MANTALK: FRATERNITY MEN AND MASCULINITY

By

SHANE PATRICK MCKEE

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of SHANE PATRICK MCKEE find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

____________________________________
Kelly Ward, Ph.D., Chair

____________________________________
Pamela Bettis, Ph.D.

____________________________________
Christian Wuthrich, Ph.D.
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MANTALK: FRATERNITY MEN AND MASCULINITY

Abstract

By Shane Patrick McKee, Ph.D.
Washington State University
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Chair: Kelly Ward

A majority of college men struggle to successfully navigate the college environment and their newfound independence and freedom upon leaving home for the first time. Although recent research makes it clear that there is a college male crisis within higher education (Kimmel, 2004) and men are more likely to struggle navigating their identity and the college environment there has been a lack of programs and services aimed at helping men be more successful in both endeavors (O’Neil & Casper, 2011). ManTalk, a men’s growth group, is my response to the call for more programmatic opportunities and services that help men explore their masculinity.

This qualitatively study analyzes fifteen fraternity men’s experiences in a ten-week men’s growth group to better understand how they made meaning of the experience and how it may have shaped their understanding of their masculinity, its intersections, and its impact on their lives as men. A multi-dimensional theoretical framework combining student development theory, critical masculinity, and critical pedagogy guides the study and frames the major themes that emerged: masculinity and intrapersonal intersections, masculinity and relationships, and making meaning of the overall experience. The major themes grew out of an in-depth analysis of participant interviews, participant reflection journals, researcher fieldnotes, and an examination of the conversations included in each of the ten ManTalk sessions.

The findings suggest that through the ManTalk experience the participants came to develop a more critical awareness of their masculinity and its intrapersonal intersections (race,
gender and sexual orientation, body image, feelings and emotions, and self-esteem and self-awareness) as well as its interpersonal intersections (relationships). The findings also show that the participants made meaning of the totality of their experience through their biggest lessons learned, their increasing comfort with critical conversations, their action and application of what they learned and discussed, and as a result of an ever-changing group dynamic. The study findings can serve as a guidepost for practitioners interested in programming designed to help college men navigate their masculinity, and for those interested in exploring different aspects of masculine identity development within practice and research.
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Dedication

This dissertation, the *ManTalk* program, and all of my work focused on masculinity and helping men better understand themselves is dedicated to my late brother, Ryan Douglas McKee, who tragically took his own life at the age of 22.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Although men are not often viewed as an at-risk group and even naming them that way seems counter-intuitive, they have been overlooked as group in recent years even though they struggle in navigating the college experience in very similar ways as other such underrepresented cultural and ethnic minorities do. As a result, the notion that there is a “crisis” concerning men in higher education has become journalistic commonplace in recent years (Kimmel, 2004). The simple fact is a lot of college men are struggling inside and outside of the classroom, and many times it is a direct result of how they understand, construct, and perform their masculinity – a predominantly hegemonic masculinity.

In the United States, hegemonic masculinity is the dominant discourse of masculine behavior embedded in men’s everyday practices, behaviors, and actions. Hegemonic masculinity contributes to universal systems of beliefs and practices that are primarily focused on oppression, exploitation, social control, and subordination of females and other males (Kimmel & Davis, 2011). The power of hegemonic masculinity lies not only in its all-pervasive, taken-for-granted, consensual nature, but also in the fact that there seems so few who readily understand its destructiveness. Hegemonic masculinity in America guides what it means to be a man in society and deviation from this discourse is usually met with resistance.

From boyhood to manhood males are generally socialized to walk, talk, and act in a way akin to the dominant discourse and prevailing notions of masculinity – which is centered around action, strength, competitiveness, achievement, dominance, aggression, independence, and control – ultimately leading to a variety of harmful effects (Connell, 2001; Davis, 2002; Harper, 2004; Kimmel & Messner, 2007; Messner, 2001). The harmful effects that result from a man’s
hegemonic masculine beliefs can include restrictive emotionality, failure to develop a healthy sense of identity, poor self-body image, lack of confidence, self-destructive behavior, denial of vulnerability, eschewal of self-care, impoverished relationships with others, and an increased tendency towards aggressive and violent behavior (Kilmartin, 2007).

By the time men reach college, often times their sense of what it means to be a man is so engrossed in hegemonic masculine belief systems that it is not surprising that college administrators and student affairs staff struggle to understand the men on their campuses and how to best serve them. Unchecked masculinity has created what some deem a “crisis” on campus and a labeling of men as an “at risk” group as a result of the risky and destructive behaviors associated with hegemonic masculinity (Davis & Laker, 2004). “The crisis of males in higher education has to do with masculinities – both the multiple definitions of masculinity articulated by different groups of men and the intersections of gender relations with other lines of identity and inequality” (Kimmel, 2004, p. 98). Because a lot of college men struggle to navigate their hegemonic masculine beliefs and the internal conflicts that result from their subscription to the dominant discourse they often end up outwardly struggling to navigate the college environment in productive, safe, and healthy ways. Male academic underachievement, lack of engagement, risky sexual behavior, alcohol-related issues, mental health issues, and an overrepresentation in judicial proceedings are just a few of the male-specific concerns facing administrators on campuses across the country (Capraro, 2004; Courtenay, 1998; Harper & Harris, 2010; Harper, Harris & Mmeje, 2005; Laker & Davis, 2011; Kellom, 2004; Kimmel, 2004; Sax & Arms, 2004).

A closer examination of current conversations about men on campus suggest that specific male subgroups have a greater probability of running into academic and discipline issues
and are more likely to struggle with issues related to alcohol and other types of risky behavior as a result of the masculine hegemony bred within these groups. For example, fraternity men – the most highly researched college-male subgroup – are one of the most risky, destructive, stigmatizing, domineering, and hegemonic groups of college men (Syrett, 2009). Although membership in fraternities provides men with a ready-made social network, leadership opportunities, and a lifetime of brothers, fraternity men are also one of the subsections of the college male population that have been most destructive, damaging, and problematic within higher education. Research over the last thirty years has consistently shown that fraternity men – on average – get lower grades, have stunted intellectual development, achieve lower levels of cognitive gains during their first year, drink more frequently and more excessively, have higher incidents of sexual aggression, assault and rape, and have the highest rates of hazing-related incidents, injuries, and deaths (Astin, 1993; Foubert & Cowell, 2004; Nuwer, 2004; Pascarella et al., 1996; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001; Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 1996). For the most part, the risky and destructive behavior of fraternity men and the subsequent issues that have arisen within the fraternal community are a direct result of the hegemonic masculinity that has been and continues to be cultivated within these organizations and society as a whole (Syrett, 2009).

Until recently there has also been an absence of research and programming focused on the gendered experiences of college men and the challenges they face as a result of the way they understand and perform their masculinity (Harris & Edwards, 2010). Even though most classic student development theories were developed from androcentric points of view that prioritized the experiences of White men (McEwen, 2003), Davis and Laker (2004) argue that these theories were not developed with a gendered lens – that is, they did not seek to understand men as
gendered beings. These studies were actually gender blind and never really took into account the male perspective or masculine identity issues. Unknowingly, many student affairs administrators have wrongly assumed that they understand men simply as a result of their knowledge of student development literature which was developed by looking primarily at the collegiate experiences of men. Just as college men are struggling to find their place in the world, so too are the student affairs administrators that are tasked with educating and developing them.

Recent masculinity scholars (Harper & Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 2008; Laker & Davis, 2011) posit that the lack of programming for college men is one of the most neglected areas in higher education and student affairs. Leading to the question: “How many more acts of campus violence, rape, male suspensions and dropouts, and male suicides will it take for the profession to understand that masculinity ideologies are directly relevant to our work with men and women?” (O’Neil & Casper, 2011, p. 46). There is a vital need to move theory into practice when it comes to understanding college men as gendered beings and working to design educational programs that aid men in this endeavor. Harper and Harris (2010) declare that those who work at college and universities have a professional responsibility to help men productively resolve their identity and gender conflicts so they transition into adult life understanding the negative consequences that patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, misogyny, misandry, sexual harassment, and all forms of abuse and oppression create. An 18-21 year old man who is treated as having no gender, and is never critically challenged to understand the innate privilege and power that his masculinity grants him, will rarely achieve a critical consciousness of his masculinity simply on his own.

College is supposed to be a time for students to explore themselves and better understand their identity, figure out their passions, become scholars in their field of study, learn what it means to be independent and interdependent, and develop the skills that are vital to be successful
upon graduation. Unfortunately college men are often unfairly lumped together as one collective group and portrayed in the media and in social science literature as, “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” (Harper & Harris, 2010, p.10). However, from my experiences as a student affairs administrator, a large majority of the men I encounter and have worked with, even fraternity men, are good and decent guys that can also simultaneously represent the negative and destructive extreme. They make good grades, they are involved on-campus, and they are scholars in their field. But these same guys are also the ones who let loose by drinking in excess, hooking-up, engaging in risky behavior, and playing video games for countless hours on end. They are men that live dual-lives – their academic life and their social life. They are men that live dual masculinities – the harder more destructive masculinity they perform to gain respect and admiration from their peers and the healthier more self-aware masculinity that they oftentimes only bring out in the friendly confines of their female relationships, familial relationships, or during times of crisis.

I was no different. When I was in college I was a struggling young man trying to find myself, understand my identity, develop healthy relationships, and navigate the college environment in a successful manner. From the outside looking in, most of my professors and peers knew me as a guy that excelled in the classroom, was highly involved as a resident assistant and within numerous organizations, was a leader on campus, and as a gentleman who could get any girl he wanted. In all reality though, my time in college was filled with unhealthy relationships, the tragic suicide of my brother, the separation of my parents as a result of my dad’s affair, bouts of depression, and extremely high levels of anxiety stemming from my
inability to cope with the physical, social, and emotional pressures building up around me. I did not have a strong support network; I periodically used alcohol to manage my emotions; I hid my insecurities and anxiety by jumping into intimate relationships; I thought I was the only one dealing with major life issues; I believed I could handle everything myself. I was wrong. In many ways I was the stereotypical college male student.

Fortunately, during my years as a Residence Hall Director at Gonzaga University I was blessed with the opportunity to make a positive impact on the lives of the men around me through the creation and implementation of a men’s growth group entitled, *ManTalk*. The goal of *ManTalk* at Gonzaga was to provide college men a safe and conducive environment where they could be educated, supported, challenged, and given the opportunity to discuss critical issues related to their masculinity and gendered experiences with other men. The program was also meant to provide men with an opportunity to more critically examine their masculinity and in so doing hopefully “liberate” them from a hegemonic masculinity that has prevented them from being their authentic self. *ManTalk* has been my vessel for addressing the issues facing college men today and many of the same personal and societal issues that I did not know how to deal with while I was in college. The program has continued at Gonzaga and is being translated for use on other campuses and within a variety of student organizations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the program can be impactful, though a more in-depth study is needed to truly understand how men make meaning of their *ManTalk* experience and how it may aid them in more critically understanding their masculinity and its impact.

**Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The primary purpose of the present study is to understand how fraternity men make meaning of their masculinity and their experiences in a men’s growth group (*Man Talk*). The
study offers insight into the experiences of fraternity men participating in *ManTalk* and how the experience shapes their understanding and conceptualization of their masculinity and how it impacts them and those around them. The study also provides information about how participation in a men’s growth group can help fraternity men become more self-aware and cognizant of how their masculinity impacts their different relationships and how these relationships have played a role in their overall masculine identity. If fraternity men better understand why their lives and relationships may be challenging and difficult at times as a result of following unattainable masculine cultural imperatives they may come to more critically see the part hegemonic masculinity plays in all aspects of their identity. Helping fraternity men understand the role their hegemonic masculine subscriptions play in their everyday life may ultimately improve their health, performance, persistence, and engagement while decreasing disruptive behavior, mental health issues, violence, sexual misconduct, and alcohol-related issues on college campuses across the country.

With reference to the overarching purpose – understanding how fraternity men make sense of their masculinity and their experiences in a men’s growth group (*ManTalk*) – the following research questions guide the study:

1. How does participation in *ManTalk* shape masculinity and other aspects of identity?
2. How does participation in *ManTalk* shape a more critical understanding of relationships?
3. How do participants make meaning of their overall experiences in *ManTalk*?

**Conceptual Grounding and Methods**

To address the research questions the study relies on qualitative methodology and a multidimensional conceptual framework to examine how fraternity men make meaning of their masculinity and their experiences in a men’s growth group (*ManTalk*). The study is informed by a three-pronged theoretical framework that sits at the intersection of student development theory,
critical masculinity, and critical pedagogy. Student development theory helps me holistically understand each student as a unique individual with a specific set of psychosocial developmental needs and wants based on their growth, development, and maturity. A critical lens, grounded specifically in critical masculinities, guides my understanding of how masculinity is shaped by political, cultural, social, and gender-based structures which are often constraining, conforming, and often times destructive. A critical approach to the construction of masculinity also focuses on how masculinity can position men in relation to themselves and others as: powerful or powerless, dominant or subordinate, central or marginal, conscious or unaware, confident or insecure, and/or liberated or shackled (Kimmel & Davis, 2011). Since this study is focused on the ManTalk program – which was envisioned and designed through the lens of critical pedagogy – it also serves as part of my theoretical framework. The theoretical grounding for the study is explained in greater detail in Chapter Three. The data for the study includes interviews, observations, and document analysis. In triangulating the data, my intent is to create a holistic picture of the men’s experiences in the program, and to examine how the program may shape them as men and their understanding of their masculinity.

**Summary**

The remainder of the dissertation is presented in six chapters. Chapter Two examines the literature focused on identity development and the social construction of masculinity as well as the most recent research on boys and masculinity, college men and the impact masculinity plays in how they navigate the college experience, the recent call-to-action for more programmatic efforts aimed at college men, and the gap in the research body on college men and masculinity. Chapter Three explores the methodology and research design for the study, including an explanation of the theoretical framework. Chapters Four, Five, and Six present the results of the
study. Chapter Four analyzes how the *ManTalk* experience helped the men in making meaning of their masculinity and its intrapersonal intersections. Chapter Five offers insights into the intersection between the men’s relationships (familial, male-female, male-male) and their masculinity. Chapter Six provides a detailed analysis of how the men made meaning from their *ManTalk* experience, both individually and collectively. Chapter Seven presents the overall conclusions of the study as well as recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, a body of higher education and student affairs scholarship that considers the gender-related experiences and challenges of college men has emerged (Harris & Edwards, 2010). This gender-specific research consistently shows that college men can struggle inside and outside the classroom in similar ways that other groups such as women, underrepresented cultural and ethnic minorities, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students do (Capraro, 2004; Courtenay, 1998; Harper & Harris, 2010; Kellom, 2004; Kimmel, 2004/2008; Laker & Davis, 2011; Sax & Arms, 2004). In response to concerns about the issues college men are struggling with, many scholars and administrators across the country have called for additional programmatic efforts as well as increased research to specifically address the specific developmental needs of college men (Davis & Laker, 2004; Kellom, 2004; Kellom & Groth, 2010; Kimmel, 2008). In spite of these calls there is still only a modest amount of research that examines men’s experiences on campus.

In order to have a critical foundation for understanding the current study, a brief overview of the historical and contextual frameworks that have guided the research agenda on men and masculinity begins the literature review. The review also includes a brief exploration of the struggles and issues facing boys and young men as they navigate their masculinity and time in the K-12 system. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the literature that examines the issues facing fraternity men and the role masculinity plays in how they navigate the fraternity/collegiate experience, as well as the recent literature calling for more male-specific programming.
Historical and Contextual Frameworks to Understand Masculinity

Early Masculine Development Theories

During the past one hundred years researchers in an array of disciplines and fields have examined masculinity and its impact through a variety of lenses (Kilmartin, 2007). The earliest studies on masculinity explored gender development through the lens of biology, psychology, and anthropology (Kimmel & Messner, 2007). While each of these early developmental models aided gender scholars in the understanding of men and masculinity, each of these models were also severely confined by a variety of limitations.

Early biological scholars held that differences in endocrine functioning were the cause of gender differences, that testosterone predisposed males toward aggression, competition, and violence whereas estrogen predisposed females toward passivity, tenderness, and exaggerated emotionality (Kimmel & Messner, 2007). These scholars argued that men’s attitudes and behaviors are “hard-wired” into males through biology, that gender change is impossible, and that masculinity is static, trans-historical, cross-cultural, and cross-situational (Kilmartin, 2007). Biological differences in men and women may set some parameters for differences in social behavior, but it does not explain everything. The psychological model sought to explain men and their deep sense of masculinity within the context of impactful childhood psychological events. Sigmund Freud, Karen Horney, Heinz Kohut, and Carl Jung were some of the leading scholars that subscribed to the psychological model of development (Kilmartin, 2007). The flaw in the psychological model is that it relied solely on early childhood events and development to explain male behavior and the masculinity issues that arise throughout a man’s life. Scholars of the anthropological model sought to understand men through the lens of culture and the behaviors that pass from one generation to the next (Kimmel & Messner, 2007). But the
an anthropological model mistakenly accepted prescribed behaviors and differences between men and women – regardless of whether or not they were outdated or restrictive – as natural and the result of cultural evolution; thus, they were not to be tampered with (Kilmartin, 2007).

In the late-1970’s, the first group of works on men and masculinity appeared that were directly influenced by the feminist critiques (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan; 1982) of the traditional explanation for gender differences. “In all the social sciences, these feminist scholars have stripped these early studies of their academic facades to reveal the unexamined ideological assumptions contained within them” (Kimmel & Messner, 2007, p. xix). Borrowing from these feminist scholars a new paradigm for understanding and studying masculinity emerged. A theoretical model that for the first time assumed nothing about men beforehand; rather it viewed masculinity as more of a socially constructed phenomenon that occurred over a man’s lifetime (Kilmartin, 2007). Existing research on masculinities almost exclusively considers it from a social constructionist perspective (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005).

The Social Construction of Masculinity

The social constructionist model relating to masculinities subscribes to the notion that man and his behaviors, values, and beliefs are a constantly changing collection of meanings that are constructed through his relationship with himself, with others, and his world (Kilmartin, 2007). Kimmel and Messner (2007), both social constructionists, declare, “To be a man is to participate in social life as a man, as a gendered being. Men are not born; they are made. And men make themselves, actively constructing their masculinities within a social and historical context” (p. xvi). The social constructionist model also seeks to understand masculinity as a multidimensional, intersectional, and mutually-shaping construct (Kimmel & Davis, 2011). “Our sex may be male, but our identity as men is developed through a complex process of
interaction with the culture in which we both learn gender scripts appropriate to our culture and attempt to modify those scripts to make them more palatable” (Kimmel & Messner, 2007, p. xxi). To better understand masculinity as a socially constructed phenomenon, it is best to examine it within the context of hegemony and the dominant discourse, gender role conflict, and through an analysis of how masculinity intersects with a man’s race, sexuality, and social class.

**Hegemony and the Dominant Discourse.** In simplistic terms hegemony teaches men: be strong, don’t cry, be the breadwinner, aggressive behavior is ok, always be in control, be logical not emotional, don’t act like a girl or be a girl or you might lose your man card, and be straight at all cost even if you aren’t. The concept of hegemony refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life (Connell, 2005), and the dominant discourse of masculinity is one that is rooted in hegemony (Brod, 1987; Connell, 1987; Kilmartin, 2007; Kimmel, 1987; Kimmel & Messner, 2007; Pleck, 1981). From a critical standpoint the social construction of masculinity must be understood in relation hegemony – the power, privilege, and patriarchy that men have had and sustained over women and men who do not live up to or subscribe to the dominant discourse. Donaldson (1993), best summarizes the definition of hegemonic masculinity as it has appeared in the works of many of the preeminent scholars in the field of masculinities:

Hegemonic masculinity, particularly as it appears in the works of Carrigan, Chapman, Cockburn, Connell, Lichterman, Messner, and Rutherford, involves a specific strategy for the subordination of women. In their view, hegemonic masculinity concerns the dread of and the flight from women. A culturally idealized form, it is both a personal and a collective project, and is the common sense about breadwinning and manhood. It is exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent. It is pseudo-natural, tough, contradictory, crisis-prone, rich, and socially sustained. While centrally connected with the institutions of male dominance, not all men practice it. Though most benefit from it. Although cross-class, it often excludes working class and black men. It is a lived experience, and an economic and cultural force, and dependent on social arrangements. It is constructed through difficult negotiation over a
life-time. Fragile it may be, but it constructs the most dangerous things we live with. Resilient, it incorporates its own critiques, but it is, nonetheless, unraveling (p. 4).

In the United States, the dominant discourse of masculinity is epitomized by personality traits such as strength, achievement, independence, toughness, aggressiveness, emotional constriction, competitiveness, forcefulness, action-oriented, risky, defiant, confident, heterosexual, and self-reliant (Kilmartin, 2007). According to Brannon (1985) the four major themes of the dominant discourse of masculinity in America include: (a) No Sissy Stuff – antifeminity; (b) The Big Wheel – status and achievement; (c) The Sturdy Oak – inexpressiveness and independence; and (d) Give Em’ Hell – adventurousness and aggressiveness.

From an early age the dominant discourse – built around Brannon’s four themes – teaches men to avoid behaviors, interests, and personality traits that are considered “feminine.” For example, men are discouraged from expressing their emotions and feelings, being vulnerable, getting to close with other men in a way that could be considered sexual, and/or pursuing so-called feminine professions (No Sissy Stuff). The dominant discourse glorifies men based on their status, achievements, and requires that they be successful at all they do: work, sports, and sexual conquests (The Big Wheel). As a result of men’s subscription to hegemonic masculine norms they maintain strict emotional composure and self control even in the most difficult situations, solve problems without help, and ignore pain while never showing weakness (The Sturdy Oak). The masculine discourse in America also encourages men to be adventurous, to take physical risks, and to be violent if necessary (Give Em’ Hell) (Brannon, 1985).

However, there is a contradictory experience of men’s aggregate power and privilege, as a result of the hegemony ingrained in the dominant discourse (Kilmartin, 2007). The contradiction lies in the reality that although a majority of men are in-fact privileged and powerful, often times they feel powerless and marginalized in today’s society. The feelings of
powerlessness and marginalization that many men feel as a result of their subscription to hegemonic norms and their inability to unsubscribe to these destructive norms is what often leads to gender role conflict.

**Gender-Role Conflict.** Gender-role conflict is a psychological state where gender roles have negative consequences or impact on a person or others and this conflict ultimately restricts a person’s ability to actualize their human potential and/or restricts the potential of those around them (O’Neil, 1981; Pleck, 1981). Building off of Joseph Pleck’s *Gender-Role Strain Model*, O’Neil’s (1981) theoretical concept of male gender role conflict suggests that gender-related conflicts and anxieties are the outcomes of discrepancies between men’s authentic selves and culturally defined notions of masculinity. The discrepancy between a man’s authentic self and the culturally defined notions of masculinity that he may subscribe to – gender-role conflict – is often the root cause for issues such as: restrictive emotionality, homophobia, socialized control, power, and competition, restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior, obsession with achievement and success, and health-related issues (O’Neil, 1981; O’Neil et al., 2010). The six patterns of behavior that most often result from a man’s gender-role conflict are defined as:

1. **Restrictive Emotionality** – Having difficulty expressing one’s feelings or denying others their rights to emotional expressiveness.
2. **Homophobia** – Having fear of homosexuals or a fear of being homosexual and holding onto beliefs, myths, and stereotypes about gay people.
3. **Control, Power, Competition** – To regulate and restrain, to obtain authority, influence, or ascendancy over others, to strive at all costs against others to win or gain something.
4. **Restrictive Sexual and Affectionate Behavior** – Having limited ways of expressing one’s sexuality and affection others.
5. **Obsession with Achievement and Success** – Having a disturbing and persistent preoccupation with work, accomplishment and eminence as a means of substantiating and demonstrating value.
In understanding gender-role conflict it is also important to understand its four psychological domains and its numerous situational contexts. The four domains include: cognitive – how men think about gender roles; affective – how men feel about gender roles; behavioral – how men act, respond, and interact with others and ourselves because of gender roles; and unconscious – how gender role dynamics beyond a man’s awareness affect their behavior and produce conflicts (O’Neil et al, 2010; O’Neil & Casper, 2011). Men often experience gender-role conflict in four specific situational contexts: (a) gender-role conflict caused by gender role transitions; (b) gender-role conflict experienced intrapersonally; (c) gender-role conflict expressed toward others interpersonally; and (d) gender-role conflict experienced from others (O’Neil, 2008).

Why is men’s gender-role conflict problematic? O’Neil and Casper (2011) examined 203 studies that used the Gender-Role Conflict Scale developed by O’Neil (1981) to better understand all the different personal and interpersonal problems that affect men as a result of their gender-role conflict. They found that gender-role conflict is significantly correlated to the following problems in men: self-esteem, anxiety, depression, stress, shame, help-seeking attitudes, alcohol and substance use and abuse, machismo, issues related to body image, family stress, conduct problems, problems with anger, suicidal thoughts, self-disclosure, marital satisfaction, family cohesion, hostility towards women, rape myth attitudes, dating violence, and entitlement (O’Neil & Casper, 2011). The intrapersonal and interpersonal problems that manifest themselves as a result of a man’s gender role conflict become even more complicated when they are examined within the framework of a man’s different identity intersections – race, sexual orientation, and social class.
Masculinity and its Intersections. Research grounded in a social constructionist perspective has shown that masculinity is greatly affected by a variety of factors, including: ethnic patterns, economic conditions, religion, language, family socialization, cultural expectations, age, and sexual orientation (Kilmartin, 2007). The unexamined assumption in earlier studies of masculinity had been one version of masculinity – White, middle-aged, middle-class, heterosexual (Connell, 1987). Now masculinity scholars (Connell 1987, 1995; Harper & Harris, 2010; Laker & Davis, 2011; Kilmartin, 2007; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 2007) subscribing to the social constructionist model argue that there is no such thing as a singular “masculinity”; rather, there are multiple masculinities which result from the intersections of masculinity and race, sexual orientation, social class, and other forms of identity. It is important for researchers and administrators to understand the interplay of these demographic factors and how they impact and are impacted by a man’s masculinity.

Masculinity and Race. White masculinity is the “default option” in today’s culture and masculinity as defined by its association with other races and ethnicities is often times subordinated and marginalized. In America, Kilmartin (2007) argues that masculinity is a “deficit model” in that the opportunity to reap all the social benefits of being a so-called “real man” is available to only a relatively few men – those who fit the stereotypical mold – while making all other men somehow feel marginalized, inferior, and subordinated. For example, African American masculinity is learned, constructed, and performed in a way that is very different from White masculinity and this also holds true for Latino masculinity, Asian masculinity, and for all other masculinities that are non-White. As a result, men on the edges tend to act out and perform a masculinity that is often times very different from the dominant discourse. In understanding and working with men of diverse backgrounds it is important to
examine how their masculinity is culturally defined, how their masculinity is learned and perpetuated through socializing agents, and how their masculinity has evolved as a result of cultural and societal shifts (Aronson, 2004).

Kilmartin (2007) suggests that any description of African-American men must be imbedded in the context of slavery and racism, which are both historical and ongoing, and both personal and institutional. Aronson (2004) further notes that African-American men’s masculinity has been shaped in response to this racism and its social consequences such as isolation from mainstream culture, underemployment, poverty, and unequal treatment in legal system. African-American men often feel marginalized and subordinate to White men, as a result their conflicts with their gender and masculinity look and play out very differently as compared to White men. Over time African-American men have constructed an alternative discourse of masculinity for themselves – one that is not embedded in the notion that power and control are their birthright (Lee, 1990). Franklin (1984) found that African-American men strive to maintain a sense of gender identity that does not depend on economic success – because historically they have lacked the real opportunity – rather it emphasizes the characteristics of toughness, risk-taking, athleticism, violence, and exploitation of women. This version of masculinity and the gender-role conflict that African-American men struggle with has led to what some call a national crisis, as the Black male population is beset with higher than average rates of unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, premature death by violence, crime victimization, and incarceration (Gibbs, 1992). The destructive variation of masculinity within the Black male community has been perpetuated via television, news, music, social media, and other channels of influence – even though it only represents a small portion of the entire community. Over time this highly limited, extremely destructive, and hegemonic adaptation of
masculinity has become the stereotype by which all African American men are judged and which so many young Black men strive for.

The dominant stereotype of Latino men centers on *machismo*, a masculinity that is characterized by physical aggression, sexual promiscuity, dominance of women, excessive use of alcohol (Gutierrez, 1990; Kilmartin, 2007). Some researchers theorize that *machismo* is a compensation for Latino immigrants’ feelings of economic and political powerlessness within a mainstream culture that discriminates against them (Kimmel, 1995; Pleck, 1981). Although *machismo* in Latino men is most often characterized as negative and destructive there are positive traits that result as well – even if they are less culturally profiled. De La Cancela (1991) and Mayo (1993) have suggested that *machismo* also includes positive behavioral traits in men, including: strength of will, self-assertiveness, self-confidence, protectiveness towards women and children, nurturing fatherhood, love for family, and stoicism. The *machismo* that many Latino men display and act out also varies across the different ethnic groups of Latino men. For example, Puerto Rican machismo looks, feels, and is acted out in different ways as compared to Cuban *machismo*.

In the same way that African-American masculinity and Latino masculinity encompass a wide-variety of both positive and negative behaviors and traits, so too does Asian masculinity. Most Asian men are brought up under stringent gender role expectations such as a focus on group harmony and filial piety, carrying on the family name, and conforming to parental expectations which ultimately can lead to academic stress, poor self-image and performance, and interpersonal dysfunction in men (Lee, 1996; Liu, 2010). Yet, Chui and Fujino (1999) found that Asian American men seemed to tie their masculinity to positive behavioral traits, such as: politeness, obedience, overachievement, intelligence, hard work, and economic and educational
success. In regard to identity, a lot of Asian American men do struggle making a true connection to their racial identity especially since their masculinity is often times seen as subordinate and marginal to the dominant discourse – White masculinity. Most Asian men are confronted with a choice – either conform to the white masculine norm or accept the fact that they are not men (Chan, 1998).

**Masculinity and Sexual Orientation.** The dominant discourse of masculinity includes heterosexuality as one of its central tenets; therefore gay, bisexual, transgendered, and transsexual men tend to construct their identities in ways that are different than the mainstream ideologies (Kilmartin, 2007). Fassinger’s (1998) *Model of Gay and Lesbian Identity Development* is the one of the most frequently cited models in the literature and involves four phases: awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis. For gay men, the formation of their personal and sexual identity is no easy undertaking due to its intersection with their own masculinity and the culturally defined norms of masculinity – both of which are often fraught with homophobia.

Homophobia is a central organizing principle of the cultural definition of manhood and the dominant discourse. Smith (1971) defines homophobia as the irrational fear and intolerance of homosexuality and homosexual persons. In today’s society homophobia often manifests itself in a variety of ways, including: avoidance of nonsexual intimate behaviors between men, derogatory joking about gay men, societal bigotry against homosexuals, and even violence against persons who are gay or may be perceived as gay (Kilmartin, 2007). Over time men’s homophobia and irrational fears that they might become gay if they get too close to another man has led to the notion that “homosexual” and “feminine” are parallel concepts and are negative in reference to masculine identity (Dilley, 2010). Consequently, from a young age boys defend
against being homosexual and being labeled as feminine by calling other young males “queers,” “fags,” or “pansy’s.” The overarching homophobic fears in society as a result of the dominant discourse force many young gay males to disguise and hide their sexual feelings and behaviors for fear of ostracism (Kilmartin, 2007). These men spend a majority of their young lives navigating through Fassinger’s (1998) stage of awareness and exploration wondering: Am I gay? Am I ok with being gay? Who can I tell that I am gay? Will my parents and friend accept me even though I am gay? Can I be gay and masculine at the same time?

In examining homosexual identity formation within men, often times gay men do reap some benefit from this identity and its intersection with their masculinity. Although gay men may have some traditionally masculine characteristics they are more likely than heterosexual men to have and adopt a broader range of gendered behavior, which may be a result of them not having to conform to the dominant discourse like most heterosexual men (Heyl, 1996). Gay men are also more likely than heterosexual men to be in-touch with their emotions and feelings, communicate well with others, take care of their physical and mental health, have close non-intimate relationships with other men, and treat women with mutual respect (Kilmartin, 2007). The broader range of gendered behaviors that most gay men are afforded as a result of not subscribing to stereotypical norms do have to be navigated cautiously, as gay men are often targets for ridicule, harassment, and hate crimes because they often stand so far outside the dominant norm. On the other hand, heterosexual men so rarely even take into consideration their sexual orientation they often do not even understand what it means to be heterosexual in today’s society and the innate privileges they have as a result of their heterosexuality (Eliason, 1995). Often, straight men have such a hard time understanding and accepting the sexual orientation of
gay men, because they hardly even understand their heterosexuality or how they came to be that way (Herak, 1986).

**Masculinity and Social Class.** In today’s society, the dominant norms of masculinity perpetuate the idea that social class and economic power are the ultimate measure of a man’s presumed success or failure (Kilmartin, 2007). It is vital to examine the role that social class plays in the ways in which males comes to learn what it means to be a man and the ways in which their masculinity intersects with their social upbringing. Connell (1995) articulates the masculine dilemmas low income men face:

In the marginal class situation, where the claim to power that is central to hegemonic masculinity is constantly negated by economic and cultural weakness…these men have lost most of their patriarchal dividend…One way to resolve this contradiction is a spectacular display, embracing the marginality and stigma and turning them to account. At the personal level, this translates as a constant concern with front or credibility (p. 116).

Men of lower social status often feel marginalized as men they have constructed alternative models of masculinity, a masculinity that includes: posturing, misogyny, and sometimes violence (Kilmartin, 2007). “Working class” men teach their sons a very different form of masculinity as compared to “white collar” fathers who have reaped the benefits of economic power and patriarchy and who will most likely pass this on to their sons. Young men whose fathers have low-paying manual labor jobs come to believe that this is also their destiny (MacLeod, 2009) and therefore fail to realize the importance of school and a college degree – the golden ticket towards greater economic prosperity. Because men of color (African-American, Hispanic, Asian) have often been victims of institutionalized inequality and are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed as compared to White men, and are more likely have lower paying jobs or be employed in manual labor jobs as compared to white men, it is these men and
their sons that seem to struggle the most with the intersection of their masculinity and social class (Kilmartin, 2007).

**Boys and Masculinity**

The social construction of masculinity begins to affect boys immediately and even though research on infants surprisingly reveals that male infants are actually more emotional than female infants – this phenomenon does not hold true for very long (Pollack, 1999). By the time boys reach elementary school much of their emotional expressiveness has been lost or gone underground, a direct result of the *Boy Code* and subscription to the dominant discourse (Kilmartin, 2007; Pollack, 1999). The *Boy Code* is a set of rules and expectations that come from outdated and highly dysfunctional gender stereotypes: the idea that boys need to keep their emotions in check; that violence is an acceptable response to emotional distress; that their self-esteem relies on power; and that they must reject any and all signs of “feminine” qualities (Pollack, 1999). Young boys learn the *Boy Code* from their parents, peers, and educational system which teaches them to constrict their emotions and suffer quietly, while simultaneously teaching them to be heroic, tough, action-oriented, and self-confident – even if they aren’t. According to Pollack (1999), although many of today’s young boys live out and unconsciously subscribe to the code the deeper and more significant issue is a conformity and perpetuation of these outdated and constricting assumptions by the most influential socializing agents in a young boy’s life.

The educational system may be the most important and long-lasting of the four socializing agents that impact and are impacted by a boy’s masculinity. Sommers (2000) found that boys’ construction and performance of hegemonic masculinity is often accelerated during and as a result their early educational experiences. For example, the current schooling system
emphasizes behaviors like co-operating, sitting still, and listening, all of which are contradictory to the gendered expectations of boys’ (Richardson, 1981); boys receive more negative attention in the classroom than girls (Sadker & Sadker, 1985); boys’ behavior is more likely to be taken seriously compared to girls (Lytton & Romney, 1991); and throughout their early schooling, boys’ do not receive the structure and moral edification they once received – therefore they are adrift without direction and the ability to positively perform their masculinity (Sommers, 2000). It is these early educational experiences combined with boys’ subscription to hegemonic masculine norms that can contribute to their underachievement in the classroom, lack of engagement in school, and struggles outside of the classroom involving violence, alcohol, and other risky behavior – as compared to their female counterparts.

The statistics are clear in showing that boys are underachieving in the classroom from grade school to college. In his article, A War Against Boys?, Kimmel (2006) declares:

From elementary school to high school boys have lower grades, lower class rank, and fewer honors than girls. They’re 50% more likely to repeat a grade in elementary school, one-third more likely to drop out of high school, and about six times more likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (p. 65).

There are countless reasons for these disturbing trends. However, the simple fact is that a majority of boys learn from an early age to subscribe to a hegemonic definition of masculinity, stressing the suppression of emotion and emphasizing power, aggression, success, confidence, and self-reliance (Kilmartin, 2007). A recent study suggests that boys are likely to overvalue their abilities in the areas of math and science and remain in programs even when they know they may not be successful (Kimmel, 2006). As a result many young boys struggle in school and underachieve academically as compared to female students – because when they don’t do well in a class their masculinity restricts them from asking for help. The false bravado and overvaluing of academic abilities is also carried forward well into a young man’s time in high school and
college. Throughout high school, boys have lower educational aspirations as compared to girls, are less likely to participate in the prestigious Advanced Placement Program, read fewer books for recreational purposes, and are outnumbered by girls in student government, honor societies, school newspapers, and debating clubs (Sommers, 2000). Also, boys are three times as likely to be enrolled in special education programs, more likely to come to school without supplies or having done their homework, and by 12th grade males are four times as likely not to do their homework (Sommers, 2000).

Meanwhile, boys are not only struggling in the classroom but outside of it as well. Boys are over four times more likely than girls in K-12 schools to be referred to the principal’s office for disciplinary infractions, suspended, or subjected to corporal punishment (Gregory, 1996; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Non-engagement in the classroom by middle school and high school boys leads some to be more involved in crime, alcohol, drugs, and other risky behavior (Sommers, 2000). Of course most young males are not criminals nor will they ever become criminal offenders. But the issue of male violence, fighting, and bullying often takes place right in front of parents and teachers and is widely evident and pervasive in the hallways of high schools across the country. Male bullies roam the halls, targeting the most vulnerable or isolated, beating them up or destroying their homework, while other male students encourage it or scurry to the walls hoping to remain invisible so they won’t become the next target (Pollack, 1999). This is all done as young adolescent men jostle for the preferential treatment that comes from achieving the socially dominant status among their male peers, all the while it is frequently excused by teachers and parents as “boys will be boys.”

All high school men, regardless of race or sexual orientation, are a potential target of bullying, both in the physical and verbal form. For example, one study found that 88% of high
school students reported having observed bullying and 77% reported being a victim of bullying at some point during their school years; and in another study conducted by the Harris Poll, two out of three male students said they have been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted during the past year by another male student (Kimmel, 2008). Male victims of bullying have their lives transformed overnight – they lose sleep, their social status, their will to excel in the classroom, and can often times become depressed and/or despondent. Not only do the victims of bullying suffer, but so to do the bullies. Male bullies grow up deficient in social coping and negotiating skills and are more likely to engage in substance abuse, are four times more likely to have engaged in criminal activity before age 24; and a full 25% have criminal records before they turn 30 (Kimmel, 2008).

Young men who are fortunate enough make it through the K-12 system successfully and who plan on attending college are more than likely coming to campus with a multitude of developmental, intellectual, psychological, and sociological issues. In addition to struggling with a variety of intrapersonal issues, college-bound men often gain a new-found independence and freedom upon leaving home – an independence and freedom from the very structures that have helped them get this far. The negative and constricting masculinity that young men learn and subscribe to as a result of the Boy Code is a major contributing factor to the gender identity they will develop, perform, and potentially struggle with as they enter Guyland (Kimmel, 2008) and begin their collegiate experience.

Men, Masculinity, and the Collegiate Experience

It is true that the stresses of masculinity impacting boys does not stop once they arrive on the college campus; rather, they are often further compounded in Guyland (Kimmel, 2008) and are one of the direct sources of college men’s academic struggles, lack of engagement, alcohol
issues, risky behavior, mental health issues, and disruptive conduct (Laker & Davis, 2004). The following section addresses the literature and data that examines (a) Guyland – as a new stage of male development; and (b) the fraternity experience and the issues and struggles of today’s fraternity man.

**Guyland and Today’s College Man**

Grammar, as it has become known by masculinity scholars, is a new stage of development that largely takes places on today’s college campus and is the world that shapes life of college men (Kimmel, 2008). Kimmel interviewed nearly 400 young men between the ages of 17 and 26 in order to map out Guyland, a relatively unknown stage of masculine development by providing both psychological insights into guy’s interior anguish and a sociological analysis of the larger social forces that have brought them to this state. Guyland is both a stage of life – a liminal undefined time span between adolescence and adulthood sometimes lasting a decade – and a social sphere governed by a perceivably rigid set of behavioral and attitudinal regulations, known as the guy code. The main contributing factor to this period of delayed adolescence in which so many college men struggle to “grow-up” and negotiate manhood and its responsibilities is a subscription to hegemonic masculinity. In Chapter One of his book, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, Kimmel (2008) declares:

- **Guyland** has become 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.
- Directionless and often clueless, men in **Guyland** rely increasingly on their peers to usher them into adulthood and validate their masculinity.
- Men in **Guyland** feel incomplete and insecure, terrified that they will fail as grownups and/or that they will be exposed as fraudulent men.
- **Guyland** is a volatile stage, when a man 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 (p. 4-23).
The guys who populate Guyland are mostly White, middle-class men who are college-bound, in college, or recently graduated. But Guyland isn’t just limited to White men, there are also plenty of Black, Hispanic, and Asian men that are just as desperate to prove their manhood and who are struggling to navigate their delayed adolescence. The men who live in Guyland are good kids, by and large, and many times they simply tend to blend into the crowd, drift with the tide, and often pass unnoticed through their lecture halls and dormitories (Kimmel, 2008). Yet, many of these so-called “good men” are struggling internally with their masculinity, albeit quietly and often times invisibly, and they deal with this inner-struggle through misbehavior, acting out irresponsibly, making bad decisions and using poor judgment, and engaging in risky behavior (Harper & Harris, 2010).

Kimmel (2008) notes that there are three distinct cultures that proliferate through Guyland and the men that inhabit it. The first is a Culture of Entitlement where many young men have an alarming sense of male superiority and a diminished capacity for empathy. The second is a Culture of Silence where many young men are afraid of being outcast, marginalized, or shunned if they admit to hurting or struggling, express or talk about their feelings, and/or speak out against other men who may be hurting or harming others. As a result, they become silent witnesses to unhealthy rituals, hazing, bullying, and violence against women. And lastly, there is a Culture of Protection that sustains and promotes antisocial and excessive behaviors such as hazing, assault, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence.

The inhabitants of Guyland are enrolled at every postsecondary institution in America and they need help from well-informed administrators and educators who recognize them as gendered beings, are familiar with their complex developmental needs, who take the 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 (Harper & Harris, 2010). Inevitably, some men and some male subgroups are more heavily entrenched in Guyland and the following of rigid guy codes. For example, fraternity men are a specific subgroup of college men that are often more deeply embedded in the culture and codes of Guyland, which will be discussed in further detail next.

The Fraternity Experience and Fraternity Men

The first college fraternity, Kappa Alpha Society, was started on the campus of Union College in 1825 and over the past 187 years fraternity men have been the standard by which all other college men have been measured. From the beginning fraternity brothers have exuded a form of hegemonic masculinity that they have used to empower each other while excluding others and in so doing men in fraternities have not only structured their own lives, but also the lives of many of their fellow students (Syrett, 2009). Fraternities have been on college campuses across the country for almost two hundred years, they still fill a lot of the same needs for the men that join today as compared to those that joined in the early 1800’s. Fraternal organizations offer men a way of securing a network of friends who vow loyalty to death; they serve as a vehicle for helping young men transition to the collegiate world; and they provide a break from the monotony of academic life on the college campus – by taking meals together, participating in social activities together, and living together, fraternity men seek to create a more well-balanced for themselves. Fraternities have also served as a form of resistance from the structure and standards that have been enforced on young men by their parents, teachers, and administrators, and in joining and becoming independent from these structures they have sought to demonstrate their masculinity and manliness (Syrett, 2009).
Although men may join fraternities for similar reasons as they did in 1825, fraternity life and the fraternity culture on today’s college campuses looks and feels drastically different it did 187 years ago. The forms fraternal masculinity takes at the beginning of the twenty-first century would be unrecognizable to those original brothers of Kappa Alpha in 1825. “While those founders emphasized intellectual rigor, oratorical skill, forthrightness, and independence, many of today’s fraternity men place value upon athletic achievement, a high tolerance for alcohol, and sexual success with women” (Syrett, 2009, p. 302). Moreover, much of the research over the last fifty years has focused on describing the fraternal system as one that reproduces hegemonic masculinity through an institutionalized, gender-segregated, racially exclusive, sexist, and highly homophobic masculine peer culture (Ross, 1999; Sanday 1990). The negative profile of fraternities and the American fraternity system is something that in many ways cannot be argued with as it is this culture which has served as the breeding ground for the thousands of fraternity-related incidents involving alcohol use and abuse, hazing injuries and deaths, sexual assault and rape incidents, issues related to cheating and academic integrity and much more. Some researchers have even characterized fraternities as antithetical to the educational process (Kuh, Pascarella, & Wechsler, 1996; Philips, 1999).

Among the negative effects of fraternity membership are less exposure to people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Pike, 2000), less openness to diversity (Pascarella et al., 1996), lower average grades (Astin, 1993; Pike & Askew, 1990), stunted intellectual development for members in the first year of college (Pascarella et al., 1996), negative effects on cognitive skills and gains (Pascarella et al., 2001), higher frequency of incidents of academic dishonesty (McCabe & Bowers, 1996), higher levels of alcohol use and abuse (Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 1996), higher incidents of sexual assault and aggression (Foubert & Cowell, 2004),
and hazing (Nuwer, 2004). Henry Wechsler and colleagues (1994) declared that the single best predictor of binge drinking in college is fraternity membership. Virtually every study of drinking in college shows that fraternity members tend to drink more heavily and more frequently, and tend to have more alcohol-related problems than their fellow students (Courtenay, 2004; Goodwin, 1990; Presley et al., 1993; Riordan & Dana, 1998; Tampke, 1990; Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995). The usage and abuse of alcohol by fraternity men seems to also play a significant role in the deadly hazing practices that sometimes take place within these organizations.

Nuwer’s (2001, 2004) research has shown that there has been at least one fraternity hazing-related death every year since 1970. “On campus today, the overwhelming majority of the nearly half-million men who belong to collegiate fraternities have undergone some form of hazing” (Kimmel, 2008, p. 111). Fraternity hazing takes on numerous forms including: menial tasks, degrading rituals and stunts, physical abuse, verbal abuse, forced alcohol usage, branding, torture, and ritual scarification (Nuwer, 2001, 2004). The practice of hazing and binge drinking are not just specific to White fraternities; sadly, contemporary Black fraternities have embraced many of the same hazing rituals as the White ones (Kimmel, 2008).

It’s not all bad news and negative statistics in regards to the fraternity experience though, and by no means should the negative issues that have plagued the American fraternity system be taken to completely or equally represent all fraternal organizations or all fraternity men. There is also published research that shows the positive impact of fraternity life on the men that join these organizations. The counter-discourse provides a body of research that shows fraternity members tend to be more involved on-campus (Astin, 1993; Thorson, 1997), have increased opportunities for leadership development and volunteerism (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1982), and that men’s
involvement in fraternal organizations is positively related to student learning and intellectual
development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1992), persistence (Astin, 1977, 1984), and alumni giving
(Nelson, 1984).

A new assessment instrument – *University Learning Outcomes Assessment* (UniLOA) – created by researchers Frederick and Barrett points to some of the newest and most positive results on the impact of the fraternity experience and its influence on fraternity men’s overall growth, learning, and development. The *UniLOA* measures student behavior in seven critical domains – critical thinking, self-awareness, communication, diversity, citizenship, leadership, and relationships. Frederick and Barrett’s 2009 study of over 6,000 fraternity men yielded the following results:

- Fraternity men scored higher than the national mean of all students as well as the national mean for all males in all seven of the domains measured by the *UniLOA*.
- Fraternity men experienced higher net gains in growth over their academic lifespan in each of the seven domains than non-affiliated male students.
- Fraternity men experienced average growth within each of the *UniLOA*’s seven domains of 2.37 points as opposed to non-affiliated men’s average growth of .60 during their first semester of their first college year.
- The largest differential in scores between fraternity men and the national norm and non-affiliated men was observed in the areas of citizenship and leadership.
- Considering that the overall rate along all seven of *UniLOA*’s domains is stronger for fraternity men than for non-affiliated males, this study provides new grounding and support to the claim that fraternity membership causes accelerated growth, learning, and development as opposed to mere correlation (p. 3).

As a result of all the high-profile hazing incidents, alcohol-related deaths, sexual assault and rape issues, and chapter closings in the 80’s and 90’s, many fraternal organizations have worked strategically to re-imagine, re-design, and re-engineer the fraternal journey so that it is a healthier, more positive and inclusive, and more educationally impactful experience. For example, In 1991 Kappa Omega implemented the *Balanced Man Program* a non-pledging single-tiered continuous development program with no hazing that focused equal rights and
responsibilities, continuous personal growth, leadership and servant learning, and a formalized mentorship program. Kappa Omega was the first fraternity to take such a leap forward and the only fraternity at the time that was ready to do away with the pledging experience. Today, over 80% of Kappa Omega chapters implement the *Balanced Man Program* and Kappa Omega Headquarters credits this program as the driving force behind the organization becoming and sustaining the status as the nation's largest fraternity by undergraduate membership as well one of the fraternities with the highest overall membership GPA. Other fraternities have since chosen to adopt similar programs, such as Lambda Chi Alpha's *True Brother Initiative*, Beta Theta Pi's *Men of Principle*, Sigma Alpha Epsilon's *True Gentleman Initiative*, Kappa Alpha Order's *Crusade*, and Pi Kappa Alpha's *True Pike* (McKee, 2011). These other fraternal organizations, which followed Kappa Omega’s lead, have also been successful in their endeavors to create a new fraternity experience that is safer, healthier, and more closely aligned with the educational missions of their host institutions.

Kimmel (2008) praised Kappa Omega for its *Balanced Man Program* throughout his book, *Guyland*, saying, “They’ve [Kappa Omega] simply and unilaterally done away with the pledge system; new members have virtually all the rights and privileges of brothers. The brothers are presumed to be men when they begin; they don’t have to prove their manhood as part of the fraternity experience” (p. 288). In August 2011, Dr. David Skorton, President of Cornell University, wrote an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* calling for the end of hazing after a 19-year-old Cornell student died in February from a hazing related incident and he also praised the *Balanced Man Program* of Kappa Omega:

There is a pressing need for better ways to bring students together in socially productive, enjoyable and memorable ways. At Cornell, acceptable alternatives to the pledge process must be completely free of personal degradation, disrespect or harassment in any form. One example is Kappa Omega’s *Balanced Man Program*, which replaces the traditional
pledging period with a continuing emphasis on community service and personal development. We need to face the facts about the role of fraternities and sororities in hazing and high-risk drinking. Pledging – and the humiliation and bullying that go with it – can no longer be the price of entry (p. A23).

Today’s fraternity man and the issues plaguing the modern fraternity experience are both vitally important for every administrator to understand, but it is even more important for administrators to understand the often invisible culprit at play – fraternal masculinity. While there has been new research that suggests there are many positive aspects of fraternal life and the impact of the fraternity experience, many fraternal organizations and their members are still fighting an uphill battle against the negative incidents that have been commonplace within these organizations.

**A Call to Action**

College-aged men, especially fraternity men, need to learn how to better navigate their collegiate experience in ways that are safer, healthier, and less harmful to themselves and others and they need help from the faculty, staff, and administrators that staff their campuses (Capraro, 2004, 2007; Courtenay, 1998, 2004; Harper & Harris, 2010; Kellom, 2004; Kimmel, 2004, 2008; Laker & Davis, 2011). Campus programming for men dates back to the late 1970’s, yet the question now is still the same as it was back then, even after forty years of work: How do administrators make men’s issues a central part of student development and student affairs work? O’Neil and Casper (2011) boldly declare, “If we gave a letter grade to student affairs for their programming for men over the last three decades… a C- would probably be very generous” (p. 17).

The limited success in developing male-based programs and services within higher education over the last forty years can be attributed to four main issues. Student affairs professionals may be unaware of how restrictive gender roles and sexism negatively affect men’s
lives due to a lack of understanding and training. Laker (2011) argues that, “The student affairs field must concede an inability to address male student development, or it needs to confront a vacuum in the knowledge about male identity development. Neither the graduate preparation programs nor the workplace of new student affairs professionals are filling this knowledge gap” (p. 68). Prior to the 1970’s, most of the theories of human and student development were based on a small subset of men – most of whom were White and affluent (Harris & Barone, 2011). Consequently, many scholars and student affairs practitioners falsely believe they understand men and their gender-related experiences. The early student development studies involved the use of males as participants, but they were not focused on understanding men within the contours of the social construction of male identity development; rather, men’s development was taken as the default for all college students and specific gender differences were not considered (Davis, 2002; Ludeman, 2011). It is time that new theoretical models of college student development conducted through the lens of a gendered experience, specifically masculine identity development, be posited in the research and used to teach new student affairs professionals.

In addition, false assumptions about boys and men, such as “boys will be boys,” support false gender stereotypes and reinforce individuals’ denial of college men’s problems (O’Neil & Casper, 2011). The “boys will be boys,” slogan condones men’s actions and misbehaviors as simply being a result of them being boys or men. Subscribing to the “boys will be boys,” discourse is also developmentally unproductive and part of a viscous cycle that has led many higher education administrators to subscribe to these misconceived notions about boys and men. Instead of brushing off men’s misbehavior and wrongly assuming it is to be expected, educators need to constantly seek insight into the contextual influences that motivate and reward men who break the rules (Harris & Barone, 2011).
On some campuses there has also been resistance to focus attention, resources, and manpower to developing male-specific programs and services. Since men have been the beneficiaries of years of unearned privilege that has resulted in a host of advantageous outcomes, women have rightfully been the focus of policies and programs that aim to bring about gender equity (Harris & Barone, 2011). The new push aimed at helping men understand their gender, is concerning to many educators and administrators because they believe it may reduce the efficacy of efforts to bring about increased gender equity for women. However, Harper and Harris (2010) point out that, “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” (p. 5).

There is also an assumption that men are not ready and willing to be involved in conversations and/or programs aimed at helping them better understand their masculinity. Davis and Laker (2004) and Harris (2010) report that contrary to prevailing assumptions about college men, they do desire meaningful and bonding relationships and are very responsive to gender-related outreach. The gender-specific outreach that research scholars have been calling for will not be successful if it is just a one-time program or service; rather, the male-specific outreach and education has to occur through both the curricular and co-curricular experience. New program and services, across the spectrum of student affairs services, need to be developed and implemented to address the multitude of needs of college men and done in such a way that men aren’t afraid to participate.

Practical Suggestions for Male-Specific Programming

The successful development of student affairs programs and services for men depends on first resolving a dilemma: college men need the programs we offer, but their own masculinity
severely complicates their subscribing to them (Capraro, 2004). There are numerous ways to tailor programs so as to intrigue college-aged men yet keep them from being defensive and/or writing off a program before it even starts. For example, Davis and Laker (2004) suggest that student affairs professionals engage men in action-oriented activities such as going for a walk or some other “doing” activity in order to get beyond the mask of masculinity. Capraro (2004) advocates for providing workshops for men that raise the issue of male-intimacy, male-to-male relations, and male-female relationships that is grounded in men’s own experiences; and conducting prevention work on sexual violence and bystander intervention through skills-based training.

Another opportunity where universities and administrators can engage and educate men is during orientation sessions. New student orientation continues to be a prime opportunity to prepare students for their undergraduate experiences by providing valuable information and resources. Harper, Harris, and Mmeje (2005), suggest a “men’s only” orientation session led by junior and seniors so as to afford incoming students the opportunity to engage peers in a candid discussion about their preconceived notions of what it means to be a man in general, and a male collegian at that particular institution specifically. Recently, many universities have put this recommendation into practice and have started requiring all first year men to attend a variety of orientation sessions, including: dating in college, sexual assault prevention, healthy decision-making in college, and alcohol education workshops.

The research has consistently shown that men engage in far fewer health promoting behaviors and far more risky behaviors as compared to college women (Courtenay, 1998, 2004). For that reason, colleges and universities have begun providing avenues for men to learn more about the hazards associated with their risky behaviors and the ways in which more positive
activities can be carried out. Courtenay (2004) offers the following list of health promotion strategies for college men: (a) provide a confidential health line; (b) bring services to men (classes, sports events, fraternities, and fitness centers); (c) offer free men’s health kits with educational information; (d) develop a health mentoring project where upperclassman men educate underclassmen; (e) use high-profile spokesmen to promote men’s health; (f) provide email-based education; (g) design activities around National Men’s Health Week; and (h) require entering first year men to attend a workshop that addresses the health effects of masculinity and includes healthy strategies for adjusting to college life.

As a result of men’s disproportionately higher rates of disciplinary issues, practitioners have begun using judicial interventions to educate men provides another unique opportunity for student affairs administrators (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005). There are a variety of strategies that administrators can incorporate into their judicial process to aid men in better understanding their masculinity and the role it plays in their disruptive conduct. Judicial officers can use a process of mediation – an educational, non-adversarial method – to empower men to develop insights as to how they could more successfully challenge the rigid gender borders related to emotionality and acting out (Ludeman, 2011). Men can also be encouraged to critically reflect on their behavior and its consequences as a part of judicial sanctioning. Critical reflection could occur through developmental dialogue with a judicial officer, a small group of other men, or through individual journaling (Harris, 2008). Ludeman (2011) advocates for using a restorative justice model so as to more closely tie men’s emotions to their behavior together when it comes to their violations of campus policy.

Campus counseling centers must also began to consider approaches that focus on building healthy masculinities among college men, because the research shows that young men
tend to have more negative attitudes toward and less willingness to seek counseling than their female peers (Gonzales, Algeria, & Prihoda, 2005). Using an approach to counseling that is focused on healthy masculinities and identity formation can be highly beneficial. Researchers and counselors need to vary their techniques so as to be more congruent with male gender role socialization; for example, focusing on instrumental change and control instead of emotional expressiveness (Good & Wood, 1995). Private, individualized sessions as well as small group therapy may also help male students unpack their identity issues and eliminate misperceptions of pluralistic ignorance, false consensus, and false uniqueness (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005).

Men’s groups have long been used in the field of counseling and psychology. However, only recently have they been recommended and/or employed with college-aged men. Men’s groups provide a feeling of belonging among participants that counters men’s feelings of alienation and depression; and these feelings of belonging, plus a shared sense of suffering, tend to create groups that are highly cohesive and family-like (Lieberman 1979, 1990). Pollack (2001) offers the following five-pronged approach to facilitating discussions with college men: create a safe space, give men time to feel comfortable with expression, seek out and provide alternative pathways for expression, listen without judging, avoid shaming, and give affirmation and affection. Davis, Laprad, and Dixon (2011) propose working with already intact men’s groups that already exist for other purposes: fraternities, athletic teams, and all-male residence halls floors. Not only are these groups already in-tact, but many times they are the groups of men that are struggling most with gender role conflict, hegemonic masculinity, and navigating the college experience. More campus-based men’s groups are needed so men can begin dialoguing with one another about how one becomes a man, how one chooses to construct relationships with those around them, how one navigates the college experience, and the healthy
process of challenging hegemony to construct a more self-authored identity (Davis, Laprad, & Dixon, 2011).

The call-to-action for more campus based education and programming, both inside and outside of the classroom, specific to men has never been more important. Even though there has been a wealth of recent literature focused on men and masculinity and a call for more programs and services focused on helping them better understand their masculinity, there is still a gap in the scholarly research and field of practice.

**The Current Gap in Research**

The gap in the scholarly research and field of practice on men and masculinities within the college context is three-pronged. The research in the area of men and masculinities is predominantly quantitative and there is a need for more qualitative work within the field. Qualitative analysis can help researchers and practitioners better understand the nuances of men’s development based on men’s own voices, not just through an analysis of the quantification of men’s misbehaviors and negative actions. Whorely and Addis (2006) conducted a comprehensive review of published articles over the past ten years and found that over 80% of the coded studies use quantitative methodologies, almost 60% of the coded studies were correlational, and an overwhelming majority (94.4%) used no observational methods. Though quantitative methodologies are still the dominant discourse, reliance on these methods severely restricts the types of questions that can be asked (Whorely & Addis, 2006). O’Neil (2004), a prominent scholar of men’s gender role conflict for the past 25 years primarily using quantitative methodology recently called for researchers to explore men’s identity development specifically using qualitative research methods. In addition, Carpraro (2004) suggests that the path to understanding a reconstructed masculinity or alternatives to the dominant discourse of
masculinity will require qualitative methods, so as to better understand more variety of men’s identities and experiences.

Currently, very little theoretical literature exists on how men’s issues relate to theories of college student development (O’Neil & Casper, 2011). Although many scholars have used student development theory to inform their work and/or have worked to developed new grounded theories, there is still a missing piece. A new link needs to be established between men’s documented problems and student development theory, a link that offers a more complex understanding of the role masculinity plays in the development of male students. After reviewing over 25 different masculinity constructs and the body of empirical research, O’Neil and Casper (2011) found that the developmental directions of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) identity vectors provide a perfect framework for understanding the issues of masculine ideology and gender role conflict/stress. “Chickering and Reisser’s identity vectors of student development, one of the seminal works in the field, is clearly relevant to the masculinity constructs…and to any service delivery model for college men” (O’Neil & Casper, 2011, p. 27). It is not necessary that all research and or delivery methods focused on college men and masculinity be informed by Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) identity vectors, but it is necessary that future research and programming models be more closely informed by a student development theory that offers a more gendered viewpoint.

There is also a vital need to connect theory to practice. Student affairs administrators have a wealth of theory and research to guide them in undertaking the development of male-specific programs, yet few programs still exist. O’Neil and Casper (2011) argue that the lack of active programming and service delivery models for college men is a result of administrator’s not connecting theory to practice. What works under theoretically ideal circumstances, does not
always hold up under the weight of developmental complexities, political realities, and contextual nuances (Davis et al., 2011). Although, there are numerous strategies for designing programmatic interventions for men, further research is needed to determine if they are actually effective, how they are effective, and why they are effective (Courtenay, 2011). Harris and Edwards (2010) are in agreement that more empirical research and practice is needed that highlights outcomes of interventions and programs. Vareldzis and Adronico (2000) recommend putting more men’s growth groups into play on campuses across the country and examining them more longitudinally to see how they impact men’s understanding of masculinity – something that has still been overlooked in research and in application. Davis (2010) advocates, implementing longitudinal qualitative studies to get a better sense of the events that promote or prohibit development in men and how male-specific programming may be helpful. “One-time programming will likely have limited impact on college men, so our efforts must be ongoing, systemic, and multi-pronged” (Harris & Barone, 2011, p. 61). The current study examining fraternity men’s experiences in a ten-week men’s growth group through the lens of critical masculinity and student development theory seeks to fill all the specific gaps in the current literature and body of practice

**Summary**

Although there have been a variety of theoretical lenses used to examine the life of men posited in the literature, since the 1970’s the dominant discourse of analysis has been through the social constructionist lens. Social constructionists seek to examine and better understand men as gendered beings that are actively and constantly constructing and refining their masculinity throughout their lifetime. In examining men through this critical lens it is easy to see and more acutely understand how a man’s race, sexual orientation, social class, and other forms of identity
impact and are impacted by masculinity. Much of the research cited in the review shows that men – from boyhood to manhood – face challenges as a result of their masculinity, their subscription to the dominant discourse, and their performance and acting out of their masculinity.

By the time most men reach college their masculinity and identity are so ingrained in the dominant discourse that they fail to even realize how destructive this path can be. Fraternity men have been one of the most highly publicized and written about college-male subgroups when it comes to bad behavior, poor performance, and risky decision-making, much of which can be attributed back to the discourse of masculinity that has been cultivated and bred within these organizations. Even though there is an alternative discourse relating to fraternity men, that is more positive in nature, these organizations and the men that join them are still fighting an uphill battle.

There has been a growing body of literature focused on the issues facing college men and how to best develop effective male-specific programming in recent years, yet there is still a lack of understanding when it comes to men and their experiences within these male-specific programmatic opportunities. The goal of this dissertation study is to conduct an in-depth qualitative study that examines how fraternity men make meaning of their masculinity and their experiences in a men’s growth group. The following chapter examines the theoretical framework that guides the study and presents an overview of the methodological design.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary intent of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction, and this is usually done through examining the meanings participants make of their experiences (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative inquiry is the best methodology for this study for three key reasons: the questions asked, the natural setting, and the emerging area of study. The study is guided by “how” and “what” questions, which Creswell (2009) notes are best pursued using qualitative methods. Further, the ManTalk program is the focus of this study and I, as the researcher, was embedded in the study (natural) setting. Given the emerging area of research on fraternity men and masculinity, qualitative methods are also appropriate. A qualitative approach allows for a more personal connection with participants and the opportunity to learn more fully about their particular experiences, in this instance their experience as part of the ManTalk program.

This chapter details the methodology I used and begins with an overview of epistemological stance and theoretical framework that guide the study. I then address my role as the researcher and how it may impact the participants and overall study. Also included in this chapter are details related to the actual study including the setting, participants, and the framework of the ManTalk program. Lastly, the data collection and analysis methodologies are presented along with a description of the study’s reliability, validity, and potential limitations.

Epistemological Stance

Epistemology is concerned with understanding what is entailed in “knowing” and “how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998). The epistemological paradigm of the researcher informs the choice of theoretical perspective, which then in turn informs the methodological
decisions and specific procedural choices. I approach this study from a constructionist epistemological stance because I believe that gender and identity are socially constructed. In keeping with the constructionist perspective, qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate approach for the study due to the complexity of masculine identity development and the intent to better understand how the program shapes fraternity men in creating a new self-knowledge base. Further, the study heeds the call for more qualitative understanding of how college men socially construct their reality (O’Neil, 2011).

**Theoretical Framework**

“The purpose of theories is to help us sort out our world, make sense of it, guide how we behave in it, and predict what might happen next” (LeCompte & Preissle, 2001, p. 42). As a student affairs practitioner and researcher I frame the current student through the lenses of student development theory, critical masculinity theory, and critical pedagogy. LeCompte and Preissle (2001) acknowledge that any inquiry process, scientific or otherwise, is affected not only by ascriptive characteristics but also by a researcher’s personal history and general sociocultural frameworks and philosophical traditions in which he or she lives. Student development theory, critical masculinity, and critical pedagogy all ultimately impact the way I see, interpret, and understand the world around me and they also have guided all my work as a student affairs professional.

Working at the intersection of three theoretical perspectives can be difficult for the novice researcher, but in my daily professional work with college students, specifically college men, I am always guided by three fundamental questions: (a) How do I holistically understand a student’s psychosocial development and serve as catalyst in their continual growth, learning and development? (b) How do I challenge male students to more critically understand their
masculinity and its intersection with all aspects of their identity and life? (c) How can I develop and design more male-specific programs and services – informed by critical pedagogy – to help male collegians be more successful? Each question is framed by a different theoretical perspective, but by working at the intersection of student development theory, critical masculinity, and critical pedagogy I am able to see all students, all problems, and all solutions through three unique and sometimes conflicting and overlapping frameworks. Figure 3.1 is a graphical representation of the theoretical framework that guides this project.

Figure 3.1: Theoretical Framework

- How do I holistically understand a student's psychosocial development and serve as a catalyst in their continual growth, learning and development? **College Students**  
  *Student Development Theory*

- How do I challenge male students to more critically understand their masculinity and its intersection with all aspects of their identity and life? **College Men**  
  *Critical Masculinity*

- How can I develop and design more male-specific programs and services – informed by critical pedagogy – to help male collegians be more successful? **Male-Specific Programs & Services**  
  *Critical Pedagogy*

Theory triangulation allows a researcher to explain more fully, the richness, and complexity of human behavior by studying and analyzing it from more than one view point (Cohen & Manion, 1986). In this study, none of the theoretical lenses provide a full framework for answering and solving all the unique problems and challenges facing college men and how they navigate their collegiate experience. Rather, each theoretical perspective provides a unique
framework for understanding specific components in the complex equation of men, their masculinity, and how programs and services can be developed to help them more effectively navigate their college experience. Student development theory and more specifically Chickering and Reissner’s *Seven Vectors of Identity Development* helps frame each individual as a unique college student and aids in knowing where they are located on the psychosocial developmental spectrum. Critical masculinity provides an additional framework for deeper analysis and a more critical perspective for understanding the issues of masculine development, which is often overlooked in most student development theories (O’Neil & Casper, 2011). It should be noted that there is a great deal of tension between most student development theories and critical theories as they are radically different frameworks. With that said it is vital to use critical masculinity theory to interrogate and deconstruct the uncritical nature of Chickering and Reissner’s *Seven Vectors of Identity Development*. Taking it one step further, I move theory into practice by structuring my educational conversations and programs, like *ManTalk*, through a critical pedagogical framework.

**Student Development Theory**

Student development theory is focused on human growth, learning, and development and the environmental influences and designs that impact students learning and success both inside and outside of the classroom (McEwen, 2003). There are four basic assumptions of all student development theory: the individual student must be considered as a whole person; each student is unique; a student’s entire environment – inside and outside of classroom – must be used to help them fully mature and develop; and the student has a personal responsibility for their education, learning, and development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).
The study is primarily guided by Chickering and Reisser’s *Seven Vectors of Identity Development*; the most researched, referenced, and widely used theory in student affairs (McEwen, 2003). The seven vectors include:

1. **Developing Competence** – Developing competence, consists of three different masteries: intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence. Students’ overall sense of competence increases as they learn to trust their abilities, receive accurate feedback from others, and integrate their skills.

2. **Managing Emotions** – Consists of learning to understand, accept, and express emotions. Individuals learn how to appropriately act on feelings that they are experiencing.

3. **Moving Through Autonomy Towards Interdependence** – The successful achievement of this vector involves learning how to be emotionally independent. This includes becoming free from the consistent need for comfort, affirmation, and approval from others. Individuals also see growth in problem solving abilities, initiative, and self-direction. They begin to understand that they are part of a whole. They are autonomous, but interdependent on others in society.

4. **Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships** – Individuals learn to appreciate and understand others. Some of the related tasks include cross-cultural tolerance and appreciation for the differences of others. An individual also becomes competent in developing and maintaining long term intimate relationships.

5. **Establishing Identity** – Individuals began to become comfortable with their inner-self. This includes physical appearance, gender and sexual identity, ethnicity, and social roles.

6. **Developing Purpose** – Requires an individual to determine his/her career path and discover personal interests, while remaining committed to interpersonal relationships.

7. **Developing Integrity** – Developing integrity, is characterized by three stages that are sequential in nature, but often overlap throughout one’s development. The three stages are humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. Movement within vector is observed when a person identifies his/her personal values, confirms these values as his/her own, and then, ultimately establishes a congruence between personal values and those which society promotes (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The seven vectors are a map to help professionals determine where students are developmentally and better understand how they can aid them in this journey. Movement along any of the vectors occurs at different rates and interacts with movement along other vectors. As a student progress through the vectors they develop more awareness, skill, confidence, complexity, stability, and integration. But Chickering and Reisser (1993) note that this does not mean that a student cannot return –accidentally or intentionally – to a vector that has already been traversed. The psychosocial journey of every college student is unique, different, and filled
with detours, but in the end all students seem to live out a specific set of reoccurring themes – all of which are described by the seven vectors: gaining competence and self-awareness, learning control and flexibility, balancing intimacy and freedom, finding one’s voice and vocation, and making commitments for the future. Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) seven vectors are also relevant to masculinity constructs and to any service delivery model for men. O’Neil and Casper (2011) posit that the vectors are related to the psychology of men by two links: men who endorse restrictive masculinity and or experience gender role conflict have greater issues developing competence, managing emotions, being interdependent, and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships; and these same men have greater problems establishing their identities and developing their purpose (O’Neil & Casper, 2011).

There are two major flaws of many of the student development theories used in today’s research including Chickering and Reisser’s Seven Vectors of Identity Development. First, many of the development patterns described by these theorists are skewed by the exclusivity of their samples (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). A majority of the samples used in developing these early theories were white males, yet these theories and patterns were applied to all students regardless of their age, race, sex, and/or sexual orientation. Researchers now know that students’ identity formation and development patterns are different for women as compared to men, different for White students as compared to non-White students, and different for heterosexual students as compared to homosexual students (McEwen, 2003). The second major flaw in many student development theories is that even though they only used male subjects they failed to view their male subjects as gendered beings (Davis & Laker, 2004). Meth and Pasick (1990) argue that, “Although psychological writing has been androcentric, it has also been gender blind and it has assumed a male perspective but has not explored what it means to be a man” (p. vii). The lack of
understanding by student affairs professionals (or assumption that they already understand) related to men’s development is a major flaw that has kept many administrators from being able to adequately address problems of performance, persistence, and engagement of college men (Davis & Laker, 2004). Since many student development theories, including Chickering and Reisser’s *Seven Vectors of Identity Development* did not view male subjects as gendered beings it is important to overlap student development theory and critical masculinity when framing any work related to college men and their masculine identity development.

**Critical Masculinity**

Critical theory aims to critique and transform the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender structures that constrain and exploit humankind by engagement in a confrontation or conflict (Guba & Lincoln, 2001). More specifically, critical masculinity is focused on exploring and understanding how these structures and contexts intersect with a man’s masculinity and how they go about interpreting the world around them. Examining men and masculinity through a critical lens is vital in deconstructing power inequities in a patriarchal society that have stemmed from the social construction of gender. Just as feminist efforts to identify, deconstruct, and confront sexism and patriarchy has benefited women as well as men (Brod, 1987), efforts to examine, critique, and deconstruct masculinity from a critical perspective have the potential to foster gender equity and social justice, expanding men’s and women’s humanity (Freire, 1972, 2000). Critical masculinity is also focused on examining how men are positioned in relation to others in terms of social dichotomies such as empowered/powerless, dominant/subordinate, central/marginal (Kimmel & Davis, 2011). Furthermore, the critical constructionist views masculinity as neither transhistorical nor culturally universal, but rather
something that varies from culture to culture and within any one culture over time (Kimmel & Messner, 2007).

The first step in reinterpreting masculinities so that student affairs administrators can help themselves and college men move beyond the static, monolithic constructions, is to employ a critical masculine perspective that avoids exaggerating differences and pitfalls either nature or nurture essentialism, is mindful of the blinders of privilege and men’s contradictory experiences of power, illuminates multiple dimensions of and their intersections, and recognizes contextual and historical dynamics that influence gender performance (Davis, LaPrad, & Dixon, 2011). Using a critical masculinity lens for this study allows me to more fully understand how the participants construct and perform their masculinity and the ways in which social, political, cultural, economic, and gender structures impact their understanding and construction. In order to help men move past just recognizing and understanding the role masculinity has played in their life, they must be challenged in a way that allows them to move theory into practice – this is best done through programs and services that are informed by critical pedagogy.

**Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education described by Henry Giroux (2010) as an educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action. The main goal of critical pedagogy is to transform society through merging theory with practice (McLaren, 2003; Shor, 1996). It also aims to develop a critical individual who is astute in deconstructing the common sense, or taken-for-granted aspects of society, and this is done by locating the edge of a student’s knowing and pushing them past it. When this happens, their current understanding of the world is disrupted, and transformation can
occur through a reformulation of the habits of mind, assumptions, and perspectives (Mezirow, 2003).

Critical educators use critical pedagogy to move theory into practice, and generally this is most successful when there is a focus on decreasing the power of the teacher/facilitator, dialogue, student self-reflection, embracing of student voice, critical analysis, and action – all of which are incorporated into the ManTalk program. For example, ManTalk is formatted in a way so that the facilitator is not just teaching “at” participants; rather, each participant plays an active role in “owning” the conversation, how it develops, and how it moves forward. Dialogue is the key to putting the theory of critical pedagogy into practice (Freire, 1970). In each ManTalk session a majority of the time is spent giving the participants an opportunity to critically dialogue with one another and ask those serious questions that they wouldn’t otherwise ask in their everyday environments. Self-reflection is also important to critical pedagogy because it pushes students to their edge of knowing (Garvey Berger, 2004). ManTalk provides men with ample opportunity to self-reflect on their masculinity and each topic in a way that is “unshackled” and independent from the dominant discourse. The participants are challenged to analyze their masculinity and its impact each week as they participate in the question-posing journey that examines their taken-for-granted and common-sense assumptions that are often viewed as “natural,” “normal,” or “just how things are” (Shor, 1996). ManTalk also challenges the men to apply and take action outside of the ManTalk vacuum – thereby continuing to be transformed and also transforming others along the way.

**Researcher Role**

Qualitative research is interpretative research and since the researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument the identification of their personal values, assumptions, and
biases should be discussed at the outset of this study (Creswell, 2009). My perception of college men’s issues and the need for more programmatic efforts specifically for men has been shaped by my experiences as a college man and my work as a student affairs administrator.

While an undergraduate student, I was a Resident Assistant and Assistant Hall Director in an all-male residence hall and this is where I experienced my first glimpse of some of the issues facing college men. Since that time I have served in a variety of student affairs positions on several campuses, and in each of these positions I have had the opportunity to further my work and passion for working with college men. Over the last ten years I have served as a Residence Hall Director (5 years), Men’s Programming Coordinator (2 years), Leadership Coordinator (1 year) and as the Member Development Manager for one the largest fraternities in North America (2.5 years). Although each of these positions has been drastically different and my work has been on a variety of unique campus settings (large urban, large land-grant, small private liberal arts), I continue to run into the same issues over and over with men: they are struggling to understand themselves, their masculinity, and how to navigate the college experience in a way that is healthy and risk-adverse.

As a Residence Director who saw hundreds of men each year during conduct meetings, I began to see a need to help men find better ways of navigating the college environment. For that reason I created the *ManTalk* program at Gonzaga University. My initial idea was to just provide men with a safe-space where they could discuss important life issues that they might not otherwise have the opportunity to discuss. Over time I have come to realize that the original program I created so many years ago has grown into something so much more. Rather, *ManTalk* is a program that allows men the opportunity to more critically examine their masculinity and in so doing liberates them from a conformance to masculine norms that sometimes prohibit them
from being their “true-self.” *ManTalk* has been my vehicle for addressing the issues facing college men today and many of the same issues that I did not know how to deal with while I was in college.

My three-pronged role as the creator, facilitator, and researcher creates an interesting and potentially conflicting dynamic and one in which I paid close attention to throughout the course of the study. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) argue that “backyard” research, one that involves studying the researcher’s own organization and/or program, can be both effective and extremely informative as long as multiple strategies of validity (as discussed later) are implemented. As an educated, White, middle-class, euro-centric, protestant, heterosexual man I know that I have experienced the world from a very privileged and powerful position in society as a result of my background. It was only after I became more educated about the critical nature of masculinity that I have come to understand how my cultural system and background have biased my experiences in the world. This is the primary reason that I examine masculinities critically and use a critical pedagogical approach in educating others about the conflicting power dynamics of masculinity.

**Framing the Study**

**Setting**

The study involves fifteen fraternity brothers from the Kappa Omega chapter on the campus of Eastern State University. Eastern State University is the largest and most comprehensive urban university located in the state. It is located in the capital city of a state on the eastern seaboard which is in a large metropolitan area. Eastern State enrolls over 20,000 undergraduate students per year, and women make up 58% of students with men making up the other 41%. The breakdown of student demographics is: 56% White, 17% Black, 10% Asian, 5%
Hispanic/Latino, 4% International, 3% two or more races, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan both make up less than 1%. About 1,000 students make up the fraternity and sorority community at Eastern State University (4.25%).

The chapter of Kappa Omega at Eastern State University was originally chartered in 1902; however, the chapter was dormant from 1905 to 1972 and between 1992 and 2008. In 2008, the chapter was re-opened at the discretion of National Headquarters and the Fraternity and Sorority Office at Eastern State. As of fall 2011 (when this study took place), the chapter had 41 members and the chapter’s overall GPA was 2.89. The chapter of Kappa Omega at Eastern State is a diverse group of men in regards to race, culture, religion, and socioeconomic status, especially when compared to the hundreds of relatively homogenous chapters of Kappa Omega across the country. Currently, the members do not have a chapter house that is overseen by the university and/or national headquarters. Many of the members do live together in off-campus residences. The Kappa Omega chapter at Eastern State is a *Balanced Man* chapter. *Balanced Man* chapters of Kappa Omega are single-tiered non-pledging chapters that offer members full voting rights upon joining, a continuous member development program that focuses on their personal, professional, and academic development, and a formalized mentoring program.

**Participants**

Fifteen Kappa Omega fraternity men participated in the *ManTalk* program during the fall semester of 2011, with only one dropping out and not participating fully in the study. While there are no firm guidelines with regard to sample size in qualitative research, Patton (2002) considers it the role of the researcher to select a sample size appropriate to the research question and the methodology. Due to the emerging nature of qualitative inquiry, the study used a small
sample of 15 participants because data emerging from additional participants may have only lead to saturation (Brown et al., 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and/or no new concepts or categories. Purposeful sampling with maximum variation was used so as to provide the greatest degree of richness and generalizability (Patton, 2002). The 15 participants were selected in order to represent the greatest degree of variation (age, race-ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation) within this relatively homogeneous group.

Participants were recruited in two ways: formal presentation to all fraternity members during a chapter meeting (completed in April of 2011), and through individual conversations and personal invitations to specific members (occurred throughout the summer of 2011). The 15 participants were asked to attend all of the ManTalk sessions, partake in two personal interviews (pre/post), and keep a journal. Each participant, who participated fully, received a $200.00 educational scholarship for their voluntary participation in the program and willingness to partake in interviews and maintain a personal journal. The scholarship was meant to reimburse men for their time and dedication to participating in the study, time that could otherwise have been spent working, studying, or participating in other university event.

The 15 participants came from a variety of backgrounds, races, religions, socioeconomic statuses, sexual orientations, and family structures. Table 3.2 provides a general outline of the participants’ demographics, while more substantive participant descriptions are provided in Appendix E. The detailed profile of each participant included in the appendix provides greater context for understanding the different backgrounds and experiences that the participants brought with them into the study and which may have impacted how they made meaning of their overall experience.
Table 3.2: Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Race-Ethnicity</th>
<th>SES/Class</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lower-Middle</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>Baptist/Non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cale</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chase</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Kinetic Imaging</td>
<td>Korean-American</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connor</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Biomedical Engineering</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>Baptist/Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>African American / Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>Christian/Non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>International Studies</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Spiritual / Not Religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jared</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Biology/Chemistry</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Lower-Middle</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Lower-Middle</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Broadcast Journalism</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Lower-Middle</td>
<td>Christian/Non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Psychology/Special Education</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Christian/Non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Christian/Non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lower-Middle</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trey</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Christian/Non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consent

After defending my dissertation proposal and prior to facilitating the ManTalk program with the men of Kappa Omega I sought and received approval from Washington State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) via submission of an IRB Non-Exempt Application. Upon receiving IRB approval from Washington State University, I notified the IRB of Eastern State University since my study occurred on this campus and my subjects were from
this institution. Before any of the men began participation in this study they were required to read and fill out an *Informed Consent Form* (Appendix A). They were each given the *Informed Consent Form* prior to our first interview and I made sure to thoroughly review it with them before they were allowed to formally decide to participate.

**ManTalk Program**

Using a qualitative research methodology with a critical focus on masculinity, the purpose of the study is to investigate and gain insight into how Kappa Omega men make meaning of their experiences in the *ManTalk* program and how it may better shape their understanding of themselves and their masculinity. In order to better understand the program being studied, the following is a detailed analysis of *ManTalk*'s mission, goals and objectives, and overall format.

**Mission.** *ManTalk* is a program that educates, challenges, and supports college men through an intentional experience that provides them with the opportunity to come together to share their lives and experiences in a supportive and nonjudgmental environment. In so doing the goal is for men to more critically examine their masculinity, its intersections, and its impact on everything they do.

**Goals/Objectives.** The following goals were created to support the mission statement of *ManTalk* and are used to assess the program:

1. Give men an opportunity to come together with other men and have a meaningful experience that empowers them to become better, more self-aware men that critically examine who they are, why they are, and who they want to become.
2. Help men better understand their masculinity, its intersections, and its impact.
3. Serve as an instrument to challenge and support men’s attitudes, beliefs, and lives.
4. Supply men with an avenue to discuss important issues that they might not otherwise discuss or have had the opportunity to about in their everyday lives.
5. Aid men in building more healthy familial, male-female, male-male relationships.
Format. *ManTalk* is a weekly 60 to 90 minute facilitated discussion group focused on examining college men’s gendered experiences and providing them with an opportunity to share their stories with one another in a safe and conducive environment. For this specific study, I served as both the researcher and primary facilitator. The facilitator’s priorities include: (a) leading and directing the conversation; (b) educating, supporting, challenging participants as they work through the curriculum; (c) sharing their feelings and experiences on any topic of discussion, especially during the tougher/weightier conversations – thereby prompting and encouraging the participants to share their personal stories; (d) adjusting the journey/curriculum as necessary based on the group dynamic and progress; and (e) serving as a role model for the men in the group.

As the facilitator, I developed a series of *Session Guides* (Appendix C) that include a variety of probing and thought-provoking questions for each topic. The *Session Guides* aided me as I facilitated and directed the ten *ManTalk* sessions. Table 3.3 details the specific session topics that we covered during the ten-week experience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/25/2011</td>
<td>Men, Masculinity, and the College Male Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10/2/2011</td>
<td>Men and Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/9/2011</td>
<td>Men and Fraternity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10/16/2011</td>
<td>Men and Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10/25/2011</td>
<td>Men and Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11/7/2011</td>
<td>Men and Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>11/14/2011</td>
<td>Men and Money / Men and Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>11/21/2011</td>
<td>Men and Body Image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>12/4/2011</td>
<td>Men and Sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>12/11/2011</td>
<td>Men and Their <em>ManTalk</em> Experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The topics were purposefully structured and ordered so as to progressively build upon each other, and the chosen topics are closely aligned with developmental competencies that are the
focus of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) seven vectors of identity development. During the first session of ManTalk the program’s primary objectives and ground-rules were thoroughly discussed and agreed upon by all participants. There are six rules of ManTalk:

1. ManTalk is confidential and the lives and experiences of other participants should not be shared with others outside of ManTalk.
2. ManTalk participants need to show due respect for other participants.
3. ManTalk participants must actively listen.
4. ManTalk participants should not interrupt.
5. ManTalk participants should not laugh at others stories or experiences.
6. ManTalk participants should challenge each other in a positive manner.

Because ManTalk is a democratic learning environment, influenced by critical pedagogy, participants are also given an opportunity to voice their opinion on additional rules that they want in place as part of their program experience.

Data Collection

Interviews

Every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987). Seidman (2006) believes the purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses or to evaluate; rather, the root of interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and how they make meaning of that experience. My primary objective in interviewing the ManTalk participants was to learn more about them as men and their background, their overall ManTalk experience, how they make meaning of that experience, and how the ManTalk experience may have aided them in developing a new critical consciousness of their masculinity.

Each participant was interviewed prior to the first ManTalk session (Mid-September 2011) and after the last ManTalk session (Early December 2011). Because I used a two-part interview approach I followed Seidman’s (2006) framework of using the first interview to establish the context and the second interview to give the participant an opportunity to detail
their experience and how they made meaning of it. During the first interview I explained the study, the ManTalk program, and the expectations I had for each participant – thereby setting the context. I then spent the majority of the first interview trying to learn more about each of the participant’s backgrounds (age, race, religion, socioeconomic status, family, relationships, and hobbies) and how they understood their masculinity and its intersections. Interviews lasted from 35 to 85 minutes depending on depth of a participant’s answers and if additional probing was needed.

The Interview Protocol (Appendix B) is informed by relevant literature on college men, the theoretical framework, the primary research questions, and the goals/objectives of the ManTalk program. For example, because I was interested in learning how the program may have helped men in their overall psychosocial development I utilized questions that focused on providing information about the participants’ self-competence, connection with feelings and emotions, relationships with others, and overall identity. I was also interested in learning how the men came to more critically understand their masculinity and its impact as a result of the program, so I utilized probing questions to examine how the men defined, learned, and performed their masculinity, and how it has changed over time. Given that critical pedagogy framed the ManTalk program I also asked questions to examine how the program may have critically transformed the men and their understanding of their masculinity.

While an interview protocol was developed and it guided the interviews I also remained flexible and used a semi-structured approach so as to make participants comfortable – especially since the topic of masculinity is a difficult topic for most men to discuss. Patton (2002) believes that a semi-structured approach allows for flexible and open dialogue with participants and allows the researcher to pursue areas of inquiry that may have not been originally anticipated.
During the interview process I took notes regarding the participant’s body language, facial expressions, hand gestures, and other non-verbal cues that may have provided additional insight. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and categorized by participant and interview number.

**Observation**

Another component of the data collection was observation – a process that “Entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 13). Observation is about exploring and examining what is said and unsaid. It is the art of breaking down the “who” “what” and “why” of participants actions, behaviors, conversation, body language, and more. Creswell (2009) advocates that there are several advantages to this type of data collection, including opportunities to: get first-hand experience with participants, record information as it occurs, notice unusual things that happen as a result of group dynamics, and explore topics that might otherwise be uncomfortable for a participant to discuss during an individual interview. As the facilitator for the *ManTalk* program, I had the opportunity to interact and observe all program participants on a weekly basis. Since I both facilitated and actively participated, my observational role took the form of participant observer.

As a participant observer, the researcher becomes more fully involved and engaged in the social setting of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Glesne (2001) argues that the more you function as a member of the group, the more you risk losing the eye of the uninvolved outsider; yet, the more you participate, the greater your opportunity to learn. While I had to take my researcher positionality into account when I was in the field, the opportunity to gather such rich, contextual information was vital to understanding the men’s experiences in the program.
Although at times it was difficult to be the facilitator and a participant observer, I resolved this issue by writing up comprehensive field notes directly after each ManTalk session. Each ManTalk session was audio-taped, but not fully transcribed – as that would have been a daunting task in trying to transcribe the back-and-forth conversation that occurred between fifteen participants each week. Rather, specific excerpts and quotes were used to provide a more holistic picture of the participants’ ManTalk experiences and used to verify categories and themes during the process of verbal analysis.

**Documents**

Documents and other unobtrusive measures provide historical and contextual dimensions to observations and interviews (Glesne, 2001) and were an additional component of data collection. In particular, I collected participant journals and a maintained my own researcher reflective journal to create a more holistic narrative of the participants’ experiences and mine as well. The journals maintained by the participants helped me better understand their experiences in the ManTalk program and how they understood, constructed, and performed their masculinity. Prior to the beginning of the study I planned to have the participants’ journal after each session and then submit it to me prior to the following session. However, after six weeks of having to constantly remind the participants to submit their entries, receiving journal entries late, and realizing that some of the journal entries were not providing the information rich data I was expecting I made the journaling optional for the final four weeks. Their weekly journal entries for the first six weeks were guided by a Journal Protocol (Appendix D) that involved 2-4 guiding questions per week; however, the participants were be encouraged to write about anything that came to mind with regards to their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences in the weekly session.
I also kept a weekly reflective journal that was interconnected with my field notes. The reflective journal or log is where qualitative researchers face their self as an instrument through a personal dialogue about moments of victory and disenchantment, hunches, feelings, insights, assumptions, biases, and ongoing ideas about methodology (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 2001). The reflective journal not only helped me make sense out of the totality of the experience but it was also something that I continually referenced during the data analysis process. It was a source that I could read and re-read to help me remember all the details of each interview and weekly session (months after the program ended) and where I could jot down new and fresh ideas as the data continued emerge and evolve.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves the preparation of data to make initial sense out of the text through the coding process, moving deeper into the understanding of the data through a comprehensive analysis, and making an overall interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009). Merriam (1988) and Marshall and Rossman (2011) contend that data collection and data analysis must be a simultaneous process in qualitative research. The first step in my data analysis process was organizing and preparing all of the data, which involved transcribing interviews, entering journal information, and typing up field notes from my observations. Secondly, I read and re-read all the data in order to get a general sense of the information and to provide me with an opportunity to initially reflect on the overall meaning.

I then engaged in a more detailed analysis that began with coding – a process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to the information (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). I followed a three-step coding process: initial descriptive coding, focused coding, and then the construction of inclusive themes. Descriptive coding
provides what Turner (1994) calls a “basic vocabulary” of data to be used for further analytic work (p. 199). The descriptive codes provided me with data which I could manipulate to assess the potential longitudinal change in participants’ masculine awareness and critical consciousness (Saldaña, 2008). A list of the initial descriptive codes that emerged is presented in Table 3.4:

Table 3.4: Initial Descriptive Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Father Figure</th>
<th>Male Friendship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why Participate</td>
<td>Role Models</td>
<td>Brotherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Conversations</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Female Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Masculinity</td>
<td>Body Image</td>
<td>Loneliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Masculinity</td>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>Making Meaning of Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing Masculinity</td>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
<td>Group Dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolving Masculinity</td>
<td>Other’s Stories</td>
<td>Additional Support Needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Masculinities</td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Most Impactful Session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraternity Masculinity</td>
<td>Emotions and Feelings</td>
<td>Continuing Critical Conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Masculinity</td>
<td>Peer Pressure</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Hooking-Up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature vs. Nurture</td>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Sex and Sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Fraternity Stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td>Fraternity Experience</td>
<td>Dating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Pornography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>Video Games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and Diversity</td>
<td>Drinking and Driving</td>
<td>Eating Healthy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focused coding was then used to search for the most frequent/significant initial descriptive codes in order to develop a set of categories and subcategories, which were then further refined into general themes (Charmaz, 2006). In moving from codes to categories and from categories to general themes I made sure that I referenced the theoretical framework and the most relevant literature, my research questions, and the program objectives. In the end three major themes emerged: masculinity and intrapersonal intersections, masculinity and relationships, and how the participants made meaning of the ManTalk experience. Each of the themes was framed and examined through the theoretical framework and the lenses of student
development theory, critical masculinity, and critical pedagogy. The findings from this process are detailed in the following three chapters.

In Chapter Four I examine how the participants came to better understand and make meaning of their masculinity and its intrapersonal intersections via their ManTalk experience. Through ManTalk and the group conversations the participants became critically conscious of how their masculinity and identity as men is wrapped up in a social, political, cultural, economic, and gendered context – a key tenet of a critical masculinity approach. In Chapter Five I present a critical analysis of the men’s different relationships (familial, male-female, male-male) and how through the ManTalk experience they came to better understand how these relationships have impacted them as men, and how their masculinity and the following of culturally pervasive masculine norms has impacted how they navigate these relationships. In exploring the men’s relationships and their understanding of them I was guided by both critical masculinity and student development theory. And finally, in Chapter Six I analyze how the participants made meaning of their overall ManTalk experience – which was done by holistically examining the experience through a student development, critical masculinity and critical pedagogical lens.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are an important component of any research project and were ensured by employing a variety of qualitative techniques consistent with my epistemological stance and theoretical framework. Qualitative validity deals with the trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Validity is considered one of the key strengths of qualitative inquiry, and it is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, and the reader (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In order to generate validity within a qualitative study, Creswell (2009) suggests actively
incorporating multiple strategies, including any of the following: (a) data triangulation; (b) rich, think description to convey findings; (c) member checking; (d) clarifying researcher bias; (e) presenting negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes; (f) spending prolonged time in the field; and (h) peer debriefing. In order to ensure trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility thereby guaranteeing qualitative validity I triangulated the data, provided rich descriptions to convey the findings, used member checking, clarified the researcher bias, presented the challenges, weaknesses, and discrepancies of the study, spent a prolonged amount of time in the field, and peer debriefed my findings.

As discussed in the data collection section there were three main sources of data (interviews, observation, documents) and each were used collaboratively to build a rich description of the participants and show how through this experience they came to better understand their masculinity, identity, and relationships. Member checking took place on a variety of occasions and was also used to ensure overall accuracy. Upon transcribing all the interviews I emailed each of the participants a copy and asked for their review. I also used this follow-up to ask a few of the participant’s to clarify several of their interview answers, which were unclear. While not all the participants responded, I did hear back from several that had additional comments as well as from those participants that were asked to clarify an answer. I also emailed each of the participants a rough draft of the final chapters and asked for their overall feedback on the analysis and my portrayal of them throughout the study. Although the feedback was limited, it did provide additional insight and was incorporated into the final document.

The challenges and limitations of the study are also detailed in this chapter and in the final chapter – thereby providing information on how the study could have been improved and how future studies can build off this one. Clarifying the role of the researcher and the
researcher’s potential biased is also important in ensuring the overall trustworthiness and validity of a qualitative study. While it would be practically impossible to have ridden this study of all researcher bias, I did strive to protect against it by thoroughly discussing my biases and their potential effects (as was done in the Role of Researcher section). Also, because this study involved me as the researcher facilitating and observing an intensive 10-week men’s growth group, I spent a prolonged time in the field as an active participant-observer. The prolonged engagement adds to the study’s trustworthiness and my ability to accurately portray the participants and how they experienced this phenomenon.

In striving for qualitative validity I also used peer debriefing as another measure to enhance the accuracy of their account of participants and the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). I asked a close colleague and mentor of mine – a retired higher education professor with a focus on the fraternity experience who has 30+ years of teaching experience – to peer-review the entire study, provide feedback, and critically analyze my methods, results, and conclusions. We emailed and spoke regularly for several months as I finalized the final chapters and his constructive feedback proved to be invaluable. The professional feedback and debriefing adds to the validity of this study – especially since this peer debriefer is highly recognized in the field of student affairs and Greek life.

It is important to not just strive for qualitative validity but to also choose specific procedures that guarantee qualitative reliability. Qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (Gibbs, 2007). Yin (2003) contends that qualitative researchers need to provide detailed step-by-step documentation of their procedures in order to increase their study’s reliability. Gibbs (2007) suggests the following reliability procedures: (a) double-check transcripts to make sure they do
not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription; (b) make sure there is not a drift in the definition of codes; and (c) find another person who can cross-check codes leading to intercoder agreement.

In order to ensure qualitative reliability within this study, I provided detailed documentation of all the data collection procedures in this chapter. Prior to data analysis I also double-checked all the transcripts in order to verify accuracy and had them reviewed by each of the participants. I worked to maintain consistency within the codes by constantly comparing the codes with the data, the research questions, the program objectives, and the theoretical framework. This process helped me greatly, as I found myself at times coding and categorizing data that was not always topical and/or specifically relevant to my research questions – even though this data may be useful for future studies. I also had two colleagues, who are doctoral students, cross-check my coding within several specific sections of transcript data. During this process we found a relatively high level of consistency between our coding, otherwise known as intercoder agreement, and this agreement lends to the study’s overall reliability.

**Limitations**

A discussion of a study’s limitations is important because all studies are bound by specific limitations and these limits often impact the findings and generalizability of a study. Creswell (2009) asserts, although qualitative research is not meant to be generalizable in the probabilistic sense, the findings of a study may be transferrable to other contexts, settings, and populations. There are several limitations to the study, which should be mentioned so as to better frame the study, the context of the study, and its potential weaknesses.

The study is limited to fifteen men in one fraternity at one institution. Given the small sample size the findings from the current study may not be fully generalizable or transferrable to
other fraternal populations and/or male populations. The research was carried out on a campus where less than five percent of the undergraduate males elect to join a fraternity, consequently fraternity members may be more likely to be at the extremes in terms of hegemonic characteristics then if they were part of a campus population where fraternity membership included a larger proportion of the male undergraduate population, such as one-quarter to one-half of all male students. The findings of the current study may differ if replicated as a result of differences in participants, group dynamics, facilitator, and/or subject matters covered. The study may have also been indirectly and unintentionally affected as a result of the researcher being the principal creator of the ManTalk program and the primary facilitator. And, while the study may have impacted change in the fraternity men involved, long-term organizational and institutional support (philosophically, politically, financially) has yet to be committed to further move the research findings towards creating larger organizational change. In spite of the study limitations, the focus and integrity of the research process can inform policy and practice related to men in college.

Summary

As detailed in this chapter, the purpose of this study is to understand how fraternity men make sense of their masculinity, its intersections, and its impact, through their experiences in a men’s growth group (ManTalk). Consistent with a constructionist epistemological paradigm the study is situated at the intersection of student development theory, critical masculinity, and critical pedagogy. Given the complexity of masculinity and how it is navigated by men, especially within the college environment, a multidimensional theoretical framework helps to best situate the research. The theoretical framework undergirds the design of the phenomenon as well as all the data collection procedures and subsequent data analysis – as discussed throughout
this chapter. The next three chapters present the comprehensive findings of this qualitative study through a set of three overarching themes: (a) masculinity and intrapersonal intersections; (b) masculinity and relationships; and (e) making meaning of the overall experience.
CHAPTER FOUR

MASCU LINITY AND INTRAPERSONAL INTERSECTIONS

A man is constantly constructing and deconstructing, learning and re-learning, and branding and re-branding his masculinity and his identity throughout a lifetime of experiences, relationships, and interactions. From birth, most young males are encouraged to follow rigid gender norms and at a very early age they begin conforming and complying with the social norms prescribed by dominant discourse of masculinity – even though following and subscribing to these norms can be very damaging and harmful. Because men spend so little time talking about their gendered perspective and the impact of their masculinity, often times they fail to realize the influence it has on all aspects of their lives. By the time most men reach college their belief system is so entrenched as a result of their subscription and following of stereotypical masculine ideologies that it can often derail otherwise healthy men as they try to navigate the collegiate environment.

The intent of ManTalk is to help participants make meaning of the totality of their masculinity as they wrestle to define it, examine the systems from which they learned it, and analyze how their masculinity intersects with other aspects of their identity. In regards to the overarching theme of masculinity and intrapersonal intersections, the findings in this chapter provide important answers to how the participants learned, defined, and understood their masculinity and how it intersects with their identity as it relates to race, gender and sexual orientation, body image, feelings and emotions, and self-esteem and self-awareness – all of which were explored during ManTalk. The findings also provide details on how the ManTalk experience shaped a more critical perspective of masculinity amongst the participants.
Defining Masculinity

If someone asked me to define my masculinity when I was in college, I would have inevitably struggled to answer the question with an intellectual response, knowing all along that what I said was not what I felt in my core. Similarly, many of the participants struggled to define their masculinity and truly understand the meaning of manhood. Jared stumbled his way through a response on the definition of masculinity during his first interview by saying:

Technically, it means different things to every single person. To me, specifically, let’s see, this is actually a very tough question. I’ve never actually thought about it. Because it’s like a thing that’s just in the back of your head and then all of a sudden, it’s just like if somebody asks you the question, then you don’t know how to describe it.

Jared wasn’t the only one to struggle in defining masculinity as he and most other participants had never really thought about it before. Chickering and Reisser (1993) maintain that many young men – like most of the participants – often have not and do not actively think of themselves in term of gender. Similarly, in their study Levine and Cureton (1998) found that young adolescent men were not as eloquent or as thoughtful in describing gender differences as compared to women (as cited in Davis, 2010). But, before a man can fully develop and understand his masculine identity, sex and gender must at least be on his radar screen.

The first session of ManTalk is solely focused on gender and masculinity, and the emphasis is on talking and critically reflecting on maleness and what it means to be a man. Like White people who do not see themselves as having race (Helms, 1992), most of the men in the study have never been fully conscious about their sex or masculinity. Privilege and power are usually invisible to those fortunate enough to have it. Knowing most young men are unaware of the privilege and power they are granted as a result of simply being male, ManTalk is designed to start at the very beginning with initial conversations focused on defining masculinity and helping men see the innate privileges their masculinity grants them. As the participants come to better
understand the social, political, and historical nature of their masculinity there is then a foundation for moving forward into more critical topics that can all be framed around the dynamics of power, privilege, and dominance.

When the participants defined masculinity they did so in terms of personality traits, activities and behaviors, prohibited activities and behaviors, and/or, stereotypical male roles. The most cited personality traits and/or male qualities used by the men to define their masculinity, included: confidence, strength, achievement, competitiveness, and hardworking. Ben described masculinity, by saying, “I think manhood you would define as expressing manly qualities, be it strong or brave, courageous, a gentleman, that kind of thing.” Other men in the study discussed the acceptable activities and behaviors of men as they defined masculinity. For the participants, masculinity and manhood is about, “taking responsibility” “taking care of things” “cracking skulls and drinking beers” “making the decisions for others” and “getting paid and getting laid.”

Meanwhile, some of the other participants talked about masculinity in terms of what it is not – what men aren’t supposed to do and/or can’t do. During my first interview with David, he commented, “When I think of masculinity I think of not crying, I think of doing what you have to do, never showing weakness. Even though you may be hurting, don’t show it. So never let your enemy see you down.” Still, others talked about the stereotypical male roles, such as being a leader, a decision-maker, a family man, and a professional. Trey explained, “Being a man is...being a leader, learning how to lead. You’re never a follower. Men, they [are] constantly in charge, whether it’s for leading a family, leading a team, leading brothers.”

An analysis of the men’s definitions made it clear that many of them defined a masculinity that was akin to stereotypical masculine ideologies. Much of what they said and
shared revolved around the four major themes that Brannon (1985) described in his classic essay about the four rules a man must follow to establish his masculinity: (a) No Sissy Stuff – antifemininity; (c) The Big Wheel - status and achievement; (c) The Sturdy Oak – inexpressiveness and independence; and (d) Give ‘Em Hell – adventurousness and aggressiveness. For the most part the participants initially did not see any of these stereotypical masculine traits as negative or potentially damaging – most men don’t. The dominant discourse is so prevailing that often times men don’t even see that they are subscribing to prevailing norms, even if they are damaging. Throughout ManTalk the participants are challenged to understand the risks involved in uncritically accepting and performing akin to the dominant norms while they simultaneously work towards constructing their own masculinity – one that is healthier, safer, risk-adverse, emotionally available, and more critical. But before participants can develop an understanding of their masculinity they first have to reflect on the people, systems, and structures which have taught them how to be men.

**Learning Masculinity**

“Boys learn how to be a man from an early age in their homes, schoolrooms, playgrounds, and religious institutions, and are taught by their parents, peers, teachers, coaches, media – just about everywhere and from everyone” (Kimmel & Davis, 2011, p. 7). As a program ManTalk seeks to help men better understand how socializing agents have influenced their masculinity while also helping them understand how they have come to learn about their masculinity. The data that resulted from my analysis and our ManTalk conversations shows that the participants primarily learned about masculinity through their fathers. But the participants all agreed that they learned not through much conversation; rather, it was mainly through emulation. There were two sides of the coin to the “learning from my father” story that emerged. There
were participants that had a positive experience with their father, thus they wanted to emulate them; and there were participants that had a negative experience with their father and they have sought to be exactly what their father is not. In the present study more of the participants seemed to have had a negative experience (or an experience that wasn’t as positive as they would have liked) with their father growing up, and many articulated that they learned “what not to do” from their fathers. For participants not fortunate enough to have a positive father figure in their life growing up, the data shows that they had to learn about masculinity and how to be men from other available sources, such as their mothers, siblings, cousins.

Connor and John were two of only a few men that had very positive things to say about their fathers and the impact they had on them as men. Connor had this to say about learning a healthy masculinity from watching his father:

I would say three people come to mind, and first off is my dad. He’s had a good impact on my life, and he’s been a positive role model, and I know a lot of people can’t say that, but I’m fortunate to have grown up in that situation. He is a leader and in every situation when he says something people respond. He has…good general leadership tendencies and he’s a fairly large man. I would say he’s what I picture as masculinity.

John’s father also had a positive impact on him growing up and how he learned be a man, even if when John was younger he was scared of his father. He shared with the group:

My Dad and I didn’t get along very well growing up. I was always just kind of like afraid of him, because he was the one who would lay the swift hammer of justice down if I did anything wrong. But he had to though, because he had to make sure that he raised me right, and I definitely would say that he did. He instilled a lot of things in me that I still kind of use in my everyday life. I’ve learned a lot of responsibility from him, and we still butt heads, of course, all the time about things, but everything I do really does come back to my parents and especially to my Dad, because I always try to think, ‘How would they handle this?’

For the rest of the men, their experiences with their fathers growing-up taught them what not to do as men. Brad, whose dad was in the Army for 28 years, said this during his first interview, “I actually learned what not to do from my dad because he and I did not get along for
the majority of my life.” He reiterated this same point during the *Men and Family* session, commenting: “I pretty much try to be what he is not. I don’t dislike him, but I don’t know anything about him. And I have tried to be open with him and he is just not into it. And it sucks.” Rye made a similar point about not wanting to emulate his father during the *Men and Family* session:

> It may sound a little like, kind of learning what not to do from my father. There had been times he would do things that just, [were not] right. Me, and my brother, we share that feeling. We learned how to be men by kind of doing the opposite of what he did at times.

Brad and Rye’s fathers are likely good men who tried their best to raise their sons the best way they could. The problem is that maybe their fathers’ subscription to hegemonic masculine norms (inexpressiveness, poor interpersonal skills, independence) constrained them from really teaching their sons the right lessons about masculinity and manhood – something they desperately wanted and needed. Kilmartin (2007) contends that the general character of masculine demands and the rigid gender roles that most fathers grew up with inhibit many of the kinds of behaviors that would allow them to be good parents or to even have the ability to actually teach their sons the “right” lessons about how to be man. Just like their confused sons, many fathers are also confounded by societal norms and expectations about what it means to be a man and a father.

Even though most of the participants said they learned about masculinity and manhood from their fathers most had never had any real sit-down conversations with their fathers about masculinity. Consistent with Kilmartin’s (2007) findings, most of the participants’ masculine behaviors were learned through observing and imitating others – most likely a father-figure – even if the traits and behaviors may have been negative or damaging. Rye told the group, “With my dad it’s like he is there…but we never really talk about anything real, and we never talked
about what it means to be a man.” Because Rye never really had these conversations with his father, he was required to, “extrapolate a good deal in creating a sense of what masculinity is” by himself and through watching others (Kilmartin, 2007, p. 80-81). Tyler had a similar story, relating: “I mainly have just watched and listened. I didn’t really have many of these conversations with my dad. But as a person I have learned a lot from other sources and other people’s mistakes.”

The men in the study were not unique though. Most young men do not have critical conversations with their fathers about manhood, dating, sex and sexuality. For example, Pollack (1998) explains, “Many boys report that, by the onset of puberty, they have been taught little or nothing about masculinity, dating, sex, and sexuality” (p. 154). As a result, young men today must fill in a wide gap of information about masculinity and what it means to be a man by using other available male-models such as their male-relatives, peers, teachers, ministers, and/or even males in the media. Some men are fortunate and get a positive stream of male role-models as they are growing up that teach them a healthy sense of masculinity and balance. Others do not, especially young men who grow up without a father, and these men tend to end up with a great deal of anxiety and inadequacy about their masculinity (Kilmartin, 2007).

In spite of the challenges of growing up without a father figure, the findings from the study provide examples (Chase, Trey, and Jesse) of how men can develop a healthy sense of masculinity from other available sources. Chase shared, “Becoming a man I learned mostly from the Army, how to take care of myself and how to survive. And I also learned a great deal about manhood by being a brother in [my fraternity].” Trey has relied heavily on his brother and college pastor to help him learn how to be the man he wants to be. Jesse said that he learned about manhood and masculinity from his cousins growing up in Mexico, because they worked
and provided for themselves from a very young age. When a father figure or other male role-models aren’t present most men simply learn about manhood and masculinity from their mothers.

Research by Kilmartin (2007) provides further evidence that in today’s society more and more boys are growing up in single-parent homes without a father and/or have parents that have been divorced – both of which have a major impact on how boys come to understand and learn masculinity. In the current study alone, five of the participants were raised primarily by their mother in a single-parent home and seven of the participants had divorced parents (though they now may be remarried to another spouse). While Pollack (1998) argues that a majority of single-parent mothers may raise their boys to be more emotionally available and in-touch with their feelings and emotions, this was not fully supported by the findings. On the contrary, my findings demonstrated mixed-results. For example, one of the participants who was raised primarily by his mother was not more emotionally available (David) as compared to other men, while one participant raised by his mother was extremely emotionally aware (Ben).

David, who was primarily raised by his mother until she got remarried when he was older, had this to say about his mom’s masculinity teachings: “God, my mom is tough. She would always say, ‘You have to be strong. You can’t be weak, and you have to be the best.’ I didn’t start getting the actual ‘what a man is?’ until I got older.” David’s mother may have struggled with what Pollack (1998) describes as “internal confusion.” In her case, she knew the kind of boy she wanted to raise but she couldn’t reconcile that ideal image with the one the dominant model of masculinity told her was more appropriate. She wanted David to be emotionally available, expressive, forgiving, and flexible but instead she unknowingly taught him to constrict his emotions, not be weak, never lose, and to keep his inner-most thoughts
buried. Her own unresolved confusion over what it means to be a man and subscription to the dominant norms of masculinity focused on power, privilege, and strength strained her ability to effectively teach David a more healthy sense of masculinity as a child – which ultimately has impacted him to this day.

Ben’s story is the exact opposite. He received a lot of healthy messages about what it means to be a man and about how to understand his emotions and feelings from his mother, grandmother, and sister. Even though Ben has developed into a healthy, mature, self-aware man that seems to be rather emotionally available, he feels like he missed out on learning about some of the things that just make “a man a man.” He talked about his upbringing in a female-dominated household, its impact on him as a man, and how he still isn’t really quite sure where he learned about masculinity:

I have no idea where I learned masculinity. Growing up...I didn’t really have a father. I was also never really into sports either [and] I think that had to do with my Dad not being there. And not having sports in my life I think kind of gave me a different perception of what it means to be a man because I didn’t have him or a lot of other guys to kind of look up to or like feed off of for inspiration. I was brought up in very much like a woman-oriented house, because my Mom, my sister, and my Grandma, they’re always home, and it was very much like me kind of just dwelling there.

From a critical perspective it would seem as though Ben assumes that one can only learn masculinity from another man – in this case a father – or from being involved in sports. But Ben may have been better off as many times a father’s teachings and/or lessons learned from sports can be damaging and overly hegemonic.

Most of the participants in the study had never really thought critically about how they learned masculinity and/or from whom they learned it, thus many of them had just unknowingly and unconsciously accepted previous teachings and lessons about masculinity. As a result, several of the ManTalk sessions were spent challenging the participants to reflect and dialogue
about the lessons they had learned about masculinity and what it means to be a man. In so doing the participants were able to break down and deconstruct the lessons they have learned in order to determine whether or not it has had a positive or negative impact on how they make sense of their own masculinity. Once the men have this initial framework for understanding their masculinity, ManTalk strives to help them become more conscious about how their masculinity intersects with all other aspects of their identity, specifically their race, gender and sexual orientation, body image, feelings and emotions, and self-esteem and self-awareness.

**Masculinity and Its Intersections**

Critical masculinity scholars argue that masculinity is not singular; rather there are multiple masculinities that result when one considers how masculinity intersects with the variety of factors and traits that make up each individual person and their identity (Connell, 1987, 1995). The concept of multiple masculinities also directly overlaps with Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) psychosocial development model, in that *Establishing Identity* is multi-pronged process that occurs as men come to better understand their race and cultural heritage, gender and sexual orientation, physical being and body image, emotional health, and self-esteem and overall awareness of self. Because masculinity and identity are not singular concepts, ManTalk provides opportunities for men to explore their multiple masculinities and masculine intersections, especially as it relates to race, gender and sexual orientation, body image, feelings and emotions, and self-esteem and self-awareness.

**Race**

The intersection of masculinity and race was a pervasive finding for both White participants and the men of color. ManTalk challenges the participants to gain a deeper understanding of “Who am I” and “Where do I come from” so they can better locate themselves
within a particular cultural, historical, and social context and recognize how these intersections impact their masculinity. As the participants began exploring their own cultural and racial heritage and its connection to their masculinity they came to more fully accept it and appreciate it, even if it made them different. They also came to better understand multiple masculinities and the similarities and differences in the masculine identities of men of various backgrounds.

Although many White males fail to ever see how masculinity is impacted by race as a result of the privilege they have sustained for being the dominant race (Kilmartin, 2007), Connor was able to recognize it right away even though he embodied every characteristic trait of the dominant discourse – White, heterosexual, and middle-class. He shared the following with the group during our first ManTalk session:

I think there are definitely different views. I think masculinity looks very different in an African-American home than masculinity in a White American home. And a Hispanic American home for that matter, because a lot of the times I would say you're more likely to have a father that has an active presence in a White child’s life rather than a Black or Hispanic child’s life. And also African-American culture has a lot of different – I feel like the macho aspect has a larger role in African-American households and what not and it looks a lot different to me. And Hispanic culture has its own masculinity that it brings to the table. They’re dealing with this very extreme machismo and that looks very different than White and/or Black masculinity.

This was an especially deep and critically conscious observation (even if it was embedded with hegemonic stereotypes); especially since so many young White males struggle to understand the innate privileges they have as a result of simply being White. Kimmel (2002) explains that White men have the privilege of invisibility in that they are the only people that do not think about their race and/or gender at every minute of their lives.

For men of color and different cultural backgrounds, they have to learn and understand how to navigate a masculinity that looks and feels very different from the White male discourse. Often times, because men of color more readily see and understand the impact of their race they
tend to create alternative forms of masculinity (Kilmartin, 2007). Interestingly, many of the racially diverse participants in the present study did not think they had strong racial/ethnic ties and/or did not really think it had a major part on their masculinity. It could be argued that these men simply have grown up thinking their race was a negative thing as a result of it being different than the color associated with the dominant discourse – Whiteness.

Darren, one of the African American participants, articulated, “[It’s] not that I’m not Black, but I’m not really – I guess I’m not really in Black culture that much. Even when I grew up, I grew up in a White neighborhood. That’s just kind of been my background.” During the session on Men and Diversity, David, who comes from a mixed background (African-American and Puerto Rican), admitted: “Growing up, I hated that I was mixed… Now, I really don’t resonate with race at all. I’m just like, ‘I’m me.’ So, at this point I don’t really resonate with my my Puerto Rican roots and/or my African-American roots.” Chase too, said that his Asian background hasn’t played a factor in his masculinity, “I don’t think my race plays into my masculinity. Growing up maybe I thought being half White and half Asian does play into it. But in the end it just doesn’t in my opinion.” And while Rye (African-American) hated being called the “Whitest Black Kid” by people in middle school and high school, he says his anger had little to do with race and/or color:

When I was growing up in Stafford, I was one of the few Black kids. So I was always hanging around with a bunch of White kids. By the time I was in middle school or high school, and there were a lot of Black kids, I would have White kids and Black kids tell me all the time that I was the Whitest Black kid they knew. That pissed me off to no extent, because I really don’t think color should factor into how you act. I just …it’s just so silly to me. It doesn’t make any sense.

Masculinity in America is predominantly seen as a White discourse and because it is so pervasive, domineering, and in your face it can sadly melt away one’s own racial background and heritage (Kilmartin, 2007). Often times this phenomenon makes men of color feel less
masculine and feel beneath their White male peers. Connor, a White participant, understood masculinity’s “zero-sum” game as a result the dominant discourse:

In the end I think maybe...race and diversity can’t make you feel more masculine it can only make you feel less masculine. It’s only a thing where you are like even par or lagging behind. It makes you feel indifferent if your White and/or it makes you feel inferior or like shit if you are another race.

Trey (Vietnamese) articulated a vivid picture of just exactly how this “White-washing” of culture and race happens, when he talked about how he has been impacted by the dominant masculinity in America – a pervasively White masculinity. “I’m very Americanized, culturally. The image in my head [of masculinity], I always picture a White man, for some reason. I don’t picture an Asian man. I don’t even picture myself. It’s kind of weird.” For Trey and the other men of color they have had to negotiate the boundaries of their masculinity and identity within a context of racial and ethnic prejudice. This is not easily accomplished by young men of diverse backgrounds, unless they are fortunate enough to have gotten the right guidance and support growing up. If they don’t, they often times slowly lose their connection and pride about being different and non-White.

Darron, David, Chase, Rye, and Trey’s stories all relate back to how they have been acculturated into relating and performing more akin to the dominant race/culture of America instead of their own, even if it has been unconsciously. Though they say their race and background doesn’t matter to them and that they don’t think about it much, I would argue, based on their comments, that they have just been saying that because deep down inside they each see their race and background as an obstacle instead of as an advantage. These men see and understand that they are different, yet they do not fully accept or comprehend the ways in which their race and masculinity coincide, collide, and contradict with each other (Kimmel, 2002). Knowing that most college-aged men have yet to explore these intersections, ManTalk seeks to
critically challenge men to begin seeing, accepting, and embracing how their race and masculinity intersect. Once young men understand this intersection they can begin to explore other identities and intersections, such as their gender and sexual orientation.

**Gender and Sexual Orientation**

Most men take their heterosexuality for granted and many do not even see themselves as being gendered (Kimmel, 2002), a direct result of the privilege that most men have in society for simply being male and heterosexual. Yet far too often, men fail to understand the intersections between masculinity, gender, and sexual orientation, as is the case in the present study as well. As college students wrestle with their gender and sexual orientation they are often faced with finding answers to questions such as: How comfortable am I being male? What is the difference between being a male and a man? What is my persistent pattern of sexual attraction? Is my sexual orientation biological or a choice? (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Since most college-aged men have never critically discussed these issues, *ManTalk* seeks to provide an environment where men can critically discuss their masculinity, gender, sexuality and the impact it plays in their everyday life.

**Gender.** Men often think of themselves as genderless, as if gender does not matter in the daily experiences of their lives (Kimmel, 2002). This research finding is echoed in the current study and is a major finding that resulted from the data analysis – as most of the participants thought of themselves as genderless. For example, Leon shared, “I guess I have never really thought about the difference between being male and being a man.” Most of the group agreed with Leon and they spoke in detail regularly about the lack of effort most had put into exploring their gender; rather, they just assumed they were men simply as a result of being biologically male. But men, like the participants in the study, rarely understand the ways in which gender is
impacted by the multifaceted social meaning that is attached to their biological sex, and how it is acted out and ever-evolving (Kimmel & Messer, 2007).

In order for a man to truly understand his identity he must understand that even though his sex may be male, his gender identity as a man is developed through a complex process of interactions that occur over a lifetime. Jesse discussed the process of gender development during our session on sexuality, reflecting: “Even though you were genetically told to be male, the environment can influence all those traits and things. Just because you are engineered as a male, doesn’t mean you are a man or feel comfortable being a man.” John agreed with Jesse and shared his thoughts on the difference between being male and being a man, “I now realize that having a dick doesn’t make me a man. It simply just makes me biologically male. In all actuality I am still trying to learn how to be a man and most people in this group are too.” As a man comes to more critically understand himself as a gendered being he can begin to explore and better understand his sexuality and sexual orientation.

**Sexual Orientation.** The dominant discourse of masculinity in the United States is not just characteristically White, but also heterosexual (Kilmartin, 2007). Yet, not all men are straight and those men that aren’t are often left negotiating a very different masculinity. The alternative discourse (homosexuality) often complicates the lives of gay men, how they understand themselves and their masculinity, and how they navigate their multiple identities. Of the fifteen men in this study, only one identified himself as gay (Darren). There may have been one or two other participants who were gay and/or were still in the process of coming out, but this was speculative. A lack of understanding and exploration of sexual orientation for both straight and gay participants was a pervasive finding in this study.
While many men can’t really pinpoint the exact moment in their lives when they realized they were heterosexual, most gay men can vividly remember the moment they thought they might be gay. Darren, the only man in the study who disclosed that he was gay, described his first experience to us during our session, reflecting:

I can remember one experience from when I was a kid. There were two men that kissed, and I thought it was the hottest thing in the world. I was...probably like nine or ten. We were in Chicago and the two men kissed, and my dad kind of was like ‘Ewe,’ but I was like, ‘Ooh!’ And that just kind of stuck with me.

According to Fassinger (1998) the first phase of lesbian/gay identity development – Awareness – occurs when an individual begins to feel different sexual feelings than most others seem to feel, which is exactly what Darren began to realize when he saw these two men kiss and had the exact opposite reaction than his father did.

Even though Darren had a pivotal moment, in regards to his sexuality, when he was nine or ten and first realized he might be gay, he did not come out until eight years later. Through a period of Exploration (Fassinger’s second phase) during high school Darren began to more readily accept his gay identity and he then developed a Deepening Commitment (Fassinger’s third phase) to this identity. However, to this day, he still struggles with the fact that gay men have to “come-out”, yet straight men never have to. He commented, “Why do I have to come out? You know, my brother didn’t have to tell everybody he’s straight. My dad didn’t have to do that. You know, being gay is not a special case. It’s not who I am, it’s just part of who I am.”

In his 2007 article, Becoming 100 Percent Straight Messner touches on the dichotomy of “coming out”:

In sport, just as larger society, we seem obsessed with asking ‘how do people become gay?’ Imbedded in this question is the assumption that people who identify as heterosexual or ‘straight’ require no explanation, since they are simply acting out the ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ sexual orientation. We seem to be saying that the ‘sexual deviants’
require explanation, while the experience of heterosexuals, because we are considered normal, seems to require no critical examination or discussion (p. 361).

While most people suspected that Darren was gay, even before he came out, rarely did people confront him about it or call him out. However, sometimes men get so caught up in another person’s sexuality and way of being, that they begin to question their straightness. This form of homophobia pops up in fraternity houses and locker rooms across the country, as a result of men’s uncomfortability and anxiety when there are not rigid enough boundaries between themselves and other men (Kilmartin, 2007). The questioning of others sexuality even came up during our discussion, because several brothers said that they thought there were men in the chapter that were gay, but had not come out. This sparked Trey to honestly and bluntly call out Jesse. The following is an excerpt of the exchange between Trey and Jesse:

**Trey:** Jesse, brother to brother, I want to be honest and I have to call you out. Yes, I have wondered and if you were gay and kind of thought you were gay. I think it mainly has to do with your culture, your accent, the things you say, and the way you dress.

**Jesse:** I am going to bring that point up. I know a lot of people have thought about it. And it sometimes is just because of the fact that I am really nice, that I dress nicely, that I smell really good, that I am in touch with my feelings and emotions. I mean does it make me gay because I am completely comfortable around Darren and I love him to death? But I think I am the way I am, because growing up my mom’s best friend was gay. And he was really nice to me, my mom, and the family. So I kind of looked up to him and how we has so comfortable in his own skin.

**Trey:** Cool. Well, I hope I didn’t hurt your feelings or you think I am a dick for saying that in front of everyone. You know me, I tend to be pretty blunt.

**Jesse:** It’s all good.

After Trey’s “call-out” and questioning of Jesse, I made it a point to follow-up with Jesse about it during our last interview. He explained, “It made me feel uncomfortable. I mean, Trey was being a dick. People have their own thoughts. You can’t change that. Oh, well. They can think whatever they want think as long as, I know the truth.”
Being called-out sexually by a friend is one thing, but often times young men’s fathers may question their son’s sexuality based on his language, dress, friends, and/or absence of interest in girls. Given society’s lingering fears and doubts about homosexuality, given its abundant antigay anxieties and homophobia (Pollack, 1998), it is not surprising that some of the participant’s parents became worried and began questioning their son’s sexuality at an early age. When Cale was in 7th grade his father approached him about being gay and this has impacted him ever since, “My Dad came up, and he sat down, and he really had the nerve to ask me if I was gay. He was like, ‘I don’t care, but I was just wondering.’” As a result, Cale feels that in order to be a man and to make sure others don’t question his sexuality he must have a girl by his side at all times. He later told me, “Ever since then, I haven’t been without a girlfriend for less than a month, and it doesn’t matter if I really, really like the person or not. I’ve always had a girlfriend.” Most fathers are so afraid of having a gay or un-masculine son that they fail to realize how demoralizing the things they say to their sons are as they grow up, as well as the long-term impact of such words on their son’s overall masculine identity.

Understanding one’s sexual orientation becomes even more complicated when this identity intersects/conflicts with a man’s other identities – such as race. The degree to which sexual orientation intersects with other dimensions of identity is based on the ability to recognize these intersections; they exist for all men, however, many men have simply never chosen to explore these intersections (Stevens, 2004). For Darren, ManTalk was one of the first opportunities he had to explore intersections between sexual orientation and race and in the sessions he was regularly challenged to think about how his masculinity impacted his African-American heritage and his homosexuality. During our session on Men and Sexuality Darren had this to say: “I think the combination of being black and being gay is… a double negative. And
so sometimes I feel like I have to overcompensate a little bit for it.” Darren went on to talk about how he had never really thought about his race and sexuality as if it were a double-blind, but during that moment I could see and feel his pain, frustration, and confusion as a result of his constant struggles to navigate these two often conflicting identities.

The conflict between Darren’s gay and racial identities is known as a double-bind. The essential premise behind the double bind theory is that a person receives two or more conflicting messages, in which one message negates the other – ultimately creating a situation in which a successful response to one message results in a failed response to the other (and vice versa) (Gibney, 2006). For gay men of color, racist attitudes can complicate their developmental process because they often have to maneuver through a double-bind in that they deal with homophobic prejudice in racial communities and racial prejudice in gay communities (Stevens, 2004). Darren has dealt with this prejudice first-hand within the gay and Black community, which ultimately has made it even harder for him to navigate overlapping identities. He shared:

People are just a little bit more…accepting of a White gay man than I think myself. And within the gay community, White gay men tend to say, ‘I don’t date black guys.’ I’ve heard that time and time and time again. I’m like, ‘Is that all I am, is a black guy? Is that all that you see? Is that all that you can observe from me?’ You know, it’s hurtful.

As a result of Darren’s intersecting identities, he is often faced with how he names himself and how he is seen by others within his varying peer groups. “Lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons of African descent continue to face the questions ‘Who are you first?’ and ‘Are you Black first or gay first?’” (Washington & Wall, 2011, p. 140). During our last interview, Darren noted, “I feel like people are always saying to me, ‘Oh, you’re my black friend,’ or, ‘You’re my best gay friend.’ But I don’t understand why I can’t just be their friend. Why do I have to be labeled?” Constantine-Simms (2001) says there are two types of gay men of African descent, African American identified gays (AAIG’s) and gay identified African Americans
(GIAA’s). Since Darren does not really identify with the black community and/or have strong ties to his racial background, he would classify himself as a GIAA. That is to say, he is more closely tied to his gay identity as compared to his African-American identity. Darren’s stronger attachment to his gay identity is extremely important, as it has played a major impact in how he navigates his double-bind and in how he chooses to situate himself within his different communities of practice.

As Darren and the other men wrestled with their gender and sexuality through our ManTalk conversations they began to more fully understand and accept gender and sexuality as part of their identity. But issues of sexual identification often interact with a man’s concern for body image and his self-presentation, the masculine intersection discussed next.

**Body Image**

The intersection of masculinity and body image is also a major finding that emerged from the study. A man’s “comfortability” with his body changes over time, especially as he grows and matures from adolescence to adulthood and comes to better understand his masculine identity, as was the case for most men in the study (Kilmartin, 2007). Many times though, early conversations between fathers and their adolescent sons about body and health impact their self-image and self-esteem throughout their lifetime. Chase had this to say, “Growing up, I was really put down by my dad about how fat I was, even though I wasn’t. That really made me gain a lot of weight, because then I had a lot of self-esteem issues and such.” Cale had similar thoughts and spoke about his experience during the Men and Body Image session, “I don’t really judge myself in a very masculine way. When I was in middle/high school, I used to be pretty chubby and it didn’t help that my dad was extremely physically fit and would say things to me.”
comments and suggestions on how to improve their body, the issue of body image is further compounded as a result of the amount of time most men spend in gyms and locker rooms comparing themselves to other men.

When students arrive on a college campus there is increased attention on the body and many men’s self-consciousness is heightened (Courtenay, 1998). Similarly, Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) found that complete satisfaction with looks is rare, and an important component of a positive identity is a friendly attitude toward one’s body and an ability to take care of it. As a result of the heightened consciousness of body and the lack of friendly attitudes towards ones’ body that men often have upon entering college, ManTalk and the Men and Body Image session strive to provide participants with an opportunity to critically reflect on the intersection between masculinity and body image. The session focused on body image also provides men with the opportunity to discuss where they have struggled with their own bodies while helping them understand that regardless of how perfect they think another man’s body is, all men struggle to be 100% confident in their own bodies. The participants and most other college men just never realize the insecurity that other men have in their bodies because they so rarely talk to each other about their bodies and how it impacts their self-identity. Instead, they just walk around for most of their life thinking that just because the guy next to them may be taller or stronger, may have better hair or skin, and/or may have a better six-pack, he must love his body and himself more. But nothing could be further from the truth and through our conversations this was demonstrated.

The session on Men and Body Image started with an activity where every participant wrote down the things that they liked/disliked about themselves physically. They also had to write down the number that best represented their confidence in their own body (1= no confidence / 10 = high confidence). Table 4.1 displays the physical attributes that each
participant liked/disliked about themselves and their overall happiness (via a 1-10 ranking) with their body image.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Like</th>
<th>Dislike</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Height, strong, muscular legs, strength,</td>
<td>Man boobs, gross feet, out of shape, non-muscular arms, big nipples</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smile, eyes, legs</td>
<td>Height, hands, hair, acne, glasses, facial hair</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cale</td>
<td>Posture</td>
<td>Arms, legs, abs, teeth, hair, shoulders</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chase</td>
<td>Chest, neck, eyes, Dick size</td>
<td>Love handles, thighs, feet</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connor</td>
<td>Eyes, ears, knees, teeth, face shape</td>
<td>Height, chubby midsection, big nose, small build, small chin</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Shoulders</td>
<td>Height, belly</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>Weight, height, skin tone, teeth, lips, complexion, butt, legs, eyes, smile, reproductive parts</td>
<td>Nose, hair, feet, body hair, odor, sweating, under eyes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Hair, chin, smile</td>
<td>Nose, skin, too much body hair, long neck, ears, doughy physique</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jared</td>
<td>Legs, hands, feet, shoulders, head, phalanges</td>
<td>Arms/biceps, chest muscles, abs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>Legs, hands, eyes, dimples, butt, height</td>
<td>Hair, feet, body odor, lips, facial hair</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>Being in shape, summer abs, fresh haircut</td>
<td>One testicle, stomach scar, being short, skin breakouts</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry</td>
<td>Legs, arms, strength, face, coordination</td>
<td>Abs, biceps, chest, acne, back, conditioning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>Calves, teeth, smile, athleticism</td>
<td>Nose, body fat, fingers, height, flexibility</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trey</td>
<td>Hair, ears, hands, chin, eyes</td>
<td>Abs, butt, nose, facial hair</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Body Image Assessment

After this exercise the men collaboratively shared and confided in each other about the things they disliked about themselves and they seemed to find comfort in knowing that a lot of their friends and brothers were also struggling with body image. The activity was not only intriguing to me as the researcher, but many of the participants said that this activity was one of the most eye-opening activities they had done with another group of men. John said the activity and the ensuing discussion was his “aha” moment of the entire study:
I know when we talked about body image and when we rated ourselves 1 through 10 on our confidence in our body, a brother that I thought would have been, a 10 was, like, a 3. And I remember I put down, like, a 4 or a 5 or something, which I honestly thought I was being kind of liberal with that, you know? And I was just surprised that I was higher than some people. And I think that was eye-opening because even people that I looked up to, that I see as being, these confident go-getters who can talk their way out of any situation or get whatever they want at any time and they’re putting down that they’re confidence level is a 3 or 4. That was like my aha moment.

Another surprising component of the body image session was how taken aback we all were when several of the men that embodied the physical ideal of a man – tall, rugged, handsome and extremely physically fit – shared that they too were dissatisfied with their bodies. The findings regarding the majority of men’s overall dissatisfaction with their bodies and/or specific parts of their body and its impact on their overall self-esteem were similar to what Hatoum and Belle (2011) found in their study when they examined men’s media consumption and bodily concerns. They found that despite the fact that 65.1% of the men in their sample were within the normal weight for height range (BMI), 81% desired to be a weight different than their own and/or to change something about their body. Although I didn’t measure each of the participant’s BMI for this study, it was easy to see by looking at the body image assessment table that there was a lot that each of these men disliked about themselves regardless of where they may be have been on the BMI chart or how perfect others may have viewed them.

As the Men and Body Image session progressed I noticed participants laughing when another participant shared something deep and meaningful about their issues with their own body. This troubled me because so many of these men had already been negatively impacted by others who had laughed or made jokes about their looks or body and because one of the overarching rules of ManTalk is to respect others. As a result of this laughing, I challenged the men on their joking and laughing at each other and its impact. Cale responded back, catching the group off-guard by commenting:
I don’t think we mean to laugh/giggle, nor are we trying to be disrespectful. However, I think it is simply a defense mechanism/coping tool because sometimes we just do not know how to react/handle the conversation when it gets so serious. I mean it’s not every day we are talking about things we hate about ourselves and our bodies with one another. So sometimes we just aren’t even sure what to say when things get so serious…so we use laughter and jokes to mask our uncomfortability with ourselves and our bodies.

The critical awareness and reflective insight by Cale about how he and his brothers were using laughter as a way to make it through these tough conversations, was a clear sign of Cale’s growth as a man – especially since he was not even conscious of the foundational issues at play prior to this experience.

At the end of the Men and Body Image session, Darren tried to get everyone to say “I love myself.” Unfortunately, he was not very successful because many of the participants could not say it, and I struggled to say it myself. Leon offered a reason for why he couldn’t do it:

I can’t say that right now because I don’t love myself. There are a lot of things I can do better and a lot of things I don’t like about myself or my body… And until I get those things figured out it and change my body it is hard for me to say I love myself.

I remember thinking to myself as I left the session about what Leon said and why I struggled so much to say it as well. I wrote the following in my reflective journal, “Why do I and other men struggle with accepting our bodies? What can me and other men do to have more confidence in our bodies and who we are as men?” In the end, it really just comes down to every man striving to be the best version of himself, both mentally and physically, and not the best version of the stereotypical male. Nevertheless, most men must first learn to accept and master their physical identity before they can turn and focus on mastering the deeper aspects of their identity like their feelings and emotions.

**Feelings and Emotions**

Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) psychosocial research reveals that most college-aged men have a misunderstanding of their emotions, and/or poor self-mastery of their feelings and
emotions. What Chickering and Reisser’s research fails to articulate, is that most college men’s misunderstanding and poor self-mastery of their emotions is largely due to their subscription to hegemonic masculine norms. For example, Kilmartin (2007) found that men often struggle with frustration, fear, anger, anxiety, and loneliness as a result of their masculinity yet they fail to ever explore these feelings and emotions. Similarly, the data from the current study shows that most participants had a misunderstanding of their emotions and/or poor self-mastery of them and as a result they often had feelings of frustration, fear, anger, anxiety and loneliness.

In traditional male socialization, Blazina Seetle, and Eddins (2008) find that most men are taught to strive for a near insular mode of existence through self-reliance and/or a wish to keep others at a distance in order to hide their conflicts about their emotions, feelings, and masculinity. Such emotional constriction, which is greatly impacted by a man’s subscription to pervasive masculine norms, can intensify a man’s feelings of loneliness and isolation – a pervasive issue that many of the participants were struggling to navigate. Although the root causes for each man’s feelings of loneliness were different, all ultimately boiled down to an inability to effectively navigate and express their emotions and feelings as a result of their masculine subscriptions.

John said he has struggled with loneliness every week: “Yeah, I think feeling alone is pretty common. I don’t know why. It’s hard to deal with. I mean, I struggle with it every week, and it’s something that I just haven’t been able to figure out. I honestly have no clue.” Leon shared a similar sentiment about loneliness with the group during our Men and Family session, but he was able to pinpoint his feelings of isolation to his inability to deal with his mother’s drug and incarceration issues:

I felt alone a lot through high school. There were a lot of times I have felt alone even when I had a girlfriend especially after my mom went through what she went through. It
kind of put me in a shell… I kind of pushed everyone away. Then, when I wanted to talk, I wanted to vent, I didn’t have anybody to go to. For a while, it just kept me in a shell of not being confident about anything. I quit football. It hurt a lot of times when I was in choir class, where somebody would get a solo over me, or something like that. At that point, my confidence was completely just shot because I was kind of in an emotional state of shock. And this was the first time I really realized what was happening.

From a psychosocial perspective, oftentimes emotions and feelings may need to reach intense levels before they get noticed or dealt with directly (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), as was the case with Leon. Leon then found Kappa Omega, which he credits for not only washing away the feelings of loneliness he had in high school, but also for openly accepting him and his emotional flaws and baggage.

Similarly, David, who spoke up very little during our sessions, emotionally poured himself and his feelings of isolation out to the group:

Oh God. Alone? All the time. I can’t talk about anything with anybody. If I talk about anything, it’s going to offend someone. I’m tired; I’m always tired. Like, if I don’t talk a bunch to my girlfriend, she’s offended. I have to stay up late on the phone with her till 1:00am, but I have to work at 5:00am. So I can’t say I’m tired, ‘cause then she’s like, ‘You don’t love me.’ I can’t talk about anything like this with my mom, because she gets so offended because she feels like I’m saying she’s failed as a mom. And then I’m just not comfortable talking about it with other people ‘cause I’m like, I don’t want you to judge me. I don’t necessarily talk about my parents and what my life is because that makes them look bad. So, I don’t do that. I just hold everything in.

But what prompted him to open-up and share all this with the group? Maybe, it was because he experienced an environment in which he felt comfortable enough to share the issues he was dealing with and because ManTalk is intentional in its purpose to give men the opportunity to discuss their feelings and emotions.

Kilmartin (2007) declares, “The person who is able to reveal his or her thoughts and feelings to others has the opportunity to express the self, receive social support, gain insight into the self, understand his or her emotional nuances, and form close relationships” (p. 149).

Because so few of the participants had previously been given the appropriate avenues in which to
reveal their inner most feelings and emotions with others and get support back, they seemed to fully take advantage of the time they had in *ManTalk* to do so. Leon admitted, “If I didn’t have *ManTalk* and this opportunity to get all of this off my chest, I am sure I would still be an emotional, emotionless mess.” For Jared, this experience helped him realize the importance of talking through his emotions, even if it is the harder and more difficult route:

I feel like I am more in touch with my emotions and other guys are too. Because I’m pretty sure that before *ManTalk* most guys in this group did not really talk about their feelings with other people. It’s pretty much something that you just accept and you just get over. It doesn’t matter. You’re just going to get over it anyway, so why talk about it now when it’s not going to matter, it’s just going to make that friend think more about it too. So why put that burden on somebody else too. I think we all realize that is just an excuse and we need to do a better job at accepting and talking through our emotions.

The findings show that an awareness of emotions increases when men are given opportunities to learn to identify, accept, and talk through their feelings as normal reactions to life experience. Emotional awareness also increases when men can understand and amend their outdated assumptions, as a result of their subscription to hegemonic norms that often amplify negative feelings or feelings of isolation. Healthier management of emotions ultimately leads to increased self-esteem and self-awareness.

**Self-Esteem and Self-Awareness**

An analysis of the data shows that many of the participants previously struggled with self-esteem/confidence issues and came into the program lacking a true awareness of who they really were. For example, Kimmel (2008) observed that men in *Guyland* exhibit high self-esteem, but often little self-awareness; and he suspects that their self-esteem, so disconnected from actual achievement, is a bit of a fraud. Correspondingly, Edwards (2007) suggests that college men put on a “mask” (fake sense of self) both intentionally by trying to prove their manhood and unintentionally when falling-in to society’s expectations in spite of themselves.
The mask men wear often disguises their true sense of self (esteem and awareness), which is exactly what the findings of the current study confirm. *ManTalk* strives to create intentional opportunities so the participants can critically reflect with one another, thus allowing them to develop a healthier sense-of-self.

For many of the study participants issues related to self-esteem and confidence date all the way back to early childhood. These deep-seated issues have had a major impact on who they are as men, how they act and behave, and why they use their mask as a protection mechanism. Brad reflected, “I’m motivated, but definitely confidence is one thing because when I was in middle school…I was picked on a lot. I have a ton more confidence than I did then, but it’s definitely not all the way up.” Ben’s self-esteem was majorly impacted by his high school experience, he told the group, “[In] high school, I definitely didn’t think I was manly nor was I confident, because I was overweight and chubby. And the girls didn’t like me.” Cale also struggled through high school a little bit, because he did not fit into a specific social group and this had an impact on his overall sense of self. He wrote the following as part of one of his journal entries:

> I never fit in well in high school, because I wasn’t on the sports team. I looked down upon the geeks and nerds, because even though I played online games and stuff, that wasn’t my number one topic of conversation when I went to high school. I didn’t fit in with the skaters. I didn’t want to go and talk to the Goths. They scared me. So ya, my confidence was definitely impacted because there was not a social group that I could really attach myself to.

Childhood and adolescence is a difficult time for a majority of men, especially since they are in still in the process of defining who they are. It is even harder for those men that may not represent the dominant discourse as a result of their sexuality and/or physical limitations. Darren, who came out as gay in high school was always a little different than the other men in his classes and at his school. For that reason he has been teased and made fun of ever since
middle school, and the teasing has continually gotten more aggressive and mean-spirited. He pointed out the following with the group during our *Men and Sexuality* discussion:

> It started with things like, ‘You’re kind of weird.’ And then it went from, weird to fruity, and then from fruity to gay. Then they started saying GAY because gay means happy, and being GAY was different than gay. And so then it went from that to, like, in middle school and high school when they just started saying ‘faggot’. And that’s kind of what it has been until probably even now.

Ben, who was most recently chapter president, has not only struggled with body image issues, he has also struggled to overcome a significant stutter he has had since childhood. Although his ability to deal with his stutter has gotten better over time, he says that it has majorly impacted his self-esteem and confidence – even to this day:

> I mean, stuttering has always been like a confidence drainer, because to this day, whenever I start a speech and everybody’s looking at me, I choke up. I know everybody stutters when they’re nervous, but I stutter all the time, even when I’m not nervous, and so it makes people think that I’m nervous. It makes people view me a different way, and I’ve always been afraid to express my thoughts until recently. Again, it’s a confidence issue. I wasn’t confident when I was young, so to this day I’m still kind of dealing with it because of habits I picked up when I was younger.

While I am not sure of the exact cause of Ben’s stutter, I was told by other men in the group that it started due to a traumatic event that occurred during his childhood. Ben admits that coming to college and meeting new people helped him become more confident with being himself, even if he was still struggling with his body and stutter. During our first interview, Ben told me: “It’s hard to be yourself when you don’t know who you are and/or those are the things that make you who you are.” Ben does partially credits his *ManTalk* experience as a catalyst in his new-found self-esteem and confidence, “Most definitely. I’ve just noticed I’m prouder of being different instead of hesitant. I’m not second-guessing myself anymore or comparing myself to everyone. I am more aware of who I am.” *ManTalk* served as a catalyst for getting Ben to stop comparing
himself to others and instead got him to begin relying on his own internal standards. As a result, Ben developed a more positive sense of self-worth.

Through his ManTalk journey, John, who had a tendency to be negative and pessimistic with his outlook on life and himself, was able to see just how damaging this outlook has been. During the last ManTalk session he commented:

Self-awareness has definitely improved. I think ever since starting this, I have just become more aware of just how I act around everybody and how negative I have been. I use to be negative in my thinking in how I would tell myself things were going to go. Again, it is like that confidence and positive thinking thing that’s really helped me improve my self-awareness. And I’ve also realized how good that I’ve had it and that I’ve taken things for granted and I really need to appreciate what I have.

As John worked diligently in the cultivation and establishment of his identity, he began to change his self-deprecating inner messages to more self-supportive talk. Most people’s self-talk is roughly 95% negative (Selvarajah, 2000), and many college-aged men like John have fallen prey to this destructive habit. Fortunately, John was able to recognize the impact of his negative self-talk and find a new level of awareness through his ManTalk experience.

For other men, ManTalk helped them to see through the smoke and mirrors they had put up in their own lives to distract them from really getting in touch with their inner-self. Being self-aware is a common problem for men who adhere to the dominant discourse of masculinity. Leon wrote the following in one of his journal entries: “I felt like, before ManTalk, I had a misconception, of my confidence. I guess I technically wasn’t as competent as I thought I was. There were a lot of things I personally hid from others and from myself.” Fortunately, for Leon and others through their ManTalk experience they were able to deconstruct the invisible walls that they had built up over the years that have kept them from being the men they truly are. Going into the program, Connor had thought everything was fine in his life, but through the program he was able to really dig into those things that had been eating at him that he had
subdued for so many years. He explained, “I’ve gained a deeper sense of awareness because before I thought everything was fine… But, I began to realize I had subconsciously subdued things that I didn’t want to talk about. And so, talking about them opened me back up.”

However, Cale probably provided the best example of the formation of new-found awareness and sense-of-self as a result of his ManTalk experience.

(Pre-Interview) You probably already know this from what I’ve already said, but I think what I struggle the most with is – I’m not happy with who I am, so I always feel like I have to change it for the better of whatever I’m doing. So when it comes to image, social appearance, etc…, I feel like whatever is the norm, whatever is hip, I have to be that, so I will spend ungodly amounts of money on designer clothing, even though I only make $4,500.00 a summer when I don’t work in college or anything. I’ll go out, and even though I don’t smoke, because my Dad got cancer from smoking, I have a $75.00 humidor with ten Monte Cristos in it that I just pull out on a special occasion with my polo and khakis, hat, and glass of liquor, just to look boss, because that’s just what I’m supposed to do. So I think that if I can find out who I am as a person a little better, that might be able to help my wardrobe, for one, but it’ll help me in life a lot more.

(Post-Interview) I think my level of self-awareness has definitely changed, as well as my outlook about myself. I’ve become a little more optimistic with my view of myself… I know my faults. I know my pros. And after ManTalk I was able to turn a lot of these faults into a foundation, something I could bring to the table, as well as build upon. So I think… my outlook has really changed and I have become more self-aware while also gaining an awareness of others. Hopefully, now I can start being a little happier with just being Cale.

A challenge for Cale, coming into the program, was that he was constantly confusing his self-esteem with his self-image, a common confusion for many people. Self-image forms as a result of comparisons you make between yourself and those around you (Selvarajah, 2000). Sadly, a man’s self-image can often become negative as they can usually find someone better than them at almost everything. Because Cale was constantly comparing himself to others he never developed a positive self-esteem and or a healthy sense of awareness as a man. Through this experience Cale was able to begin the process of developing a healthier identity and self-esteem. As Cale and others learned to more fully accept their identity, they developed what Chickering
and Reisser (1993) call a “Growing sense of self worth” or “Peaceful inner self” (p. 200). As a program *ManTalk* strives to help men find that inner-piece which comes from increasing levels of self-worth, self-esteem, and self-awareness – ultimately leading to a more critical understanding of their masculinity.

**A New Understanding of Masculinity**

The findings provide clear evidence that many of the participants developed a new understanding of their masculinity – a deeper understanding – as a result of their experience in the *ManTalk* program. Following the guidance of Kimmel and Davis (2011) *ManTalk* strives to help participants in developing a deeper understanding of the construction their gender so they have a more detailed roadmap for making self-authored choices that stand against the standards of masculinity which have been unreflectively absorbed and socially reinforced, and it also empowers them to challenge institutionalized hegemonic norms that alienate men from themselves and other people. Many of the participants began to deconstruct the dominant discourse for the first time in their lives as a result of this experience. Most began to wrestle with the concept of multiple masculinities and how they see and understand their own masculinity. A number of the participants moved from a monolithic, black-and-white definition and understanding of masculinity to more of a relativistic viewpoint. Reaching a more critical consciousness of masculinity and its impact is exactly what *ManTalk* is set up to accomplish, but even I was surprised by just how drastically different the participants’ viewpoints and understanding of masculinity evolved over the ten-week period.

For some men, *ManTalk* helped them to see through the holes of the *Boy Code* and guy code and gave them an opportunity to deconstruct the dominant discourse of masculinity for the first time. In our second interview Ben noted, “You know, I think it’s obvious that the American
concept of masculinity, is being, like, White, muscular, and heterosexual, but that might not be always true…I mean look at me, I don’t represent any of those things.” As a result of being able to deconstruct the dominant discourse Ben felt liberated from the pressures that he and others around him had put on himself to live up to the traditional standards of masculinity. Leon was also able to better see how the dominant discourse distorted his views of men and masculinity: He told me, “So many people’s masculinities don’t really reflect the American idea of masculinity. Like, a homosexual man isn’t less masculine than a straight man. You know, sexuality has no impact on masculinity. They have the same strength and emotions I do.”

Throughout this experience Ben, Leon, and others in the group were able to begin deconstructing the outdated codes of modernized masculinity and in so doing they unwrapped a critical consciousness they never had before.

As a program, ManTalk also aims to help men take off the masculinity “blinders” that have prohibited them from becoming their authentic self and accepting other men as authentic – regardless of the discourse they subscribe to. The emerging data provides proof that ManTalk helped many of the participants take off their “blinders” and in so doing they began to realize how their masculinity intersects with all aspects of their identity, including their race, gender, sexual orientation, body image, feelings and emotions, and their overall self-esteem and awareness. For example, during Cale’s second interview he commented, “Everything we do has to do with masculinity, no matter what the act is, how you dress, how you compose yourself, how you walk, like every little thing.” During our first interview he mainly talked about how masculinity has to do with confidence and leadership, but the above statement provided evidence that he had a deeper and better understanding of how masculinity plays into everything men do. No longer was it something that he couldn’t really understand and grasp; rather, it was now
something that he had begun to critically examine on a daily basis. Trey had a similar response during his last interview: “I have more of an idea now of how masculinity affects each part of my life…being a man [to me] doesn’t, especially mean being just strong anymore.”

As men develop psychosocially, Chickering and Reisser (1993) found that they begin to move from a state of absoluteness to a state of relativity. An examination of the comments Trey made during our second interview and a comparison of these comments with how he described masculinity during our first interview show his movement from absoluteness to relativity in regards to his understanding of masculinity. During our last interview he said:

I just see [masculinity] more as in like an abstract concept — that differs with each person because, like, with Jared and Trey, their idea of masculinity isn’t the same as mine or, you know, Darren’s or what not. But, it’s always there. It’s always lingering. And even if we don’t have it on the forefront of our minds, it’s always that subconscious thought that, you know, that’s maybe why you made that decision is ‘cause you didn’t want to look less masculine’. So, I just – it’s just opened eyes of how masculinity actually does play a role into our daily lives.

This definition of masculinity and understanding lays in stark contrast to what Tyler said in his first interview, “For me masculinity is…about I guess how smart you are…and your physical well-being.” In analyzing Tyler’s pre- and post- comments regarding masculinity it seems apparent that his ManTalk experience served as a catalyst for helping him begin to see masculinity as more of a relativistic concept instead of just a one size fits all, black-and-white concept. He now understands that masculinity looks and feels different for every man, and that masculinity is something that is impacting him at every moment of every day even if he doesn’t always see or understand it. Tyler is not the only one who seemed to develop and accept a more relative concept of masculinity. Brad told the group at our last session, “I think people just have their own personal masculinity. I guess I came into it [thinking masculinity] is the same for everyone, but now I know it’s more of a personal journey.”
The data from the study also provides further affirmation to Kimmel and Messner’s (2007) argument that the meaning of masculinity is not constant over the course of a man’s life but will change as he grows and matures. It just so happens that ManTalk can serve as a conduit for accelerated identity growth and masculine understanding. The growth, maturity, and more critical understanding of masculinity gained by participants was simply a byproduct of them having the opportunity to become more in-touch with who they are as men, them being challenged to think about how they have defined and learned about masculinity, them hearing how others understand and struggle with their own masculine intersections, and them having the opportunity to hear others’ stories and have critical conversations.

Summary

The focus of this chapter is how the participant’s understood their masculinity and its intrapersonal intersections and how through the ManTalk experience they came to better understand their masculine self and overall identity. The findings support the argument of researchers like Connell (1985, 1987, 2001), Kimmel (2008), and Kilmartin (2007) that a man’s masculinity is ever-changing and evolving and that it has a significant impact on how a man comes to understand all aspects of his identity. For the most part, the data shows that participants had spent little time thinking about their masculinity, about where they learned it, about the ways in which they perform it, and about how it intersects with other aspects of their identity prior to this experience. Many of the ManTalk sessions were spent giving the participants an opportunity to wrestle with questions such as: What is my cultural heritage and what impact does it have on my masculinity? How do I understand my gender and sexual orientation as a man? How comfortable am I with my physical well-being and body image as a man? How do I understand my feelings and emotions and how does my masculinity intersect
with my emotional well-being? How does my masculinity impact and intersect with my self-esteem and overall self-awareness?

*ManTalk*, as a male-specific program, provided participants with an intentional opportunity to talk about and wrestle with their masculinity and its intersection with the multiple layers of their identity. As existing research illustrates, when men are not intentional about understanding their masculinity and its intersections it continues to remain invisible to them and others – which is how the dominant discourse gets dominant and perpetuates itself. The findings suggest that the *ManTalk* experience helped many of the participants develop a new and deeper understanding of their masculinity – one that is more critical in nature and recognizes how masculinity impacts and intersects with all aspects of a man’s identity. Through a critical pedagogical framework that empowered dialogue and reflection the men came to collectively learn that, “Masculinity comes in many forms and packages and these multiple masculinities are informed, limited, and modified by race, ethnicity, class background, sexual orientation, and personal predilections” (Tarrant & Katz, 2008, p. 10). What's more, much of a man’s understanding of himself, his masculinity, and his identity impact and is impacted by his relationships with others – which is discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

MASculinity AND RELATIONSHIPS

Through relationships students learn lessons about how to express and manage their feelings, how to rethink first impressions, how to share on a deeper level, how to resolve differences, and how to make meaningful commitments (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). However, the masculine focus on hyperindependence and emotional constriction can make relationships with others difficult to navigate for some men (Kilmartin, 2007), as was the case with many of the participants in the study. Because so many college men struggle navigating their relationships several of the ManTalk sessions are focused specifically on the topic of masculinity and relationships. The intersection of masculinity and relationships was a major theme that emerged from the data and as a result of the men’s conversations throughout the ManTalk sessions. The focus of this chapter is an analysis of the participants’ most significant and impactful relationships, all of which have been impacted by the participants’ and society’s subscription to hegemonic masculine norms. The chapter also provides a lens for examining how the ManTalk program helped participants better understand and make sense of their different relationships and the impact masculinity has on these varying relationships. The theme of masculinity and relationships is broken down by the participant’s most impactful relationships: familial relationships (father-son, mother-son), male-female relationships (platonic, hooking-up, romantic and committed), and the male-male relationship (non-fraternal, fraternal, and ManTalk).

Familial Relationships

The relationships that a young boy forms with his parents as a child and that continues to develop, grow, and evolve as they mature into a man is vitally important in how they come to
understand themselves as men and how they come to understand and perform their masculinity. While some scholars (Kilmartin, 2007; Pollack, 1999) would argue that the father-son relationship is the most important and impactful relationship in a man’s life, the mother-son relationship cannot be overlooked. What follows is a critical look at the sub-themes within familial relationships: the father-son relationship, the mother-son relationship, and the impact each has had on the participants and their resulting masculinity.

**Father**

The father-son relationship (or lack thereof) is probably the most significant and impactful relationship in a man’s life. The father-son relationship is also the most complicated and troublesome of all relationships (Kilmartin, 2007) and the relationship that teaches a man the most about his masculinity and what masculine social norms to follow as he grows up (Pollack, 1998). Although warm, affectionate feelings for the father predominate for most men, there can also be feelings of disappointment for the lack of a father’s time, affection, and approval (Garfinkel, 1985). Bly’s (1991) *Father Hunger* and Lee’s (1991) *The Wound* are terms that have often been used to refer to the lack of connection that a lot of young men can feel toward their father.

One of the major findings of the study within the context of the father-son relationship relates to the *Hunger* or *Wound* that many of the participants had with their father growing up or from the sheer lack of a relationship with their father. The disconnection and resulting anger a lot of the participants had with the fathers became increasingly evident through the interviews and the initial *ManTalk* sessions. Chase talked about his relationship with his father and the overarching impact of fathers:
Yeah, it has a huge effect, and it’s weird, because a lot of guys in America don’t have father figures and/or don’t have really good ones… and that has a huge impact. That’s why a lot of men today are really messed up. It has definitely affected me a lot.

For the most part though, the participants’ issues with their father resulted from what they perceived to be a lack of love and affection, a lack of guidance and support, the case of just too little too late, a fractured relationship as a result of one life-altering mistake/event, and/or from a father that just wasn’t perfect. Each of these relational issues can be directly tied back to their fathers’ subscriptions to pervasive masculine norms and its constriction on their abilities to provide the love, support, and emotional guidance the participants were looking for as young men.

Some of the participants’ pain and anger comes from a desire for more love and affection from their fathers, something that they did not always get growing up. These men just wanted their fathers to say, “I love you” or “I am proud of you” a little more. Unfortunately, affection and reassuring words were not as forthcoming as some of the participants would have liked. In one of the sessions Darren told the group, “I’ve never heard him really say right out, ‘I love you.’ I’ve never, never, never, heard that. And I know he does because he shows me through his actions, but those three words I’ve never heard him say.” Darren went on to talk about how the lack of affection from his father has impacted him as a man, his self-esteem, and his relationship with his father. Leon’s story is similar, for he too longed to hear his dad tell him that he was proud of him:

Coming to college I felt like I never even knew how much I meant to my dad or if he was ever proud of me. And then I get a text from my stepmom saying that he was crying in the car after dropping me off at school freshman year. I kind of just did not even care. Because ‘you are saying that you are proud of me now, but the last sixteen years that I lived with you…you never once told me that you were proud of me.’ And I just always felt like I was doing things on my own never knowing if it was right or wrong in my dad’s eyes.
Many fathers, like Darren’s and Leon’s, feel passionately about getting involved with their sons and showering them with affection, but their masculinity severely inhibits their abilities to develop a close relationship with their son and makes them feel nervous and unsure about how to convey feelings of love (Pollack, 1998). Like most college men navigating the dichotomy of newfound independence with their need for constant reinforcement, Darren and Leon came to college struggling to overcome the emotional dependence they had on their fathers. For most of Darren and Leon’s young lives they simply wanted to be loved, guided, and supported by their fathers but now as they become more independent their need for their father’s affection, reassurance, and approval is diminishing. As men grow and develop on the psychosocial spectrum, they are forced to separate themselves from their parents and the constant need for their approval, and instead must begin to develop more self-sufficiency – which Darren and Leon have been striving to do.

For others, the disconnection they feel with their father did not develop over a lifetime; rather, it was a result of one significant event. Tyler was the only participant in the group that did not drink alcohol, nor has he ever. While this is a major life decision that very few men make, especially college-aged men in a fraternity, Tyler made this decision after being severely traumatized by his own father’s drinking. He remembers the evening this like it was yesterday:

The reason I don’t drink is because one night right before I got my learner’s [permit], my dad had too many long islands from Applebee’s and I don’t know how we made it home. I just remember the latter half of getting home and I remember things just weren’t feeling right. I was scared. And then when we got home – before we go into our driveway we have this big hill and it levels off on the second house on the right and we barely made it up the big hill and then my dad starts puking out the window. It’s completely disgusting. I have never seen puke this color. I was – I think I was like…15 and it’s terrible and he pulls into the driveway and stops and he’s like, ‘Just go inside,’ and he stayed outside for like half an hour, an hour I guess just puking his guts out which was terrible. I remember when I woke up the next morning I went in the bathroom and I could still see puke in the shower and kind of on the toilet… And then I see a lot of people when we go out kind of do the same thing and lose control of stuff. I just hate not being in control of myself.
Although Tyler and his father have a good relationship today, he is still impacted by his father’s lack of control on that memorable night. For Tyler, he said, “It is easy to forgive but hard to forget.” Tyler, unlike most men his age, has been able to use this traumatic event not as a crutch, but as a catalyst for making smart decisions in his own life.

Yet, most of the men’s so-called Wound was simply a result of dealing with a father who hasn’t quite been perfect, who hasn’t always demonstrated healthy masculine behavior, who hasn’t always been the best husband, who hasn’t spent as much time with his kids as he could have, who hasn’t figured out how to manage his emotions properly, and who hasn’t quite figured out how to empower his children rather than emasculate them. Then again, most young men, regardless of how good or bad their relationship is with their father, want and desire more from this relationship. Just as there is often times an unachievable standard to live-up to for most men, there is also that same unattainable standard for most fathers that is placed on them by their sons.

An example of the fatherly frustration as a result a father who wasn’t quite perfect or who didn’t manage his emotions properly, Rye had this to say, “My dad is just an ass. I mean he works and pays the bills. But then he hits my brother for dropping a piece of pizza on the ground.” He later added, “[My dad’s] ego is just so huge, and he has a short fuse. He always says he is going to change, but after 2-3 weeks he fucks-up again, doesn’t apologize, and then puts everyone else through this inconvenience.” Chase also suffered from his father’s lack of emotional control, which was then followed by his father’s vanishing act (five year tour of duty in Iraq) during his critical childhood years. Chase wrote in his journal:

He didn’t know how to handle relationships with his family at home. He put me through so much shit. He used to call me fat, a mama’s boy, and everything else in the book.
And then he...he just vanished and was in Iraq (Army) – from like 5th grade to 10th grade. It’s kind of hard to develop a relationship with someone when they aren’t present.

For Leon, he has been left wanting more from his father because he feels like his father neglected him for other relationships and also failed to teach him the things a man should know. In a journal entry he wrote this about his dad: “[He] would come home from work and yell and cuss at me for not fixing something that was already broken or that I broke. Well the truth is, he never taught me. And it’s just so annoying.” What are these mythical teachings that fathers are suppose to teach their sons? According to Trey, there are a variety of things fathers are supposed to instinctively teach their son and he feels like he missed out on all these lessons. The lack of fatherly guidance and his father’s emotional aggressiveness has also left him feeling disconnected:

He neglected to teach me how to tie a tie, how to drive a car, and stuff like that that that dad’s are supposed to do with their sons. Plus, I feel like I don’t know how to properly share or express my emotions as a result of my father never really teaching me, and he did not know how to control his...which is why sometimes he would hit me and my brother when we messed up. One time it got so bad my mom had to call the cops because my brother and father were physically fighting.

A healthy relationship between a father and son does not happen automatically; rather, it takes hard work, communication, acceptance, and most importantly forgiveness. Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) fourth vector, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, requires that men learn how to become more tolerant, more accepting, and love with unconditional regard – something that is very much needed as a man master’s his relationship with his father. Not content to allow the participants to just bitch about their fathers and/or their bad father relationships, the Men and Family session focused on helping the men see and understand how they might improve their fatherly relationships through honest dialogue, acceptance, and forgiveness. The remaining part of the session was spent talking about how and why it was
important for the participants to have an honest conversation with their fathers about what they want and need, about how the participants could learn how to accept their fathers’ flaws, imperfections, and previous mistakes, and how through forgiveness they could move forward in having a mature interpersonal relationship with their father.

I wrote the following thoughts about our Men and Family session and forgiveness in my researcher reflection journal afterwards:

When discussing the father-son relationships you could tell there was a lot of pent up anger, sadness, emotion, frustration amongst all the men. This talk really seemed to hit a note with each and every one of them in a different way. I shared a lot of my personal story…including the affair my father had and the passing of my brother. This led us directly into a great discussion about acceptance, forgiveness, and its importance in moving forward as a man. Whether it was a non-existent father, a father that left the family, or an emotionally abusive father, we talked about how acceptance and forgiveness allows us to move forward in having a better relationship – a new relationship. Some of the men felt that forgiveness is something that people must ask for over and over again before they will even think about it. Some of the men even argued that some things in life are just not acceptable or forgivable. However, most of the men came to understand that tolerance, acceptance, and forgiveness are first step in healing their Wound.

Although there wasn’t enough time for all the participants to fully dive into the issue of honesty, acceptance, and forgiveness within their father-son relationship, I challenged each of them to spend more time critically reflecting about this topic as part of their journal assignment. Chase wrote in his journal about how his spiritual journey has given him the strength, courage, and fortitude to realize that forgiveness is the best way in healing his father-son relationship:

As you know I do not have a great relationship with my father. But, recently I forgave him because I’m becoming a good Christian. God found me, and then I forgave him, and our relationship now is way better than it’s ever been in my whole life, so I’ve got to be thankful for that.

Tyler wrote in his journal how he has dealt with and healed his relationship with his father after the “drinking” incident in high school:
I can’t believe it was as easy as it was with my father. I simply just got fed up and went to him this summer and explained to him how it affected me and asked him to stop. And he really just stopped smoking and drinking. I mean he’d be a social smoker, but he loved his Budweiser and Jim Beam. But I don’t think he has had a beer or cigarette since mid-June. Now I am even getting him to work out and get in better shape. It’s like we have a whole new relationship.

Rye wrote about how acceptance and forgiveness might not really ever change his father, but it will at least allow him to move-on and move-forward:

I'm going to try to just be more accepting and forgiving of my father, but I can't say it'll be soon. It's not that I never had good times with my dad, but the way he treated my mom and brother made it hard to see him as a good man. He's a hard working man, but he's a lazy father. I think I just have to understand that it is possible to forgive him, but that to expect him to change is unrealistic. I just need to make my peace with him and move on.

Ultimately, the father-son relationship should be a constant source of love and companionship, but it can also be a source of frustration and disappointment. The problem is that most men, including many of the participants, have never really examined how the relationship has impacted who they are as men. This is par for the course as most college-aged men are still individuating and negotiating these relationships, learning to manage their emotions, becoming less dependent on their parents and more dependent on themselves, and establishing their identity – all of which are developmental competencies that Chickering and Reisser (1993) describe in their psychosocial development model. Through open dialogue most of the participants began to realize that their fathers are all extremely similar and somewhat imperfect, and that a lot of college-aged men have issues within their father-son relationship. Although some of the men may have peeled back the first few layers of this vitally important relationship previously, few had moved any deeper into critically analyzing their relationship with their father. The intentional reflection time in ManTalk provides an avenue to better equip participants in understanding the impact of the father-son relationship, the role masculinity plays
in this relationship, what they could and should expect from their fathers, how acceptance and forgiveness may allow them to begin the healing process with their fathers, and how to improve their father-son relationship moving forward.

**Mother**

The father-son relationship can sometimes be so rigid and tough that the mother-son relationship often times becomes an escape for men and the pressures of their father. An analysis of the data shows that those men that did not actively talk about their relationship with their mother, were the participants that seemed to have a fairly healthy and loving relationship with their mother. Several of the men in the study however did not have the benefit of a positive mother-son relationship and they were extremely vocal about it during the *Men and Family* session. The major findings within this sub-theme focus on the impact of a difficult/negative mother-son relationship and its effect on the participant’s masculinity and identity as men.

There is a big difference between not wanting to talk to your mom as compared to not being able to understand your mom or have her understand you. A language barrier keeps a lot of first-generation American men from developing a healthy interpersonal relationship with their parents. For first-generation Americans, often times, their parents have come over to the United States later in life and as a result English is their second language, if they choose to learn any English at all. Trey said the inability to effectively communicate with his mother has severely hindered his relationship with her. “My mom, she is Vietnamese and I can only communicate to her in Vietnamese. It’s a major language barrier, I feel. I can speak Vietnamese, but I can’t fully convey how I feel all the time. It’s kind of hard,” he told us during our session on *Men and Diversity*. Since Trey’s father is pretty much out of the picture he has no-one to truly share all aspects of his life with. He later said, “You want to share the most with the person you care the
most, your parents, and your mom. But I can’t really.” As a result of the communication barrier between Trey and his mother, he has turned to God, because it is the one relationship where he can fully be himself and share all aspects of himself with another being.

A lot of young men struggle to connect with their mom because they simply don’t respect the choices their mothers makes with regard to living a healthy life-style and/or what they do with drugs and alcohol. For example, Tyler struggles with his mom’s drinking and smoking:

Mom drinks and smokes a lot, and some days she’ll come home from work and have at least one beer. On the weekends she will have a lot more if she’s out in the garden or drinking with friends. I can’t – oh God, I can’t stand that at all.

As a result, Tyler doesn’t have a very close relationship with his mom. He does not respect her choices and he feels like she is throwing her life away one beer or cigarette at a time. While he has had some success getting his dad to change his lifestyle he has yet to make inroads with his mother.

For Leon, his mother’s drug habit which has led to jail-time has severely crippled his relationship with her. He shared his mother’s story with the group and its impact on him during our Men and Family session, explaining:

She got arrested for drug possession and was using drugs at the times she got arrested. Then after she got out she had broken off of her probation and went back to jail. But, I didn’t know that she was already on probation. So she went to jail for another year. I had no idea. I didn’t even know. There were a lot of times, when her phone would be off. I kept calling and calling. I called her phone, because there were times when we wouldn’t talk for a few months or something like that. But it never had been as long as it had. It was like, ‘why haven’t I heard from my mom?’ Then, my aunt calls me one day. She was like, ‘I just want you to know that your mom’s been in jail for the last six months.’ I was like, ‘what?’ I hadn’t heard from her at all. Then she still had about another six months to go at that point. So it was just devastating. It just really put me in a really tight shell to be like, I don’t know who to trust. I don’t know who to talk to, who to believe. It was just ugly at that point in time. It affected me a lot.

Though Leon’s mom is out of jail now, they still have a very complicated and tough relationship. The troubled relationship with his mother has had a major trickle-down effect on Leon’s
masculine identity and his ability to have honest, intimate, committed, and fulfilling relationships with other women (as discussed later).

David’s complicated relationship with his mother required him to grow up fast and become a man before he even was ready. Even though he was primarily raised by his mother, their relationship has been anything but easy. In many ways he has had to look out and take care of his mom, not the other way around. He pointed out, “We’ve been rocky since my girlfriend got pregnant at sixteen. She has always held me at this higher standard. So when my girlfriend got pregnant, she was like, ‘I would expect this from someone else. But not you.’” So at that time he moved out, got a full-time job, and has pretty much taken care of himself ever since. After patching their relationship at the end of high school, David’s mother, who had a well-paying job at the time, said she wanted to cover his tuition costs to the University of Pennsylvania (which accepted him). But things hit a huge snag when his mom reneged on her promise to help him pay for school and he had to make the last minute decision to attend Eastern State. It got worse for David when he found out his mom was in massive debt and had been living way beyond her means. He explained:

My mom makes over $100,000.00 a year. But she is just horrible with money. House has been foreclosed many times, credit card debt, car payments, you name it. She has had this bad debt accumulating for like fourteen years. And I never knew about any of this. So I had to man-up and help her get her finances in control, I had to help her financially for a while since I had been smart with my own money. And even though I am still pissed that I never got to go to UPenn, because she screwed up, I know it is my responsibility as a son to take care of my mom and help her get through this.

It is for this reason and several others related to his mother, that David really never got to be a kid. He never got to just enjoy high school and play sports. Nor has he really gotten to live the stereotypical college lifestyle like most of his fraternity brothers have enjoyed. Unlike his fraternity brothers, he has had to work a full-time job since he was sixteen to support himself and
his mom. He has had to not only take care of all of his tuition and bills, but he has also had to help his mom for the past several years as she worked to get her bills and financial affairs straight. The burden has filled David with a lot of resentment and pent up anger. He often struggles to be empathetic to others, because their stories and trials just seem so trivial to him compared to the challenges he has faced.

The mother-son relationship is vitally important to a young man and when it is detrimental and/or incomplete, Like Trey, Leon’s and David’s relationships, it has a lasting impact on a man both emotionally and psychologically. As a program, ManTalk provides all participants with a chance to more closely examine their mother-son relationship and assists them in more critically understanding how the issues that often arise within the mother-son relationship regularly play out via their romantic and platonic relationships with women.

**Male-Female Relationship**

For most heterosexual men, their early years are spent being afraid of literally touching women and/or being called one – most of their young adult life chasing, hooking-up, and dating women – and the rest of their life trying to find and settle down with the woman of their dreams. With little guidance or direction most college-aged men, so caught up with their own internal struggles, fall short in mastering their male-female relationships. The participants of the study were no different, as they too had many trials, tribulations, questions, and misinformed beliefs when it came to their relationships with women – whether it was a platonic friendship, a random hook-up, or even in a romantic and committed relationship – all of which are explored next.

**Platonic Friendships**

The male-female relationship often looks and feels very different than the male-male relationship, even when it is only platonic. In the current study, many of the participants’ cross-
sex friendships tended to be more nurturing (Sapadin, 1988), and emotional and personal (Werking, 1997) than their same-sex friendships which tended to be relatively competitive in nature (Rubin, 1985). Knowing this, ManTalk focuses on helping participants critically reflect on why their female friendships seem to look and feel so different as compared to their male friendships. During the Men and Relationship session, the participants shared their thoughts and hypothesis’s as to why there are such differences between their cross-sex friendships and same-sex friendships. John explained his thoughts on his female friendships with the group:

  I’m definitely a lot closer with most of my female friends than I am my guy friends. It’s just easier for me to talk to them. I’m still a guy at heart and do every disgusting and typically manly thing… but for some reason I’ve always just had better relationships with my female friends, and it sucks. I hate it even if it is great to be good friends with so many beautiful women, and not just see them as a piece of meat.

  Jesse concurred, and told the group his reasoning: “So for me, when it comes to talking about male concerning issues and stuff that you would usually talk to guys about, I usually don’t and end up just talking to my girls.” Aukett, Ritchie, and Mill’s (1988) research provides an answer as to why men more likely to discuss personal issues and problems with female friends than with a male friend – often times a man can be his authentic-self inside of his female friendships and when he does share his deepest feelings and emotions there is reciprocity, something most men don’t get from male friends.

  Pollack (1998) contends that men’s friendships with women often help them regain access to long-forgotten and repressed aspects of themselves, and help them come out from behind the mask that they wear in most of their male friendships – a finding that held true in the current study. Yet, the male-female friendship is often times threatened by the teasing, praising, and hinting that it is actually more than just a friendship; rather, it is a relationship. Claims that, “We’re just good friends” are often viewed as withholding information, or as an indication of
embarrassment or bashfulness about the sexual content of a cross-sex relationship, which can be very damaging to the overall friendship (Swain, 1992). Leon shared his thoughts on how his male friend’s teasing and hinting has impacted him:

I hate the fact that all my guy friends give me so much shit about my friendships with girls…it’s like just because they know I am a ladies’ man they think that I want to have sex with all my girlfriends. And nothing could be further from the truth.

Leon’s friends aren’t different from most college-aged men in that guys often cannot discern the difference between a man’s cross-sex friendships and relationships, or sometimes they simply fail to understand that friendships with women don’t have to always lead to sex. Often times though, the male-female platonic friendship is the start to a deeper and more serious relationship, even if it is just a hook up, thereby supporting Swain’s (1992) view that the cross-sex friendship is simply a stage of development in the coupling process, rather than as a legitimate relationship in and of itself.

**Hooking Up**

On today’s college campus the hook-up has replaced, and some might argue almost erased, what many of people think of as the traditional relationship and/or the courting that used to occur between two people on their way toward a long-term relationship. Kimmel (2008) declares, “Now hooking up is pretty much all there is, relationships begin and end with sex. Hooking up has become the alpha and omega of young adult romance” (p. 191). Cognizant of the predominance of the hook-up culture on today’s college campus and its negative effects on men’s interpersonal relationships, *ManTalk*, strives to provide men with an opportunity to more closely examine the hook-up culture. Four important findings resulted from our conversations: (a) men use the word “hook-up” in very different ways than women; (b) some participants enjoyed hooking-up and saw it as a means to an end; (c) often alcohol is used as a social
lubricant in the hook-up culture and this can lead to a variety of issues; and (d) some participants had no interest in the hook-up culture and were cognizant of its negative impact on a man’s ability to build healthy relationships in the future.

Before a person can truly understand why men and women choose to hook-up, they must first understand how and why men and women use the word “hook-up” differently. Kimmel (2008) describes the differences in usage by men and women, saying:

When a guy says he ‘hooked up’ with someone, he may or may not have had sex with her, but he is certainly hoping that his friends think he has. A woman, on the other hand, is more likely to hope they think she hasn’t (p. 197).

With this in mind, I prompted the group, during the Men and Relationships session, to think about how they use the word “hook-up” with their male friends to make others believe that they did have sex even when they didn’t. Upon reading Kimmel’s (2008) “hook-up” excerpt, there seemed to be a collective light-bulb moment where it was easy to see that most of the men “got it.” Immediately, they commented: “Wow” “Damn that is so freaking true” and “Ya, that definitely happens, but I have never thought about it in that way before.” John then noted, “I always associated hooking-up with sex. And I definitely know I have said, ‘Yo, I hooked-up with that girl’ hoping that they thought I had sex with that girl, when we actually didn’t.”

Cale was then able to, quite impressively, tie it directly back to the hegemonic norms of masculinity, “So is it therefore more masculine to lie about it and cover it up so that people assume their number goes higher and they more respected as a man because of it.” The unequivocal answer is, “Yes!” That is exactly what a lot of college men do, especially men that subscribe to the notion that “More sex” equals “More manly” and who are trapped as a result of their subscription to the dominant discourse. For some groups of men, particularly fraternity men, their personal conception of masculinity is often so intertwined with how others see them
that hooking up seems to benefit their reputation whereas it has the potential to damages a woman’s. Fraternity men who hook up a lot are considered “studs” while sorority women are seen as “sluts” (Kimmel, 2008). For example, Larry and Leonard were both considered the “players” of the group and they seemed to draw some level of credibility and respect for either hooking-up with a lot of women or at the least lying about it to the other men.

During the *Men and Relationships* session, Larry told the group his reasoning for choosing the hook-up over relationships, saying:

>The way I think of it [the hook-up] is like this…when I go to Capital Ale House and they have like 30 different beers on tap, I get the little tasters so I can taste all the different flavors. Because I want to check that box. And so if I see a cute girl and it looks like it is going to happen, that is great. Because that is an experience I wouldn’t have had otherwise.

Larry was clearly trying to brag about the reasoning and frequency of his hook-ups to the group as a way of posturing, a phenomenon that resonates with existing research. “Hooking up is a way guys communicate with other guys – it’s about homosociality. It’s a way guys compete with each other, establish a pecking order, and attempt to move up in their rankings” (Kimmel, 2008, p. 207). Thankfully, some of the men in group were keen to Larry and his braggadocios behavior.

Even though Leon seems to enjoy the hook-up culture, his hooking up tendencies seemed to be the result of a failed relationship in his past. He reflected: “I guess sometimes I go after girls that are just for fun, something to hold a place. [I’m] not really trying to be in a relationship or nothing like that.” Later in the session he shared more about why he has hooked-up with so many girls as of recent, “There was a girl I dated off and on for two years. She broke my heart twice. I kept a lot of stuff bottled in as a result and I haven’t been able to trust a lot of women since.” The bad breakup has become an emotional scar that has impacted Leon’s masculinity.
and his other relationships. He is so scared of getting hurt again he chooses the route of the hook-up even though he knows it will be less fulfilling. From a psychosocial development perspective, the findings suggest that for Leon to ever have mature interpersonal relationship, he must first develop a better foundation for managing his emotions.

Leonard and Larry’s answers about why they hook-up prompted me to move the discussion towards making a connection between hook-up partners and potential relationships partners. Because as Kimmel (2008) declares, many college men and women choose the route of the hook up because they don’t think they’re ready for a commitment and they just want to hang out and have fun. For example, Leon told the group, “The majority of girls I have hooked-up with are not relationship status or material. I have never had sex with the girls I legitimately want to pursue or have actually dated.” For Leon and some of his other fraternity brothers, there are those women that they hook-up with and then there are women that they date. Sometimes Leon and others will be hooking-up with one woman to fill the time, while they actively are pursuing the woman they actually want to date. The findings in the current study affirm what Kimmel (2008) suggests with regard to differences between men and women and how they see the purpose of hook ups. He posits that hooking up, for guys, is less a relationship path than it is for women – In fact, it serves an entirely different purpose.

The typical college hook-up usually occurs on a Friday or Saturday night and happens after one or both parties have been drinking. In one study, men averaged nearly five drinks before their most recent hookup and women nearly three drinks (Kimmel, 2008). During, the Men and Relationships session and the Men and Alcohol session it became clear that “hooking up under the influence” was pervasive amongst the participants. Rye wasn’t shy about sharing his thoughts about the role alcohol plays in the hook-up culture: “It’s just easier when you have
been drinking; you aren’t as nervous or stiff.” Kimmel (2008) thinks drunkenness and the so-called “liquid courage” that results from drinking is sometimes the only thing that makes men able to withstand some of the potential hookup disasters: rejection, inexperience, and premature ejaculation. Without alcohol a lot of college men, including men in this study, don’t have the interpersonal skills and confidence to interact so freely and unguarded with women.

*ManTalk* strives to help men see the potential consequences of hooking up while under the influence of alcohol, especially since alcohol and the hook-up culture are often connected to increased instances of sexual assault and rape. Given existing data about alcohol it is not surprising that among college male offenders, 64% were using alcohol or drugs prior to the incident (Brecklin & Ullman, 2002) and in 75-80% of cases in which a male rapes or sexually assaults a female college student, the female is intoxicated (Lisak & Miller, 2002). As part of the *Men and Relationships* session the majority of the men in the group shared that they had hooked up with a woman after she had been drinking and/or was intoxicated. What all these men failed to realize or fail to care about, and what *ManTalk* reinforces, is that a woman cannot consent to sex when drunk or intoxicated.

Although the participants may have heard similar messages and received similar education about consent and hooking up upon entering college, often hegemonic masculine norms make it easy for them to forget or not care. The lack of care and concern for women with regards to hooking up is demonstrated by Fisher, Cullen, and Turner’s (2000) research, which found that 25% of college men reported in engaging in sexual activity with a woman that could be considered sexual assault – a statistic that may have held true in the present study based on how many of the participants talked about hooking up with women after one or both parties had been drinking. One participant reflected after the *Men and Relationship* session, “Ya, I guess we
all need to be more careful when it comes to hooking up because even when you think she is consenting…like by her actions…she can’t really if she is drunk.”

But not all college men or fraternity guys are about hooking up and casual sex. Conversely, some of the men in the present study did not really enjoy the hook-up scene and some had never hooked up and have no intention of doing so in the future. The hook-up divide between the participants led to a very heated conversation about the college hook-up culture and its negative impact on men and their future relationships. Chase said, “Everyone brags about how awesome [hooking-up] is and stuff like that, but I’ve been there, and it’s not awesome. I feel horrible about it, because I don’t want that. I want someone. I’d rather practice monogamy. That’s way better.” John felt the exact same way, but was scared to say anything about it beforehand because he was afraid no one else felt the same way. His emotions got to him as he told the group, “Hook-ups are just incredible unfulfilling for me because when it is all said and done I feel lonelier than I did before. Because like someone was just here but now they’re gone and I have nothing to show for it.”

There are a variety of negative consequences of hooking up especially as it relates to the impact on a man’s future relationships, consequences that many of the participants had fail to see previously. Connor was on-point in regard to the long-term negative impact of hook-ups as he frustratingly spoke directly to the guys who were always hooking up:

The way I look at it is…one monogamous relationship for my life is enough and I don’t need to sleep with however many people are out there. I think you have to ask yourself whether or not in the long-term do you want to hook-up with people or do you want to be in a relationship. Because I think that those people that aren’t just looking for the hook-up earlier on will end up in healthier relationships down the line. It’s not about what’s casual, what’s ok, what’s not ok. It’s like how are you setting yourself up for the future. In my opinion if you have sex all the time and demean it and there is no intimacy there, you are kind of damaging yourself for down the line.
The anti hooking up argument posited by Conner during the Men and Relationships session is consistent with Kimmel’s (2008) research showing that hooking up can negatively impact the way one views sex within a committed relationship and the importance it plays into it further down the line. “The hook up culture so dominates campus life that many older guys report having a difficult time making the transition to adult relationships. It’s not just that they’re delaying adulthood – it’s that they’re entering it misinformed and ill prepared” (Kimmel, 2008, p. 192). It is quite difficult for a lot of men navigating Guyland to go from being a “flavor of the week” guy to being a “relationship” guy. As a result, ManTalk strives to make participants more critically aware of the impact their masculinity plays in how and why they choose to hook-up, the consequences of hooking up after consuming alcohol, and the negative effects hooking up can have on their long-term relationships. For some of the men in this study, they already understood the negative impact of just hooking up with random women and were more interested in romantic and committed relationships.

**Romantic and Committed**

Many young men do not get the intimate connection they hope for from many of their same-sex friendships, as a result of their constraining masculinity, thus they have a greater need for intimacy in their romantic relationships. Kilmartin (2007) shares, “The heterosexual relationship becomes the only safe haven from the masculine demands for independence and inexpressiveness, the only place where he can show a ‘softer’ side of himself” (p. 257). An analysis of the data within the context of romantic-committed relationships demonstrates that: the participants had rarely taken the time to think critically about the most important aspects they desired in a partner; the participants in a committed relationship often said this relationship was the most impactful and nurturing; the participant’s committed relationships have been the
relationships that have taught them the most about “real” masculinity and manhood; a long-term committed relationship is not easy, has many ups and downs, and often requires that men master a new love-language.

At the beginning of *Men and Relationships* session, an activity was introduced that gave the participants a chance to discuss those traits that are most important to them in a relationship and/or partner. Their answers are listed in the Table 5.1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Characteristic #1</th>
<th>Characteristic #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Depth</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cale</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Spontaneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chase</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connor</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane</td>
<td>Uplifting</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trey</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Godly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was clearly a lot of overlap amongst the participants’ answers. A major finding from this activity was that almost all of the men seemed to be desperately searching for trust and communication within their romantic relationships. In the follow-up discussions after this activity many of the participants shared that they all sought trust and communication in their romantic relationships because they haven’t gotten the level of trust and communication they had hoped for and seek from their familial relationships and/or from their male friendship, including those relationships with fraternity brothers.
Out of the 12 men that attended the *Men and Relationships* session, five were in romantic and committed relationships: Ben (one year), Brad (two years), Connor (one year), Cale (four-and-a-half months), and David (five years). The data makes it clear that these five men have learned more about themselves and their masculinity via these long-term relationships as compared to any of their other relationships. For some it has also been the healthiest and most impactful relationship they have ever had in their young lives, even more impactful than their familial relationships and male-to-male relationships. Ben admitted the following with the group about his relationship with his girlfriend:

> I think Kayla has definitely shaped me more than some of my brothers have, because she really believes in me, and she knows what I’m capable of. She trusts me. She probably trusts me more than I trust myself. She calls me out when I’m not being confident or I put myself down. She picks me up whenever I fall down, and she’s there for me more than anyone else has ever been there for me. There’s no barriers…I don’t have to impress her. I can just be open.

Tyler agreed with Ben, and told the group, “In all honesty, I have learned more about myself and how to be a man in my relationships with women as compared to any other relationship. But I would have to put more thought into why that is.” Ben and Tyler’s comments and insights in regards to the power of their romantic relationships is supported and consistent with research conducted by Kimmel (2007), Huston and Ashmore (1986), and Kilmartin (2007). Kimmel (2007) found that men have not been socialized to understand and manage their emotional lives except through repression; so they often a feel a “flood” of positive emotions within their romantic relationships, which often times catches them very much off-guard. Huston and Ashmore’s (1986) study showed that men tend to “fall in love” faster than females contrary to the popular belief that women are more emotional and love-hungry. Kilmartin (2007) writes that the level of intimacy in a romantic relationship is likely to be very different
from that of a male’s other relationships, which is likely to be less different from the intimacy level of a female’s other relationships.

The other men in long-term relationships have also learned lot about the in’s and out’s of relationships and how these relationships have impacted and been impacted by their masculinity. Connor said, “When you're not in a relationship, masculinity looks like one thing and when you're in relationship masculinity takes on a whole other level, and I feel like sometimes people aren’t mature enough to see that.” What Connor was trying to say is that he is a different man as a result of his romantic relationship. He is masculine in a way that is different than the type of masculinity most college men are striving for or already embody. Instead of being overly confident, competitive, emotionally constricted, and aggressive he tends to be more emotionally available, self-aware, expressive, and relational. Connor also isn’t interested in hook-ups, drinking every night, and the party scene so he sometimes struggles to relate with the other guys in the fraternity. Connor’s fraternity brothers also sometimes struggle to relate to him because they don’t understand why he doesn’t always hangout or why he puts his girlfriend first. But Connor’s focus on his girlfriend even at the frustration of his friends is not abnormal. For example, Kilmartin (2007) found that the romantic relationship can be so fulfilling that many times a man’s same-sex friends struggle to understand why they seem to be put on the backburner for a woman.

For some of the other men, they have struggled in successfully navigating their romantic and committed relationships, often as a result of their masculinity, though these struggles did provide great learning opportunities for them to grow and develop. Brad has learned that healthy relationships aren’t always easy, “I learned about myself. I learned to be less sarcastic. I learned how to compromise and that it can’t be a one-way street in a relationship. There’s always
struggle in it, but knowing the end result makes it worth it.” Many 18-22 year old men aren’t willing to put in the time and effort to develop a mature interpersonal relationship with a woman, especially when promiscuity and the hook-up culture has turned most young men into creatures of instant gratification. For Brad and a few of the other participants they had the awareness to understand that the end result of a committed relationship is worth the effort and compromise, even though few of them had perfected it. However, the development of mature interpersonal relationship cannot occur until men to begin making lasting commitments that are built on honesty, responsiveness, and unconditional regard.

Although all the other men in romantic relationships had only been in them for a few months to two years, David had been in a relationship with his girlfriend for almost five years. David’s relationship with his girlfriend has been quite volatile over the years and he attributes much of it to his masculinity and inability to know how to have a healthy relationship. When he first started dating his girlfriend in high school he said he was a really angry young man and quite the player. He told the group, “I could have like four girls. I was skinny and in shape and stuff, so I cheated on her all the time, and I didn’t respect her. I did her really wrong when I was younger.” He would later tell his girlfriend that he did cheat, and they worked to move forward together even after his infidelity. Of course, in a five year relationship, things change, people change. In the Men and Relationships session David reflected, “Like now, I strive to be the best – she deserves the world. She’s great to me, and she’s been by my side through everything. I feel like I’m changing myself to be a better man for her.” But the task in front of David was not easy and his inability to express his emotions in a healthy manner is what they argued about the most. “She wishes I could be more emotionally-inclined. She wants to hear that I love her every
day. I say that at night and I’m working on saying it more. But I wasn’t raised like that so it’s hard to be expressive,” he admitted to the group.

It was clear that David was deeply devoted to his girlfriend, but he is still working on being more emotionally intimate and learning how to communicate better. *ManTalk* gave him an opportunity to see himself and his flaws more critically and it helped him realize that he needs to do a better job emotionally connecting with his girlfriend while also making himself vulnerable. David wasn’t the only one struggling to understand the emotional language of his girlfriend. For some of the guys, the struggle of understanding a woman and her emotions and feelings is so hard it derails a relationship before it even starts. Cale frustratingly asserted, “Damn, women are hard to understand sometimes. I am never quite sure what they want. Yes means no. No means yes. It’s like another language.” From a psychosocial perspective, much of Cale’s frustration is the result of his, and most young men’s, inability to thoroughly understand the communication practices of women and speak their language, thus making it hard for him to develop real intimacy.

Developing mature interpersonal relationships with women requires men to strive for, what Bednall (1996) calls *Bilinguality*. He defines this language between the genders, by saying:

> It will be the language which enables them to enter intimately and respectfully into dialogue with females, to learn from that dialogue and to see the feminine perspective as enriching and relevant to their growth as complete males. But they will not forsake their own masculine language. Rather they will learn to be bilingual in gender, able to hear and speak the feminine with the same empathy and comfort as they speak and hear the masculine (Bednall, 1996).

Those men that have mastered this *Bilinguality* tend to be the most successful in their romantic and committed relationships. If only there were a college course or more programs and services similar to *ManTalk* that offered men an opportunity to master this *Bilinguality*, instead of them learning it over a lifetime of mistakes and failures within their male-female relationships.
However, because most men speak the same language – masculinity – the same-sex relationship, often times, is less confusing and overwhelming for men.

**Male-Male Relationship**

Most men say they truly value their male friendships and relationships. Yet, many young men struggle with understanding what true male friendships looks like and what it means to be intimately connected to another man in a non-sexual context. The inability to connect intimately with other men is usually a result of men’s masculinity and their subscription to being stoic, inexpressive, and independent combined with most men’s irrational homophobic fears (Kilmartin, 2007). For many college men, the fraternity experience provides them with an opportunity to develop connections and relationships with other men that are deeper and closer than what they previously have ever had in their lives. As fraternity chapters continue to grow, with some being as large as two-hundred men, a lot of fraternity men are still searching for a deeper connection with their brothers. As a program, ManTalk provides an avenue for the participants to dig deeper into their male friendships, to examine what may be missing, and to reflect on how they can strive to take their male friendships to the next level. The major findings that emerged from the data within the context of the male-male relationship included the comparison and contrasting of the participants’ non-fraternal relationships, fraternal relationships, and their ManTalk relationships.

**Non-Fraternal**

Kimmel (2008) considers the development of a genuine same-sex friendship perhaps the biggest risk a guy can take, it means being strong enough to show vulnerability, independent enough to brave social ostracism, and courageous enough to trust another. Sustaining a long-term same-sex friendship is even harder, because at some point a man may have to connect on a
deeper level – may have to get intimate – may have to talk about their inner-most emotions and feelings. As a result, most of the participants in the study had only one or two really close male friends throughout childhood and high school. Furthermore, the data showed that these “so-called” great non-fraternal friendships have deteriorated over time for one reason or another. For some of the participants it was simply a result of life transitions, for others it was a lack of empathy due to the competitive nature of their same-sex friendships, for a few it was a false sense of conferred intimacy as a result of time spent in engaging in shared activities, and for some it was homophobic fear that resulted in the deterioration of their non-fraternal friendships.

For Ben, his friendship with his best high school friend has faded over the years for reasons he can’t really explain:

We had been best friends from sophomore year in high school until probably sophomore year Eastern State. I mean, we use to hang out every day for every summer. I knew his family. He knew my family. We did everything together, but I still – we had different values. Like – I would think one way, and he would think a different way. Things over the years kind of separated us. While we’re still friends, I can’t interact with him the same way that I interact with a few of my brothers.

When I asked about this relationship Ben could not really articulate why this friendship has deteriorated. Maybe it was distance, maybe it was a change in priorities, maybe it was due to lack of shared interests. Whatever the reason, Ben wishes the friendship hadn’t weakened over time, isn’t quite sure how to even fix it, and now feels like this friendship cannot compare to what he has with his brothers.

Connor has had male friends come and go throughout his life and over time he just seems to have grown apart from a lot of them. He told me, “You think these guys are really good friends and then it’s just like, ‘What are you doing? Who are you anymore?’ So I would say I’ve definitely grown away from a strong percentage of my guy friends from high school.” Often times because young men don’t communicate very well with their male friends they just lose
touch with them over time, as was the case with Ben and Connor. Seidler (1992) makes it clear that this is often not because of anything significant or negative, but simply because men, as a result of their masculinity, make so few demands on their male friendships.

For David, it has been his lack of empathy and the competitive nature that he brings with him into his same-sex friendships that has caused many of his non-fraternal friendships to falter. He told the group:

Oh yeah. If you’re a male, I really don’t know how to console some of my guy friends when they start crying. If you’re a female, it’s fine. But if you’re a male crying, I’m just like, ‘Okay. Fix your stuff.’ I’ll talk to you, and I’ll give you advice. But why do you have to start crying…I was talking to my friend yesterday, and he started crying, I didn’t know what to do. But, I think it has a lot to do with me and how jacked up I am in the head, and I’m really jacked up in the head because it’s hard for me at times to be empathetic to people who complain about situations. You’re working a part time job, and you’re taking 12 credits, and you’re complaining about how your life is horrible. How can I empathize with you crying right now when my life is shit compared to your life? I’m trying to figure out a way to where I can like … I feel like it’s hindering me as a friend – all my hardships.

Because David has had such a troubled life, he fails to be empathetic and to be able to relate to what he sees as his friends minor struggles. He has overcome so much he expects the same of his male friends. He expects them to find solutions, not just bitch about having problems. Many college-aged men, like David, sometimes find it difficult to relate to each other more emotionally or to give support, because they often assume that what is being called for is a solution to a problem (Seidler, 1992). Through conversation and reflection, David and many of the other participants came to realize that the development of mature interpersonal same-sex friendships requires that they first develop a willingness not to judge or condemn others differences, that they become more tolerant and empathetic to other men’s struggles, and that they learn to appreciate the varied background of their male friends regardless of how it compares to their own (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).
During our conversations on the male friendship, there were a few participants that spoke up about how their non-fraternal same-sex friendships offered them everything they needed. For example, Brad and Leon argued that they had non-fraternal relationships that were deep and sincere, that they had no-guards up in these relationships, and that they could talk about anything with these non-fraternal friends. From our conversations it seemed as though Brad and Leon were assuming a lot about these non-fraternal relationships even though they had yet to really take these relationships to a more intimate place. According to Stuart Miller (1983), most men are so used to living without a true and genuine friendship they do not even recognize that it is missing in their life. Most college-aged men, just like Brad and Leon, have yet to master exactly how to have a deep and mature interpersonal relationship with another man so they simply infer intimacy and closeness through shared activity. However, true intimacy and closeness are not simply a bi-product of shared activity and time.

Brad said, “I’m most close with the friends who I see often, the ones who come out to stuff.” Leon concurred, sharing, “I hang out with a lot of guys. We drink together. We hang out together. We go to movies together, go to baseball games together and stuff like that. It was always a good time, nothing ever upsetting or anything like that.” Tyler told me that one of his best friends at the time was one of the guys in all of his engineering classes, because they study together, have the same humor, and think similarly. However, none of these men really talked about actually sharing intimate connections. Consistent with Sherrod’s (as cited in Kupers, 1993) findings, Brad and Leon achieved a false-closeness with their non-fraternal friends through shared activities and on the basis of shared activities. Since most male friendships are referred to as side-by-side relationships (Kilmartin, 2007), often times they fall short when real
intimacy and emotional disclosure is introduced and/or when the male friends begin spending less time involved in shared activity – which is what happened within Brad and Leon.

For some men, a homophobic fear as a result of following the prevailing discourses of masculinity does not allow them to build healthy same-sex friendships or get too close to other men. A majority of men just wrongly assume that becoming too intimately and emotionally connected with another man may make them gay or lead others to assume they are gay.

Homophobia is perhaps the greatest barrier to friendships between men (Reid & Fine, 1992), and this homophobic fear is exactly what most men are taught throughout their lifetime as a result of masculine discourse that is embedded in society. Homophobic fears and jokes were directed at John in high school as a result of his close friendship with another man: “I think there’s a lot of homophobia built into [male friendships]. Because me and my best friend were just the bane of that all throughout school. I can’t tell you how many gay jokes we got sent our way.” Though this did not slow John from developing a close relationship with this male friend, it did make the friendship a bit more difficult to navigate, especially within the context of high school. He thinks this is the reason why so many other male friendships fail, which he discussed in our session on *Men and Fraternity*:

I think a lot of guys are afraid of that, too, because they’re afraid of getting too close to another guy, because there is just that homophobia built in. Maybe it’s not built in, maybe we or others put it there, and are afraid to take it out. I think that’s a problem, and I think that’s a problem with a lot of people that I’m friends with. It’s hard to have those heart-to-hearts, because they get – it sets up that alarm in their head.

The alarm in men’s heads that John references is an invisible emotional line that other men can’t and shouldn’t cross, for if they do the relationship is deemed too close or too intimate. Because some men have difficulty making a clear distinction between sexual and nonsexual intimacy, getting close to another man may feel similar to being sexual with him; to avoid this
discomfort, Kilmartin (2007) found that men often keep other men at arm’s length, both physically and psychologically. Taking this one step further, O’Neil and Casper’s (2011) research demonstrated that it is men’s subscription to prevailing masculine ideologies and their gender role conflict that often leads to their inability to make a distinction between sexual and nonsexual intimacy, which often times severely complicates their same-sex friendships.

The homophobia that debilitates many same-sex male friendships becomes even more complicated when one of the men in the same-sex friendship is gay. Darren, who is openly gay, told the group, “I really didn’t have that many guy friends in high school. I was always a little bit, I guess, hasty around guys in high school, ‘cause I always felt like…you know, there was always some type of joke.” Many of the jokes that Darren endured and that kept him from having many close guy friends in high school related back to his sexuality, him being openly gay, and most young men’s irrational homophobic fears that their friendship with Darren might make them gay or make others think they are gay. Darren’s experience is identical to what Nardi (1992) found in his research – young gay men have far fewer male friends than their heterosexual classmates, and their deepest and most intimate same-sex friendships tend to be with other gay men as a result of most men’s internalized homophobia. Darren’s fraternal experience has offered him a new opportunity at developing true and intimate friendships with other men, friendships that have been deeper and more fulfilling.

**Fraternal**

When fraternities were first founded one of their primary purposes was friendship and camaraderie (the other being intellectual pursuit) (Syrett, 2009). Fraternities were, in essence, a way to institutionalize friendship, a means to guarantee that a man might have like-minded peers upon whom he could depend at all times. Fast forward 187 years and now many young college
men are joining fraternities because they desperately seek intimate male friendships in a world that devalues intimacy between men as inappropriate at best, deviant at worst, and almost always as unmasculine. An analysis of the data suggests that the participants’ fraternal relationships seem to be deeper and more fulfilling as compared to their non-fraternal relationships, but the data also shows that many of the participants still desire more from their fraternity brothers. The *ManTalk* sessions helped prompt the men to think more critically about what may have been missing in their fraternal friendships, especially as a result of the closeness and intimacy they developed with other participants as a result of their shared *ManTalk* experience.

Brad wrote in one of his journals that the main reason he joined Kappa Omega during his first year was because he lacked close male friendships in high school. Although he had many close female friends he just couldn’t relate to them in the same way as he thought he would with a male friend. Brad acknowledged, “I have few guy friends from high school, but there is no comparison. I’m not half as close to being as tight with them as I am with my brothers because I think the brothers are always there through thick and thin.” Brad may feel closer to his brothers as compared to his non-fraternal friends because there is more structure within his fraternal relationships as compared to his other same-sex friendships. For example, Kilmartin (2007) explains that social structures like tasks, rituals, requirements, and/or activities that force men to work together, enable men to feel more comfortable with other men and develop closer ties with these men as compared to their other friends – which may be the impetus behind Brad’s belief that he is closer with his fraternal brothers as compared to his other friends.

For many of the participants in this study, although moderately content with their fraternal friendships, they greatly desired more from their fraternity brothers. Connor said, “I would say I’ve definitely learned that my earlier male relationships have not had the substance
my relationships with Kappa Omega men have had, but I am always searching for more.” John loves the idea of having so many brothers, but he still hasn’t found just exactly what he is looking for in these fraternal relationships:

So now that I’ve got 30-some other brothers, it’s great, but I don’t feel that just one of them is like my go-to guy like I’m used to having in my life. They are all amazing people, but I haven’t found anybody who is perfectly reliable. I haven’t found that one person that I can just like call up at any time like, ‘Dude, you want to go do something right now, or you want to just come hang out?’ That’s a problem.

For Jared and David, even though they say their fraternal relationships are deeper than their other relationships, they say they are still working to build greater levels of trust with all their brothers. Jared explained:

After being in one year, I know that this fraternity is different from the other fraternities but we still need to work on the trust between brothers. I've been talking to multiple brothers and they were saying how they can only trust only one or two of their brothers. Is this how a fraternity should be?

David felt the same way as Jared and he too desires more trust within his fraternal relationships outside of one to two brothers who he is already super close with. He told me, “While I am closer with some of my brothers as compared to my other friends, I naturally have a guard up. I’m trying to trust all of my brothers like I trust the few that I am super close with.” For Jared and David they are learning that trust and honesty in a relationship doesn’t happen overnight just because they are in a fraternity together and are involved in shared activities.

While many of the participants would never admit to the fact that they want and desperately need brothers that are more than just “drinking buddies” many of them seem to struggle with understanding the difference between these two types of relationships – the “drinking buddy” vs. the “true friend.” Many of the participants also struggle in figuring out how to take their “beer buddy” relationships to deeper levels. Cale reflected:
I believe that I want it to be more than just, ‘Hey, let’s hang out. Or let’s drink,’ to something more like, ‘Are you having girl problems? I’m really having issues with this right now. Can I talk to you about this? I know we’ve talked about this before,’ and stuff like that.

Sometimes men have many buddies, but few true friends. Buddies (in this case, brothers) tend to be people that men bond with around an object or activity; friends are people with whom men share an intimate connection with. For a lot of young men it is hard to understand the distinction. While there is nothing wrong with having buddies, it becomes unfulfilling for a lot of fraternity men when they realize that a lot of their brothers are just buddies instead of true intimate friends. Although it provides a measure of social support, a lot of the “male bonding” that tends to happen in fraternity houses tends to be a poor substitute for the deeper connections of intimate friendships. Many of the participants in the study did not begin to fully understand just exactly what they were missing from their general same-sex friendships and/or their fraternal friendships until they were challenged to more closely examine these relationships as a group.

**ManTalk**

One of the main goals of *ManTalk* is to help men build healthier male-to-male relationships. However, it is not just about building healthier same-sex friendships within the *ManTalk* vacuum; rather, the hope is that once men see the benefit and richness of the friendships they have with other men in the group they will begin to realize what may be missing from their other male friendships. It was clear from an analysis of the data that the participants *ManTalk* relationships were drastically different than anything they had before. When asked to describe their *ManTalk* relationships as compared to their other same-sex friendships the participants offered the following thoughts: “A lot closer” “More easy to talk to” “More comfortable” “Consistent” “Trustworthy” “Better connection” “Greater empathy” “Stronger” “More emotional” and “Deeper.”
A fraternity brother is more than just a friend, but many fraternity men are still searching for a deeper connection. Trey found that deeper connection through ManTalk and shared his thoughts in a journal entry:

We’re no longer just fraternity brothers; we’re fraternity brothers who are there for each other, who are there for each other emotionally now. That’s not always your first thought when you’re joining a fraternity is that you’ll have emotional support. You know that you’ll have, like, physical support. A brother will fight for you. But I think the emotional support is more available to those who went through Man Talk because we practiced, you know, sharing. We don’t usually open up right away in most environments, but ManTalk allowed us to open up immediately.

While one would assume that a deeper connection would take weeks/months to develop, several of the men noticed a difference almost immediately. David wrote the following in his journal after the first ManTalk session, “I learned a lot about my brothers and developed a higher respect for them already. It takes a lot for a man to make himself vulnerable and many of them did it so freely, I feel like it has made us more connected.” What was interesting about David’s comment is that he previously had talked about his struggles with trusting his all brothers. Through ManTalk he seemed to find comfort and connection as other’s opened themselves up and made themselves vulnerable; in so doing, they gave him a free-pass to do the same when he was ready and willing.

With deep conversation comes deeper connection, yet a lot of the time men seem to struggle getting deep with their male friends for fear of failure and/or rejection. ManTalk cuts through the small talk and creates a safe and secure environment where participants don’t have to be scared of rejection or failure. Rye described the ManTalk environment the best, saying, “Here we leave the small talk and whatever trivial BS you’re worried about at the door, you know? Just let it happen. So I am definitely closer to those involved with the group…we’ll talk more and stuff.” When the small talk is left at the door and men get real with one another the trust
issue that tend to be the Achilles heel of most of their relationships no longer becomes the barrier between them and deep intimate relationships with other men. Tyler talked about the trust built in ManTalk: “For the majority of the guys in the ManTalk group, I would say I have a better connection with them. I feel I can trust them more, as well as empathize with them more.” Cale concurred with Tyler, and reflected:

I feel closer to the people that are in ManTalk. I trust them. And I can more easily talk to them about the struggles I have in my daily life, as opposed to, let’s say, a casual friend. I don’t even know his middle name, and I wouldn’t just go up to somebody who I don’t know that well and try having a really deep conversation with them, because I don’t have the foundation that ManTalks gave me with the other brothers.

There is evidence that many of the men in this study seem to have developed deeper and healthier connections with other men in the ManTalk group – as compared to their other male relationships. Hopefully, as a result of the programmatic experience and the richness they found within the relationships they formed through the program, the participants will begin to demand more out of their other male-to-male friendships.

**Summary**

The intent of this chapter is to explore the intersection of masculinity and relationships. More specifically, the data that emerged centered around three vital relationships in a man’s life: familial relationships, female relationships, and male friendships. In general, many of the participants had a real disconnection with their fathers – as a result of both theirs and their fathers’ masculine subscriptions – and they desperately wanted to have a better relationship with them. For the few men that discussed their mother-son relationship failures, the findings showed that this had major impact on their masculinity and these men also seemed to be the least emotional and relationally aware – a common occurrence when there is mother-son disconnect.
In regard to the participants female relationships, many of the participants struggled navigating the tricky waters between platonic friendships, hooks-ups, and trying to find a romantic and committed partner. As fraternity men, most of the participants in this study hoped that their fraternity experience would provide them with a deeper level of male intimacy. Although many of them initially said they had found deeper friendships via their fraternal experience, many of the participants also desired more out of their fraternal relationships. And the data that emerged showed that neither their non-fraternal or fraternal friendships compared to the deep and meaningful relationships they formed as a result of their ManTalk experience.

The ManTalk experience gave participants an opportunity to critically examine and deconstruct all of their different relationships and the role their masculinity plays in how they navigate these different relationships. This type of critical examination is vitally important in a man’s overall psychosocial development, as Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships (Chickering and Reisser’s fourth vector), is an area where most college men struggle. Through a critical pedagogical framework that embraced student voice, self-reflection, critical analysis, and action ManTalk educated, supported, and challenged the participants as they worked through some of their underlying disconnection issues with their father, as they examined the role their mother has played in shaping their masculinity, as they wrestled the detrimental impact of the college hook-up culture, as they talked through their desires and needs and issues and struggles inside of their romantic and committed relationships, and as they broke down their male friendships and how their masculine subscriptions have severely constricted these relationships. The following chapter examines the participants overall experience and how they made meaning of ManTalk both individually and collectively.
CHAPTER SIX

MAKING MEANING OF THE OVERALL EXPERIENCE

The ten-week journey these men embarked on together was filled with ups and downs, critical conversation and introspective reflection, tears and laughter, and challenge and support. There were times when I had to lead and facilitate the conversation single-handedly to times where the participants just took the topic and ran with it. There were topics the men gravitated towards that they wanted to critically dissect and reflect on immediately as well as topics the participants wanted to avoid. There were some men that immediately began applying the lessons they learned outside of the ManTalk vacuum and others that just weren’t ready to take the conversation outside of the walls in which we talked. It was through these different milestones that the participants came to make meaning of their overall experience and its impact on them as men. The major findings examined here related to how the participants made meaning of their ManTalk experience, include: reasons for participating, biggest lessons learned, most impactful sessions, critical conversations, action and application, recommendations for where further conversations are needed, and impact of the changing group dynamic.

The Reasons for Participating

In order to best understand how participants made meaning of their overall experience, it is first important to analyze why they wanted to participate in the first place. The data points to three main reasons for participation in the ManTalk program. For some it was an intentional opportunity to learn more about themselves as men and to answer the internal question, “Am I the only one dealing with this?” For others it was about having the opportunity to get to know their brothers on a deeper level. And for a few it was a therapeutic way to talk through some of those things that they hadn’t ever talked about before.
Am I The Only One Dealing With This?

As college men struggle to negotiate the boundaries of their masculinity, emotions, feelings, and identities, and with few people to talk to about it with, they often are left questioning whether they are unique in dealing with these issues. *ManTalk*, as a program, gives men an opportunity to purposefully reflect as they seek answers to their questions related to their masculinity and identities. For example, Cale explained, “Well, I think it would be really cool for me to learn more about myself and my emotions by participating in something that will compare my views of the world and problems with everyone else’s. It’s kind of like a rationality check.” A lot of college men are just like Cale, all wondering if they are the only ones dealing with certain problems and issues. Unfortunately, men’s subscriptions to the dominant norms of masculinity, which promote emotional constriction and lack of self-disclosure, often leave them feeling stranded on their own personal island (Kilmartin, 2007). This lack of emotion is what Brannon (1985) labeled being the *Sturdy Oak* while Kimmel (2008) called this phenomenon, *A Culture of Silence*.

Rye, who was tired of being a *Study Oak* as a result of the *Culture of Silence* told me during our first interview, “I wouldn’t mind just hearing what other people are going through and just to see if there’s anybody else having the same problems that I am.” For Rye and a lot of the other men in the group, hearing the stories of others helped them to make more sense of their own story and life. Rye’s comments about hearing other’s stories corresponds with Kellom and Groth’s (2010) research showing that the best way to help young men unpack their masculinity and lives is through creating safe male spaces where men can spend sacred time together reflecting and disclosing their own story while listening to others – the exact intent of *ManTalk*.

Hearing other’s stories and realizing that their personal story isn’t that different and/or as
bad as they first suspected can build a man’s confidence and increase his overall self-esteem, awareness of self, and compassion for other men. A new level of self-awareness and clarity was what Leon had been searching for and what he was hoping to find through his ManTalk experience. He commented:

I think the main reason why I wanted to do it was because having the opportunity to learn more about myself, having somewhere where I can open up and see where other people’s thoughts are, or other things that they’ve been through. Not to compare to my life, but to get a sense of, I guess get a sense of clarity.

Although, not everyone can find clarity and confirmation in who they are as a man by simply just listening to the stories of others. A man can only gain clarity and confirmation if his story is somewhat similar and/or linked to someone else’s. But for a gay Black man in a fraternity, there are not a lot of people that share a similar story. For these so-called “others” they are on the outside looking in, wondering where they fit in to everything. Darren explained that it was this questioning of “Where do I fit in” that sparked his interest in participating:

I just participated ‘cause I’m really trying to get to know myself better, and I think that there are a lot of people out there that are like me but they don’t choose to explore themselves or try to figure out, you know, how to voice themselves. And, you know, I think it’s just a good way to express myself and to figure out who I am and where I fit in the world.

For many gay college men, especially non-White gay men like Darren – socialized gender norms may not fit them appropriately and many times these men receive conflicting messages about masculinity (Berila, 2011). These contradictory messages – the result of the double-bind – are what have driven Darren to experiment with different types of masculinities and identities. Ultimately, Darren will continue to search for the perfect niche in these varying communities in which he is a lead character – the queer community, the campus community, and his fraternity community.
I Want to Get To Know Brothers on a Deeper Level

The findings also point to the fact participation was fueled by a desire by most of the participants to get to know their brothers on a deeper level. Jared put it this way, “I just felt like it would be a good way to learn more…about brothers because I feel like I don’t really know most of them very well because…I feel like they are mostly about showing up to social events rather than actually being brothers.” For Chase it was about learning more about those brothers that he hasn’t always interacted with, “There are some brothers that I just click with, and I know a lot about them. Some of the other brothers I don’t hang out with at all and hopefully they’ll participate too, so I get to know them better.” A fraternity is just like any other group or organization and there are bound to be cliques of people that share similar interests. Unfortunately, many times these cliques keep brothers from really getting to know all their other brothers on a deep level – instead of just the four or five they are closest to or live with.

The fraternity experience is supposed to create a band of brothers, but often times it falls short. Fraternity brothers go to parties together, they go on retreat together, they bond through performing the ritual together, but for some reason or another they do not reach the deepest levels of intimacy with their other brothers. A lot of men’s friendships are negatively affected by competition and jealousy, self-esteem and rejection, self-containment and fear of vulnerability – all of which can rear their head in all-male environments, such as fraternity houses and/or locker rooms. Trey spoke to how his self-containment and fear of vulnerability obstructed him from getting to know his brothers on a deeper level: “I don’t feel like being a burden to my brothers and just like laying out all my issues and being a downer. I try to be open-minded and positive around them, so I think this is just a good opportunity.” Trey is not unique as a lot of his brothers also desire deeper relationships, yet most of men are constrained by their masculinity
which emphasizes competitiveness, rejection, and self-containment issues. Siedler (1992) points out that men’s self-containment is, “One of the ways we, as men, sustain power and control in relationships is by demanding very little” (p. 21). It is the desire for deeper male friendships that are not obstructed by self-containment and power-dynamics that influenced many of the participants’ decision to participate, as they hoped that through ManTalk they could begin creating relationships that were more meaningful.

**Pseudo-Therapy Could Be Beneficial**

For a few of the participant’s they chose to participate simply because they saw ManTalk as a type of therapy and a way to talk through their struggles and worries in a safe and conducive environment. Participation in ManTalk as a result of seeing it as pseudo-therapy is an important finding, since several recent studies have shown that college-aged men are still hesitant to go to counseling, even when it is offered as a free service on their college-campus (Courtenay, 1998; Good & Wood, 1995; Pederson & Vogel, 2007). From a psychosocial perspective, Chickering and Reisser (1993) found that men are less likely to have positive attitudes toward help-seeking when they falsely believe, as a result of their masculinity, that being fully autonomous is necessary. With that said, it is easy to see how vital an experience like ManTalk can be for college men, especially since they are highly unlikely to seek out counseling or other forms of help. Take for example, John’s reasoning for participating:

I haven’t really had an opportunity to sit and discuss issues with anybody. I mean, I used to do counseling when I was in middle and high school, just one-on-one, me and the counselor, the psychiatrist. I didn’t take anything out of that at my age, because I was at a point in my life where I was like, ‘This is stupid. I don’t want to be here. This guy’s not telling me anything that I need to know,’ and I took it for granted, because there was actually probably a lot of stuff that I could have learned from that. And I think this is just kind of a good opportunity to just sit in a safe environment and just discuss any issues that I have about being in college, masculinity issues, and exactly the sort of things that you were saying that we would discuss.
For others they needed *ManTalk* more than they could even know at the time. Unlike John who had experimented with counseling and therapy when he was younger, David wouldn’t be caught dead on a therapist’s couch. More than likely, David’s negative attitudes towards counseling are a direct result what O’Neil and Casper (2011) describe as a macho self-reliance and denial about being interdependent on others – both of which are often barriers to a man’s overall identity development and growth. But *ManTalk* seemed to be the perfect environment for David to start a journey of self-discovery and it was one that allowed him to let go of some of those things that have been holding him back. He wrote in his journal:

> I know I found out growing up – of not having my dad there – not really having another male to talk to, you really – I hold everything in. I definitely do it a lot to this day. I found myself at times getting so overwhelmed because I’ve been holding stuff in my heart for 16 years. I feel like this is a really good opportunity – a controlled opportunity to kind of talk about stuff.

A cross-comparison analysis of the men’s reasoning for program participation along with the desired objectives of *ManTalk* showed that there was relatively strong alignment between their reasoning and the program objectives. The next section will examine the participant’s biggest lessons learned, which also had a major impact on the meaning they gave to the experience.

### Biggest Lessons Learned

Even though the men were learning more and more about themselves and their brothers as the sessions progressed, the findings also point to the fact that each participant seems to have walked away from the program with one or two major “aha” moments. These “aha” moments could also be classified as the participants biggest lessons learned and these moments/lessons also played a major part in how the group made sense of the totality of their experience. The findings related to the biggest lessons learned can be divided into three distinct areas: things the
participants learned about themselves, things the participants learned about others, and things they learned about their masculinity.

**Lessons Learned About Self**

For the most part, it would seem that the 15-20 hours the men spent in *ManTalk* was probably the most uninterrupted self-reflection time that most of these men had ever had. Harris and Edwards (2010) posit that the lack of reflection time by most men is due in large part to the social privilege that being a man grants men, so many men – like the participants in the current study – have not spent enough time thinking about or critically examining their masculine identity. As a result, the data shows that one of the biggest lessons learned by the participants is primarily focused on themselves and is related to their maturity, confidence and, comfortability with oneself.

Leon’s biggest lesson learned involved him looking in the mirror a little more at himself and realizing where he needed to grow and mature. During his last interview he commented:

I think that I really realized that a lot of me was immature still because, especially when [you] had talked about…how us, as brothers, how we picked on each other. And how we often don’t build each other up… and that we’re always breaking each other down. I think that I was mentally breaking down myself and others throughout the semester. And it just kind of made me realize a lot of me was immature and not ready to move on, even in situations dealing with my parents and dealing with other people when it comes to, like, joking around and different situations. It just made me kind of want to change that aspect about myself because I am now becoming an older member in the fraternity.

For others, their biggest lessons learned came from just better understanding who they really are, being comfortable/confident in themselves regardless of what others think, and learning to take off their masculinity masks. For example, Jesse’s biggest lesson learned was just about having true confidence, “I learned that I just need to have more confidence in myself and more confidence to talk about personal things with others…instead of just acting confident.” Jesse’s fake confidence and false bravado do not make him unique as a college man, as Kimmel
(2008) found that college-aged men tend to couch their insecurity in bravado and bluster; and the
same men desperately struggling to conceal their own sense of fraudulence, can smell it on
others. As the researcher and facilitator it was easy for me to sense Jesse’s false confidence and
bravado as well as others who tried to exude this artificial confidence in lieu of having actual
confidence in themselves. However, Jesse was one of the few men that was able to see-through
his own façade of bravado and confidence and realize it was partially fraudulent.

Ben shared a similar lesson learned about rejection and confidence, saying:

Well, I mentioned in my beginning interview about how not having enough money was, like, a huge thing to me, cause I couldn’t dress a certain way or whatever. But then I realized, like, that’s really not the issue. The issue is still me, me being afraid of, like, rejection by my friends or whatever, and I needed to realize that, you know, the friends that I have now are not the friends that I had in high school. The friends I have now are not going to stop hanging out with me because I don’t wear cool enough shoes or whatever, you know? So it’s kind of like that, me just realizing that things have changed in my life, and you have to change as a person when those things change and be more comfortable and confident in who you are.

The ManTalk experience gave Ben an opportunity to see how his masculinity, self-esteem, and
confidence had previously been so wrapped up in how he thought everyone else viewed him,
instead of how he viewed himself. But the confusion of self-image with self-esteem is
something Selvarajah (2000) found happens with most college-aged men, as they often fail to
rely on their own personal standards and instead constantly compare themselves to others. Ben
was able to realize this dichotomy and become more comfortable with himself as a man,
regardless of how others may view him. John’s biggest lesson learned had to do with realizing
that he was holding himself back by creating self-imposed obstacles:

I learned that I have the right tools to be sort of, like, a strong, dependable – man. And, sometimes, I let – I get in my own way. When we talked about these topics, you know, we discussed a lot of the problems that everybody had, I realized that, you know, I get in my own way sometimes, just with my negativity or, you know, my self-esteem and things like that, when it, like we’ve talked about in many of our sessions, a lot of the stuff comes out in the confidence. And, you know, whenever I have that confidence instilled in me,
I’m not getting in my way, but, you know, that’s I think that’s one of the things I really learned about myself is that confidence has always been there. It’s just been hiding.

Sometimes viewing yourself from a different vantage point is helpful in restoring some of the lost self-confidence that a man can lose when they he tries to fit himself inside the restrictive masculinity box and/or always feels as though he has to wear a mask. Cale understood this firsthand and his biggest lesson learned was realizing that even though he may have felt like he had low self-esteem and self-confidence, others around him saw him in a completely different light:

I found out that looking in a mirror doesn’t give you a full perspective. A lot of people see different things in you than you see yourself, especially when we were talking about things like confidence. Everyone was not confident about themselves in some way – including myself – and most everyone in the room would turn around and say, ‘Yes, you are,’ with whatever they’re having confidence trouble about. So there may be internal conflicts, external conflicts, but whatever you see is not the same as everyone else sees, so it’s nice to take into account all aspects.

These self-revelations show just how psychologically detrimental it can be when men try to act out and perform in a way that is akin to the dominant discourse of masculinity just so others will see them as a “real man.” ManTalk seeks to provide men with an opportunity to learn more about themselves as they deconstruct the taken-for-granted assumptions of what society has told them it means to be a “real man.” In so doing, they learn to be more self-aware and confident in who they are – regardless of their inadequacies, flaws, and/or imperfections.

Lessons Learned About Others

For a lot of the other participants the major findings illustrate that their biggest lessons learned involved learning something new about one of their fraternity brothers. The stories and new revelations learned about their brothers caught a lot of the participants by total surprise – especially since they readily assumed they knew everything there was to know about each of their brothers. Though much of what these men knew about each other and/or had shared previously with one another was only surface-level or little more than a few layers deep. Brad
described his biggest lesson learned, saying: “I thought I knew them [other participants] a lot – this kind of asked for more personal stuff, not so much like surface level things like a lot of us talk about mostly. More than meets the eye.” In listening and understanding the other brothers’ stories and challenges they were given a better perspective on their own life/story, and they could then potentially apply these lessons learned directly to their own life.

Ben shared:

I’d probably say an aha moment for me was – or something that, blew me away was when Chase talked about his first time having sex and how he did it out of, like, peer pressure and it really upset him. I had no idea, and I was – I was really embarrassed for my fraternity, that we would have that impact on somebody. You know, maybe you saying one comment or joke to somebody else that you might’ve intended well but not phrased correctly could have a profound impact on them, you know? I think if everyone had that kind of sense, that everything they say matters, then we’d be in a much better place. People wouldn’t put each other down as much. People would respect each other more. People would actually look at someone for who they are and not how their hair looks or, you know, what they wear or how they walk or whatever.

The type of aggressive and demoralizing joking that Ben is referring to is sometimes the foundation by which male relationships are built on, especially in the fraternal environment. Lyman (2007) found that the fraternal bond is often almost entirely built off of a joking relationship; a relationship that allows men to be aggressive, hurtful, and demoralizing to other men through their usage of joking and insults – a finding that holds true in the current study. Through joking and insults fraternity men can often enact their dominance over other brothers as they all vie for the top position, a particularly destructive habit perpetuated by hegemonic norms. *ManTalk* provided an avenue for Ben and others to hear Chase’s story for the first time and as a result they were able to begin realizing how demoralizing and damaging their joking can be on others.
For Rye, hearing another participant's story about his father was his biggest lesson learned, because it gave him the perspective he was missing regarding his own relationship with his father:

For me, it was when one of the brothers talked about forgiving their father and stuff and that whole thing. I was like, ‘Whoa, I should probably do that.’ I mean, I haven’t yet. But, I – it’s constantly on my mind, like I should figure out a way to do this, you know, because my dad’s been – he’s been trying lately, but he’s so awkward about it. I feel like I kind of got that from him at least. The way he goes about it is so awkward and he’s still kind of stuck in his ways, so it’s hard to just be like, ‘I forgive you’, but – He’s trying. So, I should at the very least, try.

Emotionally and/or physically distant fathers like Rye’s sometimes leave their sons with feelings of disappointment, animosity, and anger (Kilmartin, 2007) as a result of their failure to connect intimately with their son. Fortunately through hearing the story of another participant, Rye’s biggest lesson learned will hopefully have a positive impact on his relationship with his father and thus minimize his unpredictable feelings of disappointment and anger as a result of this relationship.

Lessons Learned About Masculinity

Since most of the men could not even properly define or describe what masculinity was at the beginning of the first ManTalk session, it is not surprising that the data also reveals some of the participants biggest lessons learned involved a new understanding of how their masculinity is intertwined in everything they do, say, think, feel. Jared learned that every person has a different and unique understanding and definition of masculinity. He told me, “Pretty much, there’s a different meaning to masculinity for every single person. One person cannot describe masculinity for everybody else. Pretty much, you have to define it yourself.” For example, it is clear from the data that Jared, as an Asian American man, defines and performs a masculinity that is very different than Darren’s, as a gay African American man.
Another major lesson learned about masculinity by the participants, consistent with Harris and Edwards (2010) research, was how masculine norms and expectations that dictate what college men “should do” or how college men “should act” often go unrecognized by most men in their daily lives and interactions. For example, David was not able to see how impactful these masculine norms were on his masculinity and his life until after this experience: “I guess we need to reevaluate ourselves, reevaluate our lives… I mean - more specifically, reevaluate masculinity. Masculinity affects every part of our lives. It really drives our lives and people don’t realize it.”

One of Chase’s biggest lessons learned was coming to the realization that being a self-aware man that has a healthy sense of masculinity can be extremely difficult:

I learned that it’s hard – masculinity. It’s not an easy route, but it’s also I learned that everyone goes through the different phases of being a man, and in the end you have to look in the mirror and love yourself for who you are. The choices you make every day, no matter in school, outside the classroom, towards women, or towards your brothers can affect how people see you.

Chase is no different than most other college-aged men, internally struggling between being the man he wants to be and being the man his friends and society tell him he has to be. But for Chase and many other men, the external pressures and expectations to perform akin to the dominant discourse, which they have all learned and internalized during their pre-college gender socialization and which have been reinforced in college, are so strong that they often prevent them from being the men they truly aspire to be (Harris & Edwards, 2010). Knowing this, ManTalk, as a program, seeks to help men deconstruct these pervasive norms and aid them in better understanding their masculinity, its intersections, and its impact. Because, as the data illustrates, as men come to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity and better understand their own masculine identity they gain increased confidence and awareness in who they are as men. Many
of the participants “aha” moments and biggest lessons learned were interweaved into conversations that occurred during the sessions they also said were the most impactful – as detailed next.

**Most Impactful Sessions**

As a program *ManTalk* seeks to provide men with opportunities to engage in critical conversations around some of the most impactful and relevant issues men face in their everyday life. At the conclusion of the study, as I sought to better understand how the participants made meaning from their overall *ManTalk* experience, interview data was analyzed to determine which sessions were most impactful and why. The findings demonstrate that, although the participants seemed to have enjoyed each of the sessions and conversations, there were two sessions that really stood out as being significantly more impactful and beneficial to them as men – *Men and Family* and *Men and Relationships*.

**Men and Family**

Men’s families and their relationships with family members, whether positive or negative, are probably the two most influential factors that shape a man’s identity (Kilmartin, 2007). Because familial relationships have such a profound impact on men and their masculinity and because all men share the commonality of family it is easy to see why the findings illustrate that the *Men and Family* session was one of the most insightful and relevant topics.

For Chase, the *Men and Family* session was most helpful and beneficial because:

I actually found out what the hell’s going on with all my brothers. For example, Leon had – he doesn’t have a good relationship with his mom. I saw this before we actually had *ManTalks*. He would always get girls and stuff like that, and I’d be like, ‘Man, he’s really good at talking game,’ but *ManTalk* helped me see that really deep down inside he really has a bad relationship with his mom, so that’s why it feels like he has to get with other women. So I got to see that point of views of Jesse, Tyler, even Connor. Like Connor’s family sounds like the perfect story of all of them – I thought it was just really funny that he was the only one that didn’t have any problems.
Without the *Men and Family* session and/or these conversations Leon may have never been challenged to reflect on his promiscuity issues and its connection to his familial relationships and Chase would have never had the opportunity to learn more about his fraternity brothers’ families and familial issues.

For Brad, the *Men and Family* session was the most impactful because of all the emotions it stirred up in the men as we discussed this topic. He told me, “Family was probably most impactful session. I think you probably heard that one a lot, because I think that one got the most emotions when we talked about it. I’ve never seen so many men cry before then or since. WOW. “ Interestingly enough, even though the research of Kilmartin (2007) demonstrates that men’s inexpressiveness and emotional constriction usually develops as a result of their early familial experiences, the data from the current study showed that the *Men and Family* session provoked the most emotional and expressive reactions from the men. This may have been because many of the participant’s have never had a platform in which to air and discuss their familial issues and its impact on them as men. So when they did get the opportunity to talk through their familial relationships via *ManTalk* their emotions poured out of them.

Even those men that had a healthy familial relationship thought the *Men and Family* session was beneficial and eye-opening. Take Jared for example, he commented, “Family was my favorite session… I have a really great relationship with my family already… [But] I learned so much, learned about other people’s family and I feel even more grateful for what I have.” Hearing the stories of others helped Jared and a few of the other men who had really positive familial relationships get some much needed perspective about how fortunate they really were. Besides struggling with familial relationships most college-aged men seem to have the most
difficulty navigating the female relationship, and the men in this study were no different – hence
the reason it was mentioned by the participant’s as the other most impactful session.

**Men and Relationships**

An analysis of the findings shows that nine of the fifteen men listed the *Men and Relationships* session as the session that stood out the most to them, and was most applicable to their lives and where they struggle as men. For David, the relationship session really hit home because he was in the process of trying to fix his five-year relationship with his girlfriend. Prior to *ManTalk*, David seemed to struggle with really understanding what was causing the difficulties in his female relationships, but the *Men and Relationships* session opened his eyes to how his emotional constriction was damaging this five-year partnership. He said:

> Recently, it’s beginning to affect [my relationship] really hard and, being that I’m not as expressive, everything’s just piling up, like, a force. So, you know, the relationship session really hit home and made me realize that I was struggling with talking about my emotions. And that I need to step my game up… especially, if I want to make this relationship continue to work.

For David, he was raised by his mother to think crying and talking about deep emotional issues was a sign of weakness. And even though emotional constriction and inexpressiveness are not generally considered positive or healthy characteristics the pervasive masculine discourse teaches men otherwise, including many college-aged men like David. Over time, emotional constriction and limited self-disclosure lead to problems in a man’s life and his relationships with others – as seen in David’s situation.

For John and some of the others the *Men and Relationships* session was the most beneficial and insightful because it gave them a chance to see and hear from a lot of other men that were also not into hooking up. This was hugely beneficial because prior to the experience many of the participants had just wrongly assumed that most of their brothers were hooking up
every weekend or were at least interested in hooking up. But as Kimmel (2008) found, in a
given weekend only about 5-10% of guys are actually hooking up even though most men thought
upwards of 80% of their male friends were hooking up each weekend. Thus, the Men and
Relationships session gave the men an opportunity to really understand more about the hook-up
culture, the pressure its places on men to keep up, and the distorted vision the culture creates in
young men’s minds.

John told the group the following at the conclusion of the session, “It is just nice to see
other men in the room think, like, ‘I’m not satisfied with just hooking up and having sex with a
bunch of girls.’ We’re over it and ready for real relationships.” This may be easier said than
done, as Kimmel (2008) declares:

The hook-up culture so dominates campus life that many older guys report having
difficulty making the transition to serious adult relationships. They all say that eventually
they expect to get married and have families, but they have no road map for getting from
drunken sloppy ‘Did or didn’t we?’ sex to mature adult relationships (p. 192).

Because so many young men are ill-prepared for adult relationships as a result of the college
hook-up culture, programs like ManTalk, with specific sessions on relationships, have become
increasingly more important and desired by men looking to prepare themselves for the future.
Hence the reason the Men and Relationships session was consistently rated as the most impactful
session.

Tyler felt the same way as John and was also glad to see that many of his brothers were
not just about hooking up. Although, Tyler’s favorite aspect of the session was talking about
love and what it really means:

I enjoyed hearing peoples’ thoughts on love. Cause you hear people saying, ‘Well, I
loved her. She was my first love and now I love her’ and, you know, it was nice to get
everybody’s opinions on what love actually is and how a relationship is supposed to be.
How it forms and just all that. To actually see, like, where the man plays his role in that
part. Is he is supposed to, like, chase the girl at all times? You know, where does that
line get blurred? Just different aspects of what our roles are and how that probably differs with a heterosexual or homosexual relationship.

Tyler and others had trouble understanding what love means and what a healthy relationships looks like because they have such limited experience, and rarely have had the opportunity to have critical conversations about love and healthy relationships. As men get older and prepare for life after college they develop a stronger desire to be in an intimate relationship with a woman. But, most college-aged men (including many of the participants) have limited practice in the skills required (self-disclosure, reciprocity, empathy, emotional availability) to even sustain a healthy loving relationship (Kilmartin, 2007). The lack of mastery of the skills necessary to sustain a healthy relationship by most men, and many of the participants, is because these are the exact same skills that the dominant discourse teaches and perpetuates as feminine.

For the few men that had never really had a long-term relationship, they may have benefited the most from the Men and Relationships session. Jared said, “Having never really been in a relationship…that session was the most beneficial because I learned about all the do’s and don’ts, the benefits and challenges. And, like, I actually feel a little more prepared and less scared.” Through dialogue, reflection, and hearing others’ stories – some of the central tenets of critical pedagogy – Jared and some of the others who had never been in relationships were able to develop a more critical understanding of how to sustain a healthy relationship. None of this would have been possible if ManTalk wasn’t intentional about challenging the men to have critical conversations about these different topics.

**Critical Conversations**

One of the main goals of ManTalk is to give the participants an opportunity to have critical conversations with other men, with the hope that these critical exchanges will better prepare them to continue having these conversations in their everyday lives. Before I could
understand how the program may have better prepared and equipped the participants to continue these critical conversations moving forward, I first needed to understand their experience with these types of discussions before their ManTalk experience. The findings show that many of the participants had an increased interest in regularly continuing these critical conversations in-between the ManTalk sessions, and that the participants felt more comfortable having these types of critical conversations as a result of their experience.

**Lack of Experience with Critical Conversations Prior to ManTalk**

A majority of college-aged men do not and have not had critical conversations about their masculinity, sexuality, identity, emotions, relationships, and life and the data from this study shows that these participants were no different. For the most part college-aged men just haven’t been given the opportunity or right environments in which to have these conversations, and most are ill-prepared to even talk in-depth about these things on their own without some guidance. The lack of experience with critical conversations played a major role the participants’ initial ManTalk experience. For example, Cale said he had never had these types of conversations before with other people. He told me, “I never talk about this shit. That’s why I really like this program. Whenever I’m around the people that I’m close to, all we talk about is the fraternity. And that gets old.”

For Chase, the questions and conversations in ManTalk are “Level 10” and he had never really gotten as deep before with other men – not even with his dad or fraternity brothers. He explained:

I don’t really – it’s sad, but I really don’t talk to my Dad about man issues at all, which is sad. He should be there for any of those questions, any of those like, ‘Dad, what should I do when this happens?’ I really don’t talk about these things. Sometimes I talk to God about it…Well, that’s the thing is like no one asks these types of deep questions. These are like, in the recruiting terms of Kappa Omega, Level 10 questions. You don’t meet someone and be like, ‘Oh, where are you from?’ and then be like, ‘So what’s your views
on masculinity?’ You don’t say that. Those types of questions I don’t even say to my brothers. It’s like that magic trick where you pull the scarves out and they just keep going. That’s why. It’s a lot. You ask those questions, you’re going to hear an earful. You’d better be ready to take it. That’s why we don’t talk about it, which sucks, but no one knows what truly happened in my family right now. No one knows but me. I really don’t bring that up, because when we’re together, we want to talk about the good. We want to talk about the funny. We want to talk about girls, anything but school, finances, and real problems, so that’s why.

But over time and through experiences like ManTalk, that give participants opportunities to critically discuss and reflect on “Level 10” questions, men become better prepared to have these conversations in their everyday lives.

**Continuing Critical Conversations In-Between ManTalk Sessions**

An analysis of the data also shows that after the first few sessions many of the participants began to continue these conversations in-between the ManTalk sessions with their brothers, girlfriends, and family. Although the participants may not have perfected how to have these conversations and/or were not able to get to the same level of depth outside of our sessions, it did seem as though most at least tried. The participants’ continuation of these conversations in-between the sessions demonstrates the positive impact the program had on them as men and the value of their overall experience.

Ben told me, “I definitely talked with Kyla [girlfriend] about it. After ManTalk, just talking with her about what I realized, things I thought about, things I’m thinking about, and/or things I want to change really helped.” For Tyler, many of the ideas and thoughts he took from ManTalk flowed over into his everyday conversation even if it was just minor. He shared, “I definitely continued talking and thinking about ManTalk. A few times I’ve brought up ManTalks or I’ve related a conversation back to ManTalk. Nothing too long or detailed. But, it has played a role in my outside conversations.” Connor told me, “I’ve definitely gone up to the people who are in ManTalk, like outside of the talks and just talked to them about things that
they mentioned and been like, ‘how’s that going? You ok?’” Cale explained, “I try it on an everyday basis if I can, because when you’re with your friends, a lot of the time conversations devolve into trivial stuff like drinking or just stuff that doesn’t matter.” Lastly, Chase told me about how he had a conversation with another brother (not in ManTalk) about his drinking because he was worried that this brother was drinking because he couldn’t effectively handle his emotions and anger – something Chase might not have done prior to ManTalk or before he grew more comfortable and at ease having these types of conversations with his friends.

**Increased Comfort and Ease with Critical Conversations**

Even though many of the participants came into ManTalk with minimal opportunities and/or experiences with critical conversations, the data illustrates that most of them left the program feeling more comfortable, better equipped, and more excited to have these conversations moving forward. The participants’ new-found comfort and ease with critical conversations certainly impacted the meaning most gave to their ManTalk experience.

Ben said in our last interview, “Yeah, I think I’m more comfortable with having these conversations. I definitely see a broader spectrum.” Brad had a similar thought, “I’m a lot more comfortable with it. After hearing all the men’s experiences and talking through all these things I feel a little more prepared to talk about this kind of stuff in my everyday life.” For Leon, even though he said he has always felt comfortable talking about things, he said he is more excited moving forward, “I feel like I was always comfortable talking about things. But, not to the level and depth that we talked. I think that made me more confident and I more excited to have these discussions now with all my friends.” Furthermore, Darren told me, “The seeds that you planted through our conversations in ManTalk have definitely made me more comfortable talking about these things. It’s not every day you talk about these types of deep things but I am ready and
Most participants were not only ready and willing to have critical conversations about their masculinity, identity, sexuality, emotions, and relationships as a result of their ManTalk experience many of them were also ready to take action and apply their lessons learned in their everyday lives.

**Action and Application**

One of the key tenets of critical pedagogy is moving from theory towards action and application. The ManTalk program, informed by critical pedagogy, strives to do the same thing – help men in moving from reflection and conversation towards actively applying the lessons they learned to their everyday lives. This is extremely important because theory, reflection, and conversation do not necessarily create critical change; rather, it is the actions and applications of an enlightened individual that create change. For that reason, I was interested in analyzing the data to better understand how the participants may have already acted on and applied some of their lessons learned in their own life and/or how they might do so in the future.

Immediately prior to the last session, the chapter had elections for the upcoming year. Cale, who hadn’t planned on running for Chapter President a few weeks prior, ended up winning the election to everyone’s surprise. When I first heard that Cale had won the election, after not planning on running a few weeks earlier, I was intrigued as to what created the change in Cale.

He told me:

> To tell you the truth, I probably wouldn’t have ran for president if it wasn’t for ManTalks. A lot of the people that I was in ManTalks with and other people came up to me and kept telling me to do it. But I didn’t realize I could be a good president until ManTalk. It helped me accept myself more as a man, as leader, and as a normal person. I think ManTalks really helped me cross that boundary and because I am more comfortable with myself I am more comfortable taking action in my life.

ManTalk allowed Cale to more clearly see and accept his strengths and flaws as a man and as a leader, which gave him a new-found confidence. As a result of this experience, Cale took action
with his new-found confidence and set out to run for Chapter President. He put theory into practice. He moved from critical conversation and reflection to concrete application.

After the *Men and Alcohol* session, Brad told me that he decided to quit drinking alcohol until he turns 21 (approximately two years). Brad informed me, “I’m quitting drinking right now, because this conversation really hit a nerve with me and because of my past experiences. I just think it’s not something I should be doing as a healthy man and as a healthy behavior.”

Although Brad may have been thinking about quitting prior to the session, our conversation in the *Men and Alcohol* session about my brother’s addiction to alcohol and drugs and the role they played in his untimely death, Ben’s story about his sister’s DUI, and Tyler’s story about his dad’s drinking seemed to have had a major impact on Brad. Like Cale, as a result of hearing others’ stories and through self-reflection Brad took action to begin abstaining from alcohol.

Some of the other men moved theory into practice and took action within their different relationships. After leaving our sessions, they began to actively use their lessons learned in order to repair and strengthen some of their familial relationships and romantic/committed relationships. For example, Connor began approaching his family and his relationship with his girlfriend differently after critically reflecting on the inner-workings of these relationships. He told me:

I took action by working to approach my family differently. I talk to them a lot more and a lot more in depth and I definitely, like, don’t take for granted that aspect of my life. And it has made my family relationships a lot stronger and deep. Also, I’ve tried to be a better boyfriend. I mean, I don’t think I’ve been a bad boyfriend, but, you know, there’s always – you always want to be better and you want to be the person you want to be with, you know? So, definitely, I’ve tried to step my game up in different areas of my life and everything like that.
Although Connor was one of the participants that came into ManTalk already having a healthy relationship with his parents and girlfriend, these findings seem to demonstrate that ManTalk can benefit any and all men – even relatively self-aware men with healthy relationships.

David, on the other hand, had recently been struggling with his long-time girlfriend, as a result of what he described as his “emotional unavailability” which probably stemmed from his subscription to pervasive masculine norms. After numerous conversations and opportunities to self-reflect in ManTalk he took action in his relationship and applied what he learned – a relationship that might have ended otherwise. He shared with me how he applied his lessons learned and the impact they had on his relationship:

I can really apply it to all to my girlfriend. There’s just been a lot going on. A long distance relationship is – it’s hard. Hard. And it was affecting her more than me because I had to be strong for her. And, now, recently, its beginning to affect me really hard and, being that I’m not as expressive, everything’s just piling up, like, a force. So, it’s like, hold all that in. I didn’t really think I was supposed to talk about it because I don’t want to seem like a little bitch. So, you know, towards the end of the program is when I kind of got that realization and actually expressed myself, and we’re still on the rocks. So, I mean, I think if I didn’t actually finally say something, we probably would have broken up because she was finally at the point she was going to break up with me and it’s never been that way before. So, that self awareness really helped because she’s – I guess she’s been – she’s dehydrated when it comes to the emotional feel. So, I actually sat down with her and talked to her about the relationship, my feelings, my worries, and what the future may hold. And damn did it make a difference. She didn’t know what happened, but she liked it. I can’t be that way all the time, but I can start being a little more expressive – even if it is just for her and this relationship. That is how much it means to me.

Hearing how the participants actively applied the lessons they learned in ManTalk in their everyday lives provided another layer for understanding how the participants made meaning of this experience. But, there were also specific areas in which the participants felt like further conversation was needed and/or would be helpful as they moved forward.
Further Conversations Needed

I never expected *ManTalk* to cover every male issue or solve every problem as it relates to masculinity and college men. I did hope that *ManTalk* would create a platform for the participants to begin having critical conversations so they could start to better understand themselves, their masculinity, and the role it plays in everything they do. With that said, the findings suggest that some of the sessions just got the men going and when these particular sessions ended many of the participants suggested that further in-depth conversations were needed. The three areas in which a majority of the men suggested that further conversation and time to work through specific problems was needed included: relationships, alcohol, and emotions.

**Relationships**

The one area in which a majority of men told me they thought further conversation was needed and where they were left wanting more was the exact same area of *ManTalk* that they found most impactful and beneficial – relationships. For Cale, he was and continues to be self-conscious about himself inside of his romantic relationships. He told me, “I’m always trying to gauge other relationships and how those work. So being able to have more conversations about what works and why it works, what people are looking for, and how to have a healthy relationship would be huge.” For John it was just about finding the time to talk through his relationship struggles with and the *Men and Relationships* session while helpful, really left him wanting more. John said, “I never have, you know, enough time to talk about these [relationship] issues and it seems that they have always just been predominant in my life. You know, a lot of the other ones come and go, but relationships have never gotten easier.”
Cale, John, and some of the other participants really just struggled to understand how to have a healthy relationship because they haven’t had that much experience inside of them, they haven’t gotten enough good advice and counsel on healthy relationships from their parents and friends, and because the hook-up culture that dominates today’s college environment makes serious relationships the outlier. As a result of the college hook-up culture and without intentional programs like ManTalk, many college-aged men end up, “know[ing] little more about themselves and their sexuality at 28 than they did at 18, and the more subtle aspects of romance and partnership likewise remain a mystery” (Kimmel, 2008, p. 192).

ManTalk seeks to help men on their psychosocial journey and as they begin Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships through providing them with opportunities to critically self-reflect on their relationship struggles, while also teaching them how to lay the foundation for establishing a healthy mature interpersonal relationship. But all of this can’t be taught in one ninety minute session, so it is understandable that many of the participants wanted to further this conversation and still had things they wanted to work through.

Alcohol

Another area in which several of the men desired further conversations was in relation to alcohol (usage, abuse, impact). This was no surprise, especially since so much of the college/fraternity experience revolves around alcohol and partying and since the overwhelming majority of risky/negative behavior occurs when people are intoxicated. Ben told me, “The men and alcohol thing could be expanded upon. Because that’s one a lot of guys just laugh off… like, ‘Ha ha, I got so drunk last night,’ but really there’s a problem if it’s happening all the time.” Connor and Jesse also had related thoughts with regard to continuing the conversation about alcohol. Connor shared, “I think something that as far as support goes…is that fraternity men
often kind of brush off is the alcohol one as being something that they don’t need to talk about.” Jesse reiterated Connor’s point, saying “I will say, not just me necessarily, but the whole chapter needs more education and support around alcohol usage. So I will say alcohol.”

As a researcher and a student affairs professional, I know a majority of these men – not just the ones who brought it up – could and would benefit from additional conversations and education in regard to alcohol. Alcohol education within the fraternal environment takes on added meaning upon an analysis of the recent literature which shows that that 80% of fraternity men could be considered binge drinkers and 6% would qualify as alcoholic (Wechsler et al., 2009). The men in this group were no different. They tended to drink to get drunk, on occasion they drank too much, and they usually tended to engage in their riskiest behaviors while intoxicated. In this regard, they were stereotypical fraternity men. Through their ManTalk experience and the session on Men and Alcohol they were challenged to reflect and understand how damaging their alcohol usage could be on themselves, their relationships, their academics, and their overall well-being. But, alcohol plays such a huge role in the college/fraternity experience that it is a problem that must continue to be addressed and one in which the participants wanted to further help.

**Emotions**

A lot of college-aged men do not fully understand their emotions and are not equipped to express or talk through their emotions with others – a developmental task that must be mastered before men can progress towards a deeper understanding and awareness of themselves. The ability to label, experience, and express emotions is critical to a man’s identity development and overall growth (O’Neil & Casper, 2011), and ManTalk provides a one-time opportunity for men to reflect on and work through their emotions and feelings. But David and Rye are two
participants that mentioned they desired further conversation and help in this area. David, the participant who had the most challenge with talking about his emotions, shared the following with me during our last interview:

Yeah, I mean, it would be great to have additional support in every area of – well, okay, I mean, I guess for every area of the emotional side. You know, being, masculine doesn’t mean that you can’t be, I guess, aware of your emotions in essence. I mean, of course, I struggle everywhere else…but, I feel like that’s just my biggest struggle – emotions.

For Rye, it was more about talking through his emotions instead of bottling them up or letting his emotions and feelings cause anger and anxiety.

Yeah, just like anger, anxiety. Just the proper way to deal with emotions, I guess. I mean, sometimes, it’s like I just shut down and recluse [sic] in my own little world. I just do whatever it is that keeps me distracted from whatever’s bothering me. It’s like sometimes it’s not a problem, but most of the times, it’s like I could be doing something a little more constructive and, I don’t know. I feel like if I were to talk to somebody about that, it would help me, like, at least get an idea of what I should be doing and helping me focus on it.

The problem is that when men, like David and Rye, aren’t able to effectively deal with their feelings (anger, anxiety, depression, guilt, shame) these emotions can become so overwhelming that they disrupt sleep and learning processes. For example, college men that endorse a masculinity that teaches them to restrict their emotions by saying that “everything is ok” even if they are in pain and suffering, are at high risk for emotional and interpersonal problems (O’Neil & Casper, 2011). Although ManTalk provided David and Rye with an initial opportunity to critically reflect on their buried emotions and helped them begin to unpack some of these emotions – they still had things that they wanted to work through and continue to discuss. Even though this was only a ten-week program and there were plenty of areas where the conversations could have been expanded and/or continued, the changing group dynamic was vital in the increasing depth and intensity of the conversations as the sessions progressed.
The Changing Group Dynamic

In trying to better understand all the ways in which the participants made meaning of their overall experience and its impact, the findings show that there was a changing group dynamic that also played a role in how the participants made sense of their ManTalk experience. This evolving group dynamic played a major role in how the participants experienced each session and in their individual and collective growth and development as men. They went from barely wanting to share their inner-most thoughts and feelings with each other during session one as a result of a very closed-off group dynamic to fully owning and regulating the conversations depth and intensity during session ten. The two major sub-themes that emerged in regards to the changing group dynamic include: an increasing depth and intensity, and an increasing level of ownership and self-regulation.

Increasing Depth and Intensity

An analysis of the data shows that as the sessions progressed so did the group’s depth and intensity of conversations, and as the depth and intensity increased so did the learning. Tyler said the first session was a little awkward: “Guys were, obviously, afraid to share certain ideas because they didn’t want to be, I guess, looked down upon or just, I don’t know kind of cast out for having an idea.” However, he later told me how drastically different the group and conversations were by the end of the program, “At the last session, we were just throwing out everything we could from porn and everything. And it definitely showed our comfortability [sic] as a group of guys who just open up with anything we have while learning from others.”

I think Rye put it best when he compared the increasing depth and intensity of conversations and its impact on learning to the way a middle-school dance progresses:

Session one…it was like the get to know you phase, pretty much. There wasn’t a ton of learning going on. Everybody was…like the wallflowers at a middle school dance, you
know? And then, once it started, everything kind of went into motion, you know? Everybody got more comfortable, evident by the less joking around and stuff ...and by the end everybody was able to form a thought, opinion or think a little more critically their masculinity and about what was being said.

Harris and Edwards (2010) experienced this same increased depth and intensity over time in their studies with college men, articulating, “After some initial hesitation, these men shared very insightful and poignant thoughts regarding their identities and experiences as men. In this way their [masculinity] was like an egg shell. It appeared firm and impenetrable, but once cracked everything poured out” (p. 57).

Before the conversations in ManTalk could ever go deep, the men had to understand and realize that it was also ok to take off their masks. Chase explained:

[The] first session was awkward, because everyone still had their cool mask. By the fifth, people understood how to do it and understood when we talk here, it means something. We understand that we’re not trying to bullshit for an hour and a half. We’re going to talk about real shit. Around eight and nine session, we just came in and hit the books and started talking about stuff, so, yeah. The last session, it was just like, ’Man, I can’t believe it’s done’

Chase’s poignant comments gave me a glimpse into the inner-workings of his fraternal brotherhood and how his and his brothers’ everyday conversations tend to be a whole lot of “fluff” or as he puts it, “not about real shit.” The main reason that Chase and the other men haven’t had a lot of these “real” conversations is because they haven’t been given the opportunities or environments to have these critical conversations. As the conversations took on increased depth and intensity the participants also began taking on increased ownership and regulation of the sessions.

**Increasing Ownership and Self-Regulation**

In order for the participants to really buy-in and get behind the ManTalk program I strove to steadily decrease my ownership and regulation of the group while encouraging them as a
group to take on increased ownership and self-regulation. Critical educators, Freire (1998) and Shor (1996), believe that by decreasing the power of a facilitator within a classroom or group over time while simultaneously increasing the participant’s power an experiences is created that:

(a) allows the participant to have more control of their learning, which stirs excitement; (b) validates all participant’s life experiences, regardless of how different they may be, and; (c) forces the participants to critically talk and reflect while also self-controlling the group. As the participants’ ownership and self-regulation of the program and individual sessions increased so too did the positive meaning they attached to their overall ManTalk experience.

Two of the men commented about how they really took ownership of the sessions and conversation as we got further into the program and what that meant to them. John pointed out:

Well, the first session…it was just like hard to get going. But, I think, by the end, I mean, we were really owning the whole thing and we had some really relevant questions and we got some really good ground cover. And what was most cool was how we regulated and…called out each other during the last sessions. You know, when like people weren’t paying attention or were screwing around…If we didn’t like have some level of ownership it may have got boring or like been less fun.

Cale agreed with John, and added:

You let the grounds be open to us in the last couple, and we talked about everything from money to sexuality in a mature way, not just trying to get around it using jokes like we usually do. I think the change from like joking about everything to talking about it in a mature way is a sign of us taking more ownership….which ultimately made the program more impactful

The participants weren’t the only ones noticing that there was a shifting of ownership and regulation as the program went on. As early as session four I also began noticing a difference in the group dynamic and felt like they were really beginning to own it. After session four, I had the following observation notes:

I have come to the realization that I think we have hit ‘our stride’ and this masculinity stuff is really starting to make sense to them. They really seemed to get it last night and I loved that they began challenging each other on things, asking each other questions, and
being able to relate things back to masculinity without me even suggesting it. To me that meant a lot, because it meant that they were really owning the conversation. They were learning and listening to each other and applying lessons we had learned in previous weeks.

In the end, the increasing depth and intensity of the conversations combined with the participants increasing ownership and regulation of the sessions seemed to have major impact on how the participants made sense of their overall experience.

Summary

Although each of the men in this study had a unique ManTalk experience and each made meaning of it in different ways, the findings discussed in this chapter paint a holistic picture of how the group made sense of their experience together and its impact. For the most part the men participated in this experience because they wanted to know if they were the only ones dealing with masculinity issues, because they wanted to get to know their brothers on a deeper level, and because they saw it as pseudo-therapeutic opportunity. As they progressed through the experience together they grew and developed as men through lessons they learned about themselves, others, and masculinity. The sessions that seemed to be most impactful based on a review of the data were the Men and Family session and the Men and Relationships session, two of the most important things in a young man’s life. However, ManTalk, as a program, couldn’t cover all subject matters or solve all the participants problems, thus many of the participants expressed a desire for further conversations and opportunities to engage in critical reflection, specifically in the areas of relationships, alcohol, and emotions.

Even though many of the participants came into the program with minimal experience talking about such critical topics as a result of a lack of opportunities, the findings demonstrate that most seemed to grow increasingly comfortable having critical conversations as a result of their ManTalk experience. As they became more comfortable with these critical conversations
they also began applying the lessons they learned in their everyday lives – thereby moving from theory to practice. The men’s experiences and how they made meaning of it was also impacted by the changing group dynamic that occurred as the weeks progressed. While the participants’ experiences and how they made meaning of the ManTalk program was the most important part of the study – my viewpoint and how I made meaning of the experience as the researcher and facilitator, which will be discussed in the next chapter, is also important in capturing the totality of our experience together.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A majority of college-aged men do not have a firm grasp or understanding of their masculinity and how it impacts and intersects with all aspects of their identity. One of the main reasons for the lack of understanding is that today’s young men, like the participants of this study, are coming of age in an era with no road maps, no blue prints, and no primers to tell them what a man is or how to become one (Kimmel, 2008). As a result, college-aged men often struggle to navigate the college environment and all their new-found responsibility and freedom. In an effort to prove their masculinity, with little guidance and no real understanding of what manhood is, they engage in behaviors and activities that are ill-conceived and irresponsibly carried out.

Over the last thirty years there has been a new body of literature that has begun examining and addressing issues related to masculinity and the college-male experience. But, O’Neil and Casper (2011) argue that much ground hasn’t been covered because even though many student affairs professionals recognize that men have problems, they have not and still do not know how to create psychoeducational programs to help men. ManTalk has been my answer to O’Neil and Casper’s call for more psychoeducational and preventative programs aimed at helping college-aged men better understand their masculinity, and the present study serves as one of the first in-depth qualitative studies examining fraternity men’s experiences in a men’s growth group.

This chapter summarizes and draws conclusions from the overall findings and themes of the study and the ManTalk experience through an analysis of the study’s key findings. The strengths and challenges of the study and the ManTalk program are highlighted, providing
insights for others interested in researching in this topical area or who have interest in creating a men’s growth group. A set of recommendations for future research and practice are also provided, along with a detailed look into my ManTalk experience and how I was impacted as a result.

**Analysis of Key Findings**

The primary purpose of this research study is to gain a foundational understanding of fraternity men’s experiences in an all-male growth group and how it may help them understand their masculinity. In an effort to bring this study full-circle I offer an analysis of the five key findings that emerged and how these findings intersect with the multi-dimensional theoretical framework that undergirded the ManTalk experience.

**ManTalk, Masculinity, and Identity**

One of the main purposes of this study is to find out how the participants understand and make sense of their masculinity, how it impacts and intersects with all aspects of their identity (race, gender and sexual orientation, body image, feelings and emotions, self-esteem and confidence), and how a program like ManTalk can be beneficial in helping them become more critically conscious self-aware men. In order to assist the participants in making more sense out of their masculinity, their masculine subscriptions, and the role their masculinity plays in their everyday life the unconscious has to become conscious, the invisible has to become visible, the unknown has become known.

The unconscious became conscious as the men were challenged to think critically about how they defined, learned, performed, and understand multiples masculinities. Through deep reflection and conversation the participants became enlightened about the power of hegemonic masculinity and its all-pervasive, taken-for-granted, consensual nature which has led many of
them to just unconsciously accept it as the gospel of manhood. As the participants challenged each other and their subscriptions to the dominant discourse they developed a deeper consciousness for understanding how their masculinity is situated within a historical, political, and social context and how it is greatly impacted by race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation. Through this question-posing journey the invisibility of multiple masculinities became visible as the participants wrestled with and disentangled the intersectional nature of their masculinity and all aspects of their identity. In so doing they began to recognize the multiple, contradictory, fragmented, incoherent, disunified, unstable, and fluid nature of their own masculinity and their ability to reinterpret and re-imagine it moving forward. And the unknown became known as the men explored the contradictions of their masculinity and its often constricting impact on their ability to develop competence, manage emotions, develop mature interpersonal relationships, and establish their identity.

As the men traversed deeper into the ManTalk experience and began breaking down the dominant discourse they learned: that although they were born male they must actively work towards becoming men; that although the dominant discourse of masculinity is predominantly White there is much to be learned by how men of color come to learn and define their masculinity; that “maleness” is not the absence of gender but simply the result of the invisibility and privilege that men have held in society as a result of being the dominant sex; that heterosexuality is something that should be questioned and more deeply understood much in the same way that homosexuality is questioned in society; that regardless of how perfect or sculpted a man can make his outward appearance there will always be self-doubt and confidence issues that arise if he compares himself to other men instead of his relying on own personal standard; and that feelings and emotions are not something to bury or hide from but something that should
be embraced and expressed. While *ManTalk* did not itself create healthy men or solve all the participants’ issues, it did act as a powerful catalyst nudging the men in the right direction, creating a more permissive environment where they could do the difficult emotional and transformational work necessary to be more critically conscious about all aspects of their masculinity and its intersections. Now that the unconscious is conscious and the invisible is visible in regards to masculinity and its intersections, the participants are prepared to live more authentic lives that are less constrained by hegemony and the dominant discourse, should they so choose.

**ManTalk, Masculinity, and Relationships**

Chapter Five provides critical answers to understanding the totality of the participants’ relationships, specifically, their familial relationships, female relationships, and their male relationships. Although each of the participants discussed and described unique challenges and issues that they were having inside of their different relationships, the data demonstrates that the underlying issue for many of these relational problems is an adherence to traditional masculine ideologies. Upon having a safe and conducive environment in which the participants felt comfortable sharing their issues and struggles inside of their different relationships they came to realize that the individual issues they were dealing with weren’t so unique or abnormal. Rather, they were all dealing with nearly identical issues that were merely part of the trial and tribulations of the developmental process of learning to establish mature interpersonal relationships. *ManTalk* simply served as a vehicle for helping the participants better understand how their masculinity impacted and intersected with all of their intimate relationships and it helped them become more consciously competent about this intersection so they could be more successful in navigating these relationships in the future.
For example, as the participants began deconstructing their own masculine subscriptions and better understanding how their masculinity has often constricted their own lives and relationships they began developing a more critical framework for making sense of their relationship with their fathers. Through *ManTalk*, the participants came to realize that the disconnect (*Hunger* or *Wound*) most had with their fathers was not because of some lack of love, affection, and/or intimate connection; but was really resultant from their own fathers subscription to the pervasive masculine norms and the participants unconscious emulation of these same constricting norms. As a program, *ManTalk* helped the participants realize that one of the keys to developing healthy adult relationships and becoming comfortable with being interdependent on others is accepting that all individuals – including their parents – will fall short of the ideal. Making this known to the participants’ through the telling and retelling of the men’s personal stories helped them move forward in their familial relationships, while also aiding them in developing increased tolerance, a capacity for intimacy, a willingness to forgive, and a love that is free from the wish that their parents should have been different.

The formation of romantic relationships, same-sex friendships, and cross-sex friendships is a critical part of a man’s psychosocial development and the college setting is an important context for the development of these relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Through this experience the participants were given an opportunity to critically examine and deconstruct their different female relationships (friendships, hook-ups, romantic) through a more gendered lens that took into account their masculinity and its impact on these relationships. An analysis of the data shows that through the participants’ experiences in *ManTalk* they gained a better understanding of: the reasoning behind why their female friendships tend to be more nurturing and honest as compared to their male friendships; the detrimental nature of the college hook-up
culture in regards to building a satisfying committed relationship in the future; the role masculinity plays in their romantic relationships and the best way to go navigating and sustaining a long-term relationship; the *Bilinguality* between genders that men must master in order to be more successful in their relationships with women. Making all this known to the participants through *ManTalk* only better prepares men to navigate the emotional challenge (men benefit more emotionally from their different cross-sex relationships), the sexual challenge (sex can often get in the way of many cross-sex relationships), the equality challenge (men are typically the dominant player in their cross-sex relationships), and the audience challenge (managing assumptions of others about men’s different cross-sex relationships) within their cross-sex relationships and friendships.

The men in the study also talked a great deal about the importance of their male friendships, but prior to their *ManTalk* experience, many of them had no idea how superficial many of these friendships were and what they were lacking. Through this experience they were better able to see how their same-sex relationships – including their non-fraternal and fraternal – have been restricted as a result of the aggressiveness, competiveness, homophobia, and lack of emotional intimacy that is bred into these relationships via traditional masculine norms. *ManTalk* also provided the men with an opportunity to collectively reinterpret and deconstruct the systematic social mechanisms that have constricted their male relationships. As they re-examined their male friendships and what was missing they came to realize that they had the power to “unmake” and “remake” these friendships so they were more grounded in open, honest, communication and less about just drinking beers together or playing sports together. Most of the participants left the program even more excited to rebuild and reframe many of their male friendships as a result of experiencing the positive benefits of their *ManTalk* relationships, which
they all agreed were deeper, healthier, and more intimate, trustworthy, and satisfying as compared to any of their other male relationships (per the data).

**ManTalk and the College/Fraternity Experience**

Many masculinity scholars argue that higher education professionals need to do a better job arming men with a roadmap for more successfully navigating Guyland – as a stage of life – more consciously, more honorably, and with greater resilience (Kimmel, 2008). The findings from the study show that ManTalk, as a program, educated, supported, and outfitted participants with some of the necessary skills and tools to more successfully navigate the college/fraternity experience in a more congruent and critically conscious manner. For example, through ManTalk the men were given numerous opportunities to critically analyze and expose the contradictions in their lives through an examination of their espoused masculinity and identity with the masculine identity they actually perform and live-out in their everyday life. As the men grew more enlightened about the incongruity in their life between the men they said they wanted to be versus the men they really were, they gained a consciousness that should help them more successfully navigating their college/fraternity experience in a more happy, healthy, and congruent way. Fulfilling Kimmel’s (2008) request to help men more successfully navigate Guyland, the ManTalk program equips participants with a map for better understanding the intersecting roads of their masculinity and identity while also helping them better navigate this often difficult landscape.

**ManTalk and Critical Conversations**

The first rule of the guy code, a rule that many of the participants subscribed to prior to the experience, is that you can express no doubts, no fears, no emotions, and no vulnerabilities (Kimmel, 2008). The findings presented in Chapter Six show that ManTalk, provided a free
that a majority of college-aged men subscribe to and push on to others. The emerging data presented shows that as the men became more comfortable having critical conversations about their trials and tribulations with regards to their masculinity and identity development inside of *ManTalk*, they also grew more comfortable and prepared to have these conversations in their everyday life. For example, as a result of having a safe environment in which David felt comfortable initially working through his issues related to his emotional constriction, he felt more confident in addressing this issue inside of his five-year relationship with his girlfriend. Although the data reveals that the conversations participants began having outside of *ManTalk* with their friends and families may not have been as deep or critical is irrelevant, as the first-step in moving theory to practice and transforming hegemonic systems is through critical dialogue (Friere, 1970).

The study also demonstrates that through critical conversations, *ManTalk*, as a program, helped to humanize, validate, and normalize participants’ issues and struggles related to their masculinity, race, gender and sexual orientation, body image, feelings and emotions, and relationships. Through dialogue, reflection, and storytelling *ManTalk* provided an avenue for participants to begin deconstructing the pluralistic ignorance that is perpetuated via the dominant discourse. For example, the findings illustrate that participants often falsely perceived that their issues and struggles were drastically different than everyone else’s – when in all reality they weren’t at all. A lot of the participants came into the program thinking, I am the only one who feels insecure in myself as a man, I am the only one who has no idea how to talk about my emotions, I am the only one who really dislikes my body, I am the only who doesn’t want to drink all the time, I am the only one who isn’t all about hooking-up and having sex with random people. However, as they progressed through *ManTalk* together they were able to collectively
breakdown and critically question these faulty taken-for-granted assumptions, and in so doing they gained increased awareness, confidence, and reassurance in themselves as men.

**Making Meaning of the ManTalk Experience**

The participants created meaning individually and collectively from their *ManTalk* experience as a result of having an opportunity to openly dialogue about masculinity, to reflect on their lives and experiences as men, to critically analyze the social and political structures created by the dominant discourse, and as a result of being challenged to take action in their everyday lives. Because naming and critiquing masculine ideology is a new intellectual terrain for many male students, achieving success in this area is best done through a critical pedagogical lens that embraces dialogue, self-reflection, critical analysis, and action. As described in Chapter Six the participants also made meaning of this experience via the lessons they learned about themselves, their brothers, and masculinity, via the increasing depth and critical-nature of the conversations that the men had within *ManTalk* and outside of it as they continued these conversations, and via the changing group dynamic which became more self-directed and self-regulated as the sessions wore on.

The process of learning and making meaning however does not occur simply as a result of an experience. Rather, Dewey (1916) argues that an experience creates meaning only when critical reflective thought leads to growth and the ability to act and react within a more informed perspective. *ManTalk*, as a program, met each of the men at their respective developmental life-stage and through recurrent critical reflection and conversation about the discourse of masculinity and its impact and intersections, the participants wear pushed past their edge of knowing. Through the deconstruction and interrogation of the participants’ masculine identities, belief systems, and the larger social systems at play, meaning was made as they began to reform
and transform – both individually and collectively – their habits, assumptions, and perspectives about what it means to be a man.

**Strengths and Challenges of the Study and ManTalk Program**

As a novice researcher I encountered many ups and downs as I embarked on the dissertation journey, undertook this qualitative study, and simultaneously facilitated this program. As a result, I have come to better understand and appreciate all the specific strengths and challenges that were embedded in this study. Because the body of research on college men and masculinity is so young and because there is very limited research on college men’s growth groups and their impact, it is vital to discuss and reflect on the strengths and challenges of this study. In so doing, I hope to better equip and prepare those researchers and practitioners who may do further research or programming in the area of college male development.

**Strengths**

The key strengths of the study included: (a) the amount of diversity amongst and within the participants; (b) my connection and relationships with participants; (c) the participant’s honesty and vulnerability with each other and me; (d) the participant’s increasing ownership of program and curriculum; and (e) the parallels and similarities in the participants answers across all data sources – interviews, group sessions, personal journals.

The greatest strength of this study is probably amount of diversity within the sample population. The participants had varied backgrounds in regard to their ages, races, religions, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic status. The participants truly were a melting pot – Black, White, Hispanic, Korean, Vietnamese, gay, straight, lower class, middle class, upper middle class, Catholic, Baptist, and Atheist. The diversity of the sample takes on even greater significance as an overall strength when it is realized and remembered that this diversity existed
inside of an IFC fraternity – which tend to be predominately White. While qualitative research is not primarily meant to be generalized to a larger population, the diversity within this sample of participants, allow the results herein to be more applicable and generalizable (Patton, 2002) across the spectrum of all male college students as compared to other qualitative studies.

Another key strength of the study is the connection and relationships that I developed with the participants. Although, Glesne (2001) argues that the more one functions as a member of the group, the more one risks losing the eye of the uninvolved outsider; he also makes it clear that the more one participates, the greater opportunity one has to learn and build relationships. Coming in as an outsider I was nervous that the participants might not open up or that they might see me as just another guy from “Headquarters.” But I was wrong. I didn’t realize how strong of a connection I made with the participants until I started getting the random “Thank you” texts and calls during the week from the men. For example, Darren texted me after our Men and Family session, saying, “Thanks Shane for all your help and support with this whole family thing. Divorce isn’t easy. But I appreciate you challenging me not to keep it in.” At one point during the study I also received an unexpected text from David, saying, “Realize I got to work on my emotional self or the girlfriend is going to leave me. Wouldn’t have realized it without you. You are the man.” The best part about my connection and relationships with the participants is that I have even been able to maintain many of them even after the program ended.

The men’s honesty and vulnerability with each other and me throughout the study is another key strength of the study. An honest and vulnerable man is something to appreciate. Fifteen honest and vulnerable men meeting week-in-and-week out for a semester is an inspirational and transformational experience. After I showed up on the first day wearing an ancient Hawaiian mask and took it off as a sign that our space was a place where all the men
could take off their armor and masks and be real men - honest and vulnerable men – it was easy for the participants to try and do the same. John wrote in his journal about his thoughts on the men’s honesty and vulnerability, “It meant everything to me, because I know now that other people so close to me are going through the same things I’m going through.” If the environment created was not one that bred open and honest dialogue and vulnerability, the program would have had less of an impact on the men and how they made meaning of their experience.

An additional strength of this study is how the participants gradually took ownership of the program, the curriculum, and the weekly conversations. As a critical educator being guided by the theory and practice of critical pedagogy, I strove to steadily decrease my control – as the facilitator – over the sessions and conversations while simultaneously empowering the participants to take more control. Although I had session outlines that helped guide the conversation each week, I embraced the reality of not knowing just exactly where each lesson would go. In the beginning I wasn’t sure that when I let go of the reins if the participants would be ready to steer and guide the conversation. What I came to realize is that even though they took the conversation in a direction I didn’t expect or the conversation wasn’t as critical as I would have liked, none of that really mattered, because as Dewey (1916) points out, all social interaction is learning. As soon as I embraced Dewey’s idea, I began to look forward to seeing where the participant’s wanted the conversations to go and to seeing how, when they directed the conversations, they became critically active learners instead of just passive observers.

A final strength of the study is the parallels and similarities in participants’ answers across all data sources – interviews, group sessions, and personal journals. Since I approached this study from a critical constructionist viewpoint I expected to see multiple realities created by participants depending on the type of data instrument used, whether or not they were alone or in
a group, and/or whether or not they were talking or writing down their thoughts. I was wrong. What I found through an analysis of all the data were parallel answers, parallel stories, parallel emotions, parallel masculinities, and even parallel realities. But the study also had unique challenges that had to be overcome.

**Challenges**

There were three specific challenges that I encountered during the study which should be noted and discussed in greater detail: (a) data richness of some participants; (b) issues related to the personal journals; and (c) attendance-based issues. Although these challenges may have had a minor impact on the overall study, most were negated as a result of data triangulation and sample size.

When conducting interviews or group-based sessions there are always some people who have a lot to say while others don’t, some people that have an intriguing story they want you to know about and others that don’t want reveal as much about themselves, some people that know exactly who they are and others that can’t explain or articulate who they are. As a researcher, I faced this obstacle as a part of the study and it led to some participants being more information rich and others being less information rich. The challenge was trying to paint a holistic picture of the different participants’ experiences even though several participants were not as information rich as others in the study. While I don’t think any of the participants meant to not be information rich, it probably just happened as a result of the number of men in the group, the limited time we had to converse during our interviews and each week during our group sessions, and as a result of some participants not being as articulate or critically reflective as others.

The personal journals of the participants also created a minor challenge throughout the study. Although personal journals can be extremely beneficial in the data collection process,
they are only beneficial if the data contained within them is rich and each journal entry is written while the participant is still being critically reflective on their thoughts and emotions resultant from a session. The personal journals were a minor struggle for two main reasons: a lack of follow-through by some participants and a lack of reflection within the journal entries by some participants. Unfortunately, it took a lot of prodding and poking to get the some of the men to submit their journal entries each week and a few men did not get around to submitting all their journal entries until the end of the program. Besides a lack of follow-through with the personal journals by some participants there was also a lack of reflection by other participants. For example, some participants gave only very brief, one sentence answers to the different journal prompts each week and most others only wrote a few sentences or a paragraph.

Attendance is another minor challenge that I faced as part of this qualitative study. At the beginning of the program I informed all participants that the program was voluntary, so if they needed to miss a session for a legitimate reason it would be ok. But I also stressed how the ManTalk program was a series that builds upon itself week after week and topic after topic. Only seven of the participants attended all ten ManTalk sessions and had no absences. Three participants had one absence, three participants had two absences, one of the participants had three absences, and one participant (Larry) – who basically dropped out of the study – had six absences. Though most participants usually informed me that they would be absent for a specific session and most of the participant absences were excused (death in family, test next day, sick), it still may have had an impact – albeit minor – on their overall ManTalk experience and how they made meaning of the program. However, none of the challenges just discussed should take away from the influence and impact this study should have on future research and practice.
Recommendations For Future Research and Practice

The academic discourse associated with understanding college men as gendered beings, how college men understand and perform their masculinities, the obstacles and challenges they face as men throughout college, and how male-specific educational programming may aid them as men in navigating the college environment in healthier and more successful ways, is limited in its overall scope and depth. I advance and recommend that further research and practice is needed in the following areas: examination of critical masculinities within the college setting, the linking of student affairs practice to student development paradigms and men’s issues, campus programming for men, college men’s growth groups, and member development within the fraternal setting.

Examination of Critical Masculinities Within the College Setting

The findings of the current study provide further support that the privileged nature of dominant group identities (college men in this case) often leaves them unexplored and unexamined not only in the literature but also in the individuals themselves (Johnson, 2001; Jones, 1997). Because dominant identities and systems, like hegemonic masculinity, often go unexamined, acting individually as a student, administrator, practitioner, or researcher against the social, political, and cultural tide of the dominant discourse – almost ensues failure. Therefore, the study and exploration of critical masculinities and masculine identity development embedded within the college context must be on-going, systematic, and multi-pronged. Harris and Barone (2011) argue that it will take a substantial and long-term commitment to examining intersections of identities and a dedication to understanding men and masculinities from a critical and social justice perspective before administrators will be able to do the transformative work that their institutions, students, and specifically college men, deserve. And Kimmel and Davis
(2011) pose that only, “A critical perspective that incorporates both psychological and sociological aspects of men’s development will transform Guyland” (p. 14).

While this study used a critical approach to examining the participants’ masculinities and their experiences in a men’s growth group, further research needs to be conducted in this area if educators and administrators are to transform the system of patriarchy, power, and hegemony that most college men subscribe to and benefit from, and that often oppresses and subordinates men of color, gay men, transgendered men, as well as female students. Since so many people contribute to the socialization of gender and the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity within the college setting, further research is needed to better understand how gender queer individuals, women, and even faculty and staff – who often say they oppose and have actively worked against the destructive nature of hegemonic masculinity – perpetuate it via their actions, behaviors, relationships, and teachings (Wagner, 2011). Davis (2010) calls for further research to be conducted that explores how men see themselves as men within the context of the restraints, constraints, and expectations of the male gender role. Edwards (2007) advocates for additional research that helps administrators better understand how the practice of exposing men to personal influences, literary and historical influences, alternate versions of masculinity, and consciousness raising academic courses may help them begin to transcend their subscription to hegemonic masculine norms. Through a continual and multi-pronged approach focused on additional research and practical application that helps college men better understand hegemonic masculinity, the dominant discourse, and the systems in which it is embedded, student affairs professionals have the unique opportunity to aid college men as they reinterpret their masculinities toward a more healthy, adaptive, self-authored identity.
Linking Student Affairs Practice, Student Development Theory, and College Men

Although student affairs practice, student development theory, and the current issues facing college men are all innately intertwined, the link between these three distinct phenomena has been mainly unconnected. This study sought to connect this three-way link by qualitatively studying the experiences of fraternity men participating in a men’s growth group, facilitated by a trained student affairs practitioner, through a critical student development paradigm. However, this is but one study that has actively sought to connect this link, which has been greatly missing from the research and practice. Unfortunately, most student affairs professionals falsely believe that they critically understand men, their development, and their gender-related experiences. But as Laker (2011) points out, neither the graduate preparation programs nor the workplace of new student affairs professionals are connecting the bridge between male identity development and student development paradigms. As a result, O’Neil and Casper (2011) posit that the lack of understanding of masculine identity development by student affairs professionals is the reason why very little theoretical literature exists on how men’s issues relate to college student development paradigms. Hopefully, as new and current student affairs professionals are better trained and educated in addressing men’s issues there will be more research and practice that connects this three-way link between student affairs practice, student development paradigms, and men’s issues.

Campus Programming for Men

Over the last fifty years colleges and universities have made great strides in creating offices and programs that assist and support female students, multicultural students, first-generation students, international students, and students with disabilities – all of which were and still are greatly needed. But now more and more college men are struggling both inside and
outside of the classroom, and some would argue that they have been left behind. Recently, there has been a push aimed at helping men better understand their gender and arming them with the tools and skills to more successfully navigate the college experience through a variety of campus-based programs. The recent question student affairs administrators have been asking is, “What type of programs do we need to create and develop to help college men?” The answer is campus-based programs like ManTalk – programs that support and challenge college men – programs that educate and enlighten college men – programs that are critical in nature yet fun and interesting – programs that help men deconstruct their masculinity while simultaneously giving them the tools to rebuild and re-invent themselves.

There needs to be more orientation programs that are focused specifically on men and that address and challenge their preconceived notions of what it means to be a college man (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005). The men themselves need more programs and services that are action-oriented and that engage them in conversation simultaneously (Davis & Laker, 2004). Universities need more programs that address college men’s choices with regards to drugs and alcohol (Courtenay, 2004). There is also a vital need for more programs that educate men on healthy living and the consequences of risky behavior (Courtenay, 2000). Universities need more programs that address sexual assault, bystander intervention, and the relationship between masculinity and violence (Capraro, 2004). More restorative justice programs are needed that help men connect their conduct and behavioral issues to their masculinity (Ludeman, 2008). And there is also a need for more men’s growth groups which provide men with a safe-space where they can dialogue about manhood, masculinity, the issues and challenges they face as college men, and the process by which they become the author of their own identity (Davis, LaPrad, & Dixon, 2011). Of course, these programs and services should not take away from the
programs and services focused specifically on supporting and assisting female college students and/or other traditionally marginalized student populations; rather, they should exist on campus together in harmony.

There is also a vital need for further research on how each of these campus-based programs (listed above) specifically impact male participants, how these programs may benefit college men in understanding themselves, how these programs may aid men as they navigate the college environment, how these programs may help college men in becoming more health conscious, how these programs may aid in decreasing the risky behavior of college men, how these programs may help in decreasing male conduct violations, how these programs may aid in decreasing the alcohol-related incidents involving college men, and/or how these programs may aid in decreasing the number of rape and sexual assault cases that are perpetrated by college men. As more male-specific programs and services are created, developed, and implemented, and as additional research is conducted in understanding the impact of these programs, student affairs professionals will come to better understand which programs are the most and least impactful in helping the men matriculate on their campuses.

**College Men’s Growth Groups**

Based on my extensive literature review this dissertation on college men’s growth groups would seem to be one of the first in-depth qualitative studies focused specifically on understanding the impact and implications of participation in a college men’s growth group and how participants made meaning of their overall experience. Although the present study provides much needed insight into the overall impact of all-male growth groups on college men and their understanding of their masculinity, it does only represent a time- and context-bound snapshot of the participants’ perspectives. Additional research and practice is needed so as to further our
understanding of the impact of men’s growth groups, such as *ManTalk*, as a potential programmatic solution for helping men better understand themselves, their masculinity, and how to more successfully navigate the collegiate experience.

Vareldzis and Adronico (2000) recommend studying men’s growth groups longitudinally to see how they impact men’s understanding of masculinity, something that has still been overlooked in the research. A longitudinal study examining the impact of the *ManTalk* program on participants, long after their participation, is vitally needed in order to better understand “if” and “how” participation in this type of all-male growth group may have long-term benefits on participants in helping them become more critically conscious self-aware men. The proposed longitudinal study, which could be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method, could survey past participants at specific points in time (6 months after, 1 year after, and/or 3 years after) over a pre-determined period to gain additional insight into the potential long-term impact of this growth-group. Results from a longitudinal study examining the impact of a program like *ManTalk* would help researchers and practitioners better understand the strengths and shortcomings of one-time programming (single-dose) vs. ongoing, systemic, and multi-pronged programming on college men, which Harris and Barone (2011) posit as being much needed.

Further research should also be conducted that examines the potential impact of such a program or a similar ones within different all-male student populations, such as with: male residence hall communities, men’s athletic teams, multicultural fraternity members, male ROTC cadets, men who are a part of the LGBT community, and/or male students who are a part of a university’s first-scholars program. Not only are these groups already intact, but many times they are the groups of men that are struggling most with understanding their masculinity, gender role conflict, and navigating the college experience (Davis, LaPrad, & Dixon, 2011). It would
also be highly beneficial if additional research was conducted that looks into how men of varying ages and grades may make meaning, benefit, and/or be impacted by participating in a program like *ManTalk*. For example, do first-year men make meaning of the program and/or gain more from participating as compared to fourth-year men? What about the difference in impact and meaning for traditional-aged college men vs. non-traditional older college men? Lastly, further research should examine how professionally-led all-male growth groups compare and contrast in their overall impact on participants compared to peer-facilitated programs.

Professionals who plan on creating their own program and/or refining their current program need to be critically conscious of the following program variables – each of which may impact their program in some way, shape, or form:

- **Length of program** – Ten-weeks, twelve-weeks, all-semester, all-year
- **Number of participants** – Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty
- **Facilitator of program** – Professor, administrator, student/peer
- **Location of program** – Classroom, locker room, chapter house, living room
- **Session topics** – Men and relationships, locker room, chapter house, living room
- **Conceptual framework for program** – Critical masculinity, Chickering and Reisser’s Seven Vectors, Baxter Magolda’s Theory on Self-Authorship

### Member Development within Fraternal Setting

Although fraternities and fraternity men have been studied in-depth for many years there is very little published research that specifically examines the impact of specific member development programs within the fraternity setting. Many organizations, including Kappa Omega, have failed to gather empirical data that would aid them in truly understanding if they are successful in their endeavor to aid in the overall growth and development – both personally and professionally – of their approximately 15,000 undergraduate members. For example, Kappa Omega doesn’t have information in regards to understanding how the fraternity experience they endeavor to provide impacts their members intellectually, socially, relationally,
professionally, and/or as leaders. The organization doesn’t have clear evidence besides retention and GPA that proves members are better off as a result of joining the organization. And Kappa Omega doesn’t have data that shows “if” and “how” the developmental experience of a member leads to increased masculine awareness and understanding of gender identity. But, Kappa Omega isn’t the only fraternal organization searching to find this data.

The current study provides great insight into the areas in which fraternity men are struggling, areas in which fraternity men want and need additional support, and how group-based discussions may be beneficial in providing a more impactful and developmental membership experience for fraternity men. But this single one-time program within one organization on one campus is just the beginning. There are 75+ fraternal organizations within the North-American Interfraternity Conference with over 5,500 chapters located on 800+ campuses comprising over 350,000 total fraternity men (North-American Interfraternity Conference, 2013). Many of these organizations only provide an educational and developmental experience during a member’s first eight weeks. The lack of active programming outside of the new member program – pledge program - has left many fraternity men desiring and wanting more out of their fraternity experience and these men deserve more.

Fraternal organizations need to do a better job in how they go about creating and designing their member development programs and in how they assess and evaluate these programs to determine their effectiveness – which is vitally needed if these organizations are committed to truly aiding in the personal and professional growth of the 350,000+ fraternity men across the country. Kappa Omega, as an organization, is committed to leading the way in the important endeavor of changing the fraternity experience to one that more closely aligns with the student’s curricular experience. For example, they are redesigning their programs to better align
them with gender development and student development models, they are putting together a comprehensive assessment strategy to measure growth and development, and they are using a variety of professionals in the field to aid them in this endeavor. But there is still a lot of research and practice to be done in this area – not only by the fraternal organizations themselves, but also by researchers and practitioners in the field of student affairs and Greek Life who are advocate for these organizations.

**Researcher Reflection**

Although the primary purpose of this study was to understand how the participants made meaning of their experience in a men’s growth group, I too, experienced the phenomenon and felt it was important for me to also examine how I too was impacted by this study. What follows are my thoughts and reflections on how, through this experience, I have grown, developed, and become more critically aware as a man, as a researcher, and as a student affairs professional.

**As a Man**

As a critical constructionist I believe that I am who I am, as a man, only because of the relationships and experiences I have had throughout my lifetime. As a result of each new experience and relationship I am given the opportunity to re-examine my common sense, taken-for-granted assumptions as a man and what I know about myself as a gendered being. But through my *ManTalk* experience I have learned more than I could have ever expected about myself as a man and my masculinity. I learned that even though I try to be the very best man possible I am still a flawed individual. I learned that, even though I am always working with men to help them understand the impact their masculinity has on them, their identity, and their emotions, I never even realized how overwhelming and painful coming to better understand my own masculinity was going to be on my psyche. I learned that, just as I talked with the men
about building and rebuilding their familial relationships, I need to do the same, especially with my brother. With regard to masculinity, I learned that I still struggle moving theory into practice in my own life. I know my hegemonic masculine tendencies have caused me to sometimes have low self-esteem and poor body image, but I don’t know how to autocorrect. I know my masculinity and how I saw my father treat my mother has impacted my relationships with women and how I treat them, but it has been so ingrained in me that sometimes I conduct myself in a way that is not becoming of a gentleman. Thankfully, through this experience I had the opportunity to re-examine myself and my masculinity, and was given another chance to proactively work on becoming a better more self-aware man.

**As a Researcher**

Throughout this study I was constantly learning, growing, and evolving as a researcher. While I came into this study with a foundational understanding of qualitative research and the research process, I by no means was an expert. As a researcher, this experience has helped me become even more critically conscious of everything around me and everything I do and say. When you become so ingrained in your work as a researcher your theory truly becomes a part of you. I understand and study masculinity through a critical lens and work with college male students through a student development lens, and as such I am constantly viewing the world through these theoretical lenses. Now that I have put on these theoretical glasses and see the world through them – like a superhero – they are my blessing and my curse in that I can never take them off. It is impossible now, as a researcher and practitioner, to not always be fully cognizant – fully aware – of all the masculine hegemony that surrounds me and how it is embedded in a social, political, cultural, and economic context.
As a Student Affairs Professional

While I never planned on making student affairs my profession, I think after almost ten years of work at a several colleges and universities across the country, two masters degree, and a doctorate, I am in for the long haul. Throughout the past ten years I have learned a lot about myself and the profession of student affairs; however, this study and the men who participated have taught me more than I ever learned in the classroom or through a textbook about the current state of college men – where they are struggling, where they need help, and how I can have an impact on this generation of college men and future generations as a professional within the field. The experience has also reminded me that sitting behind a desk doesn’t change lives. How can we aid in the development of a male student’s character and identity from behind our desk? We can’t. We do it through our interactions with them, through our relationships with them, through our mentoring of them, through our support of them, and through our educational discipline of them (if necessary)

This experience reminds me how important our work is, as student affairs professionals, in providing an educational, developmental, impactful, and engaging out-of-classroom experience to college men. The typical college male spends, on average, only 15 hours in the classroom each week, which means he has roughly 153 hours outside of the classroom every week, or 92% of his weekly time. The literature presented in Chapter Two is clear in showing that when college men are not or choose not to be actively engaged or involved on-campus or in the community they tend to fill their time with video games, engaging in risky behavior, binge drinking, hooking-up, and being otherwise unproductive. Thus there is a vital need for additional programming that will aid men in adjusting to college, being successful while in college, and effectively transitioning out of college. None of this is really taught in the
classroom, yet it is expected that college men will just figure it out. The ManTalk program, although it was only a few hours each week, is just one possible programmatic solution for how we can better engage and challenge college males.

**Final Thoughts**

Many college men on campuses across the country are unconsciously and invisibly struggling as they navigate their masculinity, identity, and relationships. They may be doing well academically, they may be engaged on-campus, and they may even be leaders of student organizations, but there is often an internal struggle that is brewing inside of these men. Without a roadmap to help guide them through the college experience, or a support network that they can turn to should they have questions, college men often struggle internally as a result of the ever-constant pressure to conform to hegemonic masculine norms. As a result these men act out and perform their masculinity in ways that are often destructive, damaging, risky, and unhealthy in an effort to prove their manhood.

The fifteen fraternity men that participated in this qualitative study are no different than the stereotypical college male. They are mainly good and decent men who want to do well academically, who want to be engaged outside of the classroom, and who want to be leaders in their fraternity and on-campus. They enjoy hanging out with their buddies, partying and drinking on the weekend, and randomly hooking-up with women. But they also struggle navigating their masculine identity and their psychosocial development without a true support network or a safe space where they can dialogue about these internal struggles and dilemmas. Prior to the ManTalk experience, these men were also unconsciously incompetent about the critical nature of their masculinity and how much of “who they are” and “how they think” as men is embedded in a very historical social, political, and cultural context. The problem is that
most men, including the participants, often never see or fully comprehend the privilege they have sustained and continue to maintain in society simply as a result of being male – that is, until it is pointed out to them and deconstructed via programs like ManTalk.

Although the research has shown that college men are struggling many colleges have done little in the way of creation of new programmatic interventions aimed specifically at men. “The lack of active programming for men is one of the most neglected areas in higher education…And the real challenge for the profession is to fully accept vulnerable college men are a special group that need our help and support” (O’Neil & Casper, 2011, p. 46). The good news is that there is a new body of research that offers a variety of solutions to address this problem. The ManTalk program has been my attempt at a solution. It has been my attempt to provide men with a safe and conducive environment where they felt comfortable talking about their issues and struggles as it relates to their masculinity. It has been my attempt at providing an intentional space where men can dialogue, reflect, analyze, and deconstruct their masculinity, its intersections, and its impact on them as men. Although I have been facilitating ManTalk for many years prior to this experience on several campuses, I never had in-depth data to truly understand how men make meaning of their experiences in ManTalk and how it may impact their overall masculine awareness. The results of this study would suggest that ManTalk, as a programmatic intervention, can be successful in helping participants become more self-aware, critically conscious men who are more intentional about their navigation of their masculinity, its intersections, and its impact in everything they do as men.

This qualitative study joins with only a few others that have sought to examine and understand the meaning and impact of participation in all-male growth group by college men and is the only one, to date, that examines how fraternity men make meaning of their experiences
in a men’s growth group. Thus, it should greatly contribute to the limited body of research focused on understanding how college/fraternity men understand their masculinity within a critical context, its intersection with all aspects of their identity, and how men’s growth groups can be a successful vehicle in better educating and empowering college/fraternity men to become more critically self-aware individuals. It is my hope that future practitioners will use this initial study as a guide-post and resource as they go about designing and developing men’s groups and/or other programmatic opportunities for men on their campus – because, as Kimmel and Davis (2011) declare, “The need for a band of brothers is stronger than ever. Boys and men need a place where they can be vulnerable, honest, and open with each other and learn how to become men” (p. 13).
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Appendix A
Participant Consent Form

Attention: Study Participant

RE: ManTalk: A Qualitative Study Examining Fraternity Men’s Experiences in a Men’s Growth Group

From: Kelly Ward, Professor, Principle Investigator
Shane McKee, Ph.D. Candidate, Co-Principle Investigator

Researcher’s statement
This letter is regarding the research project that Kelly Ward Ph.D and Shane McKee are conducting through the Washington State University, College of Education. We are asking your consent to conduct this research as approved by the WSU institutional review board number #12136-001. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called ‘informed consent’. I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

Purpose and Benefits
The purpose of the research project is to gain an understanding of fraternity men’s experiences in a men’s growth group. Benefits to the participants may include a better understanding of themselves, their masculinity, the role masculinity plays in their everyday life, how other men make meaning of who they are and their masculinity, and how to navigate the college environment – as a man – in healthier and safer ways. Benefits to society may include a better understanding of how college men/fraternity men understand who they are and the role masculinity plays into their lives; and how innovative programs may aid these men in more successfully navigating the college experience.

Procedures
This project will be conducted during the fall 2011 semester, during which time participants will be involved in the ten-week men’s growth group (ManTalk program). All men will be given a sheet outlining the description of the research and a consent form from each agreeing participant will be collected either before the first interview or first session of the program. Any man not giving consent will not be used in the research project; however they may still participate in the program. Students consenting to the study will be informed that they may discontinue their involvement at any time.

Participants will be interviewed prior to the first ManTalk session and then immediately after the last session. These interviews will last from forty-five minutes in length to ninety minutes in length. Participants will also be asked to journal about their experiences in the program and provide these to the researcher as well. Each interview and ManTalk session will be audio-recorded.
**Risks, Stress, or Discomfort**

There will be minimal risk associated with your participation in the program, the personal interviews, and/or the journaling exercises. A risk is minimal where the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the proposed study is not greater, in and of themselves, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. During the men’s growth group we will discuss such topics as: male friendships, intimate relationships, your fraternity experience, your experiences with alcohol, sex and sexuality, etc... However, these conversations will occur in a very supportive, non-judging, confidential environment where men in the group can discuss openly and participate at their own free-will.

**Confidentiality**

Participant confidentiality is of utmost importance to the project; therefore, students’ names will be coded to ensure autonomy throughout the study and into any publications that may come from the data. All personally identifiable material will be kept solely by the researcher and destroyed at the conclusion of the class project.

**Subject’s statement**

This study has been explained to me. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have general questions about the research, I can contact Shane McKee (shane.mckee@sigep.net). If I have questions regarding my rights as a participant, I can call the WSU Institutional Review Board at (509) 335-9661. After review, please check the boxes below that you consent to and then sign and date the bottom line to acknowledge that you understand and give consent to the research project.

I consent to having information collected from:

- [ ] Audio recordings of *ManTalk* Sessions
- [ ] Audio recordings of individual interviews
- [ ] Journal exercises I participate in

Researcher ___________________________ Date ________________

Participant ___________________________ ____________________________

Signature Print Date
Appendix B
Interview Protocol

Name: ____________________________ Date: __________________

Pseudonym Reference: ______________________

☐ Consent
☐ Explanation of Recording

FIRST INTERVIEW
Thanks for agreeing to participate in this study on your experience in a men’s growth group. I
am excited to get to know you better and learn more about your experiences. Before we begin
you will need to read and sign an Informed Consent Form. This form will tell you more about the
study and asks you to sign indicating that you agree to participate. Do you have any questions?

We are going to record this conversation so that I can listen to it later and transcribe our
conversation. I will summarize our conversations before the second interview so that you can be
sure that we are both as clear as we can be about what you have to say. Do you have any
questions? In order for this to be as confidential as possible I’d like you to select a pseudonym
that I will use in any written material related to this study.

The first interview will focus on introducing the participants to the study, getting their initial
thoughts, and getting them thinking and reflecting on their masculinity.

I. Understanding the participant and their background
• Tell me about yourself: Family, age, hometown, major, year in school, race, ethnicity,
  religion, socioeconomic status.
• Why did you agree to participate in this experience?
• How would you define masculinity?
• How have you come to understand what it means to be a man?
• How do you construct and perform masculinity in your everyday life?
• How has your understanding of what it means to be a man changed over your life?
• How would you describe your relationships with other men?
• How often and with whom do you have critical conversations focused on masculinity, men’s
  issues, and/or the effect these have on all aspects of your life?
• Where do you struggle the most as a college man/fraternity man?
• In what ways do you ever feel alone or as if no one truly understands what you are going
  through as a college/fraternity man? Why do you think that is?

SECOND INTERVIEW
The second interview will focus on participants’ experiences in the men’s growth group and how
they make meaning of the experience. This interview will also re-examine some of the topics
discussed during the first interview and explore them more in-depth to see how participants’
reflections have evolved over time.
I. Making Meaning of Experience
1. How would you describe your overall experiences in the men’s growth group?
2. What did you learn/gain as a result of your participation in the men’s growth group, if at all?
3. What would you say was the biggest “a-ha” moment for you during the men’s growth group?
4. How would you describe the men’s growth group to another student?
5. What is the meaning of a program like ManTalk?

II. Understanding yourself, your masculinity, and the role it plays in your life
• How would you define masculinity?
• Do you think the way you understand and define masculinity is different than when I asked you during our first interview? Why, why not?
• Do you think the way you construct and perform masculinity in your everyday life is different than when I asked you during our first interview? Why, why not?
• Has your level of self-awareness as a man changed throughout this experience? If so, why do you think that is?

III. Navigating the college/fraternity experience
• Where do you struggle as a college/fraternity man?
• How do you think the conversations and experience in the program may aid you in how you will go about navigating the college/fraternity experience, if at all?
• How will you apply what you learned/gained through your experience in the program in your everyday life as a college man/fraternity man, if at all?
• In what areas do you think you need additional support as a college man/fraternity man?

IV. Preparing men for future conversations
• How often and with whom do you have critical conversations focused on masculinity, men’s issues, and/or the effect these have on all aspects of your life? Is this different than when I asked you during our first interview? Why, why not?
• How would you explain your level of comfortability with conversations on masculinity, men’s issues, and the college male experience? Is this different than before your experience in the men’s growth group, and if so why?
• What specific topic do you wish you had more of an opportunity to further discuss? Why?

V. Understanding the stories/issues of other men and making meaning
• What did hearing the stories/issues other men shared during this experience mean to you?
• How did hearing the stories/issues of other men affect how you understand and make meaning of the issues in your life?

VI. Building Healthy Relationships
• How do you make meaning of the relationships you developed with the other men who participated in the men’s growth group?
• How would you compare your relationships with these men with other men in your fraternity? Your male friends outside of the fraternity?
Appendix C
ManTalk Session Guides

Session 1 Guide
Defining and Understanding Masculinity and What it Means to be a College Man

I. Welcome – Let's take off our masks, our cool caps, and share our stories, triumphs, challenges, worries, and challenge ourselves and each other to be better men.

II. Goals/Objectives - ManTalk and are used to objectively assess the program:
6. Give men an opportunity to come together with other men and have a meaningful experience that empowers them to become better, more self-aware men that critically examine who they are, why they are, and who they want to become.
7. Help men better understand themselves, their masculinity (construction and performance), and the role it plays in their everyday life.
8. Serve as an instrument to challenge and support men's attitudes, beliefs, and lives in a positive and supportive way, thus aiding them in navigating the college experience.
9. Supply men with an avenue to discuss important issues that they might not otherwise discuss or have had the opportunity to, thus increasing their level of interest and comfortability in continuing these conversations in their everyday lives.
10. Allow men to learn from the stories and experiences of other men, thus aiding them in how they make meaning of their own issues/challenges.
11. Aid men in building more healthy male-to-male relationships.

III. Ground-Rules - There are six rules of ManTalk:
1. ManTalk is confidential and the lives and experiences of other participants should not be shared with others outside of ManTalk.
2. ManTalk participants need to show due respect for other participants.
3. ManTalk participants must actively listen.
4. ManTalk participants should not interrupt.
5. ManTalk participants should not laugh at others stories or experiences; and
6. ManTalk participants should challenge each other in a positive manner.

IV. Defining Masculinity - According to Whitehead and Barrett (2001), Masculinity is, “the behaviors, languages, and practices existing in specific cultural and organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine” (p. 15).
1. In the United States, the dominant discourse of masculinity is epitomized by personality traits such as: strength, achievement, independence, toughness, aggressiveness, emotional constriction, competitiveness, forcefulness, action-oriented, risky, defiant, confident, heterosexual, and self-reliant (Kilmartin, 2007).
2. And the four major themes of the dominant discourse of masculinity in America, include: (1) antifemininity; (2) status and achievement; (3) inexpressiveness and independence; and (4) adventurousness and aggressiveness (Brannon, 1985).
3. **Hegemonic masculinity** concerns the dread of and the flight from women. A culturally idealized form, it is both a personal and a collective project, and is the common sense about breadwinning and manhood. It is exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent. It is pseudo-natural, tough, contradictory, crisis-prone, rich, and socially sustained. While centrally connected with the institutions of male dominance, not all men practice it. Though most benefit from it. Although cross-class, it often excludes working class and black men. It is a lived experience, and an economic and cultural force, and dependent on social arrangements. It is constructed through difficult negotiation over a life-time. Fragile it may be, but it constructs the most dangerous things we live with. Resilient, it incorporates its own critiques, but it is, nonetheless, unraveling (Donaldson 1993, p. 4).

V. **The Perils of being a college man/fraternity man**

1. From elementary school to high school boys have lower grades, lower class rank, and fewer honors than girls. They’re fifty-percent more likely to repeat a grade in elementary school, one-third more likely to drop out of high school, and about six times more likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder.

2. College men study less (Kellom, 2004), are more likely to miss class, not come prepared, and not complete homework or turn it in late (Sax & Arms, 2004).

3. Studies show that college men outnumber women in virtually every drinking category of drinking behavior used in research for comparison – prevalence, consumption, frequency drinking and intoxication, incidence of heavy and problem drinking, alcohol abuse and dependence, and alcoholism (Capraro, 2007).

4. Residents of fraternity houses and non-resident fraternity men experienced many more problems as a consequence of their drinking as compared to nonfraternity men, including: hangovers, doing something they regret, missing class, getting behind in school work, arguing with friends, engaging in unplanned sexual activity, and damaging property (Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 2009).

5. Among college students specifically, men engage in fewer health-promoting behaviors than women—including wearing safety belts; eating well; conducting self-examinations for cancer; and behaviors related to driving, sleep, and exercise (Courtenay, 1998). College men also engage in more risky behaviors than college women do, among them behaviors related to driving, sex, drug use, carrying weapons, and physically fighting (Courtenay, 2004).

6. According to Courtenay (1998), among college students, men begin sexual activity earlier in their lives, have more sexual partners, and are two time more likely than women to have had more than ten sexual partners.

7. Fisher Cullen and Turner (2000) found that 25% of college men reported in engaging in sexual activity with a woman that could be considered sexual assault.

8. Compared to non-fraternity men, fraternity men are a more sexually aggressive group (Lottes and Kuriloff, 1994); have a greater belief in “rape myths” (Boeringer, 1999); are more likely to have friends who have gotten women drunk or high to have sex, and who did not disapprove of this practice (Boeringer, 1996); and are more strongly associated with the sexual objectification of women through pornography, displaying sexually degrading picture of women, and using sexually degrading language when referring to women (Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; Murnen 2000; Sanday, 1990).
9. Two studies found that, among depressed college students, men are more likely to rely on themselves, to withdraw socially, and try to talk themselves out of depression (Courtenay, 1998). It is these types of behavioral responses that most explain why young men represent six of seven deaths from suicide (Department of Health and Human Services, 2000).

10. Male students in comparison with their female counterparts disproportionately violate policies and are sanctioned more often for violence and disruptive behaviors on college campuses across the country (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005).

VI. *Understanding the struggles of your brothers* -
Of course none of the statistics we just talked about matter if we don’t think about how they may relate to the struggles of your brothers. Do you know where they struggle the most as a college man/fraternity man? Let’s discuss our own personal struggles as men, so that way we can better understand each other and how we can better support one another moving forward.

VII. *Understanding what you mean to your brothers and why they look up to you as a man* -
Before we conclude I want us to reflect on what our brothers mean to us and how/why we look up to other men in this room. For many times we never take the chance to tell someone just exactly what the mean to us, or why we might look up to them. However, this may be all they need to hear in order to reaffirm to themselves that they are doing a good job as a man….that they are the man they want to be…that people’s perceptions of them as a man go hand-and-hand with how they perceive themselves.

VIII. *Where we go from here* -
Men and Family, Men and Fraternity, Men and Alcohol, Men and Spirituality, Men and Diversity, Men and Relationships, Men and Body Image, Men and Sexuality, Men and ManTalk

IX. *Journal of the week* –
1. How would you describe your overall experience (thoughts, feelings, opinions) in this week’s session?
2. What did you learn/gain as a result of your participation in this week’s session, it at all?
3. How might you apply what you learned/gained in this week’s session in your everyday life as a college man/fraternity man, if at all?
4. What did hearing the stories/issues other men shared during this week’s session mean to you and how you make meaning of this week’s topic?

X. *Attendance* – All participants were in attendance
I. Welcome – Recap last week, ask participants if they continued the conversations outside of our session, remind them to take off their masks and cool caps, reiterate the ground-rules and showing respect for everyone during sessions, and talk about rescheduling ManTalks on October 16th and October 30th.

II. Men and Family -
1. What did your family structure look like growing up?
2. Has your family structure changed since childhood? How, when?
3. How difficult was this on your family?
4. How do you think your masculinity has been impacted by your family structure?
5. How do you think having/not having a central father figure affected your masculinity?
6. How do you think your masculinity affects your relationships with family members?
7. What things do you appreciate the most about your family or family life?
8. What things do you find tough about your family or family life?
9. Who are you closest with in your family? Why?
10. What relationship do you struggle with the most in your family? Why?
11. What are some things that you want to do similar/dissimilar to your family?
12. What could you do to be a better brother or son to your family members?

III. Where we go from here -
Men and Fraternity, Men and Alcohol, Men and Spirituality, Men and Diversity, Men and Relationships, Men and Body Image, Men and Sexuality

IV. Journal of the week –
1. What did you learn/gain as a result of your participation in this week’s session, it at all?
2. How might you apply what you learned/gained in this week’s session in your everyday familial life?
3. Continue to contemplate that relationship you struggle with a little more and discuss how masculinity (yours or the other person’s – if male) has effected this relationship. Then discuss those things that YOU can do to repair this relationship as well as those things that YOU need from this other person to make the relationship better. And if you feel strongly enough send a copy of this to that person!

V. Attendance -
I. Welcome – Recap last week, ask participants if they continued the conversations outside of our session, see if participants followed-up with the familial situations they were struggling with, address the journal prompts and necessity of getting them back to me before following weeks session, provide outline for remaining topics of semester to everyone.

II. Men and Fraternity -
1. List off the most common fraternity stereotypes. Why are most negative? How many of these stereotypes do you play into? Does the chapter play into?
2. What pre-conceived notions to you bring with you to your fraternity experience? Did the chapter live up to those pre-conceived notions? Why or why not?
3. Which one of our three core values (virtue, diligence, brotherly love) do you most represent? Least represent? Why?
4. Which one of our three core values (virtue, diligence, brotherly love) does the chapter most represent? Least represent? Why
5. Within this group which brother best represents the core values?
6. Where do you struggle most as a member of Kappa Omega? How does your struggle relate to masculinity?
7. How do you think the family-structure of your chapter affects the overall closeness of chapter? Does it create more/less cohesiveness?
8. In the past week how have you seen masculinity permeate chapter activities? Was it positive or negative?
9. Why do you need the PAB (pussy-ass-bitch) award of the week? Does such an emasculating award really boost someone’s esteem and masculinity?
10. What can you do starting NOW to be a better leader and chapter brother?
11. What do you want to challenge your other brothers in this room to do moving forward in order create the best chapter experience possible for you and your other brothers?

III. Where we go from here –
Men and Fraternity, Men and Alcohol, Men and Spirituality, Men and Diversity, Men and Relationships, Men and Body Image, Men and Sexuality, Men and ManTalk

IV. Journal of the week -
1. What is the one thing you need from your fraternity brothers that you are not currently getting?
2. How do you play into and not play into those positive/negative stereotypes of the typical fraternity man?
3. How has your masculinity and who you are as a man been impacted by your fraternity experience in both the positive and negative?

V. Attendance -
I. Welcome – Recap last week, ask participants if they continued the conversations outside of our session, address the journal prompts and necessity of getting them back to me before following weeks session, ask everyone to challenge each other as well as asking others to speak up more.

II. Men and Alcohol -
1. When did you first start drinking alcohol?
2. Do you think masculinity played into that experience at all?
3. Was your first experience with alcohol positive/negative? Why?
4. Why do you drink alcohol? Is it usually a positive/negative reason?
5. How do you think masculinity/peer pressure play into your experiences with alcohol?
6. How does masculinity play into the reasons you choose to drink and/or how much you may choose to drink on a given occasion?
7. What do you think about the “Alcohol/Party” culture within the chapter? Is it healthy?
8. What are the positives and negatives that happen when you are with your brothers consuming alcohol? How do these relate to masculinity?
9. Have you ever worried about a brothers/friends drinking or your own? Why or why not?
10. Do you think your alcohol consumption will change as you get older?
11. Do you think the legal age (21) should be lowered? Why or why not?

III. The Research –
1. Studies show that college men outnumber women in virtually every drinking category of drinking behavior used in research for comparison – prevalence, consumption, frequency drinking and intoxication, incidence of heavy and problem drinking, alcohol abuse and dependence, and alcoholism (Capraro, 2007).
2. Capraro (2000) writes, “My interpretation of evidence suggests that men may be drinking not only to enact male privilege but also to help them negotiate the emotional hazards of being a man in the contemporary American college” (p. 307).
3. Among college male offenders 64% were using alcohol or drugs prior to the rape (Brecklin & Ullman, 2002) and in 75-80% of cases in which a male rapes a female college student, the female is intoxicated (Lisak & Miller, 2002).

IV. Where we go from here –
Men and Spirituality, Men and Diversity, Men and Relationships, Men and Body Image, Men and Sexuality, Men and ManTalk

V. Journal of the week -
1. Have you ever negatively used alcohol or been involved in a negative experience involving alcohol, and how did masculinity play into that experience?
2. What did hearing my story mean to you and in relation to how you view me as a man?

VI. Attendance -
Session 5 Guide

Men and Spirituality

I. Welcome - Recap last week’s session, ask participants about how these conversations have impacted them as men in their everyday lives, and discuss remaining sessions

II. Men and Spirituality -
1. As a child were you raised in the church?
   a. If so, what type of church?
   b. How often did you and your family attend church?
2. What is the difference to you between being religious and being spiritual?
3. Where are you at with your own religion/spirituality?
4. What do you struggle the most in regards to your own religion/spirituality?
5. How do you think masculinity plays into your religion/spirituality?
6. Although you may be comfortable with your own religion/spirituality how knowledgeable are you on the other religions/spiritualities of the world?
7. How do you practice your religion/spirituality?
8. Do you live a congruent spiritual life? (i.e.: not just going to church on Sundays and then swearing, drinking, etc… every other day)
9. How has your college experience affected your religion/spirituality?
10. How does your religion/spirituality affect your relationships with your Kappa Omega brothers?
11. What can you do moving forward to be better in practicing your religion/spirituality?

III. Where we go from here –
   Men and Diversity, Men and Relationships, Men and Body Image, Men and Sexuality, Men and ManTalk

IV. Journal of the week – NO JOURNAL ENTRY FOR THIS WEEK

V. Attendance -
Session 6 Guide

Men and Relationships

I. Welcome - Recap last week’s session, ask participants about how these conversations have impacted them as men in their everyday lives, and discuss remaining sessions.

II. Men and Relationships -
   1. Are you currently single or in a relationship? If so, how long?
   2. What was your longest relationship?
      a. If it is over can you explain what happened?
   3. What do you look for in a relationship?
      a. Did you have all these things in your past relationships?
   4. What bothers you in your current/past relationships? Why?
   5. What is your favorite part about being in a relationship?
   6. What scares you the most about serious relationships?
   7. How does masculinity play into your relationships?
   8. What do you like/dislike about being single?
   9. How does masculinity play into your desire to be single?
  10. What are the advantages/disadvantages to just hooking-up with girls?
  11. How does masculinity play into your decision to hook-up with girls?
  12. What questions/concerns involving relationships can you pose to the group for discussion?
  13. Have you ever been in love?
  14. What does love look like to you?
  15. How does the physical aspect (kissing, sex, etc…) play into your relationships?
      a. What happens when you move to fast?
      b. What happens when you move slowly?
      c. What happens if you don’t see eye-to-eye on being physical?

III. Where we go from here –
   Men and Relationships, Men and Body Image, Men and Sexuality, Men and ManTalk

IV. Journal of the week -
   1. How has your masculinity affected your past/present relationships and/or the reasons you choose to be single or engage in hook-ups?
   2. What can you do to be a better and more-healthy man in how you go about searching for relationships, hook-ups, love, etc…?

V. Attendance -
I. Welcome - Recap last week’s session, ask participants about how these conversations have impacted them as men in their everyday lives, and discuss remaining sessions.

II. Men and Body Image -
1. EXERCISE: Hand every participant a note card and have them make two columns. The first column will be for them to list the things they “Like” about their body image and the second column will be for them to list to things they “Dislike” about their body image. And, at the very bottom of the note card write down a number that represents your overall confidence in your body image (1=low / 10 = high).
2. Was this activity hard? Why?
3. What column “Like/Dislike” has more things listed in it? Why?
4. Of the things you listed in the “Dislike” column, how many can you not physically change/alter (height, hair, size, etc…)?
5. What do you take away from this activity and hearing the things other men struggle with in regards to their body image?
6. How does body image affect/impact your confidence as a man?
7. How does body image affect/impact your masculinity?
8. How does the media impact how you view yourself as a man and your body?
9. Is comparing yourself and your body image to others healthy/not healthy?
10. Have you ever been teased, ridiculed, or made fun of for some physical trait (i.e.: parents, girlfriend, etc…)? How did that make you feel?
11. Have you ever teased, ridiculed, or made fun of someone else because of a physical trait? How do you think that made that person feel?
12. Why do you think we tease others about their body image? Is there a deeper meaning?
13. What can you do today to impact your body image and your confidence in your overall body image?

III. Where we go from here - Men and Sexuality, Men and ManTalk

IV. Journal of the Week - NO JOURNAL ENTRY FOR THIS WEEK

V. Attendance –
Session 9 Guide
Men and Sexuality

I. Welcome - Recap last week’s session, ask participants about their Thanksgiving holiday, and discuss plans for the final session next week.

II. Men and Sexuality -
1. How and when did you first learn about sexuality/homosexuality?
2. Do you truly understand the spectrum of sexuality? LGBTQ?
3. How does sexuality affect/impact your confidence as a man?
4. How does sexuality affect/impact your masculinity?
5. How does the media impact your views on sexuality/homosexuality?
6. Do you have any family members or close friends that are gay/lesbian? If so, who? How did you first find out and how did that impact your relationship?
7. Do you agree/support homosexuality or disagree/not support homosexuality? Why?
8. Do you believe that sexuality is nature (genetic) or nurture (choice) or both? Why?
9. Does homosexuality conflict with your religious beliefs? Why?
10. What questions and/or things do you want to know about heterosexuality/homosexuality that would make you feel more comfortable?
11. Do you consider yourself homophobic or that you may have homophobic tendencies?
12. How do using words like “homo, gay, fag, and queer” in everyday life affect those around you that might be gay or just take offense of these derogatory words?
13. How does the fraternity experience support/not support openly gay members?
14. What can you do today to be more comfortable with your sexuality, the sexuality of others regardless of preference, and create an organizational culture that is openly supportive of all brothers regardless of sexuality?

III. Where we go from here - Men and ManTalk Pizza Party

IV. Journal of the Week – NO JOURNAL THIS WEEK

V. Attendance –

**Session 7 and 10 were directed by the participants therefore there was not a specific guide these sessions. Rather, these two sessions were very free-forming and unstructured. **
Appendix D
ManTalk Journal Prompts

Session 1 Journal Prompt
Defining and Understanding Masculinity and What it Means to be a College Man

Name: _______________________________ Date: _______________________________

Pseudonym Reference: ___________________ Topic: ______________________________

Thanks for partaking in this week’s ManTalk session. As part of this study I am asking participants to journal about their experience throughout the program. These journal entries will help you reflect on what we discussed and they will give me, the researcher, greater insight into how you have been affected by this program. Please complete this journal entry (preferably by typing your answers) and submit it to me via email at shane.mckee@sigep.net before the following week’s session.

• How would you describe your overall experience (thoughts, feelings, opinions) in this week’s session?

• What did you learn/gain as a result of your participation in this week’s session, it at all?

• How might you apply what you learned/gained in this week’s session in your everyday life as a college man/fraternity man, if at all?

• What did hearing the stories/issues other men shared during this week’s session mean to you and how you make meaning of this week’s topic?
Thanks for partaking in this week’s ManTalk session. As part of this study I am asking participants to journal about their experience throughout the program. These journal entries will help you reflect on what we discussed and they will give me, the researcher, greater insight into how you have been affected by this program. Please complete this journal entry (preferably by typing your answers) and submit it to me via email at shane.mckee@sigep.net before the following week’s session.

- What did you learn/gain as a result of your participation in this week’s session, if at all?

- How might you apply what you learned/gained in this week’s session in your everyday familial life?

- Continue to contemplate that relationship you struggle with a little more and discuss how masculinity (yours or the other person’s – if male) has effected this relationship. Then discuss those things that YOU can do to repair this relationship as well as those things that YOU need from this other person to make the relationship better. And if you feel strongly enough send a copy of this to that person!
Thanks for partaking in this week’s *ManTalk* session. As part of this study I am asking participants to journal about their experience throughout the program. These journal entries will help you reflect on what we discussed and they will give me, the researcher, greater insight into how you have been affected by this program. Please complete this journal entry (preferably by typing your answers) and submit it to me via email at shane.mckee@sigep.net before the following week’s session.

- What is the one thing you need from your fraternity brothers that you are not currently getting?

- How do you play into and not play into those positive/negative stereotypes of the typical fraternity man?

- How has your masculinity and who you are as a man been impacted by your fraternity experience in both the positive and negative?
Thanks for partaking in this week’s ManTalk session. As part of this study I am asking participants to journal about their experience throughout the program. These journal entries will help you reflect on what we discussed and they will give me, the researcher, greater insight into how you have been affected by this program. Please complete this journal entry (preferably by typing your answers) and submit it to me via email at shane.mckee@sigep.net before the following week’s session.

- Have you ever negatively used alcohol or been involved in a negative experience involving alcohol, and how did masculinity play into that experience?

- What did hearing my story mean to you and in relation to how you view me as a man?
Thanks for partaking in this week’s *ManTalk* session. As part of this study I am asking participants to journal about their experience throughout the program. These journal entries will help you reflect on what we discussed and they will give me, the researcher, greater insight into how you have been affected by this program. Please complete this journal entry (preferably by typing your answers) and submit it to me via email at shane.mcke@sigep.net before the following week’s session.

- How has your masculinity affected your past/present relationships and/or the reasons you choose to be single or engage in hook-ups?

- What can you do to be a better and more-healthy man in how you go about searching for relationships, hook-ups, love, etc…?
Appendix E  
Participant Descriptions

Ben

Ben is a 21 year-old senior, White, non-religious, heterosexual male from a working class background who grew up in Newport News, VA. He is a first generation college student studying accounting. He has a twin-sister (21) and younger brother (16). Ben and his sister were one of the first documented artificially-inseminated twins in the country, so he does not know his father’s blood line. However, his mother met his step-dad when Ben was 6 years-old and they conceived his younger brother together. His mom owns a house cleaning company and his dad works as a maintenance electrician. Ben has a girlfriend and has been dating her for about one year. His girlfriend is African American and their interracial relationship has been a learning experience for both of them. Ben has had a significant stutter since childhood and according to him this has had a huge impact on his self-esteem and confidence. Ben joined Kappa Omega when he was a first year student and was most recently the chapter president.

Brad

Brad is a 19 year-old sophomore, White, non-denominational Christian, heterosexual male from an upper-middle class background who grew up in Charlottesville, VA. Brad is majoring in political science and minoring in religious studies. His parents are still married and are both retired army veterans, although his dad continues to work. Because both his parents were in the Army, Brad moved several times during his childhood. Brad has two younger brothers (17, 12). Brad has had a long-time girlfriend that he has been dating for approximately two years. Brad joined Kappa Omega when he was a first year student and was most recently the Vice President of Member Development.
Cale

Cale is a 19 year-old sophomore, White, non-religious, heterosexual male from a middle class background who grew up York County, VA. Cale is double-majoring in mechanical engineering and physics and is a part of the Honors College. He is an only-child and says that he is not very close to his parents, who have divorced once and separated twice but are currently together. During high school Cale’s father was diagnosed with level I and II head and neck cancer from smoking. This experience had a major impact on Cale’s high school experience. Cale has a girlfriend that he has been dating for about four months. Cale joined Kappa Omega when he was a first year student and was most recently the Vice President of Finance.

Chase

Chase is a 19 year-old sophomore, Korean-American, non-denominational Christian, heterosexual male from a middle class background who grew up in Stafford, VA. Chase is majoring in kinetic imaging, which is focused on the production of video, sound, and animation. Chase’s mother is 100% Korean and she grew up in Korea before coming to the states in 1979. Chase’s parents are both army veterans, but they separated when he was in the fifth grade. He has an older sister (22) who also attends Eastern State and they are currently roommates. Interestingly enough, both Chase and his sister also made the decision to serve in the Army and are enlisted in the Army Reserves. Chase is currently single. He joined Kappa Omega when he was a first year student and was most recently the Vice President of Recruitment.

Connor

Connor is a 19 year-old sophomore, White, Baptist/non-denominational Christian, heterosexual male from an upper-middle class background who grew up in Hampton, VA. Connor is majoring in biomedical engineering (pre-med) and hopes to attend medical school.
after graduation. He is also a part of the Honors College on campus. His parents are still married and his father is a government contractor and his mother is a teaching assistant at an elementary school. Connor has one older brother (22) who just recently graduated college and they have a relatively close relationship. Connor has a girlfriend who he has been dating for about one year and she is of Asian descent. Connor joined Kappa Omega when he was a first year student.

David

David is a 19 year-old sophomore, African-American/Puerto Rican, non-denominational Christian, heterosexual male from an upper-middle class background who grew up in Virginia Beach, VA. David is majoring in finance and has been working full-time since he was sixteen to support himself and pay his tuition. David’s father is Puerto Rican and his mother his African-American; however, his parents were never married. His mom married his step-dad when he was younger, but he does not have close relationship with his father or step-dad. David’s father is currently in prison and has been there for some time for an undisclosed reason. David has nine half brothers and sisters (father had six other children and his mother and stepdad had three children together). David has had a long-time girlfriend of five years and currently she attends another university located two hours away. David joined Kappa Omega as a first year student.

Darren

Darren is a 21 year-old senior, African-American, spiritual/non-religious, homosexual male from a middle class background who grew up in Virginia Beach, VA. Darren is majoring in international studies and is double-minoring in business and Spanish. Darren’s parents recently separated and plan on divorcing and this has had a major impact on Darren. He has an older brother (26) who is married and is expecting his first child. He was single throughout this
study, but talked with me on numerous occasions about his struggle to find a partner. Darren joined Kappa Omega as a second year student and has held a variety of leadership positions within the fraternity.

**Jared**

Jared is a 18 year-old sophomore, first generation Korean-American, catholic, heterosexual male from a lower-middle class background who grew up in Flushing, NY before moving to VA in high school. Jared is also a first generation college student double majoring in biology and chemistry with a pre-pharmacy concentration. Both of Jared’s parents were born in Korea and his parents met in New York in the 1980’s. Jared’s parents are still married and he is an only-child. His mother works in a hair salon and his father works for a hardwood flooring company. Jared was single throughout this study. He joined Kappa Omega as a first year student.

**Jesse**

Jesse is a 19 year-old junior, catholic, heterosexual male from a lower-middle class background who was grew up in Monterrey City, Mexico before coming to VA when he was in middle school. Jess is a first generation college student majoring in biochemistry. Jesse’s parents are still married, but his father was absent for most of his younger life as he left Mexico for Virginia thirteen years before the entire family moved up to Virginia to take a job in a local paper mill. Therefore, Jesse has a closer relationship with his mother. Jesse has one younger brother (13) and two younger sisters (8, 3). Jesse was single throughout the study, but did talk about several recent hook-ups during ManTalk. He joined Kappa Omega as a first year student and was most recently the Chaplain.

**John**
John is a 23 year-old senior, White, non-religious, heterosexual male from a middle class background who grew up in Charlottesville, VA. John is majoring in public relations and minoring in business, and is highly interested in going to graduate school to study higher education administration/student affairs. John’s parents are still married and his father is a driver for a fuel company and his mother is an administrator for an HVAC company. John has an older sister who is 25 and still lives at home with his parents. During the study John was single, but did discuss his interest in several women during ManTalk. John spent three years attending community college before coming to Eastern State in fall 2010. He joined Kappa Omega as a junior during his first semester on-campus.

Leon

Leon is a 20 year-old junior, African-American, non-denominational Christian, heterosexual male from a middle class background who grew up in Amherst, VA. Leon is majoring in broadcast journalism and minoring in business and criminal law with the hopes of working on TV or going into law. Leon has seven half-brother and half-sisters, as a result of his parent’s separating when he was still a baby. Leon was raised by his father, who remarried about six years ago. During high school his mother went to jail for over a year for drug possession and breaking her probation. He was single throughout the study, but mentioned several hookups during the ManTalk sessions. Leon joined Kappa Omega as a second year student.

Larry

Larry is a 21 year-old senior, White, non-denominational Christian, heterosexual male from a middle class background who grew up in Fairfax, VA. Larry is majoring in psychology and special education. His parents are still married, and he has a younger brother (16). Larry’s father has held a variety of jobs from carpentry to construction and his mother works for the
Department of Treasury. Larry was diagnosed with ADHD when he was in elementary school and spent most of his younger life on a variety of medications. He was single throughout the ManTalk study. Larry spent his first year on a college lacrosse scholarship at Mercyhurst College in Pennsylvania before coming to Eastern State. He joined Kappa Omega as a second year student.

Rye

Rye is a 22 year-old junior, African-American, non-denominational Christian, heterosexual male from a middle class background who grew up in Stafford, VA. Rye is majoring in computer science. His parents are still married, and he has a younger brother (19). Both Rye’s parents are army veterans and his mother now works with a geologist group and his father owns his own business. He was single throughout ManTalk but asked for my advice on several occasions about a woman he was interested in. Rye spent four years at community college in northern Virginia near his hometown before coming to Eastern State. Rye joined Kappa Omega as a third year student.

Tyler

Tyler is a 20 year-old junior, White, non-religious, heterosexual male from a lower-middle class background who grew up in Chester, VA. Tyler is first generation college student majoring in mechanical engineering with an emphasis in nuclear engineering. Tyler’s parents are still married, but he has four half siblings from his parent’s previous relationships. His father dropped out of high school in 11th grade and worked for the same company for 25 years before being laid off last year. Tyler was single throughout the study. He joined Kappa Omega as a first year student and has held a variety of leadership positions within the organization.
Trey

Trey is a 20 year-old junior, first generation Vietnamese-American, non-denominational Christian, heterosexual male from a lower-middle class background who grew up in Arlington, VA. Trey is the first person in his family to attend college, and he is majoring in social work. His parents separated when he was younger and his father now spends most of his time in Vietnam, so he has been mainly raised by his mother. Trey has an older brother (40), who has acted as a pseudo father-figure for most of his life and they remain close to this day. Although his mother does work, Trey and his family grew up in affordable housing and lived most of his life on food stamps and welfare. Trey was single throughout the study. He joined Kappa Omega as a first year student.