

# Stories from Ourselves: Personal Musings from Students, Faculty, and Staff about Men's and Gender-Related Work



**A NASPA and ACPA Joint Publication**

**Fall 2010**

# Introduction

Dear Readers,

Lately, we as Co-Editors have been consumed with the idea of creation and why we partake in the process of making something new. In thinking directly about this publication, the basic premise was we were filling a niche that had remained vacant; namely, giving a voice to the many practitioners and scholars working alongside college men on a daily basis. Who better to speak to the trials and triumphs of working with college men than the people who have been doing it, sometimes for years, without a thought of seeking the spotlight? We made the assumption there was great work being done out there, and if we provided a space to capture and share that work, it would coalesce. We assumed correctly, and are proud to put forth this joint publication between the ACPA Standing Committee for Men and NASPA Men and Masculinities Knowledge Community.

At its core, the intent of this publication is to continue the conversation about how we work with college men as well as how we conceptualize the myriad of masculinities we may encounter throughout our lives. While we wanted to pay homage to those scholars and practitioners who have been pioneers in the study of men and masculinities, our aim was to provide a platform to encourage new voices that, to this point, have yet to emerge. Furthermore, while this publication is an attempt to extend the available scholarship on men and masculinities, it was never intended to be a simple intellectual exercise. Rather, we wanted to put together a set of stories that spoke of the successes and failures, costs and benefits, and unique strategies being developed to effectively engage college men. This can, and should be, seen as a resource guide, albeit not in a conventional format to those with which you are likely familiar. Instead of providing a direct road map with numbered steps, this publication creates a network of practitioners and scholars doing similar work in an effort to help us guide and learn from each other in the name of true collaboration and resource sharing.

Our main goals with this publication are that you as the reader do two things: put it to work for you and share it with others. This publication does no good if it is merely read and put on a shelf to collect dust. While all



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contributors to this collection of work have put forth great effort, there is still much to be undertaken. After reading this, it will be up to you to put what you have learned into practice to enhance the work you do regarding men and masculinities. Regardless of how insightful or inspiring the individual pieces may be, much of their efficacy will come from how they utilized by those who make up their audience.

On that note, we encourage you to not let this collection of work stop at your desk or coffee table. As was the case with its creation, this publication exemplifies the ideals of collective thought and action. Due to this, we would be remiss if we were not transparent as editors that one of our main goals in putting this publication together was to have as many people read, share, learn, and grow from it as possible. This goal comes with a responsibility as a reader to share it with those who may not have ready access to it, but would benefit from its contents. It is never too early to begin to confront and answer questions like: what does it mean to be a man?, what does it mean to be masculine?, and who has the ability to set these guidelines? These are not light questions, and there are no generic answers that work across the board. While this can seem overwhelming at the outset, we want you, the reader, to think about how this magnifies that which is possible and implores us to be active in coming up with the solutions, strategies, and methods by which to make the best possible impact in our communities.

In this Joint Publication, you will read a variety of voices and perspectives. We start with Sean Robinson's piece on his experience as a member of the Gay Men's Chorus of Washington. The next piece,

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\* Cover photo by Jeanette Senn—Cal Poly University

[Continued from page 4] Brian LeDuc’s “Gender Roles”, is written from the perspective of a student finishing his undergraduate degree who was a member of a men’s group called The Locker Room. This is followed by a selection from Peter Paquette, which details his work with a perpetrator of sexual assault navigating the judicial process. Patrick Tanner then writes about The Locker Room from a staff perspective, offering a unique opportunity to gain insight about the same men’s group LeDuc was involved in, yet from a different personal framework. *Stories from Ourselves* closes with a piece by T.J. Jourian, who expands the notion of masculinities with his exploration of his identity as a transgender man, and a culminating piece by Chris Wilcox Elliott, who describes how we can implement what we continue to learn related to men, masculinities, gender role socialization, and hegemonic masculinity to our daily work as educators in the field of higher education.

We as Co-Editors hope this publication helps to illuminate a path for you and others to begin answering some of the questions raised for yourself, as well as asking questions of the answers with which you come up with in an effort to come to a more clarified sense of self and the world in which you live. Furthermore, we

encourage you to remain open to the idea that there are many solutions to how we can engage those in our spheres of influence to think critically about men and masculinities. Instead of being hampered by fear and anxiety, we hope this publication will spark you to become a change agent invested in the liberatory idea that together we can make an extremely positive impact in the lives of many. As we shared at the outset of this introduction, we have been consumed with the idea of creation and why we partake in the creation of something new.

Ultimately, we have done this so that we can continue to inspire and be inspired by the good work being done around men and masculinities; we hope you will share in our excitement, joy, and inspiration.

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## I Am Because We Are: The Impact of a Musical Community on Gay Identity

Being part of a musical community was not new to me; I had been singing and dancing since high school. Music has always been just something I do. Being gay was not new to me either, as I came out right after my junior year of college. Being gay is just a part of who I am. At least I thought that was how the world was...until I joined the Gay Men's Chorus of Washington (GMCW) in the fall of 2000. I never knew there was such a thing until I moved to Washington from a small Midwest city. Not only did I find a new musical home, I found a new Gay home. Over the past 11 years, for nine months out of the year, on almost every Sunday night, I have gathered with 200 other Gay Men--my chosen brothers and family--to sing, to share, to laugh, to cry, to join together in music as a community of One. Over the past 11 years, I have not simply grown as a person, I have grown as a Gay Man.

Because of my continuing involvement with GMCW, I have grown to appreciate the richness of diversity of our experiences, and to relish the sense of community that truly exists. Although I am a singer, it isn't simply the

performances and the concerts that move me, although they do bring joy to my soul. What truly inspires me is the part of GMCW's mission that seeks "to affirm the place of gay people in society and to educate about the gay experience." As a life-long educator, Student Affairs professional, and current faculty member, these aspects of GMCW's mission hold a deeper meaning. Because of these tenets, every time I perform as part of GMCW, I am standing up for who I am, I am standing up for those that are not able to stand up for themselves, and I am telling those watching and listening that it is ok to be whoever they are. Every time I step on to the stage--usually dressed in some outrageous costume and under some fantastic lighting and set design--I come out. I come out as a proud Gay Man. I come out for the LGBTQ community. I come out unashamed of who I am, and proud of who I am becoming. *I am, because we are.*

GMCW celebrates the outrageous and resists oppression, and that has guided my own journey. Over time I have learned to appreciate most of the labels and stereotypes of being Gay.

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[Continued from page 5] I consciously chose, freely accept, and even own, names like Gay, Queer, Girl, Bear, Daddy, Homo, Fag, and any number of other terms. I have learned to embrace what each of these mean in the moment for what they are. They do not define my essence, but simply give acknowledgment to something deeper within. They are but a mere representation of what it means to me to be Gay. Likewise, I have learned to have fun both embracing and exaggerating the stereotypes within my community one day, only to turn around the next day to fight against those very Gay stereotypes, to rail against heteronormative expectations, and to protest the denial of our basic rights or freedoms.

Historically, every movement for social justice and social change has been accompanied by music and song. As a member of GMCW, I feel as though I am part of a long line of folks who perform or sing for social change... the slavery movement, the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, and the list goes on. Being a part of this group of Men, performing as we do, isn't just about musical expression; it is also about political expression. Such political action has taken shape by such recent events as our nationally televised performance at President Obama's Inauguration, singing before members of Congress on the day that DC's Same-Sex Marriage Law took effect, and performing as part of the 2010 March on Washington. We have sung in response to the AIDS crisis, to same-sex marriage discrimination, in response to Don't Ask-Don't tell, in response to the impact of drug use and addiction in the Gay community, in response to hate crimes and violence against LGBTQ individuals. Both our musical expression and our political activism, as it were, seek to revise those heteronormative conceptions of love, of family, of community, and of humanity.

Not only is this obvious in our regular concerts, but it is also clearly evident when we are involved in our outreach activities. Whether we are taking an abridged concert into a school, giving panel talks to students and teachers, or bringing high school and college youth, teachers, and their families to a full performance, we as a group of Gay Men are working to create those spaces where all LGBTQ individuals are valued, affirmed, respected, and celebrated. I know that had I experienced such an opportunity in high school or college, my life may have taken a different path. Maybe not easier, but certainly different.

Over the past decade, I have come to realize fully just how much LGBTQ individuals yearn for the experience of community--being together, sharing our different

realities, exchanging ideas, being ourselves in all of myriad forms. I have discovered that GMCW is really one of the relatively few places where I get to experience that sense of community in my way, on my terms, in often highly creative ways. Our performances, our events, our outreach activities truly reflect the diversity of our Gay experiences and community. This place, my "Gay home," is one avenue for me to feel empowered to work for social justice, and thus, in turn, can empower others. This happens not only when I am performing as a member of GMCW, but takes place almost daily in my role as an educator on my campus with my students, my colleagues, and my administrators. As an educator, I witness daily the work that must occur with and for our LGBTQ youth. And I see the work that needs to happen with those that work with our LGBTQ youth. It is work that I eagerly embrace.

In small ways and big ways, in subtle ways and in-your-face ways, we are part of the social justice movement. To sing, to dance, to stand side by side, and to rejoice in song with my chosen GMCW family is to be a part of something larger than me alone. Gay novelist Ethan Mordden wrote in his 1986 collection of short stories, *Buddies*: "What unites us, all of us, surely, is brotherhood, a sense that our friendships are historic, designed to hold Stonewall together. It is friendship that sustained us, supported our survival." Now more than ever, I can appreciate this sentiment. Now I understand what it means to "hold Stonewall together." Some believe that friendship and brotherhood of this nature is an escape from the rules of social life. Nothing could be closer to the truth. In my experience, friendships and community such as GMCW don't offer simply an escape from social life, they offer a respite from the "closet" of mainstream society. For me it's a chance to drop the roles and external expectations of my everyday life, and be who I am, freely, honestly, and openly, as a Gay Man. As an adult, I have learned that being a *Man* is special, and affords a certain type of privilege. Furthermore, I have learned that "Gay is ok," and this, too, comes with a certain kind of privilege. However, over the past decade, as a select member of GMCW, I have learned that being a *Gay Man* is a gift, and I wouldn't have it any other way. Nonetheless, I have also discovered that for me, that identify comes with a certain level of responsibility--to my students and my colleagues, to my family and friends, to my chosen brothers, to our past, to our present and to our future as LGBTQ people. I know that because we can, I can. I know that because we are, I am.

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## Gender Roles

Typically when a group of male college students sits down together in a room it's for a sports or social gathering—and one thing is for sure; it's *definitely* not the time to start expressing personal feelings about your support system, or your male icon, or your feelings on the last beer commercial you saw; at least not in relation to the objectification of females.

I don't know what other men think about things. Or *didn't* anyways. I always just assumed my feelings of disdain for certain ads or frustration with gender stereotypes was a personal experience and I found myself thinking "all guys don't feel like this." But occasionally someone would surprise me; talking at a retreat or conference, we would wander into a deep conversation almost by mistake, and find camaraderie of sorts; like-minded thinking. We would often become friends, or unite in circles of friends, recognizing (and occasionally embodying) the "a-typical" male, seldom recovering the conversation that formed our friendship. Before "The Locker Room" this was the most formal example or knowledge I had of a men's group.

A year or so earlier, administrators on campus began to explore more and more the possibility and interest in a group like this, often trying to gauge interest, and at some points, recruiting. Needless to say after some resistance, I attended my first meeting once a syllabus was created, and I began to hear more and more of the positive buzz around the benefits of attending. Sitting amongst the conversation of other men talking about the experience of being male in today's college culture was refreshing. I found that I wasn't quick to tell or invite some friends, while I'd check in with regular group members to make sure they were going. It opened the opportunity to have great discussions with men who were open to the idea, whether any of us really knew what we were getting into or not. Typically conversations about the subjugation of women or male sexuality aren't the first in a newly formed group of men, but with willingness and understanding, I peeled back some layers of 'what it meant to be a man' from week to week.

I wasn't as active as I would have liked because of other campus involvement, but truthfully, the thought-provoking insight that hour per-week provided was often the most engaging conversation I had of any campus activity; it was real, it was personal, and it was relevant. One thing above all became very apparent; once the gender 'switch' flips as an identity and becomes a topic of everyday consciousness, it doesn't go away. The light of gender as a complicated identity is

blinding, and readily affects the lens through which many view the world. I started to cringe when you hear 'hey guys' uttered in front of a large group; I caught phrases like 'don't be a pussy' or 'man-up' in everyday conversation and needed to make an effort to confront with care. I found I am affected and more sensitive to definitions of identity in all forms (race, age, religion, sexual orientation) as a result of my involvement with "The Locker Room." When I realized how quickly a 'static' identity like gender becomes complicated by its social elements and standards, nothing is black-and-white any longer; anything more definitive of one person beyond their existence on a spectrum seems restrictive. But even more basic, I realized how many interactions are based in gender dynamics, even if the two people talking aren't aware of it, or ever more compelling, even if they share the same gender.

The group provided that opportunity to me to view other parts of the spectrum, and other points of view; it was an opportunity for advocacy and discourse on seemingly straightforward gender roles that men play, or are culturally accepted. It provided the forum to think about gender more critically and decide how much of gender is socially constructed as status or the product of a conditioned response for instance. Sitting down in a group to discuss these intricacies helped to articulate the ideas and form my own opinions about them. Our group often used commercials, news media, and written works along with guiding questions brought forth by two passionate administrators, built around a weekly theme. These materials and discussion only reinforced and enhanced the larger dialogues and often provided the frame of reference to get conversations started. Conversations were slow at times, but always worth having. But once I saw a stereotypical male scenario play out naturally, heard the response from the perspective of one man, and realized that they were thinking the same thing I was, it provoked a whole new insight on how much emphasis there is on the *role* of gender, wondering which of my peers actions or statements were genuinely their feelings and not the product of a conditioned response, or maintenance of status.

My experience with the men's group was beneficial on several levels. It provided the opportunity to scan beyond gender and view identity holistically as it challenged what I once viewed as such a basic characteristic, it helped me to identify the ways in which gender is generated in a social

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[Continued from page 7] environment, and it put words to so many of the experiences that I identified and was often frustrated by day-to-day.

I still struggle with facing those who do not view gender on a continuum, or who believe that there is one definition of man, and it is provided in the context of a socially constructed one-dimensional male. While I have moved on from my undergraduate institution and begin a new adventure away from the support of those who provoked the conversation within me, I find solace in the fact that there are both students and administrators interested in enlightening, guiding, and taking part in the conversation, and who will continue to enrich it's content to educate others of the complexities of not only gender, but identity as a whole, because it's not "gay," or "lame," or "retarded" either; difference enriches, and variance within gender as everything else, has value.

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## Reflections on Facilitating a Collegiate Men's Group

The students who have joined our men's group, The Locker Room, have helped me to think about men in a different way than I used to. In many ways, they keep me young. I am constantly thinking about what they are experiencing and how they are going to handle the conversations and situations that are presented to them each day. Because of The Locker Room (or TLR for short), I look at life through the eyes of a 20-something man. I look back at my own collegiate experience; I wonder what they will be like as young fathers. I wonder how they will handle all the experiences that I have gone through in the intervening time since I was in their shoes. And it makes my brain hurt. I can't imagine tracking gender as a college student to the degree that I do now. I don't know if I could have handled the cognitive dissonance that comes with the recognition of the power play that resides at the intersection of identities such as gender, class, and race. It makes me tired, and yet so very proud of all the men who continue to attend our meetings.

The most important outcome of my preparation for these sessions and the interactions I have with the great people at The Locker Room is the fact that I can now articulate my thoughts about men and masculinities in a somewhat intelligent way. I haven't so much changed my opinions on men, or women's rights, or the interplay of the various intersections of identity; I just have new theories and concepts to use when I am expressing my thoughts and incorporating those of others into my daily work. I also have new questions. As I reflect on the impact of my efforts with TLR, there are a few areas of my life that I can see with more clarity. Namely, how my time spent learning about and talking about men's issues continues to shape my relationships with my family and with other men.

I am not the same person that I was a few years ago. More specifically, I am not the same *man* that I was a few years ago. I have a greater awareness of the struggles and joys of other men. I understand that men, myself included, benefit from

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**[Continued from page 8]** a system that subordinates women and other men. I feel the pain of the socialization of hegemonic masculinity in the relationships of the men in TLR. I've looked back at my own high school and college years and have been able to see the influence of media and peer pressure on my decisions about dating and other social choices.

That being said, I don't think that my gendered perspective is completely new. I honestly struggle to identify the origin of my social justice roots, but they have always been there. I remember being impacted at a deep level when I was a child and for the first time saw a homeless person. I was in grade school and I remember my heart absolutely broke when I thought about the fact that that person didn't have dinner or a bed to sleep in. Ultimately though, this work with the men of The Locker Room has bolstered my resolve to fight for gender equity and to put a spotlight on the mistreatment of people for any reason.

I can especially see the evidence of this perspective at home. I am trying to be the best father and best husband that I can be. The definition of "best" is a moving target though. I am constantly stepping back and deconstructing my thoughts, words, and actions through a gender lens. What will my disciplinary style mean for my son as he grows? How will my daughter interact with her playmate based on my leadership? I am always second guessing myself about the words and the tone that I choose when I'm with my kids. They are the most precious of God's creations, and it is precisely because of that that I hate it when I take corrective words too far. I try to avoid crossing the line between the need for them to stop annoying me with their fussing, and the need for them to stop crying. Crying is good, especially for children, but when is there too much crying? I don't want my son to grow up thinking that boys and men shouldn't cry.

It is because of the discussions in The Locker Room that I talk with my wife about having dolls for our son and trucks for our daughter. It is because of the reading that I've done to prepare for TLR sessions that I wonder about the relative ease that we men have had in achieving success as a group. It is through discussing O'Neil's male gender role conflict theory that I am conscious about my struggle with balancing both my work life and my home life. I want to be successful as a student affairs administrator, but why can't I dedicate the same amount of time to being the world's greatest husband and father?

My wife and I want the children to see us being affectionate with each other, but why do we avoid

letting them see us having conflict? What does my wife think when I talk about all of these men's issues? Does she think I should talk more about women's issues, or men's impact on women? We talk about what it means to be a Christian pro-feminist and explore the background of apparent sexism in the Bible. It doesn't seem right to me that women weren't (and aren't) supposed to preach the Word to a congregation. Some of the most spiritually wise people I know are women – why can't they fill the pulpit? We also talk about the ways that God made men and women to be different, and how much he designed us to be different. I look forward to exploring this concept from a Biblical and a sociological perspective. Are there really that many inherent differences, or are we all socialized into this concept called gender?

Thankfully, I am energized by the fact that there are more questions at the end of each day than answers. I continue to be motivated by the guys I get to interact with each day on campus. Stimulating research is being published all the time. Inspiration can be found around every corner, if we are in the frame of mind to see it. Local, regional, and national organizations are focusing on men. As a community of educators, we are clarifying what it means to be in relationship with one another and communicate across difference; and we are starting to see gender as a significant difference. We have identified that men are more than just testosterone-fueled, adventure-seeking creatures who lack emotion and the ability to make meaning of their lives and maintain meaningful connections.

Being involved in with the men's group has also given me the opportunity to develop mutually enjoyable relationships with male students on my campus. My studies in this area have allowed me to explore the reality of my white privilege, the development of masculine identities over time, and the impact of a rape-supportive culture on folks from all points on the gender spectrum. Professionally, I've had the honor of meeting folks who have expansive minds and the capability of sharing world-changing ideas that challenge my sense of social justice.

The most tangible impact, though, is that I am willing and able to have a different level of connection with other men because of my fortified security in my own performance of masculinity. This desire to cultivate loving relationships is a gift, and one that I am thankful for. I now, more clearly than ever, can see the limited relationships of my past; I can see their roots came from my inability to fully express myself. My previous view of masculinity revolved around the "solid oak" theme, but I now realize that a pro-feminist

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[Continued from page 9] standing that encourages men to analyze their place in society and not repress their feelings will bear the most fruit.

Of course I want the world to be a reasonable place for me to exist, and I want it to welcome my children and wife; but if I'm honest, I'm a perfectionist, and gender injustice is just plain wrong. I don't like it when things aren't done the right way. When people make sexist comments, or they in any way devalue another human being, they have missed the proverbial target, and I see it as my duty to show them a better way to behave and interact with the world around them. Discussing men's issues with collegiate men is an effective way of righting some of the wrongs that I see in society. And even if they are self-selecting into our group and I am preaching to the choir, the good news is that this choir will hopefully go out and sing!

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## Transparency

A combination of distress, shame, guilt, sadness and confusion was evident on his face the afternoon he knocked on my door asking if he could speak with me. I had interacted with Jeff briefly through a conduct hearing earlier in the year for a violation that landed him on probation, but our relationship was not one in which he regularly turned to me for guidance. I knew what Jeff was about to share was powerful, but even I was not ready to respond to what was coming.

"I don't know how it happened," he said. "It was the best day of my college career—I had helped us with the game and we were out celebrating. I have no idea how this happened."

Together we took deep breaths—he to gain the power to share with me what was coming next, and me to begin imagining what Jeff might be sharing. What on earth could have happened that had him this torn up and decided I was the ideal person to confide in? After all, I was the one who had put this man on conduct probation just six weeks earlier.

"I saw this girl I have been talking to a lot lately at the bar". My heart sank. My gut turned. I knew what was about to follow. Jeff proceeded to share with me a horrific and painful story in which he confessed to sexually assaulting a female student two nights prior.



I had spent my professional life prior prepping myself to hear this story from victims-and have served in that role numerous times. We know how to respond to victims. We have support services on campus, advocates they can talk to, and we are trained in how to carefully respond. It never crossed my mind that I would one day be the sole individual on campus to whom a perpetrator of sexual assault decided to share his story. The young man before me had just confessed that he violated our standards at a level that would result in separation from the institution. What was next in our rule book on accepting sexual assault confessions?

I sat with Jeff for a considerable amount of time. I quickly explained to him that any information he shares that suggests our standards may have been violated would require me to report that information. He understood. His conscious had won. He needed to share this. I'm not a parent, but learned that day of the on-going struggle parents must face when the emotive aspect of what has transpired requires a hug yet a voice in the parent's head is screaming "how the hell could you have done this?" "What is wrong with you?" "I thought I knew you better!" I was screaming on the inside. As a conduct officer I spent many hours in hearings trying to get a confession of this caliber and here was one in front of me

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**[Continued from page 10]** and I had no clue what to do with it. Yet, somehow I felt vindicated. “We’re going to get this one,” I thought. One less sex offender on campus. Check.

Despite my mixed emotions, one thing was clear: before me sat a nineteen year old college freshman, broken and in tears. I couldn’t tell him everything I wanted to tell him. I couldn’t tell him about the impact on the victim and her family and the he SHOULD sit there and cry for hours. I couldn’t tell him he is a rapist and should be banned from campus never to return again, but I certainly wanted to.

Instead, I did what seemed logical. I was transparent. I gave him a hug, and thanked him for sharing this information with me—that I was grateful that he felt he could trust me enough. I then asked Jeff if he knew this would likely result in his suspension or expulsion. He shook his head yes and fell apart again, sobbing loudly. I knew this was causing additional pain for Jeff, but I needed to be clear that while his taking the correct steps to share this information and face the repercussions were admirable, it was still outside of what is acceptable and I could not tacitly condone his actions. Next I said to Jeff something that seemed to let us both feel a bit freer in each other’s presence. “Jeff, I think what you did is deplorable. By the way you are responding, I sense that you feel that way as well. We’re not going to spend any more time with those emotions. Instead, we’re going to take some very important next steps to correct the injustice you’ve caused.” I don’t know where those words came from, and in retrospect, I’m still unsure how I had the courage to say them. Jeff countered my honesty with his own version. Between tears, he muttered, “I don’t need your approval; I just need your help.” I softened a bit.

We moved forward with clearer expectations of each other and an understanding of the role we would play in each other’s lives for the coming weeks. I made Jeff aware of what was ahead for him and connected him with counseling services on campus. Jeff asked that I be his advisor through the hearing process. I told him I needed to think about that decision. In the end, I opted not to do so, but again shared with Jeff the rationale behind my decision—that I felt sexual assault was one of the most heinous of crimes and that for me it felt inauthentic to sit through the hearing supporting him. He seemed to appreciate my honesty and was able to secure another advisor. Jeff pled responsible.

Within a few weeks of our initial interaction, Jeff was packing his bags to make the lengthy journey back home to fulfill the requirements of his suspension. Before he left, Jeff and I met and he thanked me for my assistance. Before Jeff left, I asked him why he chose to come to me to share this information. “You are easy to talk to and seemed like someone who would care.” I inquired further with Jeff about how he drew that conclusion—partly for his own

reflection and partly for my own self assessment. He said that in his hearing earlier in the year I asked about real things—about how his time had been at the College and that I took the time to get to know him. I was humbled and was reminded that we never know the impact of having a genuine interest in and care for our students.

The most important lesson Jeff taught me, however, is the importance and necessity of transparency. It is easy to convince ourselves that students can’t handle the truth, so we sugar-coat it. We do so to make it easier to bear and softer to deliver. He reminded me that transparency is always essential, no matter how difficult it is to share or receive—we are doing a disservice by not being fully transparent. I could have said “everything is going to be ok” the day he was crying before me, as my instinct suggested that may help end the tears. But that could not have been further from the truth. Everything was not okay, nor would it be okay any time soon.

My interactions with Jeff left me with many questions: How did this happen? Why did this happen? How can we make sure it will never happen again? Why must our young men celebrate by consuming dangerous levels of alcohol? How do we teach men not to do something they don’t intend to do? Why does our campus culture continue to support this environment? Why are we struggling with the same problems campuses grappled with fifty years ago? While the answers are not clear, we must commit ourselves as educators to finding them and working with our young men in a mentoring, constructive way to create a better culture. We must reject the notion of “boys will be boys” and hold our fellow educators accountable for rejecting it as well.

My current role involves oversight of the conduct process on my campus. When training hearing panelists to understand the nuances of sexual assault, I always share Jeff’s story—not as an attempt to resist holding the Jeff’s of the world accountable—but to see the necessity to treat all members of our community with dignity. Jeff is a product of an environment we helped create.

Finally, before Jeff left my office I told him that while he was gone he needed to use his time away to find the courage and strength to come back to the institution ready to help other men understand consent more fully and be prepared to make sure that his peers can learn from his mistakes. I reiterated that his actions were completely inexcusable, but that he had to find some meaning in this incident and help both he and others continue to learn from this—his response was “I want that too.” Finally, we agreed on something.

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## Reinventing Privilege: How I Learned a New Way to Dominate and Get Away With It

The first time I was invited to a men's group was barely two years ago, and I can't say I was expecting it. The group was for Men of Color, and as an olive-skinned Middle Eastern Armenian, the times I am read as a white person are as frequent as the times I am recognized as a person of color. My own struggles in figuring out which of these US-based social constructions of race or ethnicity better fit me as someone operating with an 'outsider's' lens often meant approaching POC and MOC spaces with caution and in search of signs of approval. I felt skeptical, unsure if the other men in the group would question the validity of my presence there, and not only as a person of color. After all, it had only been six or so years that I even saw myself as a man.

For the better part of my life, I was socialized as a female, and so my entry into gender-related work was from the other side of the binary fence. I value the lessons I have learned, the experiences I have had and the conversations I have had the honor to access that most men will never know even happen. And I feel blessed for being one of a small segment of people engaged in gender-related work that get to say I know what it took to become an empowered woman, to become empowered in my gender transgressions and trans identity, and now to slowly be learning how to be an empowered man.

This also means that I often still find myself feeling or behaving like an outsider being invited to observe and sometimes comment on what men have to talk about. I can't relate to childhood stories involving "boys don't cry" type of admonishments or the pressures to be aggressive or perform well in traditionally masculine activities. Dolls weren't taken away from me, I gave them away.

So far I have compensated for my inability to relate by doing one of two things:

I have sat back and listened, waiting for the opportunities to jump down another guy's throat. I mean, we are supposed to challenge each other on our displays of privilege and dominance, right? Isn't that how we get points in this structure, by proving we are better men than the rest of them? As someone who experientially 'gets' women and women's experiences, I knew I had to be the best equipped to call a guy out.



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When I have contributed, I have injected female perspectives and viewpoints into the conversation, sentences that started with things like "how a woman might see that..." or "let me tell you how women feel about that." I am doing men a service, right? I am 'translating' and cluing guys into the mysteries of the female mind, and by extension doing a service to women by teaching men how not to be jerks.

As far as I have been concerned, I am a god-send to these men, an accidental spy bridging the gender communication gap. And what I was getting out of it was a unique purpose as a man and something I couldn't access before: male bonding. But I didn't really think I had much to learn from it all.

I haven't been particularly challenged or called out for this behavior either. Whether this is an accurate assessment or not, I have felt

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[Continued from page 12] praised, listened to and grateful for. At the very least, I have felt certain no one in the room was going to voice doubt. How could they? I have ‘expertise’ no other man in the room could claim, and thus untouchable. And what cisgender colleague would dare give a trans person grief around gender? I have earned my stripes.

And therein lies my own reimagining, repackaging and regurgitation of practicing male dominance. It is a version of male privilege that the vast majority of cisgender men are unable to recognize or challenge in appropriate ways that does not also rely on practicing cisgender privilege. Cisgender women can’t access the spaces where I practice it, and other trans people are just not around when it happens.

I entered these intentional men’s spaces with assumptions about their intent. As a newcomer in ‘man world’, I could have benefited from listening to my peers’ stories, not only to hear their content, but also some of the pain that comes with them. One of the things I have come to learn is how rare it is for men to feel like they can speak their truth without fear of judgment, reprimand – including in the form of violence – or having their masculinity questioned.

This led to an even bigger realization for me. If, as men, we are going to work to dismantle patriarchy and dominance, and exercise these towards other genders, we need to also see how these show up and are practiced towards other men. As men, we compete with each other in a variety of arenas: strength, – usually physical – sexual prowess, wealth and income, title, sports trivia, reputation, and so on. In my case, and in a lot of men’s groups, it is about being the least oppressive man in the room.

And when it comes to behavior that is oppressive towards other genders, predominantly women, oppression is the intentional symptom and result of an unrelated goal: to gain the validation and admiration of other men. This begs the question: how differently would we behave if we could not count on that validation and admiration? How many more times would we interrupt women for example, if instead of our contribution getting a “that’s a great point/idea”, we got a “I don’t think she was finished”, from other men?

In much the same way, when I have exhibited my dominance by acting like I get all women’s experiences and perspectives just because I happen to have one version of them, and I see what I interpret as nodding affirmations and appreciative looks, I am receiving the validation from other men that I am seeking. The

concurrent result is that I am betraying some women’s experiences by talking about feelings of pain, anger, frustration that were shared in spaces meant for women’s solidarity and empowerment, not the education of men, without their permission.

In fact, I was capitalizing on women’s experiences – including my own – for my personal gain and receiving instant credibility in groups of men that saw gender-related work as important. This is not to say that there is not merit at all to sharing some of what I know and have heard, rather there is a need to be more intentional in doing so for the right reasons (self-reflection being one of them), in ways that demonstrate humility and compassion, and only in appropriate contexts that necessitate them, challenging myself to also focus on my transmale and male identities and experiences.

My journey navigating this world as a transman and as a man – as those at times coexist, at times overlap, and at times separate – is still in its beginning stages and constantly evolving in its complexity. My lived experiences as a woman are invaluable parts of my ongoing holistic development as a full human being. They continue to function as a lens through which my understanding of gender and my transmasculine journey are shaped and at times critiqued.

Whereas before I thought that that lens would be the primary (if not always the solitary) shaper of that journey that I needed, my forays thus far into men’s groups have demonstrated that I now have a responsibility to infuse it with a more pluralistic multi-gendered viewpoint, to maximize the utility of having access to multiple gender lenses. To do otherwise if to pretend that I don’t experience male privilege at all, which I don’t to the extent or in all realms that my cisgender brothers do, but I still do somewhat. And that extent itself is also evolving.

I have learned these lessons from other men (cisgender and transgender alike), not necessarily through direct challenge, but from watching them role model these guidelines of (a) right reasons, (b) better ways, and (c) appropriate contexts in their own approach to gender work and conversation. For someone who so erroneously thought cisgender men had nothing to teach me about gender oppression and privilege, these have been huge pills to swallow and the reasons I will continue to seek out men’s groups and be grateful for the ones thus far.

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## Closing Thoughts

Our stories become who we are. Or is it that we become our stories? Regardless of which precedes the other, our personal narratives are the ways in which we articulate our lives, our values, our beliefs, motivations, experiences, and truth claims. We are bound by these stories and freed by them. They have the power to dramatically animate us and to cautiously give us pause. This joint compendium of personal narratives from professionals in NASPA and ACPA contains both types of stories – animating and reflective. We are told that the best stories are those which move people to act decisively, to join a cause and fight for something we come to believe. While this decisive action may be a notable endpoint or *part* of the success story, it is critical that we, as educators, ascribe just as much meaning to those stories and moments which give us pause. Who are those people who have caused us to stop and think more deeply about our passions, our commitments, our lives? What did I learn through that class that changed the way I think about myself, my relationships, my world? And, most importantly for this special edition, what experiences have I endured that have caused me to deepen and perhaps complicate my beliefs about what it means to be a man?

Narrative is a tool that plays a larger part in our lives than we often recognize. We introduce ourselves, we engage and connect with others, and we imagine our own futures through narrative. For such an important reflective and interactional instrument, we pay very little attention to *how* the tool works. For example, I can tell my own story of coming to be critical of socially constructed gender identity that was dramatically impacted by a Promise Keepers rally in D.C. called Stand in the Gap. As I retell that story from 13 years ago, my story can and should be tested constantly by the formative teenage years before it and the continued growth years between now and then. As a young college student, I was impressed by what I considered then to be a very diverse and interfaith gathering (at that time, to me, meaning Catholics, recently converted Christian folks, conservative and mainline Protestants all together). I never would have guessed that years later I would study and write a dissertation on intersections between spiritual and masculine identity development for college men, with a much bigger interfaith tent this time. So now, ironically, I see that “sacred assembly of a million faithful men” as a developmental marker for me as a feminist researcher. I was drawn to the promises of what so many men could be capable of accomplishing, while quietly afraid of the very same thing. Of course, I didn’t talk about the fear with the other 12 men in the group from my college, and I could hardly spell feminist

at the time. It is all part of my narrative - one that I don’t often reference, but an important part of my history nonetheless.

With every telling of a narrative, there is reinterpretation by the storyteller since our experiences and audiences are always changing. But if we *are* our stories, does that then change who we are when our personal narration changes? Of course! Personal narratives are generative in that they can reflect, create, and modify our beliefs and subsequent actions to support those beliefs about ourselves. So we are both actors and authors of our own screenplays – a true ‘Choose your own Adventure’. This is not merely indulgence or self-important fantasy; it is fundamental to how people work out who they are in public and private. I am not sure we could find a task more central to our work with college students.

As a University administrator, a student affairs professional, a course instructor, and a feminist researcher, I recognize that most college men rarely seize opportunities to substantively discuss personal identity issues with one another. This is not to say that they *have* few opportunities, but instead that they actually fail to capitalize on the opportunities presented to them. While teaching a class on contemporary American masculinities, I was always struck by how much the young men in the class wanted to share, and how they would tip-toe the line of self-disclosure until someone else shifted the line. Every once in a while, one young man would change the rules of that game and advance the line much further by telling a very personal story. The group would pause and look around as if to signify a collective gasp of both surprise and relief, then we could all tell our real stories. If we are to be effective in supporting both college men and women, we have to become storytellers and narrative coaches. We have to model the depth and struggle that is often required to do this hard work of recognizing our honest histories to envision our hopeful futures. This takes courage, vulnerability, and uncommon strength – especially when our stories stray from the mainstream.

In some ways, if we ask men to do this type of reflection, we ask them to sin against the doctrine of Masculinity (in its singular form) that exalts action, inexpressiveness, and solely experiential relationships. Good! Of course, we must be mindful of the costs some men may incur when they break the rules that have both bestowed them privileges and shackled them from honest expression. It is partly our responsibility to build the case as to how the benefits of a contemplative pause for reflection and

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[Continued from page 14] finding one's own voice can outweigh the norms of groupthink and restrictive emotionality. When we call men to transgress these restrictive roles, we call them to greater authenticity and allow space for wider, more inclusive expressions of masculinities (plural). It is unreasonable for us to expect this of our students if we do not also expect it of ourselves. This special edition is a step in that direction. It is time for us to call men to greater authenticity, and we begin with our own stories.

Peace be with you.

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# Guidelines for submitting to ACPA's Standing Committee for Men—Briefs

## **The History and Philosophy of SCM Briefs**

The SCM 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 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.

## **The 3 Types of SCM Briefs: Research, Practice and Thought**

### **Research Briefs**

The "Research Briefs" category was the first to be published by the Standing Committee For Men. Research Briefs usually involve literature reviews, extensive reviews of existing research, or the presentation new and original research. Sometimes they have been briefs of pre-existing articles by the author (with permission) or modifications to graduate student papers and/or theses. They most always include an extensive list of references and citations.

Research Briefs should be approximately 1000-1500 words including references. Remember, the purpose of these briefs is to provide a research primer, not an exhaustive article on the topic. The Brief should be written for a broad audience who may not be fully familiar with research into men's issues. As such, the Brief should contain information that directs readers to additional information (key references, journals, newsletters, web-sites, videos, national associations, etc.)

### **Practice Briefs**

A new category of Brief initiated in 2004. The purpose of the Practice Brief is to profile unique, new or innovative programs and approaches to working with

men and gender issues on campus. Practice Briefs should include a brief background from which the program arose, a detailed description of the program implementation and foundational research or thought, suggestions on how to modify the program to fit numerous campuses with different needs, and success and challenges associated with the program's processes and outcomes.

Practice Briefs should be approximately 1000-1500 words and include references where appropriate (reference are included in the word count). Remember, the purpose of these briefs is to share successful programs and strategies with other student affairs professionals. The Brief should contain as many details about the program as possible and should be presented in such a way that it could be modified and implemented across many different student populations. As such, the Brief should contain information that directs readers to additional information regarding the practice (websites or contact people may be of most help).

### **Thought Briefs**

A new category of Brief initiated in 2004. The purpose of the Thought Brief is to provide a forum for articles that may not fall under the traditional definitions of "academic" work. Following some of the paths trailblazed by our feminist colleagues, we hope the Thought Brief will provide a forum open to a broader range of authors and readers. Thought Briefs may be personal stories of men or people that work with men to provide unique insight into an issue or an experience. Thought Briefs may also be opinion pieces highlighting important issues in work with men, or a position piece, or a call to action or change in practice. Thought Briefs are intended to make the reader think. They can be provocative, polemical, or simple narratives. The best Thought Briefs will provoke reflections, reactions, or actions within a reader. Thought Briefs may not need citations, but Briefs such as opinion pieces should also include a foundation in research or cited fact where appropriate.

Practice Briefs should be approximately 1000-1500 words and include references where appropriate (reference are included in the word count). Remember, although the requirements for the Thought Brief may seem broad, there are standards relating to the content for which the Standing Committee for Men is looking. As such, questions relating to appropriate content for Thought Briefs should be directed to the SCM Coordinator for Research and Scholarship.

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### Submitting Briefs

Please follow the guidelines listed below for submitting a SCM Brief:

1. Choose the appropriate type of Brief for the information you wish to convey: Research, Practice, or Thought. Review the descriptions above for guidance. If you are unsure about what format would best convey your idea, thought, or message, contact the SCM Coordinator of Research and Scholarship.
2. Contact the SCM Coordinator of Research and Scholarship with an “intent to submit”. Your “intent to submit” should include information about the type of Brief you are looking at authoring, who the author(s) is/are, the topic of the Brief, and contact information for all authors.

3. All Briefs should be submitted to the SCM Coordinator of Research and Scholarship. Email submissions are preferred. Before submitting the Brief, make sure it adheres to APA style and guidelines. Since many of the Briefs are similar to what might be found in the ACPA’s About Campus Magazine, you may wish to refer to their “Author Guidelines” for further suggestions:

4. The SCM will contact you to convey your Brief’s (1) acceptance, (2) acceptance with minor revisions, (3) acceptance with major revisions, or (4) denial. Should the Brief require revisions, via email the SCM Coordinator of Research and Scholarship will provide you with a revised copy, or suggested areas for revision.
5. A proof with the Brief designed in the PDF format will be sent via email.

## ACPA’s Standing Committee for Men - Purpose, Vision, and Mission

### Purpose

Over the past 26 years, the Standing Committee for Men has evolved as a space to discuss the role men’s development plays in our lives as student affairs educators. In accordance with wanting to further this dialogue, the Standing Committee for Men Directorate and Membership have taken a critical look at what the group currently stands for along with what direction(s) the group should head in the future. This Strategic Plan is meant to serve as a living document, one which changes and evolves as time goes on, marking the ongoing development of the Standing Committee, its membership, and the Association to which it belongs.

### Vision Statement

The vision of the Standing Committee for Men is to be a preeminent clearinghouse of information, knowledge, and professional development on issues related to men’s identity and development for all student affairs educators.

### Mission Statement

The broad aim of the Standing Committee for Men is to promote men’s development. To accomplish this mission we:

- seek to promote awareness of men’s issues among men, women, and transgender individuals, support men on campus in developing their full potential,

- encourage and support the creation and dissemination of knowledge about men’s development, multiple modes of masculinities, and the intersections of masculinities with other socially constructed identities,

- challenge the current social paradigm that promotes a restricted vision of what it means to be a man, thereby limiting men in terms of their success and potential,

- actively welcome individuals who are newer to exploring male gender role socialization and the myriad issues related to hegemonic masculinity,

- welcome and actively develop successful partnerships and collaborative relationships with individuals and organizations working toward the same goals as the Standing Committee for Men,

- create a space wherein members’ personal growth and exploration is supported along with our professional responsibility to educate, organize and participate in the work of Association at large, and

- create meaningful partnerships with other Standing Committees, Commissions and colleagues who are instrumental in furthering our collective understanding of how men’s development impacts our work as student affairs educators.

# The Purpose of the Men and Masculinities Knowledge Community

The purpose of the Men and Masculinities Knowledge Community 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 for this KC 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.

## How to Submit an Article to the MMKC Newsletter

The Men and Masculinities Knowledge Community is a young, but ever growing knowledge community. Our newsletter is even younger than that. We're happy to report that we are making great strides in creating a tool for communication and dissemination of valuable information on masculinity issues in higher education.

We are always looking for great articles for the newsletter. Are you working on a research project dealing with masculinity issues? Do you have a great men's workshop for students or practitioners that you would like to share? Care to share your thoughts on masculinity issues in U.S. colleges and universities? Tell us about it. If you would also like to announce an upcoming event at your school or tell us about an upcoming seminar, workshop, or men's conference - let us know. The MMKC also would like to publish graduate students' work too!

### The submission guidelines are as follows:

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 [ptanner@rwu.edu](mailto:ptanner@rwu.edu).