



**NASPA** | KNOWLEDGE  
COMMUNITY

**MEN AND MASCULINITIES**

**SUMMER 2014 NEWSLETTER**

EDITED BY

PONGPUNYA JACK KORPOB & LAUREL DREHER

# LETTER FROM THE NEWSLETTER EDITOR



Hello!

The summer has been a whirlwind. I recently earned my Masters degree and have started my first professional position as a Residence Director at the University of Vermont.

After a couple weeks of winding down previous positions and packing everything, I made the move. As training picks up in my position, I often think about how I will support male students in the residence halls and how my male identity affects the work I do.

I'm very lucky that the department I am working in values social justice and work around diversity and inclusion work. While doing the professional work, and I hope to continue doing the personal work and exploration around my own male identity and what masculinity means, especially because this work is supported by colleagues.

I really enjoyed all the articles submitted for this issue of the MMKC newsletter and hope you enjoy them, too! I hope everyone is enjoying summer, and good luck to those already preparing for the next academic year!

-Jack Korpob

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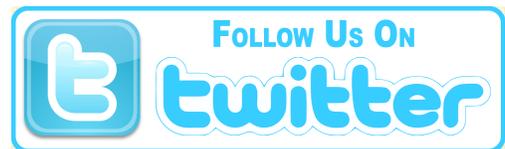
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## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



Sometimes I read.

I go to meetings, I respond to email, I strategize, I coordinate, I present, I write, and I mediate, but rarely do I read. Not because I don't want to, and not because I don't have time. I'm convinced that I can do anything I want as long as I make it a priority. I learn this lesson daily as I witness successful students, researchers, and

entrepreneurs. I don't read because I don't want to. It is tough to admit that, but it's true.

The silver lining though, is that we humans can change, and change happens one decision at a time.

The other day I decided I wanted to read again. I just had a friend decide to write again. I had another friend decide to take charge of her health for the first time in years. Another friend decided to get out of a bad relationship. Another friend decided to pursue a dream. Witnessing change is palpable, it's powerful!

Those few minutes I spent reading were inspirational, as a colleague had written about her passions, her professional

desires, and how she never tires of seeking new challenges. Then I got hungry. Everything old looked new. Problems looked like opportunities. Frustrations became challenges. Fears became aspirations.

As we turn the corner on this brief respite we call summer and stare down another academic year, what are you going to change? Are you finally going to start talking with some students about creating that men's discussion group? Are you going to decide to read one article on masculinity each week? Are you going to mentor someone on your campus or are you going to ask a senior colleague to be your mentor? Are you going to write for the MMKC blog? Would you consider stepping out and joining the MMKC Mentorship Initiative? Will you nominate a colleague for a well-deserved award? You've still got a few weeks to submit a proposal to present at the annual conference in New Orleans. You've still got time to submit a proposal to your supervisor to ask for start-up funding for a pilot initiative to facilitate programming around gender topics.

Please enjoy the content of this newsletter, and know that we are the sum of our decisions - thousands of daily decisions. I'm so glad that I decided to read again. What will you decide to do today?

Be well and at peace,

Patrick Tanner  
MMKC Chair

**MMKC**  
**Drive-In**  
**CONFERENCE:**  
**MASCULINITIES IN THE**  
**INTERSECTIONS**

**Oct 10th 2014**  
**ST. LOUIS UNIVERSITY**  
**9:00AM-3:00PM**

Questions?  
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**NASPA** KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY  
MEN AND MASCULINITIES

# SEVEN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTERS RESPOND TO WHITE HOUSE REPORT ON BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

BY SHAUN R. HARPER, FRANK HARRIS III, J. LUKE WOOD, BRYANT T. MARKS, VICTOR B. SÁENZ, LUIS PONJUAN, JAMES L. MOORE III, TYRONE C. HOWARD, AND JERLANDO F. L. JACKSON

In response to a recent [task force report](#) to President Barack Obama on [My Brother's Keeper](#), an initiative that brings together private sector and philanthropic organizations to improve the lives and outcomes of boys and young men of color in the United States, seven university-based research centers have jointly issued a statement.

[The Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education](#) (University of Pennsylvania), [Minority Male Community College Collaborative](#) (San Diego State University), [Morehouse Research Institute](#) (Morehouse College), [Project MALES](#) and the [Texas Education Consortium for Male Students of Color](#) (University of Texas at Austin), [Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male](#) (The Ohio State University), [UCLA Black Male Institute](#) (University of California, Los Angeles), and [Wisconsin's Equity and Inclusion Laboratory](#) (University of Wisconsin-Madison) are all research enterprises that rigorously and routinely study factors that enable and limit educational, social, and occupational opportunities for boys and young men of color.

Leaders of the seven centers emphasize the importance of effective research-based interventions and are jointly issuing the following statement in response to the task force report:

"As Black and Latino male professors and research center directors, we salute President Obama as well as the many philanthropic and private sector funders for their commitment to improving the conditions of our nation's boys and young men of color.

The task force report offers a commendable articulation of challenges and opportunities for young men of color and various agents who play some role in their life outcomes. Recommendations offered therein are appropriately informed by research from a range of academic disciplines.

As our nation prepares to enact recommendations from the task force, we call for programs, policies, and services that are guided by research and documented effectiveness. We caution, for example, against the widespread replication of mentoring programs that haphazardly match young men with adults, as evidence concerning the outcomes of such programs is mixed. Moreover, we believe interventions should focus on better understanding and remedying systemic inequities in policies, schooling and social practices, and structures that persistently undermine the success of boys and men of color. More significant investment in the dissemination of existing research on

what works, as well as funding new studies on promising policies and practices, would help ensure the success of My Brother's Keeper and the Americans it aims to effectively serve.

We urge private foundations, federal funding agencies (i.e., the Institute of Education Sciences, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health), and other entities that invest in projects associated with My Brother's Keeper to take seriously the evidence base of initiatives that are proposed, as well as rigorous evaluations of newly funded projects. Funds are needed to facilitate productive collaborations among research centers such as ours, and to connect researchers with agents who lead organizations and initiatives for young men of color across our nation. The success of My Brother's Keeper depends heavily on the quality of research produced about its effectiveness. Ultimately, strong cultures of evidence and efficacy should guide all programs, services, and interventions associated with the initiative.

My Brother's Keeper affords our country an important opportunity to reframe hopeless, deficit-oriented narratives about boys and young men of color, schools that educate them, and communities in which they live. We are hopeful that the initiative will produce replicable models of success, but doing so requires more investment in studies of what works. To ensure the success of My Brother's Keeper, our research centers stand ready to serve as resources to its funders and the Obama Administration."

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# IMPROVING INSTITUTIONS: MOCI'S IMPORTANCE OF MALE STUDENTS OF COLOR EMPOWERMENT

BY PABLO JOHN & JAIME MIGUEL MCCARTHY WITH SUPPORT FROM CHRISTOPHER RAMIREZ

*"Succeeding in college is all about connecting with the people around you. Don't be afraid to use me as a resource. Don't be afraid to ask for help from everyone, that's how you grow."*

As we table at orientations for incoming University of New Mexico freshmen, we see glazed eyes, deer in the headlights – students are seemingly dazed by the information thrown at them over the course of three days and don't know where to begin – and when considering where they'll end up in four years, that's the problem.

UNM caters to a different demographic of society than many public schools. As the flagship institution of a majority-minority state, we are blessed to see an incredible amount of diversity represented in every lecture hall, dorm room, and student organization. The numbers at Commencement, however, are a different matter.

According to graduation rates compiled by [collegeresults.org](http://collegeresults.org) in 2012, UNM graduates only 45.1% of students – in six years (the "traditional" four-year number hovers around 12%). This number is bad enough, but when put in the context of race, gender, and ethnicity, it is far worse.

Only 44.3% of Latino students graduate within six years. Black students have struggled as well, with 34.9% of them graduating. Finally, Native American students have a rate of just 24.3%. Overall, only 40.9% of men at UNM graduate, compared to 48.6% of women, a number that is proven to be most problematic for minorities through further number-crunching. The result? A heightened need for resources for students of color, especially men. Hence, the development of our organization, the Men of Color Initiative (MOCI) in 2011.

MOCI is a program under the umbrella of the university's Division for Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Office of Student Academic Success (OSAS), focused on improving retention and graduation rates among men of color, as well as the overall college experience of all students. All projects are geared at developing leadership skills, academic progress, creative expression, and community engagement.

As students of color, we have been searching for such resources ever since we came to this campus. Coming from low-income backgrounds with fewer successful academic role models to follow, we had to adjust to a school that

sees over 25,000 people on a daily basis and knows us only by identification numbers. Groups like MOCI have a different perspective, with goals of inclusion and engagement.

This summer, we are participating as interns with MOCI and Strong Families New Mexico, a project of Forward Together. We are focused on "community building", or civic engagement, for male students of color. This includes doing outreach at orientation, planning events, attending coalition meetings, facilitating workshops, and other projects to promote access and success for male students of color in higher education and the K-12 and community college pipeline. We are also being coached and mentored by the project's coordinator, Christopher Ramirez, and other campus and community partners.

Through the Men of Color Initiative, we have been able to see first-hand how involvement leads to positive collegiate experiences. This summer, we have had the opportunity to do community gardening in Albuquerque's South Valley, which exposed us to ideas of togetherness and sustainability, two concepts that are lacking in many conventional forms of education. We also were able to present at a youth conference, forcing us to think critically, shape ideas, and respond to the always-quick inquiries of the next generation. We are learning as much through the experience of facilitating as did the students who were supposed to learn from us. And this is the most important piece of information of all: education is best gained through *doing*.

By doing things as men of color with our community, we are growing and learning about ourselves and our communities. We are making new relationships, seeing how we are connected as men of color and use each other as role models. We are also learning that we are "stronger together" as male students of color coming from diverse backgrounds; we can share with each other our cultures, experiences, histories, languages and struggles.

The concept is simple: involved, goal-oriented students succeed. At the University of New Mexico, MOCI is the answer. By putting young men of color on the front lines and helping them develop the above-mentioned skills, we are making an investment in the future of our institution. Through the continuation of this program, we expect to see higher rates of graduation – and success in life – for male students of color and all students on our campus.

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## BE THE BEST DAD

### BY RON J. CLARK



Man meets woman in college. Man and woman hit it off. Nine months later, man and woman are parents. Somewhere along the way, man and woman decide not to marry but they are forced to co-parent. Sound familiar? The new dad typically has his offspring living with their mother and he becomes a visiting parent. A "baby daddy."

Now your nerves and money are stretched thin. You ask yourself, how did I get here and can I be the best dad while not living with my child?

*'How can I be there **without** actually being there?'*

Research says children with uninvolved fathers are more likely to experience major challenges. *Poverty, teen pregnancy, incarceration, and depression* are just a few. While one-fourth of U.S. children live in fatherless households, two-thirds of African American children experience this reality. Fathers serve as roles models for boys and relationship models for girls. Hence, a father's contribution is unique and irreplaceable.

Being a "baby daddy" has challenges, but also great opportunities. Consider this statement: physical absence does not have to equal abandonment.

It's highly possible to maintain a meaningful relationship with your children although you no longer live in the primary household. Just because you are no longer under the same roof, you can still play your important role as the most important man in their lives.

### Here's How You Do It:

- **Be respectful towards your children's mother.** Although she's no longer your girlfriend or "wifey," she is their mother and the gateway of access to your children. Keep the access clear and the environment peaceful!
- **Meet your financial responsibilities to your children.** Children are expensive to raise and one parent should not shoulder the responsibility alone. Take advantage of programs that offer training and employment opportunities when necessary. National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse at [fatherhood.gov](http://fatherhood.gov) is a federal government initiative that supports dads with local programs and resources.
- **Send frequent text messages and emotionally connecting pictures for older children.** Show you are thinking about them often. Little notes can be great emotional connections as well.
- **Initiate 'sacred' dad and child(ren) time.** Let the child (if old enough) help decide the activity and meals for the designated time.
- **Initiate spontaneous and unplanned dad-child(ren) events.** Be sure to get moms' 'buy-in,' but be open to pancakes for dinner, silly activities, etc.
- **Draw special pictures for your child(ren).** Regardless of your talent, the love and effort matter most.
- **Make birthdays extremely special.** Make the entire day special to the birthday child(ren) with their favorite "fixings." Co-plan with mom where possible since you are the parents. Let the kids see you as a team.
- **Improve your parenting knowledge and skills.** Visit the National Fatherhood Initiative's web resource center at [fathersource.org](http://fathersource.org), and talk to other highly seasoned and successful parents- a lot!

Our time to directly impact their lives of our children is limited. The years go by so quickly. As we live in a world of constant technological upgrade, let's make a decision to upgrade our relationship with our children. Success on Wall Street and Sesame Street are possible if we stay motivated, focused, and make every moment matter.

**Ron J. Clark** is a national conference speaker, consultant, writer on manhood and fatherhood issues. He is a frequent lecturer on college campuses and cited in numerous fatherhood and family services articles and research reports. Visit his website at [responsiblefatherhood.org](http://responsiblefatherhood.org).



society, and/or media, and instead of students choosing that something is important to them, they've been taught that it should be. College provides students the opportunity to establish their own value systems and learn how to commit to them in various communities.

Because college men struggle with identifying their values, they often find themselves making choices that are inconsistent with the type of image and reputation they want to establish in their communities. Shaun Harper and Frank Harris (2010) echo this thought stating, "College men, especially those who spend a substantial amount of time engaged in male-dominated subgroups, work hard to ensure that their gendered behavior is aligned with the identity and values of the group. Consequently, some men suppress personal values that contradict group norms" (p. 220). As a college student, I often found myself in situations that illustrated this thought, and so many of our young men do as well. Whether it involves alcohol, drugs, or vandalism, our young men are finding themselves in compromising positions where the fear of being alienated, or having their status as men questioned, prevents them from staying true to who they are.

### **The Pursuit of Happiness?**

Roy E. Disney stated, "It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are," and when given the opportunity to explore and discuss their values, college men dive into the conversation. I developed and implemented a values exploration program for the students in my community. Titled "About Manhood," the goal of this program was to provide a safe space where college men could define and discuss their view of masculinity and values with their peers. During the program students spent time in reflection and identified the values that are most important to them. After identifying these values, students spent time in conversation with their peers where they articulated the values they identified and why their values were important. There were three important themes that surfaced from the series of programs that were held.

First, the young men always wanted more time. The program was scheduled for an hour and fifteen minutes, but because of the quality and depth of the conversations and discussions, the program always lasted two hours. Second, students enjoyed the opportunity to gather with their peers to learn about them at a deeper level. Feedback from the attendees mentioned appreciating the time for reflection and the closeness they felt when discussing their values in small groups. Grant Schuler, a student from Pittsburg, PA agreed by saying, "I feel closer to the men on my floor now that I know their values and the reasons for their beliefs." Third, "happiness" was the most common value identified as important. Students were asked to identify their top five values, and of the students who participated in this program 54.8% identified "happiness" as a value that is important to them. In addition to "happiness," 45.1% chose "integrity," 41.9% chose family, and "faith and wisdom" both were chosen by 35.4% of attendees.

### **What Are Your Values?**

As Student Affairs professionals, how often do we spend time thinking about our values, the values of our departments, institutions, or profession? Even further, how often do we put them into practice? As I reflected on this topic of values and students' ability to be unwavering in their commitment to their values, I asked myself if our students' struggle because we struggle. Are we living what we say we believe? Are we unwavering in our commitment to uphold and honor our core beliefs?

I challenge every young man with this question: what are your values? The question demands so much. In the moment, students find themselves wrestling with being vulnerable, while also trying to reflect on their decisions and their lives to identify what their values are and if they have honored them. It's been in these moments that I've seen the greatest change in the men I work with.

**Terrance D. Smith** is a Residence Education Coordinator at Purdue University where he works in an all-male residence hall housing 1,200 young men. This population consists of student-athletes, fraternity men, and a significant number of engineering and ROTC students. You can email him at [smit1511@purdue.edu](mailto:smit1511@purdue.edu), and you can follow him on Twitter: @TerranceDSmith.

## Missed an MMKC Newsletter?

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NASPA Website.

<http://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/kcs/men-and-masculinities>

# OOPS, IT'S A BOY: GENDER IDENTITY AND THE GENETICS OF MASCULINITY

BY NICHOLAS BARNES

I was born a fraud. I was the fourth and final child that my mother was able to have. My mother had previously given birth to three boys, and due to complications in child birth, she was advised to not have any more children. When she found out she was pregnant with me, she thought she finally was going to have the baby girl she always wanted.

My mother was determined to carry me to term. Due to my heart rate, my mother was placed in a pink room in order to get her ready for the arrival of her new baby girl. I was born at 2:24 on August 27th, 1980, a healthy baby boy. I would not presume to think that my mother was disappointed, but it is possible that she was in shock. Back in the 1980s, it was thought that one could predict sex of a baby based on heart rate. However, the cards had been dealt, and I was not the little girl she and the doctors had been waiting for.

Growing up, things became complicated. As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a girl. Physically, I was

just a normal boy, slightly smaller than some, and "too sensitive". I loved playing with dolls, loved my mom's beautiful clothes, and never seemed to fit into the "boy box". I always volunteered to be the princess or the damsel in distress when it came to playtime. I even remember the day that I asked my mother if I could be a girl. We were sitting at the kitchen table, and I just flat out asked if I was a girl. I do not remember whom, but someone asked why I was asking this question. I responded, "Because I want to wear pretty dresses".

My mother and father may have been more progressive than most parents. I was allowed to play with dolls and my parents would even purchase them for me, albeit we had to pretend in the store that they were for my "twin sister Nicole". The years that followed only added to my confusion. I only made friends with girls, and started to get a reputation as a "girly guy". Sports were not my forte; I enjoyed quietly drawing fashion designs, writing stories and poetry. I was allowed to pursue dancing, singing and acting classes, much to the chagrin of my father.

While the other children were starting to show the signs of puberty, I went unchanged. I envisioned myself as some sort of caterpillar. I thought erroneously that when puberty hit, that I would either become a boy or a girl. I felt different then everyone else, I did not know who I was. I felt like a sheep in wolf's clothing. My father and three older brothers were adamant about "trying to 'butch' me up." I remember being forced to play sports, ride dirt bikes, and eat the crust on my sandwiches because it would "put hair on my chest."

I began to be very aware of my gender expression, and I felt "less than" and inferior to other boys. Adults and fellow teens would confuse my gender and would ask if I was a boy or a girl. I hated to answer the phone because everyone thought I was my mother. I started to resent the fact that people did not know I was a boy. I stopped wanting to be a girl, but I was not a boy either. I was stuck in-between the binary.

To fight the confusion, I started to keep my hair real short, and deepen my voice when I would talk on the phone. Even though I was biologically a male, I was trying to act male, and failing at it. To make matters worse, I started to realize that I found other males attractive. The attraction that I started to form for the boys in my class took me by surprise. I wondered if it was actually admiration and if I just wanted to be like them; to be "male." I knew that this was not okay, so I tried not to think about it. I started to be angry with my gender; things would have just been easier if I was born a girl.





school did not like the notion of effeminate men. Males, even gay ones, had to be butch. I feared that I would still not fit in the Queer community, so I decided to “man up”. During the last few years of my college career, I developed my identity as a masculine, tattooed, gay male. I figured these were the cards I was dealt, and I had to make the best of it.

Now in my thirties, I realize that this process is still in constant flux. I was living my life on the notion that gender existed in a binary system. The polar opposites of male and female were always at war with each other. Gender, however, was not something as strict as two boxes. One is not always able to check the box marked male or female. Gender begins to look like a three-part system, where biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression converge. Gender transcends the binary and becomes a continuum with infinite possibilities. It took me years to come to terms with how I define my gender and my masculinity. Although I am a biological male, there are times I still feel like a fraud. Everyday, I put on my male identity and try to meet the expectations of masculinity that society has placed on me, and most days, I fail.

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Puberty finally began to take its full effect my freshman year of college. Although the process was on a bit of a time delay, genetics decided to accelerate the process to make up for lost time. In the course of a year, I went from a virtually hairless “it,” to a covered in body hair “male.” There was no going back now. The cocoon had opened, and I was not the beautiful, sparkling butterfly I thought I would be, but rather a big hairy moth.

College was a time in my life that I was able to design who I was. Free from the influence of parents and extended family, I was able to discover who I was. As a visual artist, I was able to play with my identity through art. My “ideal self” became the focus of many art projects. Days that I felt more masculine, I would draw and sculpt myself as a strong, confident and attractive male. For those days that I felt more feminine, I would imagine myself as a beautiful, ethereal and powerful woman. Through art, I was able to express my gender and manipulate my identity. In art, I was able to do what I could not do in real life; I was able to make my gender fluid.

With art as my most effective tool, I grew to tolerate my increasingly “male” body. I became active with the university’s Gay/Straight Alliance. Trans\* issues were not the focus of our GSA, and as the only support system available to me, I started to embrace the idea that if I was in fact male, then I was a gay male. Other gay males at my rural

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# MAKE TOTAL DESTROY: MY #SACOMMITS CONFESSIONAL

BY CRAIG BIDIDMAN

**[Note: Some language, suicidal ideation, real talk. Also, there is obviously much more to this story, and I hope to write more companion pieces stemming from this post, so please stay tuned!]**

Being an extrovert can be a lose-lose personality type.

People often look for you to be the source of energy in a room.

You're expected to be upbeat and bubbly all the time. But sometimes life happens...

Essentially, when I am too loud, people get annoyed. And when I'm too quiet, people get worried.

Yet, as an extrovert there are advantages and disadvantages.

**Advantages:** Outgoing, energetic, positivity, people skills, self- confidence.

**Disadvantages:** Obnoxious, annoying, selfish, perceived unintelligent, over-commitment.

*(Note: These do not apply to all extroverts, obviously.)*  
I am all of the above.

\* \* \*

First, a story of my youth—

In being such a young energetic (ADHD) kid—with hardly a language filter—I alienated myself from a lot of people and said a lot of things to a lot of people I should have never said. I was, and still am, a polarizing person. I recognize that.

And especially while growing up, I didn't really know how to harness my energy constructively.

So I destroyed things. I smashed windows with rocks, kicked through walls, started fires constantly, and hit golf balls with a baseball bat into traffic. Those are things that I actually did.

And when I ran out of things to destroy, I would turn to myself.

My anger derived from feeling as though no one could relate to what was going on in my head. And no one reached out to help me.

Counselors told me I needed to **"calm down."**

Teachers told me to sit in the hallway so I wouldn't disrupt the learning of others.

My parents told me I needed to **"quit acting out."**

I often made a scene during class because *I WANTED HELP!* But I didn't know how to ask for it.

Instead of asking if I needed help, teachers just sent me to the principal's office. Effective.

I was aware that my obnoxious nature alienated me from many potential peer groups and honestly led to many people thinking I was very immature and idiotic. And that affected me. I genuinely had no idea how to help myself, and I didn't know how to ask the few close friends I had for help.

This led to me developing a lot of issues with depression. I felt alone. I would come home, crawl into bed, and cry in my room.

And the destruction issues I had regarding things evolved into harming myself.



I have attempted suicide twice in my life—the scars of one attempt are now covered with tattoos.

I honestly do not wish to return to those memories, so the exact circumstances will not be referenced, but I need to get that out of the way immediately.

Throughout high school and the early years of college, I harmed myself in various ways of which I hid. Much of this harm was due to multiple aspects of my mind fighting against me.

A lot of this harm was due to my consistent failures with relationships—of which I had little faith until about two years ago.

As I said before, a disadvantage to being an extrovert is that some of us are pretty selfish people. I am selfish. I acknowledge this. And I've learned a lot since getting older, but I surely was a terrible person to date because I like being independent. And I also like being selfish. And I

feared compromise. However, I also wanted companionship. And I wanted to care for someone. And I didn't want to be alone. But I do not deal with rejection well.

However, all of this cognitive dissonance led to me having no idea how to support someone else when I couldn't even handle my own shit. I also overthink everything—if you couldn't tell.

And when I felt things falling apart I would try to drastically solve all of the problems all at once to fix the relationship. And I always failed. I failed constantly. I would use guilt to manipulate whomever I was with because I didn't know what else to do. And it was impossible to gain any sort of self confidence in relationships because I knew I would destroy them eventually.

And then I would turn on myself.

Probably the strangest thing about being an extrovert is that I was able to hide a lot of my pain, frustration, and anxiety by forcing myself to be myself—an overly enthusiastic, life of the party, energetic, lover of life. You know, like an extrovert.

But I haven't always loved life.  
I have always had to hide.

A black rectangular box with white text that reads: "SOMETIMES THE PERSON WHO TRIES TO KEEP EVERYONE HAPPY IS THE MOST LONELY PERSON". The text is in all caps and has a slight reflection effect below it.

Writing has always been my most effective way of working through a lot of my depression and anxiety throughout high school and college.

I don't have to hide when I write.

And if you haven't noticed, I write a lot.

I have kept journals for as long as I can remember. I wrote for myself and it was the best sort of therapy.

Many of my notebooks and journals are no more. I often destroy them once they fill up because the simple

act of having written out my words is enough for me. I have no need to keep those words.

However, since I love words and I love writing, I decided to become an English major, which was the best and worst thing to happen to me.

I kept journaling through college, but it took a different shape.

I would compete with my classmates in a way that was unnecessary. I wanted to impress my professors. I wanted to challenge my classmates by writing about REAL LIFE. And honestly, I think some of the tactics I tried were doing more harm than good for my credibility as a writer. I mean, I thought I was a good writer.

And it only led to great amounts of anxiety.

*Why the fuck am I not getting As on these stories?  
How did they get a better grade on this paper than me?  
I poured my heart into this story!  
I thought I was a good writer.  
How do they write more vividly?!  
What do I need to write to impress you?!*

These thoughts would race through my head whenever I received a grade on a paper or a story. I knew I was a good writer, but I wasn't seeing the results. I thought I was a good writer. I felt as though I was failing at being a writer, just as I was failing at relationships at the same time and writing about those failed relationships as a form of therapy.

It became a vicious cycle.  
I thought I was a good writer.  
I thought I was a good writer.  
I thought I was a good writer.  
But I kept feeling I wasn't good enough.

I would go days without eating—obsessing over being a better writer. When I didn't eat, I couldn't sleep, and when I couldn't sleep, I would obsess over how it was impossible for me to ever reach the level of my classmates, and I certainly wouldn't reach the level of the writers I admired. After all, I thought I was a good writer.

It was vicious cycle on top of vicious cycle.  
I thought I was a good writer.  
I thought I was a good writer.  
I thought I was a good writer.  
But I kept feeling I wasn't good enough.

This unnecessary competition that only happened in my head went on for at least three years. It made me a mess of feelings and anxiety.

I thought I was a good writer.

There are many reasons I didn't continue pursuing writing as a career.

My anxiety toward a life full of failure and rejection was a major factor. It also had to do with another element—alcohol.

I used to drink constantly when I wrote.



Now, for starters, I didn't drink alcohol until I was 21. That's right. I waited. And when I started drinking, I HATED IT!

However, it just so happened that my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and ending a nearly two-year relationship closely coincided. So I developed a taste for beer quickly as I found that it helped me repress the feelings I still very much had for the partner who left me.

My second suicide attempt actually occurred shortly after that relationship ended. And my motivations were purely fueled by alcohol. I felt like a failure again. I was so sure that this relationship was it for me, but I was wrong. My trust and faith in relationships was destroyed. I had no idea how to process this pain, so I drank. And I was so new to drinking that I didn't know my limits, so I wound up making a poor decision while under the influence of alcohol.

I never thought of myself as having a problem in comparison to how much I saw others drink—but the point of this is not comparison. While I may not have had issues with drinking to excess, **I personally struggled with the reasons for why I was drinking** to begin with.

I drank to not feel pain.  
I drank to fall asleep at night when my mind kept me awake.  
I drank to ignore my depression—to lessen my anxiety about writing, about life, about relationships.

I was actually an RA at this time. And I was pretty good at hiding my depression around my residents because I ignore whatever issues I was dealing with in order to help them with their issues. And that only made things worse for me. I

was taking in a lot of emotions and not letting any of mine out constructively. Except through drinking.

And of course I didn't want anyone to think of it as an actual issue, so I'd often sneak alcohol into my room—like my underage residents would do. **I was ashamed.** I didn't want to admit to anyone that I was struggling with a hidden drinking problem.

The issue only perpetuated further when I was teaching high school English. I would read so many stories of students struggling with the realities of their own lives, which made it more difficult for me to process my own life. So I drank. Every night I would come home, decompress, drink, grade, drink, and sleep.

**I wasn't happy. I wasn't healthy. I wasn't me. I felt I was destroying myself.**

I struggled to go in to teach every day because I felt as though I couldn't actually connect with my students because I was losing track of who I was as a person.

The interesting thing is that during all of this, when I would talk to friends about drinking, many of them would say, "Oh, but you hardly drink—"

And in my head, I would reply, "Yeah, that you know of." Even if I tried to explain the extent to which drinking was a private activity for me, I know that many of my friends would have never understood.

So I kept it hidden.

\* \* \*

After a few years of what turned out to be meaningless "romantic relationships" that ultimately destroyed trust in myself and relationships in general—for various reasons, many of which are my fault. I own that. Alas, while I was being reckless with my body, I recognized that I didn't like who I was becoming, so I reached out for help for the first time in my life by going to Oregon State University's Counseling and Psychological Services.

I maintained going to counseling while I was an RA, stopped for a few months, and then continued during my student body presidency, and concluded counseling through being a high school teacher.

Counseling really helped me put a lot of things into perspective. And it helped me conceptualize a lot of my feelings within the larger social constructs that have led to my inability to properly communicate all of the thoughts, fears, frustrations, and denials going on inside my head. I needed to be able to share these thoughts and have someone help me process.

In many ways, I am who I am today because I asked for help.

Being able to talk with someone about my issues and process my depression and anxiety was incredibly necessary for me. I was able to develop better self-control, a better sense of self, and a better sense of identity.

As of today **I am over 22 months sober** and I have no intent to pick up a drink again. I don't like who I am when I drink and I certainly do not like the feeling of being out of control of my body or my decision making.

*And as I reflect on so many past experiences, there are a few things to take away from this post:*

- Sure, extroverts may appear to be fine on the outside. But that does not mean they are fine on the inside.

- As I've grown older, I've *learned* how to ask for help. It takes time for most people. And it is always okay to ask for help.

- Many depression and suicide attempts during college stem from relationships ending. Being able to acknowledge these situations as valid struggles for our students is important.

- Students want help and we need to know how to acknowledge signs and ideations before they turn into larger issues. Because I have struggled in so many ways with depression and anxiety, I know firsthand the realities of feeling like no one is there for you—like you are alone.

- No one should ever feel alone.

*In many ways, I am who I am today because I asked for help.*

I was recently talking on the phone to my mother and twice she said, "I feel like I've failed you, son." To which, I replied, "No, mom—society has failed me."

### **Society has failed all men.**

Men should not be afraid to come forward with their emotions. I didn't want to talk to anyone—even though I needed to do so.

Ultimately, my reason in sharing such detailed information about my experiences with depression and anxiety is simply that men do not want to talk about this. And the only way I was able to get help was by reaching out to a specialist.

### **Men cannot hide their mental health issues any longer.**

We **MUST** create brave space for men to feel comfortable to share the reality of what it is like to deal with mental health issues. Otherwise men will continue to repress their feelings & will perpetuate the statistics proving that **four times as**

### **many men commit suicide than women.**

This is our chance to create change and create a brave and caring community in which men are comfortable with their emotions to open up. Otherwise, men will continue to feel as though they won't be taken seriously when coming forward with *ACTUAL* issues.

Never tell a man they are being dramatic when they bring up issues regarding mental health. **THAT** is the harmful stigma at play that makes it nearly impossible for men to share in the first place. This takes reaching out to young men early in their schooling and not trying to lump children into these useless boxes of ADHD just because teachers are too lazy to actually sit down and talk with a student.

I wanted help when I was growing up but no one knew how or was willing to help me.

Society has failed men long enough. It is time to turn the tables and show men that it is important to ask for help. **Our culture must eliminate stigma that men who share their emotions are weak or feminine.**

### **Mental illness stigma harms everyone.**

To the friends who may know these stories and were there to support me, I thank you. Your care means the world to me. I know I am not alone anymore.

I hope this post resonates in some way.

**And as always, be free to join the dialogue on Twitter—@CrigBididman.**

Be well.

Please be sure to submit an article or piece for the next issue of the MMKC Newsletter!

See the last page for more information on the submission process!

Questions?

Email: Jack Korpob at [pkorpob@gmail.com](mailto:pkorpob@gmail.com)



## 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.

## MMKC NEWSLETTER SUBMISSION TIMELINE

EDITION	CALL FOR ARTICLES	SUBMISSION DUE DATE	PUBLISH DATE
Fall	Late August	September 21 <sup>st</sup>	Early October
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