of negativity, within the world of hip-hop lays an often oppressed and unacknowledged world of counter stories. Encoded by narratives and practices emphasizing a rejection of dominant norms (Powell, 2011), hip-hop also includes stories that challenge mainstream images to go against the grain as a means to confront structures of dominance and oppression (McCune, 2008). Though often extinct from any form of relevant airplay or discussions, many artists use hip-hop to convey messages of political activism, social empowerment, and civic responsibility. Artists of the likes of Lupe Fiasco, Common, KRS One, Talib Kweli, and Nas are known for using lyrical content to provoke challenges of widespread messages and promotions of what masculinity is and looks like. Also, when examining issues of identity and manhood, one might question why artists such as David Banner (Southern University); Ludacris (Georgia State University); and Rick Ross (former correctional officer) receive more fame and recognition for music popularizing masculinity via attributes of misogyny, violence, and drugs rather than their college degrees and careers.

Not meant to initiate an argument of what hip-hop is or is not; what music should or should not receive attention and publicity; or the intent of artists, companies, and media; the purpose here is to demonstrate how hip-hop has a place in the practice and curriculum of student affairs. Discussions and debate over the authenticity, messages, and content of hip-hop offer opportunities for practitioners to utilize a 1) cultural phenomenon, 2) influencer of social, political, and cultural norms and trends, and 3) exceptional form of communication (Malone & Martinez, 2010) to provoke critical, difficult, and necessary dialogue to dissect and deconstruct ideals of masculinity to promote engagement, empowerment, and success.

(Continued on Page 21)



# IF I CAN BE AN EXAMPLE: MACKLEMORE AND THE SEARCH FOR REAL MALE ROLE MODELS

I have a bad habit of idolizing impossibly great leaders. Nelson Mandela, Bill Gates, and Salvatore Giunta all populate my list of men whose influence and grandeur I wish I could replicate to even a fraction of a degree. These men have earned their place in the annals of history through various means, but they all represent a powerful, ambitious sort of person. They represent the type of man who is seemingly unburdened by society's expectations of what it means to be masculine and successful.

In an educational setting it's easy to create a lesson plan or presentation on any of these men (or any man like them) showing their virtue and their drive, especially when trying to address one of the large number of issues associated with our male students. But are these messages really getting through to them? How many of our K-12 and college men are set on overhauling racial stratification or radically changing the face of technology? It's tough to find a middle ground – on the one end we have these monolithic figures, on the other we have athletes and pop culture icons who embody the restrictive societal norms of masculinity: tough, emotionless, drunk. How can we as educators and concerned citizens find a compromise?

Enter Macklemore.

You may not know Macklemore well or maybe you've never even heard his Macklemorename, but you've probably heard his biggest hit. Three months ago if someone asked you about a thrift shop you might be inclined to think of Goodwill. Now, Thrift Shop and Can't Hold Us are getting serious play time and Macklemore aka Ben Haggerty, a white guy from Seattle, is rapidly becoming one of the most successful independent rappers to ever hit the airwaves. Building off the success of his notable release *Otherside*, a powerful song about addiction and recovery, Macklemore (along with his incredible producer Ryan Lewis) debuted his new album, *The Heist*, in October 2012. What makes *The Heist* different from your average rap album is its content: within its tracks you'll find a song about relapse, a song about gay marriage, and a song about the commercialization of urban youth.

Of course, Macklemore is hardly the first rapper to tackle broad social justice themes: Lupe Fiasco (with songs like *American Terrorist* and *Words I Never Said*, among others) and even K'Naan are just two of the myriad artists who have used their lyrics to touch on topics more meaningful than most of what gets played on pop stations. But something about Macklemore stands out.

He's not preachy.

He's real. Relatable. Despite the content of his lyrics, there's no holier-than-thou attitude.



And he certainly doesn't elevate himself.

*These interviews are so obnoxious /  
Saying that 'It's poetry; You're so well spoken'? Stop it.*

Macklemore – A Wake feat. Evan Roman

Before we go much further, I think it's important we recap exactly what's going on with college-aged men, especially on our campuses. There's not a huge amount of research out there, but what we do have is telling.

College-aged men (O'Neil & Crasper, 2011)...are overrepresented in university conduct hearings, party more and study less than women, drink, on average, twice as much as women, are five times more likely to commit suicide than women...and we haven't even begun to touch depression, violence, and sexual assault yet.

It's easy to dismiss these issues as "boys being boys" – the age-old adage of man's instinctive role as troublemaker. But if we applied that same narrow thinking to women or to race or to sexual orientation, wouldn't we be (rightly) lambasted? So why is it socially acceptable to espouse the same ideas towards men? What is at the core of male misbehavior?

In several published articles and in his popular but controversial book *Guyland*, Michael Kimmel argues that there are three cultures that men face in their gender identity development (Kimmel & Davis, 2011):

### **Culture of Entitlement**

Men grow up believing that they can show neither empathy or compassion. So why are we surprised when men commit violent acts? Men are being raised by people who say that crying is bad, but stoicism is good. Men are being told that we have to be the

best, and when we don't get what we want or feel we've earned, we feel slighted.

### Culture of Silence

Men are also told that we shouldn't talk about our feelings. This silence can range from simply being upset and not acknowledging it to being uncomfortable with something another man is doing to a woman but not speaking up because of some fear about breaking man law.

### Culture of Protection

Finally, men put each other before anyone else. "Bros before hoes," as it were. You don't want your drunk buddy to get an MIP so you keep him on the couch and hope he doesn't have alcohol poisoning. You don't want your brother to get in trouble for hazing, so you don't say anything about what he's doing to new recruits.

Do any of those sound familiar?

And this is where we tie it all back in – despite the norms that tell men we aren't supposed to talk about meaningful issues or engage in serious dialogue with our brothers, Macklemore is making a name for himself by forcing the issue. Macklemore is breaking the silence, stripping himself of his entitlement, and putting the greater good first. Macklemore is comfortable being uncomfortable, as evidenced by many of his songs.

#### Self-Awareness and Esteem

*And I had to find out who I really was /  
Who I really wasn't /  
So sick of who I was becoming /  
Yeah, tired of running /*

*Time to look at the man in the mirror until I can learn to love him*  
Macklemore – Make the Money

#### Father/Son Relationship

*Oh well I'll just take my slip to the grave /  
Uh, what the f— are my parents gonna say? /  
The success story that got his life together and changed /  
And you know what pain looks like /  
When you tell your dad you relapsed then look him directly into  
his face*

Macklemore – Starting Over feat. Ben Bridwell

#### LGBTQ Rights and Social Justice

*A word rooted in hate, yet our genre still ignores it /  
Gay is synonymous with the lesser /  
It's the same hate that's caused wars from religion /  
Gender to skin color, complexion of your pigment /  
The same fight that lead people to walk-outs and sit-ins /  
Human rights for everybody, there is no difference*  
Macklemore – Same Love feat. Mary Lambert

#### Poverty

We want what we can't have, commodity makes us want it /  
So expensive, d—, I just got to flaunt it /  
Got to show 'em, so exclusive, this that new s— /  
A hundred dollars for a pair of shoes I would never hoop in  
Macklemore – Wing\$

### Racial Strife and White Privilege

*"Why you out here talkin race, tryin' to save the f— globe?" /  
Don't get involved if the cause isn't mine /  
White privilege, white guilt, at the same d— time /  
So we just party like it's 1999 /  
Celebrate the ignorance while these kids keep dying*  
Macklemore – A Wake feat. Evan Roman

...and on, and on.

So why do we care?

Macklemore is using the talents he has to send a message and make a stand. He's not your average activist, but he's trying. And isn't that what we want from our men? Not that they are perfect, but that they are eager. That they are earnest. There is no one solution to the myriad issues men face – each man defines masculinity in profoundly different ways. But as student affairs personnel, and more importantly as educators, we must strive to make better men.

So is Macklemore the ideal role model? Of course not. He still uses many of the tropes we've come to associate with the rap genre: objectification of women, violence, and alcohol. But what's really important about Macklemore is his ability to bridge the gap – he is someone who, outwardly, appears to subscribe to societal expectations of masculinity. But once you dig past that, you find a man who is willing to have difficult conversations about his relationship with his father, about relapse and recovery, and about pressing social justice issues.

Macklemore is the middle-ground role model.

If we're going to break through to our male students' vulnerabilities and have meaningful discussions, we as educators have to be willing to meet them on their playing field. We have to find men like Macklemore who are putting aside their imperfection and trying to make a difference anyway. By injecting positive, constructive discussions into a place where men are already comfortable, we can begin to address the issues that plague college males and work towards a more tolerant, more productive future.

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*Continued from Page 5*

The Minority Male Student Success Program's objective is to improve the success rates of minority male students. At Durham Technical Community College in North Carolina, they have implemented a Minority Male Leadership Initiative known as "Visions." Visions have become an instrumental program that focuses on the growth of young men in the Durham community. The faculty works closely with the parents of these young men to help with their development, prosperity, and working towards triumph.

I'm not saying I have definite answers, but how do we accomplish this task? Support and discussion about leadership opportunities that can better assist young men in college to achieve academic success. Male faculty can also have a stronger impact on campus, serving as mentors to a young group of men, supervising and offering them engaging programs that will help these men engage in academic and social programs.

The numbers are increasing and more men are choosing not to go to college. As men in higher education we can provide the tools needed to help support these young men to enter into a college community with purposeful meaning and relationships. If we develop these programs now, young men will begin to develop, realize potential, and encourage more men to pursue higher education.

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**Special thanks to everyone who contributed to the Fall Edition of the MMKC Newsletter!**

**Interested in writing for our next issue? See the last page for details and the submission timeline!**

*Continued from Page 9*

This will be my third official year participating in Movember, and I have encouraged many people in my life to either get involved with the movement, or to keep in tune with their own health. Whether that is through exercise and fitness, seeking counseling, having an annual physical, paying more attention to their smoking or alcohol habits, or learning more about the health concerns that may impact them or the men around them, everyone can have a role in improving the health of men in our lives.

Keeping in line with my understanding that not everyone has direct access to health care, I try to push education about Movember and other men's health initiatives as much as I can. I had the opportunity to table for a Health Fair this past June in the Bronx and had information about Movember along with handouts that described what health issues one should pay attention to given their age. I recently learned that June is actually Men's Health Awareness Month (Men's Health Month) and additional efforts are being made to support men's health during this time of year.

Working in an institution of higher education gives me, and the members of NASPA, a unique opportunity to encourage students (and other administrators) at our institutions, or students we may know who attend other institutions, to seek out resources that are available to them through health centers, wellness/fitness centers, and counseling and psychological services. Some of us are also advisors to clubs or organizations whose missions are to spread awareness of health, empower men (ie. fraternities), or just educating the community. Movember could be an organization that some student groups may be interested in being involved with and host programming around.

As I mentioned earlier, one article could not possibly cover the all of the various health issues that plague men. This also goes for attempting to describe all of the details regarding what Movember is and does.

Below are websites that can extend the resources and information available on this topic. I hope that this is the beginning of a conversation and hope that it possibly sparked your interest to get involved with, or at least learn more about Movember.

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Continued from Page 13

To determine all the factors of men's diminished outcomes in higher education is beyond the scope of this paper. It may relate to both the natural tendencies to which Rosen (2010) refers and the socialized masculine ideology described in other studies (Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009). I want to suggest, however, that student affairs truth rests outside of this dichotomy. There are many ways in which men and women are different, but we should not forget that all people, regardless of their gender, are similar in that they thrive in a supportive environment that recognizes individual and group members needs. If we can start with this idea in mind as student affairs professionals, we may arrive closer to serving more of our student's needs. If we cannot, then our assumptions that men cannot change will be fulfilled. Whether we think we can serve men or not, we are probably right.

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Continued from Page 17

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## THE PURPOSE OF THE MEN & MASCULINITIES KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY

The purpose of the Men & Masculinities Knowledge Community (MMKC) is to provide a venue for discussion, research, and the distribution of information about men’s gender identity development, in the context of college campuses.

The goals of the MMKC are:

1. To make gender identity(ies) a salient lens for viewing and working with male staff and students.
2. To develop and distribute resources that will enhance student affairs professionals’ ability to respond to the needs of male students
3. To inform the profession about new research and practices regarding the development of masculine identities as manifested in people in general, and men in particular (e.g. inclusive of masculinities performed by Trans/Queer, women.)
4. To offer technical and creative assistance to colleagues as they develop programs and services for male students.
5. To assist Student Affairs professionals in navigating the tensions between male privilege and men’s personal needs (e.g. challenge and support,) including support through the professionals’ personal frustrations in this regard.
6. To create guides to best practices in teaching male students about diversity, gender identity, and other critical issues affecting their personal growth.
7. To promulgate and/or distribute men’s issues and development scholarship for use in graduate preparation programs.

This KC was founded upon a pro-feminist, anti-racist, gay-affirmative agenda with the hope of providing resources to increase multi-cultural competence among male students by providing the NASPA membership with tools to invite and engage men into this process. The underlying assumption is that men in general are interested in social justice, capable of enacting it, and that they need language and a connection to the process.

## ARTICLE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

1. Articles should be no less than 300 words and no more than 1500.
2. All articles should be relevant to the mission and purpose of the Men and Masculinity Knowledge Community.
3. Articles should include the name of the author, job title, email and school affiliation.
4. Anyone with an article that is time sensitive should inquire with the Technology Chair for deadlines.
5. Please take the time to proof and edit your work.
6. All work should be saved in .doc (Word) format.
7. Photos and artwork should be sent as high quality .jpg files.
8. All submissions must be sent to the Newsletter Editor, Jack Korpob, at [pkorpob@gmail.com](mailto:pkorpob@gmail.com).

## MMKC NEWSLETTER

### SUBMISSION TIMELINE

EDITION	CALL FOR ARTICLES	SUBMISSION DUE DATE	PUBLISH DATE
Winter	Late November	December 21 <sup>st</sup>	Early January
Conference	—	--	Annual Conference
Spring	Late February	March 21 <sup>st</sup>	Early April
Summer	Late May	June 21 <sup>st</sup>	Early July
Fall	Late August	September 21 <sup>st</sup>	Early October