

CHAPTER 1

Beyond the Model Gender Majority Myth

Responding Equitably to the Developmental Needs and Challenges of College Men

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Too often, though, we treat men as if they have no gender.

KIMMEL & MESSNER, 2010

In May 2009, Elizabeth Redden, a reporter for *Inside Higher Ed*, wrote a news story titled, “Lost Men on Campus.” She began by briefly describing some contemporary issues facing college men, such as their lower rates of enrollment, persistence, and graduation in comparison to college women; their relative disengagement in enriching educational experiences and campus leadership positions; and their overrepresentation among campus judicial offenders. The remainder of the article was devoted to the Second National Conference on College Men, which had been recently co-sponsored by two student affairs professional associations and hosted at the University of Pennsylvania. Reportedly, educators and administrators from post-secondary institutions across the United States and Canada gathered to devise a set of educational strategies in response to the alarming status of male undergraduates. Highlighted in the story were conference presenters whose research linked various problems concerning college men to troubled masculinities and gender identity development. Perhaps more fascinating than Redden’s article were the comments posted in response to it—nearly 100 within the first week.

Almost instantly, anonymous persons offered virtual commentary regarding the magnitude, sociocultural origins, political underpinnings, and implications of the gender gap in college. Remarks ranged from expressions of sympathy for men's loss of power in society to reminders of the permanence of patriarchy and its harmful effects on both women and men. Some attempted to share solutions based on anecdotal observations, and a few others critiqued the research cited in the news story. One responder proposed that women be allowed to carry guns on campus to defend themselves against male rapists; another suggested the politically correct ethos of American higher education is responsible for the disengagement of White male heterosexuals. "I'm a rising senior in high school. I'm not overly terrified by the loss of men at college campuses. All that means to me is a greater selection of hot chicks," one student wrote. In another post, attendees at the Conference on College Men were condemned for failing to recognize their own complicity in the cyclical reproduction of problematic educational outcomes among male students. These are just some of the many viewpoints written in response to the article.

We were disturbed by the apparent "either/or" bent to the online discussion—*either* equity for women *or* a stronger focus on men's issues, but very little advocacy for both. Although anonymous screen names were sometimes used, numerous posts were obviously gendered, with men on one side of the debate and women and pro-feminists (some of whom may have been men) on the other. This made us wonder, why not both? Why was there such a robust debate about who was disadvantaged more on college and university campuses? It was interesting that several posters also expressed that focusing on a male student's gender identity is considerably less important than other efforts to curb his destructive behaviors and reduce negative consequences of his actions. An emphasis on masculinities is really about "fixing" heterosexual White men, some felt. And others argued that gender studies courses and related programming are a waste of time and institutional resources, as they merely exacerbate political correctness and favor women at the expense of male students.

In this chapter, we unpack several issues reflected in comments on the *Inside Higher Ed* story. Specifically, our aim is to explain why there is such resistance to moving beyond singular notions of gender, beginning with historical insights into the privileged position of undergraduate men throughout the lifespan of American higher education. We then show how gender has been mishandled in recently published higher education and student affairs scholarship, and differentiate studies *of* men from those *about* men as men. This is followed by our observations of flawed assumptions regarding the universality of male privilege in college, which we have termed

the “Model Gender Majority Myth.” The chapter concludes with a call for greater participation of faculty and administrators in the developmental journeys of male undergraduates, as well as a more positive disposition toward the study of college men.

■ HIGHER EDUCATION: A MASCULINE HISTORY

Historian Frederick Rudolph noted: “Given the conditions of American life, it was inevitable that the college classroom should one day be blessed with the charms of femininity and graced by the presence of aspiring American womanhood. But it would take time” (1990, p. 306). He goes on to tell how a young woman was deemed fully qualified for admission to Yale in 1783 but was denied on the basis of her sex. Rudolph explains that women were viewed as being intellectually inferior and unworthy of education—their place was perceivably in the home. Hence, from the founding of Harvard in 1636 until 205 years later when Oberlin College awarded the first bachelor’s degree to a woman, previously established men’s colleges in the United States refused to become coeducational. Rudolph further reports that fewer than six of these institutions enrolled women prior to the start of the American Civil War. Consequently, for more than two centuries, masculine norms and gendered ideologies that privileged men were woven into the structural character of colleges and universities. These would not be easily changed.

In her book, *In the Company of Educated Women*, Barbara Miller Solomon writes about female academies and seminaries that eventually led to the founding of women’s colleges in the mid-1850s. Solomon maintains that early feminists preferred coeducation, as they viewed women’s colleges as “second best.” In some instances, coordinate or annex female institutions were founded next to men’s colleges that resisted coeducational instruction (for example, Radcliffe to Harvard and Barnard to Columbia). Accordingly, Radcliffe women were not awarded Harvard degrees until 1965, and Columbia did not admit female undergraduates until 1983. It was mostly during periods of war, when college-aged men were in shorter supply, that many coeducational institutions allowed more women to enroll (Eisenmann, 2007; Rudolph, 1990). Although women’s access to higher education increased in the latter half of the 1800s, still just about half of all institutions remained single-sex at the turn of the century. That American higher education has excluded women longer than it has included them certainly weakens current concerns regarding the declining presence of men on campus. Also noteworthy is that the majority of colleges and universities in the United States have never achieved gender equity—the quest for it has indeed remained elusive.

In addition to restricting women's participation, Solomon (1985) also notes the historical absence of female faculty and the masculine-dominated curricula at coeducational institutions. Eisenmann (2007) discovered that despite their increased presence at U.S. postsecondary institutions during and immediately after World War II, women were viewed as "incidental students" and few policies and practices were developed to respond to their needs. Since their entry into a dual-gender version of higher education, women have been forced to contend with sexism, sexual harassment, and egregious acts of differential treatment that often cause them to question their intellectual competence and develop lower career aspirations than their male peers.

Dorothy Holland and Margaret Eisenhart's book, *Educated in Romance*, is based on a comparative study of undergraduate women attending two universities, one predominantly White and the other historically Black. Most of the students they followed from college into adulthood were extraordinarily bright and possessed high post-baccalaureate career aspirations upon entering the two institutions. But unfortunately, Holland and Eisenhart found that less than one-third of the women actualized such expectations. "Most had ended up with intense involvements in heterosexual relationships, marginalized career identities, and inferior preparation for their likely roles as future breadwinners," the authors report (p. 4).

Holland and Eisenhart (1990) describe a duo of campus cultures that amplified romance, reinforced traditional gender roles, and compelled women to invest much care into how attractive they were perceived by male students (prospective husbands). Similar findings emerged in Jacqueline Fleming's (1984) study of undergraduates, which included 1,514 Black women and 1,077 Black men. In her acclaimed book, *Blacks in College*, Fleming furnishes data on the emotional pain, social isolation, and competence anxieties that Black women felt on the eight predominantly White campuses she studied. Moreover, she offers this conclusion about gender at the seven Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs):

It seems that when there are men around who are flexing their assertive muscles, there is no room for Black women to do the same. This basic pattern of women failing to translate their academic gains into good career development holds true in most of the Black Colleges studied. (p. 145)

Consistent with Fleming's findings regarding the subordination of women at HBCUs, Gasman's (2007) historiography shows how the experiences and contributions of women at these institutions have been consistently ignored in the higher education literature.

Jay, an anonymous person who contributed to the *Inside Higher Ed* post-article discussion, maintained: “Men are now damned at the university. We must instead conform to Women’s Studies.” Honestly, given the historical exclusion of women and the constant reinscription of masculine norms into the cultural fabric of most coeducational colleges and universities, it makes sense to us that some would care less about the current dilemmas facing college men. In fact, those who resist any attempt to shift gendered programming and curricula from women to men are wise for so doing, as American higher education has long proven itself incapable of responding simultaneously and separately to the needs of both women and men. Those who ask, “What will a focus on college men mean for enduring efforts to ensure the fair, respectful, and equitable treatment of women,” should be labeled gender realists, not skeptics. Although our focus in this chapter is on men, our greater plea is for the closing of gendered outcomes gaps in postsecondary education. We simply want to make clear that men have gender too. Thus, the ongoing quest for gender equity should also be inclusive of them and responsive to their challenges.

■ INTRODUCING THE OTHER HALF OF GENDER

In their book, *The Other Half of Gender*, Ian Bannon and Maria Correia make clear how gender has long remained synonymous with women. That is, gender-related public policies and programmatic efforts are rarely inclusive of men. The male side of gender is acknowledged mostly in conversations regarding men’s roles in eliminating the oppression and subordination of women, Bannon and Correia assert. Otherwise, any emphasis on men as gendered beings is thought to be in opposition to important efforts to achieve equity for women. The one-sided mishandling of gender occurs in most social spaces, including college and university campuses. For instance, student activities, resources, and courses offered on “gender” are almost always about rape and sexual assault, empowering and protecting the rights of women, and illuminating consciousness of women’s experiences around the world. Though each is undeniably essential, they are examples of how gender is misused as a substitute for women. For sure, we are not arguing for a reduction in or the elimination of women’s courses and initiatives; in fact, we feel there should be more. But we are advocating a two-sided treatment of gender for two important reasons: (1) It needs to be more widely understood that men have gender too; and (2) because gender is relational, the status of women cannot be improved without a corresponding emphasis on tending to the social forces that misshape men’s attitudes and behaviors and helping them develop productive masculinities (Bannon & Correia, 2006; Connell, 2005).

Recent media facilitation with the troubled status of male undergraduates has not been accompanied by a sufficient emphasis on better understanding and responding productively to their developmental needs. This is certainly evidenced in the higher education and student affairs literature. The subtitle of Sharon Gmelch's (1998) book, *Gender on Campus: Issues for College Women*, is reflective of how several scholars have ascribed gender to only one group of college students. For example, the 2003 edited book, *Gendered Futures in Higher Education*, included only one chapter on men—it was titled, “The Gender of Violence on Campus.” Similarly, chapters published in Jaime Lester's (2008) volume on gender at community colleges were overwhelmingly focused on women's needs, experiences, and issues. Moreover, most articles in student affairs journals that are supposedly about “gender” are almost always studies of women or statistical documentations of gender differences. Little higher education research, most of it recent, has been published on college men as men. Besides *College Men and Masculinities*, only two books (Byrne, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006) and two *New Directions for Student Services* monographs (Cuyjet, 1997; Kellom, 2004) have been published about male undergraduates; three of these four publications were focused specifically on African American men.

In our view, the most balanced consideration of gender (at least in recent years) is Linda Sax's 2008 book, *The Gender Gap in College*. In it she presents four decades of survey data on differences between male and female undergraduates, giving reasonably equal consideration to both. Sax's study furnishes an impressive supply of statistical proof on how gender variably affects students' identities, values, experiences, and outcomes. On some measures men were more advantaged, whereas on others women scored bigger gains. Thus, she submits that postsecondary educators and administrators should be equally concerned about the anxiety and low self-esteem issues faced by women as well as the increasing academic disengagement of men, along with other developmental and experiential differences found. Despite its laudable consideration of the duality of gender, Sax's book is based on a study *of* women and men, yet leaves much to be understood *about* them.

■ STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORY: STUDIES OF MEN—NOT AS MEN

Some fellow higher education and student development researchers may take issue with claims made in the previous section about the absence of men in gender studies. “Aren't most foundational studies of college students based on men,” one

might ask? As Nancy J. Evans and her colleagues note in the second edition of *Student Development in College*, several theories taught in graduate programs that prepare college and university administrators were derived from predominantly or exclusively male samples (for example, Erikson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1971; Levinson, 1978; and Perry, 1970). Hence, there is a widely held view that much is already known about men in the postsecondary domain. This is problematic in at least three ways. First, it ignores important demographic characteristics of the men upon whom these theories are based—most were White, heterosexual, young, and middle class. Because men of color, gay and bisexual men, and male students from lower-income backgrounds were excluded, the universality of these theories is extremely limited. Second, most theories are based on men from prior generations. As Kimmel (2008) notes, contemporary cohorts of college men are drastically different from those who were enrolled in the 1960s and 1970s. Although more recent theories have been formulated on women's development in college (for example, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000; and Josselson, 1987), significantly fewer have been offered on men over the past 30 years.

The third and perhaps most noteworthy problem with the view of men as the foundational basis of the student development literature is that the studies were indeed based on men, but they were not explicitly concerned with gender (Davis & Laker, 2004). Classic studies with all-male samples are not necessarily synonymous with men's studies. The latter hinges on questions asked, particularly the pursuit of insights into various aspects of a male student's lived experiences as a gendered being. In more recent years, sociologists and psychologists have endeavored to gain more sophisticated understandings of men as men—the social construction of their masculinities, how environments shape their attitudes and behaviors, conflicts that ensue as they struggle to fulfill hegemonic conceptions of manhood, and so on (Connell, 2005). Few such studies have been undertaken by higher education researchers (i.e., Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris III, 2008). We further explain in the next section how these theoretical misconceptions and the one-sided study of gender contribute to the routine disregard of male undergraduates in higher education and student affairs practice.

■ THE MODEL GENDER MAJORITY MYTH

Because male students have historically comprised the majority in American higher education and the structures of most colleges and universities (curricula, pedagogy, policies, staffing and leadership practices, etc.) remain largely based on norms established by men, gender-related initiatives over the past 40 years have been justifiably

geared toward women. Such important work, however, has led to the manufacturing of a major erroneous assumption: that everything is just fine with college men. The basis and perpetuation of this misconception reminds us of a popular and unfortunate fallacy concerning another population in U.S. schools and colleges: Asian Americans.

Museus and Kiang (2009) describe the infamous “Model Minority Myth” that has misshaped public opinion about Asian Americans. Accordingly, this myth causes educators and others to wrongfully mistreat persons from various Asian backgrounds as a monolithic group. Since *some* Asian Americans have historically outperformed others in school, are gifted in mathematics and science, and are exceptional standardized test takers, *all* Asian American students are often thought to possess these talents and are expected to achieve accordingly. Such stereotypes are universally imposed on Asian Americans, despite their socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, and intellectual differences. Museus and Kiang summarize five common misconceptions associated with the Model Minority Myth: (1) Asian Americans are all the same; (2) Asian Americans are not really racial minorities; (3) Asian Americans do not encounter major challenges because of their race; (4) Asian Americans do not require resources and support; and (5) college degree completion is equivalent to success.

In a similar fashion, we offer five flawed assumptions about college men: (1) Every male student benefits similarly from gender privilege; (2) gender initiatives need not include men unless they are focused on reducing violence and sexual assault against women; (3) undergraduate men do not encounter harmful stereotypes, social and academic challenges, and differential treatment in college environments because of their gender; (4) male students do not require gender-specific resources and support; and (5) historical dominance and structural determinism ensure success for the overwhelming majority of contemporary college men. We have termed this the Model Gender Majority Myth.

“The institutional structure advantages men and always has,” several respondents to the *Inside Higher Ed* article argued. As such, equitable outcomes are presumed to be automatically conferred to the male student collective, despite stark differences within it. Most coeducational institutions have been contaminated by this reasoning. Consequently, too few efforts are enacted to respond to what media and institutional researchers report about the problematic status of male undergraduates. Campus leaders commonly fail to connect data from health centers, student engagement surveys, and judicial affairs offices with men’s troubled gender identities and their obvious need for help. Furthermore, challenges faced by male subgroups, such as men with disabilities or those who work more than 20 hours per week off campus, are overshadowed

by their presumed gender privilege. These are just some of the detrimental byproducts associated with the Model Gender Majority Myth.

■ HELP NEEDED IN GUYLAND

Guyland is the world in which young men live. It is both a stage of life, a liminal un-defined time span between adolescence and adulthood that can often stretch for a decade or more, and a place, or, rather, a bunch of places where guys gather to be guys with each other, unhassled by the demands of parents, girlfriends, jobs, kids, and the other nuisances of adult life. (p. 4)

In his 2008 book, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, Michael Kimmel takes readers on a journey from adolescence into adulthood. Based on interviews with over 400 young men (many of whom were college students or recent graduates), the book offers powerfully rich details about who these men are, how they struggle to negotiate manhood with themselves and their peers, why so many seem to wander aimlessly through their teenage years and twenties, and what their social interactions entail and signify. Guyland is a complex social sphere governed by a perceivably rigid set of behavioral and attitudinal regulations, which Kimmel refers to as “the Guy Code.” For sure, those who fail to adhere to it bear the burden of ridicule and other penalties imposed by their peers (especially other men); yet those who abide by the code often feel like frauds.

After reading *Guyland*, we have never been surer of this: it is not a place that any young man should be expected to successfully navigate on his own. Our position on this is informed by four of Kimmel’s provocative statements (p. 4):

1. Guyland becomes the arena in which young men so relentlessly seem to act out, seem to take the greatest risks, and do some of the stupidest things.
2. Directionless and often clueless, they rely increasingly on their peers to usher them into adulthood and validate their masculinity.
3. They feel incomplete and insecure, terrified that they will fail as grownups, that they will be exposed as fraudulent men.
4. Guyland is a volatile stage, when one has access to all the tools of adulthood with few of the moral and familial constraints that urge sober conformity. These ‘almost men’ struggle to live up to a definition of masculinity they feel they had no part in creating, and yet from which they feel powerless to escape.

These guys are enrolled at every postsecondary institution in America—they need help! Colleges and universities pay hundreds of professionals thousands of dollars each to help students mediate challenges encountered during their persistence through the undergraduate years. One college student posted this remark in response to the *Inside Higher Ed* news story: “Student affairs airheads teaching classes on masculinity. If that isn’t a vision of hell I don’t know what is.” Acknowledging this perspective, we augment our previous declaration: college men need help from well-informed administrators and educators who recognize them as gendered beings, are familiar with their complex developmental needs, actually take time to talk with them about their conflict-laden voyages toward becoming better men, and are committed to equitably eradicating experiential and outcomes disparities between them and their female counterparts.

The stakes in Guyland are enormously consequential. Albeit in different ways, both women and men are harmed when an institution makes a one-sided investment into pursuing gender equity (Davis & Laker, 2004; Davis & Wagner, 2005). A man who graduates from college without having benefitted from a well-guided exploration of his gender identity is likely to find himself stranded on a destructive pathway of confusion and self-doubt. His stifled emotional maturity, bad health habits, undisturbed sexist viewpoints, and insufficient preparation for meaningful employment will not only negatively affect him but also other men and women he encounters during and after college (including spouses, partners, and colleagues). Those who work at colleges and universities have a professional responsibility to aid women and men alike in productively resolving identity conflicts and transitioning into a version of adulthood where patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, misogyny, misandry, sexual harassment, and all forms of abuse and oppression ends with them. We doubt that a 20-year-old person who is treated as though he has no gender will achieve all this on his own.

■ REPLICATING THE GOOD IN COLLEGE MEN

They are drunken, promiscuous, academically disengaged lovers of pornography, sports, and video games who rape women, physically assault each other, vandalize buildings on campus, and dangerously risk their lives pledging sexist, racially exclusive, homophobic fraternities. This view of male undergraduates was not only conveyed in several comments on the *Inside Higher Ed* article but are also reflective of what is generally reported about them in the higher education and social science literature. Although it is true that a fraction of young men engage in some of the

dumbest, most alarming acts imaginable, not all are as destructive as the headlines and journal article abstracts lead us to believe. The institutional action we have advocated throughout this chapter is likely to be met with enormous resistance by those who possess only one view of college men. That is, some may understandably argue that trying to fix those who are not mature enough to behave sensibly in college is a waste of institutional resources. Our reaction to this is threefold.

First, once an institution admits a student and accepts payment for his enrollment, its agents (faculty, staff, and administrators) have a serious responsibility to aid in his development. Instead of “fixing” him, we prefer to align such efforts with those long recommended by student development theorists (i.e., Nevitt Sanford, who emphasized challenge and support) and routinely promoted by student affairs professional associations (i.e., the American College Personnel Association, whose core values include “development of the total student”). Second, we strongly agree with other scholars (namely Davis & Laker, 2004; Davis & Wagner, 2005) that an increase in gender-specific services and educational interventions crafted specially for college men will lead to a dramatic decrease in their self-mistreatment, excessive alcohol consumption, abuse of women, and other acts associated with misguided masculinities. We comfortably predict that the continued one-sided mistreatment of gender in higher education will sustain the very worst in college men, which concurrently and cyclically yields negative effects for them and their female peers. Concerning this, we believe it to be educationally irresponsible to continue doing what we have done over the past several years.

Our final reaction is concerning the stereotypical, unfairly popularized view of college men. Like Kimmel (2008), we fully acknowledge that young men in their teens and twenties at times behave stupidly and without good judgment. But what about those who don’t—student leaders who are productively engaged on campus, make good grades, achieve healthy masculine identities, act responsibly and with honor, and respect women and themselves? Who are they and what can they teach us? Unfortunately, little is known about undergraduate men who act in these ways and embody such positive attributes. We know they exist, yet they are rarely consulted as models upon whom effective educational interventions should be based.

Although continuing to explore the social undercurrents and enablers of men’s misbehavior and bad habits in college environments is important, so too is the pursuit of instructive insights based on student success. For example, researchers (Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper, 2009) have called attention to the deficit-orientation of most published scholarship and public discourse regarding African American male undergraduates. “In the research literature, there has been little attention given to solving

educational problems for African American males, but more emphasis placed on documenting it” (Jackson & Moore III, 2008, p. 848). This fetish with the amplification of negative outcomes among these students has been counterbalanced with recent contributions that reveal how they productively negotiate masculinities within their same-race male peer groups (Harper, 2004); how they manage to succeed on HBCU campuses despite their academic underpreparedness (Palmer & Young, 2009); strategies they employ to gain access to social capital and exclusive information networks (Harper, 2008a); factors that lead to their persistence at community colleges (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2002), as well as through baccalaureate degree attainment at four-year institutions (Warde, 2008); and enablers of their simultaneous achievement in academics and intercollegiate athletics (Martin & Harris III, 2006). Desperately needed are more studies such as these. Likewise, whereas Nuwer (1999) and Jones (2004) expose hazing as one of the grimmest aspects of the college fraternity, other scholars (i.e., Harper, 2008; Harper & Harris III, 2006; Kimbrough, 1995) reveal positive behaviors that are reinforced in modern day Greek-letter men’s organizations; unfortunately, the latter is consistently overshadowed by the former.

To meet their developmental needs, educators and administrators must move beyond a singular view of college men. Identifying the good in them and seeking to replicate those traits in their same-sex peers should be the center of gender programming and educational interventions designed to reverse problematic outcomes among male undergraduates. One student who is trapped in the darkest corner of Guyland may be rescued through what has been learned from his buddy who somehow managed to escape its harmful trappings. Those of us who care authentically about gender in the postsecondary context need to better understand how some men develop into mature adults who responsibly enter society as healthy citizens, ethical leaders and professionals, principled parents, and unwavering agents for social justice.

■ CONCLUSION

Maintaining our composure while reading the *Inside Higher Ed* posts was difficult, but writing this chapter proved to be even harder. Frustrating for us was the zero-sum perspective articulated in several of the online posts—a common and unfortunate misconception that equity for one automatically disadvantages the other. Although we disagree with this point of view, revisiting the history of American higher education helped us better understand from where it comes. As we noted previously, most colleges and universities in the United States have done a poor job of simultaneously and equitably educating women and men. Why should we

expect educators and administrators who work within predominantly masculine institutional structures to suddenly get better at closing gendered experiential and outcomes gaps between women and men when doing so has not occurred over the 374-year lifespan of postsecondary education in this country? Our answer is this: as long as students, regardless of their gender, come to us with developmental needs, educational goals, and tuition dollars in hand, we should expect no less of those who are entrusted with their success. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Education projects 2,375,000 associate's and bachelor's degrees will be awarded this year (2010); 40.9% of them will be earned by men. To send nearly one million college-educated men into the world with troubled masculinities, underdeveloped gender identities, and erroneous assumptions concerning women and other men with whom they co-occupy society makes contemporary institutions of higher education one of the guiltiest culprits in the perpetual maintenance of patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia in America.

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