



# ♂ Men: On Campus RESEARCH BRIEF

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## **A Primer on College Men Research**

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The following Research Brief departs from our usual format by presenting a primer on a myriad of issues and related research on working with and creating behavioral interventions for college men and their emotions. Below you will find research compiled and organized under topical headings. An exhaustive reference list is included at the end. It is our hope that this Brief will be used by others to help “kick-start” their research into issues facing college men. The author, Randy Ludeman, invites dialogue and can be reached at [rludeman@bemidjistate.edu](mailto:rludeman@bemidjistate.edu).

### **Gender Role Socialization**

- Boys are experiencing a “crisis” due to the pressure society places on them to be strong, follow a strict masculine code, hide their emotions, and most importantly, avoid engaging in anything that creates shame for themselves or their parents (Pollack, 1998).
- Research shows boys are experiencing crises in many ways: “Boys are failing at school, succeeding at suicide, engaging in homicide, and disconnecting from their own inner lives: losing their genuine voices and selves” (Pollack, 1999, p. 7).
- Pollack (1998, 1999) describes boys as experiencing “gender straightjackets,” which affect them by forcing the repression of emotions and needs for love and affection.
- For many males, “one striking and far-reaching consequence of the male socialization ordeal is an inability to differentiate and identify their emotions” (Levant, 1997, p. 9). Levant (1997) has labeled this condition “normative male alexithymia” (p. 9), which is the inability for men to put feelings into words or even to be aware of them.
- Negative consequences of this lack of emotional awareness and expression for men are often hidden and include loneliness, isolation, alienation, and physical illness due to the pent-up emotions seeking release (Harrison, 1978). It has also been suggested that men’s restricted emotionality leads to aggression and violence (Seidler, 1996).
- Unlike daughters, sons were not trained to nurture others or to be sensitive to their needs, but were instead trained in “problem-solving, risk-taking, staying calm in the face of danger, and assertion and aggression” (Levant, 1995, p. 229).
- Men are being asked to take on new roles and demonstrate care in ways that are opposed to the traditional masculine code, requiring them to have skills they have not developed, such as nurturing children, revealing vulnerability, and expressing feelings (Levant, 1995).
- For many men, this has resulted in a confusion and conflict regarding what it means to be a “real man”.
- Levant and Pollack (1995) spoke of a need for a “gender-aware examination of the psychology of men...[that] might contribute to the solution of some of the male problems...that have had a negative impact on women, men, children, and society” (p. 1-2).

### **Male Gender Role Conflict**

- O’Neil (1990) described gender role conflict as occurring when “rigid, sexist, or restricted gender roles learned during socialization result in the personal restriction, devaluation, or violation of others or self” (p. 25).
- O’Neil theorized that traditional male-role socialization produces contradictory and unrealistic messages that lead to a fear of femininity (O’Neil, 1981a, 1981b, 1982).
- Research has suggested conflict surrounding the male gender role creates liabilities for men including self-destructive behaviors (Meth, 1990), increased stress (Stewart & Lykes, 1985), disregard for health (Courtenay, 1998; Nathanson, 1977), substance abuse and addiction (Capraro, 2000; Blazina & Watkins, 1996), increased depression and anxiety (Real, 1997; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991), negative attitudes toward help-seeking from counseling (Good & Wood, 1995), lack of emotional expressiveness (Pleck, 1981), and a drive to accumulate money, power, and sex partners (Kimmel & Levine, 1989).

## The “Dark Side of Masculinity”

- It is easier, and riskier, than ever to write about the dark side of male behavior. After centuries of celebrating male patriarchal manhood, a new gender consciousness has arisen. Feminist scholarship has written women back into history, highlighting the former marginality of women and challenging the misogyny that is deeply imbedded in Western culture. (Brooks & Silverstein, 1995, p. 280)
- Research has suggested men most often are the perpetrators of homicide (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991), physical assaults (Valois, Vincent, McKeown, Garrison, & Kriby, 1993), sexual assaults (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987), domestic abuse (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1992), and bias-related crimes (Levin, 1993). Boys and men also are more likely than girls and women to bear weapons (Courtenay, 1998; Hong, 2000), which significantly increases their risk for violence. Finally, men have been cited as a significant proportion of the victims of violence (Hong, 2000).
- Creating what Brooks and Silverstein (1995) called the “dark side of masculinity” (p. 281), traditional masculine roles and norms have been purported to encourage behavior such as violence, sexual abuse and sexual harassment, substance abuse and other self-destructive behaviors, relationship inadequacies, absent fathering, and social-emotional withdrawal.

## Gender Border and “The Rules” of Masculinity

- My dissertation explored men’s experience with emotions. Through significant interactions with the participants, several themes emerged:
  - 1) These men had difficulty being aware of and expressing feelings.
  - 2) Through prolonged involvement with these men, they were able to begin to recognize their feelings and talk about them.
  - 3) They then talked about the “rules” for emotional expression such as:
    - It’s easier to talk about feelings with women.
    - There are consequences for sharing feelings with other men.
    - Women want men to be strong and brave.
    - It is more manly to be confused rather than afraid, and mad than sad.
    - If you do share more vulnerable emotions, it is important to then state that you are OK (i.e., “I was sad when my grandmother died, but it wasn’t that big of a deal.”)
- Many men have established rules for themselves regarding emotional expression and vulnerability. Due to the messages we hear growing up, we are afraid of appearing weak or vulnerable (feminine) and often are unaware of or hide our emotions. Today, this pattern of emotional distancing is not conducive to such life experiences as parenting, relationships, and work teams.

## Feminist Theory – What Have We Learned?

- “Feminist scholarship in the human sciences is responsible for revealing, rediscovering, and rescuing documentation of women’s lives and related gender patterns across societies” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 26).
- The feminist challenge to hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1987, p. 4) has afforded an opportunity to explore the negative and oppressive effects of traditional masculinity on both women’s and men’s lives.
- May, Strikwerda, and Hopkins (1996) quoted from a lecture delivered by feminist scholar Sandra Harding during which she highlighted the need for writings by men who are committed to feminism who could “speak specifically as men, of themselves, of their bodies and lives, of texts and of politics, using feminist insights to see the world” (p. ix). In this same speech, Harding warned that this task would be difficult and painful, but that it was critical for men to develop a self-understanding of their experiences as men similar to how women had during the early stages of the feminist movement (May, Strikwerda, & Hopkins, 1996).

## College Men & Behavioral Intervention

- “Scholars from the men’s studies movement have documented a clear link between socialization into stereotypical norms of hegemonic masculinity and an increased risk for experiencing violence” (Hong, 2000, p. 269). However, many college campuses have failed to recognize this link between men, socialization, and violence, and have relied only on traditional approaches to violence prevention (Hong, 2000).
- In the college setting, the judicial system is the venue for handling disruptive behavior, including incidents of violence. It would seem beneficial, therefore, for student affairs practitioners, and male college students, to understand better how gender roles and socialization impact male students in the collegiate environment in order to proactively intervene at early stages of misconduct to prevent increasingly serve patterns of behavior.
- Judicial officers must develop an awareness of the emotional development of college men. Judicial processes, while serving the function of accountability for behavior, must also provide opportunities for emotional growth and development. In order for college men to understand possible reasons for their inappropriate choices and behaviors, the judicial process venue must be open to men’s explorations of their emotionality and its connection to their behavioral choices. This would mean incorporating emotional work with students (i.e., counseling) into the judicial process, rather than referring it as a sanction to be dealt with outside the judicial arena.
- There is contested discourse as to the role judicial process plays on a college campus. Judicial affairs emerged to protect the rights of both students and institutions and as a vehicle for accountability and enforcement of campus policies and procedures. However, the legalistic nature of the judicial process has been criticized as having become too complicated and power-laden, resulting in an adversarial process for students. Although many student development practitioners intend to provide student development and learning through the judicial process, the perceptions students have of the process may limit the ability to provide developmental and learning outcomes.
- I challenge institutions to recognize our role as educators when dealing with student behavior. Our judicial processes must hold students accountable for behavior and protect the rights of community members, but also must remain focused on development and learning. Rather than imposing sanctions for this developmental work away from the judicial venue (i.e., referrals to counseling), we must incorporate this developmental work into the judicial process. For college men, connecting behavior to emotional experience can result in incredible growth and development. There is no better time or place for this connection to be made than *during* the processing of behavioral issues. This will require judicial officers to have training and education in the emotional development of college students. Of course there are situations that call for the need to remove student privileges based on serious misconduct, however many students involved in misconduct may benefit from emotional development work as an integral part of processing their behavior.

### **Men On Campus: The History and Philosophy of SCM Briefs**

The Men On Campus Briefs were first published by the American College Personnel Association’s (ACPA) Standing Committee for Men (SCM) at the 2001 National Convention. Originally, there was only one category of Men On Campus Briefs known as the Research Brief. These Briefs were intended to be short theory-to-practice primers distributed to ACPA members and other student affairs professionals interested in men’s issues. They were published as one page double-sided handouts with literature reviews, analyses and an extensive listing of resources. These Briefs were and are intended to be accessible to both the potential author as well as the potential reader. Authors have ranged from individuals with PhDs to masters degree candidates in College Student Personnel Programs.

Beginning in 2004, the SCM expanded the range of Briefs to include three areas: Research, Practice and Thought. It was the committees hope that these expanded categories would encourage more dialogue on men’s issues as well as expand the resources available to student affairs practitioners. For more information, please visit the SCM homepage off of the main ACPA website.

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