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Back to “Bro Time”? The Post-Pandemic Social Re-entry of Men Living on Campus

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS ALTERED the ways that college men develop and interpret masculinity on campus. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, this study explores the experiences of 28 second- and third-year undergraduate men living in on-campus housing to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected masculinity and the socialization of college men. The data from semi-structured interviews revealed three overarching themes: navigating social life on campus, managing social re-entry, and redefining masculinity in shared spaces. Though participants noted the challenges associated with their social re-entry to campus, they also recognized an enhanced understanding of masculinity. The findings of this study provide important insight into how the pandemic has served as a catalyst for evolving definitions of masculinity and gender expectations in residential settings on campus.

The COVID-19 pandemic arrived at residence hall front doors in the spring of 2020 and has potentially forever changed our approach to students living on campus. While the pandemic and the subsequent response by institutions disrupted student life significantly, one of its greatest impacts may be on the residential experience. Studies have long shown the benefits of living in on-campus housing and the development that occurs for students because of it (Blimling, 2015; Pascarella et al., 1994; Pike, 2009; Pike & Kuh, 2005). In fact, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) reported that “living on campus is perhaps the single most consistent within-college determinant of impact” (p. 611).

Men are leaving college at historically high rates in the wake of the pandemic, a trend that should concern higher education institutions (Baldasare, 2021) as they consider what life on campus may look like in a post-pandemic world; for this reason, there is some urgency in examining the lingering effects of the pandemic on the ways men experience college. Exploring how the communal experience of living in on-campus housing has been altered will shed light on how men are now socializing

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in residential settings. Men have historically been associated with destructive social behaviors on campus—simply put, men often behave badly (Davis & Laker, 2004). But what, if anything, related to behavior has changed during the pandemic?

The subsequent resocialization of undergraduate college men within the context of on-campus residential environments may create both challenges and opportunities for housing professionals. For many college students, the pandemic has disrupted most or all of their experience and should be raising questions for student affairs professionals about what the future of student development will look like on campus. This paper explores the social re-entry of college men on a residential campus during the COVID-19 pandemic and provides insight into how the pandemic has altered masculine behavior—knowledge that will help housing professionals enhance the services they provide during these uncertain times.

This study was rooted in the question raised by Selingo (2021) about whether life on campus would return to stereotypes associated with the 1978 film *Animal House*, which centers on the antics and overtly masculine stereotypes of fraternity life on campus (Arnold, 1978). Selingo pondered how college students would handle re-entry into college life after having peer interactions limited during the pandemic, noting that student affairs professionals had already identified concerns over the fact that many teenagers had not had a chance to exercise their social development nor to evolve in their maturity during the pandemic.

This study focuses on the lived experience of college men navigating social re-entry and the ways they responded to their circumstances on campus. There are lessons to be learned from hearing the voices of current male students as they grapple with their own identities, developmental transitions, and the ways they express their masculinity in the context of the pandemic.

PERSPECTIVES ON MEN'S BEHAVIOR

Many researchers have argued that masculinity is a socially constructed concept (Foste & Davis, 2018; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel & Messner, 2018; Weber, 2001). Research and professional experience have given practitioners ample evidence of problematic behavior among men on campus. Men disproportionately account for campus judicial policy violations (Harris & Struve, 2009); are more likely than their female counterparts to be perpetrators of violence and to exhibit destructive behavior (Ludeman, 2004; Pollack, 1999); and are responsible for higher rates of sexual harassment and assault, violence, racial bigotry, high-risk alcohol use, and drug use (American College Health Association, 2021; Ashlee et al., 2020; Downey & Stage, 1999). College men are more likely than women to be engaged in situations that involve physical fights, physical assaults, or verbal threats (American College Health Association, 2021). In addition,

men who adhere to stereotypical patterns of male behavior are more likely to experience depression (Good & Wood, 1995), sexually assault women (Kilmartin, 2001), and espouse homophobic views (Rhoads, 1995). Patterns of behavior contributing to stereotypes of men behaving badly are often described as *toxic masculinity*, which is “a set of behaviors and beliefs that include the following: suppressing emotions or masking distress, maintaining an appearance of hardness, [and perceiving] violence as an indicator of power” (Salam, 2019, para. 7).

THE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent adjustments to policy and protocol made by higher education institutions have had a noted effect on college students. For example, Borkoski and Roos (2020) noted that the pandemic is amplifying feelings of loneliness and isolation and has led to an increase in students’ self-reported levels of stress, depression, lack of motivation, difficulty focusing on schoolwork, disrupted sleep patterns, and challenges coping (Birmingham et al., 2021; The Healthy Minds Network & American College Health Association, 2020).

EXPERIENCING GUYLAND

This study is centered on Michael Kimmel’s (2008) book *Guyland*, the term he used to describe the transition between boyhood and adulthood for men. Kimmel’s study of 16- to 26-year-old men examined the decade-long developmental and social space serving as the transition period to adulthood when men actively construct their masculinity within a social and historical context. Guyland “becomes the arena in which young men so relentlessly seem to act out, seem to take the greatest risks, and do some of the stupidest things” (p. 42). As Kimmel noted,

Guyland is a volatile stage, when one has access to all the tools of adulthood with few of the moral and familial constraints that urge sober conformity. These “almost men” struggle to live up to a definition of masculinity they feel they had no part in creating, and yet from which they feel powerless to escape. (p. 43)

College men carry with them preconceived notions of masculinity, usually gleaned from their development as youth. The varying influences of peers, media, family, and role models shape how men understand masculinity when they start college. Kimmel noted that men rely on peers to usher them into adulthood and validate the behaviors tied to masculinity, making the application of the *Guyland* concept particularly compelling when examining college men in residential communities.

... social and cultural norms of the student body are shaped through the residential experience, and definitions of masculinity at the host site specifically were shaped through the lens of the residential experience and living in community.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent responses by institutions have disrupted an already tumultuous period of transition and growth for undergraduate men. Kimmel's (2008) *Guyland* could not have accounted for a worldwide pandemic that would change how men observe, engage with, and process their masculinity—both as individuals and in social settings. However, he provides a backdrop by which to assess behavior and interpret how men are developing their identities in the face of the pandemic and how, in a post-pandemic world, they have adjusted to disruption in order to engage in the process of social re-entry.

Using *Guyland* as the lens through which this study was envisioned influenced data analysis by providing context for the state of development that many typical college men experience. Kimmel's (2008) work framed an understanding of the tumultuous transition between adolescence and adulthood for men, which was then compounded by the disruptions caused by the pandemic. Analyzing data using Kimmel as a framework allowed greater insight into how aspects of the pandemic and the subsequent institutional response interacted with the development of masculine identities.

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of masculinity held by second- and third-year undergraduate men as they navigated life in campus residence halls during the first and second full years of the COVID-19 pandemic. The central research question—*How do college men perceive masculinity as they experience social re-entry while living on campus during the COVID-19 pandemic?*—was answered using a qualitative approach in order to allow respondents to provide rich descriptions of their experiences in their own terms.

Participants

A recruitment email was sent to 409 students who identified as men in the research site's student information system. Those interested in participating in the study volunteered by responding to the recruitment email with basic demographic information. Potential participants were screened to confirm class year status and that they lived in on-campus housing during the previous and current academic year. The self-reported demographic information of potential participants was screened to ensure that both second- and third-year men were represented and that racial and ethnic representation was at least equal to the demographic make-up of the broader population of men on campus. More participants were then added on a rolling basis until saturation of data was reached.

Institution

The research host institution is a small private residential institution in the midwestern U.S. The institution has a 4-year residency requirement, and approximately 90% of the student body lives in on-campus housing, with exceptions made for limited, specific appeals and when the student population exceeds the available bed space on campus.

... even when residential life staff attempted to provide programming, institutional messaging about limiting social gatherings and keeping close friend groups small subconsciously inhibited social connections, creating tension for participants as they sought connection but found themselves even more acutely socially isolated.

The institution has approximately 2,200 full-time undergraduate students, with 45% percent of the student body identifying as men and 21% of students identifying as non-White.

This particular research site provided an opportunity to recruit from a broad base of men who experienced living on a residential campus during the pandemic. In addition, the small size of the institution allowed participants to personalize and ground their experiences and speak to more specific observed masculine culture at the institution in a way that may be more difficult for men who had more isolated and/or disparate experiences at larger institutions.

Interviews were conducted at the end of the 2021 fall semester. In the fall of 2020, new students began the year in-person, and returning students arrived three weeks later; courses were delivered both in-person and online. Temporary college policy related to the pandemic required face coverings, social distancing in classrooms, restricted visitors in residence halls, and limited social interactions, such as limited seating in the dining hall, capacity limits in lounges and social spaces, and student organizations meeting online. All students returned to campus for the fall of 2021, and courses were delivered in-person, online, or in hybrid formats. College policy required face coverings, but social restrictions were lessened in residence halls and social gathering spaces.

The value of researching this topic on a residential campus was evident through student perspectives: All participants in the study had multiple years of experience living on campus. In general, social and cultural norms of the student body are shaped through the residential experience, and definitions of masculinity at the host site specifically were shaped through the lens of the residential experience and living in community.

Data Collection

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 28 undergraduate men who were second- or third-year students at the research site institution. All participants were between 19 and 21 years old, and the racial/ethnic composition of the participant group was more diverse than what was reflected in the demographics of the host institution. The participants included 16 White men, eight Black men, two Hispanic/Latino men, and two Asian American men. Twelve of the men were second-year students, and 16 were third-year students (see Table 1, page 34). All 28 participants lived on campus during the previous and current academic year. A majority of second-year student participants lived in traditional double rooms on campus, while several third-year students lived in triples/quads or apartment-style housing.

TABLE 1**Demographic Information**

PSEUDONYM	RACE/ETHNICITY	CLASS YEAR	AGE
Ahmad	Black	Second year	20
Antoine	Black	Second year	20
Bryan	White	Second year	19
Conrad	White	Second year	21
Daniel	Black	Second year	20
Devon	Black	Third year	20
Doug	White	Third year	21
Elijah	Hispanic/Latino	Second year	19
Eric	White	Second year	20
Evan	White	Third year	20
Frank	Black	Second year	19
Garrett	White	Second year	19
Harrison	Asian American	Third year	20
Isaak	Black	Third year	20
Jack	White	Second year	19
Jasper	White	Third year	20
Jay	White	Third year	20
Jeffrey	Black	Third year	21
Jesus	Hispanic/Latino	Third year	20
Jordan	White	Third year	20
Liam	White	Third year	20
Markus	White	Second year	19
Patrick	Black	Third year	21
Sam	White	Third year	20
Taylor	White	Third year	20
Tommy	Asian American	Third year	21
Trevor	White	Third year	20
Ty	White	Second year	19

Individual interviews lasted an average of 35 minutes. Questions included those about general perceptions of masculinity (e.g., *How do you define your own sense of masculinity?*), the comparison of social experiences over the previous two years (e.g., *What is different about this year compared to last year for you in terms of social life?*), role models of masculinity on campus (e.g., *Who sets the tone for what masculinity looks like on campus?*), and the experience of living in on-campus residence halls and observations of stereotypical masculine behaviors in those settings. Institutional Review Board approval was granted by the research host institution.

Analysis

The data from this study were analyzed using the phenomenological approach in order to understand the lived experiences of individuals (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) noted that descriptive phenomenological research attempts to study a particular phenomenon in the context in which it occurs. The main purpose of the phenomenological approach is to “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Given the subjective nature of lived experiences during the pandemic and the complexities of the development of masculine identity, it was important to allow participants to describe their experiences to help create meaning.

Participants provided rich, first-hand descriptions of their experiences to capture the meanings they attributed to the phenomenon in the context of their lives. The coding strategy followed the multiple steps of Saldaña’s (2015) concept coding, where preliminary analysis occurs iteratively. The cyclical process of coding “further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, and concepts” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 9). The coding process narrowed data into categories, and the codes were then collapsed as themes emerged. Analytic memo writing assisted with code choices, emerging patterns, and categories (Saldaña, 2015). Additionally, random member checks were employed with participants as coding was conducted to validate findings.

Limitations

While participant demographics signaled a diverse perspective, the research site was a small private residential predominantly White institution (PWI) in the Midwestern United States. As such, preconceived notions of masculinity and the ways that masculinity is presented may differ from the perceptions on other campuses. In addition, COVID-19 pandemic policies and procedures were often dictated in part by local or state authorities, so the experience the students at the research site had may differ from that of students at other institutions. Also, masculinity is influenced by culture, social connections, family, and other external factors that were not the focus of this study. Finally, this study did not explicitly explore the intersecting identities of participants, such as race and disability, which also influence perceptions of masculinity.

The immediacy of social re-entry was evident when discussing experiences in the context of campus residence halls. While classroom interactions provided structured, concrete opportunities for social interaction in controlled settings, life in the residence halls was a wide-open social landscape that was, for many, uncharted territory.

Positionality

The author identifies as a White, cisgender man who has worked with college men on issues of identity development. A bracketing exercise was conducted prior to data collection to identify potential biases and acknowledge perspective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The intent of this study was to understand how college men's perceptions of masculinity on campus may have changed during the pandemic. The data provided insight into how the socialization process for men was impacted by the pandemic and how conceptions of masculinity—particularly in the context of residence hall living—have been challenged and altered.

The pandemic created a disruption that forced men to navigate and adjust to the college experience as it existed: with institutional response, safety protocols, and new social and behavioral norms and expectations in place. The pandemic had disrupted all or part of the college experience for participants, therefore creating tension for them as they tried to explain their experience. More often than not, they admitted that they were comparing their lived experience with a hypothetical, stereotypical college experience that they had assumed they would have. The men in this study were second- and third-year undergraduate students who had experienced their socialization on campus almost entirely during the pandemic.

Analysis of the interview data revealed three overarching themes: *navigating social life on campus*, *managing social re-entry*, and *redefining masculinity in shared spaces*. Each theme is expanded upon below and illustrated through participants' voices.

Navigating Social Life on Campus

Being in college during a pandemic has been challenging for most students, disrupting expectations for what the college experience should be, particularly with regard to living in on-campus residence halls. Safety protocols developed by institutions created tension between expectation and reality and strained social experiences traditionally associated with life on campus.

Participants in this study were second- and third-year undergraduate students who lived on campus during the previous and current academic year, therefore experiencing life in the residence halls over the span of approximately 15–18 months prior to the interviews. As the pandemic moved into its second full year, many institutional rules

and protocols were shifting to allow for greater social interaction as the pandemic was more or less managed. That constant change proved challenging for most participants. As Markus, a White second-year student, said, “If [men] are supposedly good at black and white and all you give us is gray, then life gets pretty hard for some guys.” Jesus, a Latino third-year student, added,

One thing I associate with men is being adaptable, like you should know how to change and adjust to whatever life throws at you. But when it’s all new every day and you don’t even know what you’re supposed to be doing or how you should be acting, it’s stressful.

The ambiguity associated with constant change was felt in the residence halls. Several men expressed frustration that they could never feel confident or comfortable in their residence hall, the place where they expected to be the most relaxed. Eric, a White second-year student, said,

I feel like [men] should be better at just going with the flow with changes in the dorms, but it was honestly really . . . rough. True or not, [men] are supposed to be low maintenance, but I feel like guys in my [residence] hall were constantly pissed off about rules.

Antoine, a Black second-year student, noted, “It feels like my freshman year for a second time. Every day is like learning a new campus environment . . . I feel like I’m living in a freshmen dorm all over again, like it’s constantly my first day at college.” Daniel, a Black second-year student, had a similar perception about his sophomore year.

It’s weird to say I was nervous about what my dorm would be like . . . Showing up for the first day of my sophomore year felt a lot like the first day [of my first year]. It’s like I didn’t know what to expect, but it wasn’t my first time this time, obviously.

When asked to elaborate on the comparison between the previous year and the current year, participants expressed optimism, though they acknowledged the deficit created by restrictions over the previous 18 months. Taylor, a White third-year student, explained, “I for sure feel like guys are behind [socially and behaviorally]. We’re always told we mature more slowly than girls anyway, and then it’s like we don’t even have a shot right now because nothing feels like it should.” Ahmad, a Black second-year student, agreed, saying, “You feel behind socially, and you’re panicking like you’re behind in class but it’s more pervasive.” Ty, a White second-year student, expressed his version of feeling behind socially.

It’s hard to think of us as all together again. Some of us have never had that, so what does it even mean? I feel like we don’t know how to function or even fit in [socially] unless we’re told exactly what to do and how to do it.

The role of residence hall programming and interactions with paraprofessional staff were explored, shedding light on the complexity of living communally during a pandemic. Tommy, an Asian American third-year student, said that his RA “is a great

guy, but talk about an impossible job [during the pandemic]. The people who followed rules kinda faded into the background because he spent so much time enforcing rules.”

Despite the efforts of paraprofessional staff to encourage socializing in the halls, participants talked about the struggles they faced creating connections. As Jeffrey, a Black third-year student, expressed it, “My roommate and like two other guys—that was my friend group. I was scared that we’d stop being friends because you ran the risk of not finding another group.” Department-sponsored events created tension for some participants, who were unsure about whether or not they should be part of a group, even temporarily. Tommy, an Asian American third-year student, said, “I felt bad for going to [programs] even when [my RA] put them on. It was a weird energy to hang out in groups.” Jordan, a White third-year student, commented, “There were times I felt like I lived in my own little world when the rest of the world closed in on us.” Participants shared that even when residential life staff attempted to provide programming, institutional messaging about limiting social gatherings and keeping close friend groups small subconsciously inhibited social connections, creating tension for participants as they sought connection but found themselves even more acutely socially isolated.

Managing Social Re-Entry

Another theme that emerged from the data was the process of managing social re-entry. Participants articulated challenges associated with processing social expectations and deciding how and when to step back into the patterns of social life they were accustomed to prior to the pandemic. The immediacy of social re-entry was evident when discussing experiences in the context of campus residence halls. While classroom interactions provided structured, concrete opportunities for social interaction in controlled settings, life in the residence halls was a wide-open social landscape that was, for many, uncharted territory.

Participants were asked directly if they felt like they or their peers were making up for lost time by engaging more deeply in social interactions on campus because of what they had lost previously due to institutional restrictions. Many of them described the scramble that ensued to try to capture as much socially as they could, yet they clearly articulated the challenges associated with figuring out the best ways to jump into a social life when they returned to their campus living spaces in the fall.

Despite portrayals in the media and the conjecture they heard from external sources, participants felt that the pandemic had the potential to shape masculinity in positive ways. In fact, the pandemic was a turning point for how several participants felt masculinity should be viewed.

As Jordan, a White third-year student, commented, “We’re doing a lot because we can now. We know what it’s like to lose something and live without it. And so, you have this anxiety about ‘What did I miss? What should I do now?’” As Bryan, a White second-year student, put it, “My friends and I call it the ‘great joining.’ I feel like everyone is just joining clubs, showing up at events in their dorm that they never would have before, stuff like that.” Antoine, a Black second-year student, agreed when he said, “I’ve signed up for like 10 student orgs and haven’t been to even half of them, but it was like ‘*new people!*’ I was just so excited to have a chance to do things again.” The exuberance expressed by some participants about the liberating feeling of being able to join organizations or clubs and more freely interact illustrated the idea that *making up for lost time*—whether consciously or not—was at the forefront of the experience for many of these men.

The idea of FOMO, or the fear of missing out, is an ever-present dilemma for students as they balance involvement and social lives while always worrying about what their friends are doing and wondering what they are missing. As Conrad, a White second-year student, noted, “The pace of social life is legitimately hectic now. There is no more chill—you have a full calendar. My friends joke that we ‘got FOMO—no mo.’” Despite some of the anxious descriptions of jumping back into social life, participants also expressed an awareness that the action felt necessary. Garrett, a White second-year student, said, “I feel like we all basically sat it out for a year and now we’re getting a true college experience. It’s hard to say it’s an over-correction [socially], because this is what we think college should be like.” The participants in this study are often considered part of the generation of over-scheduled children (Feiler, 2013), whose lives have been regulated by full schedules; the sudden experience of a year or more of under-scheduled time created dissonance for some of them, who felt they needed to make up for lost time.

Reverting to stereotypical and normalized masculine behavior was a default setting for many participants. Trevor, a White third-year student, highlighted this when he said,

[It is] definitely back to “bro time” in a lot of settings, especially where I live. That lack of social interaction for men was tough and now it kind of blew up and is back to normal ways of guys being guys in a lot of ways.

Liam, a White third-year student, expressed similar sentiments: “I live on the same floor this year as I did last year. Guys are definitely acting like stereotypes again on my floor. We’ve had [vandalism], it’s loud. It went from *quiet guys* to *loud dudes* pretty quick.”

But even with the impulse to be social again, several participants noted that they often hesitated because they were concerned about being socially responsible and not violating policies related to the institutional pandemic response. As Evan, a White third-year student, explained, “We totally want to make up for lost time by going to parties, meeting women. . . . But in the back of my head there’s always this weird feeling like it’s wrong. Is my [RA] going to get me in trouble?” Some participants noted that

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following rules has always been difficult for men, and adhering to COVID-19 protocols was no different. Jay, a White third-year student, said, “I mean, men always have trouble with rules and authority, but the seriousness of [the pandemic] doesn’t seem to sink in, especially when it feels like it gets in the way of your social life.” The perspective that residential life staff were acting solely as COVID-19 rule enforcers created tension for some participants as they reverted to their perceptions of men as rule-breakers, particularly when something they valued (e.g., their social life) was at stake.

Redefining Masculinity in Shared Spaces

Participants expressed a tension between their perceptions of traditional masculinity and the ways they would define it in a post-pandemic world. The stereotypical manifestations of masculinity were on display during the pandemic and were often magnified by reactions to pandemic-related social disruptions on campus. Jack, a White second-year student, explained it this way: “Old stereotypes bubbled up—guys not [wearing face coverings] because they think they are tough and don’t want to look weak.” And Evan, a White third-year student, said,

Some men definitely have this fear of losing some masculinity through all this. They have anger towards school, anger at the government, and they are upset that things we want to do are taken away from us. I mean, I get it. But acting like a jerk doesn’t make anything better.

Bryan, a White second-year student, agreed with this assessment, saying that the pandemic “has definitely reinforced masculinity—especially toxic. Like, men don’t follow rules—or struggle with rules—even when it seems really important.” Six of the participants mentioned portrayals of masculinity in the media (including news, television, and social media, among others) as being negative or exaggerating the toxic masculinity stereotype as it related to the pandemic.

Despite portrayals in the media and the conjecture they heard from external sources, participants felt that the pandemic had the potential to shape masculinity in positive ways. In fact, the pandemic was a turning point for how several participants felt masculinity should be viewed. As Jasper, a White third-year student, expressed it,

I’ve had a chance to re-evaluate what I think masculinity is now. There’s some serious self-reflection that can happen when you feel isolated, like you go into this cocoon—both personally & socially—and come out as something different.

Harrison, an Asian American third-year student, articulated the difference before and after COVID-19.

Before [COVID-19], I thought it was good to be independent and break all these social norms and it looked and maybe felt masculine to do that. Now, breaking social norms isn't the main goal. There's no enhanced benefit to going around the system. I think some men realized there's a logic to social conventions that we have, even if you don't fully understand them.

Jesus, a Latino third-year student, noted that he learned some lessons about vulnerability: "I learned that asking for help is okay, and I like to think my friends feel that way now, too." In a similar vein, Doug, a White third-year student, perceived the pandemic as "a springboard to talk about feelings; to let your guard down in lots of ways." Ty, a White second-year student, responded similarly. "Men like to give this aura of not caring, but I feel like this has taught us that it's okay to care." Isaak, a Black third-year student, said, "The line between masculinity and humanity has blurred during [the pandemic]. That's probably a good thing for all of us."

Participants acknowledged that the behavior associated with masculinity might be shifting away from traditional stereotypes in the residence halls, a place they often associated with rules and regulations. Frank, a Black second-year student, said,

*People view males as rowdy, and that they break rules [in residence halls]—and that's honestly fair. All of this made me realize that how men act was **not** cool, and you don't have to do that to be a man. I feel like some guys matured in their perspective on manhood and got a little broader world view . . . but at the end of the day, some part of them will always still act like guys.*

The residence halls were a location specifically labeled as a place where connections were formed, and the evolving notions of how men should act created a renewed sense of appreciation for the social nature of the residential environment. As Garrett, a White second-year student, explained, the pandemic "has helped me see that masculinity is a façade we use when we think it will help us. I care about people more now, and I'm way more grateful for connections [in my hall]." Evan, a White third-year student, said,

Dudes are always going to be dudes. Seriously. The "boys will be boys" stuff is so true. But maybe some men feel like they can see some other side of themselves now and they'll behave a little different than men used to.

Sam, a White third-year student, also expressed a sense of optimism. "I am kind of loving this rediscovery of manhood. Self-care is a thing. Code switching doesn't have to happen the way it did just because of who I hang around with. I can be . . . *me*."

The men in this study expressed their perception that aspects of traditional masculinity were present on campus and that there was a resurgence in the prevalence of stereotypically masculine behavior as life on campus shifted away from strict pandemic protocols and back to what the men considered to be a typical college experience. That said, they also articulated a perceived change in how men thought about

their masculinity and their roles as men on campus. Some participants felt that the effects the pandemic had on their college experience—and the broader effects it had on the world around them that influenced their understanding of their experiences as men and as college students—created opportunities to rethink parts of their core identity. Participants also indicated a noticeable change in how men on campus viewed their masculinity as the pandemic wore on, which may have lasting effects on how student affairs professionals and educators engage with men on campus moving forward.

IMPLICATIONS

This study highlights several implications for practice and research, particularly as institutions focus efforts on the student experience in a post-pandemic environment. First, institutions should invest energy and resources into helping students establish the *next normal* on campus. Campus life may not fully return to pre-pandemic patterns of behavior, but concerted efforts to assist students in normalizing behaviors, accepting changed expectations, and establishing new social norms will promote development.

Residence halls are often incubators of masculine stereotypes and behavior, so residential life professional and paraprofessional staff must find ways to intervene appropriately and effectively to establish new social expectations among men. Staff should help reimagine stereotypical masculine spaces on campus, including a critical examination of the culture of the residence halls toward which men gravitate. One step, for instance, is to explore why some halls have distinct hyper-masculine cultures and then to audit processes and systems to address the potential causes (e.g., reviewing housing selection processes, assessing the effectiveness of conduct procedures, reviewing building maintenance and aesthetics, among others).

A particularly relevant way of addressing concerns in masculine spaces is to offer educational opportunities that leverage reconceptualized notions of gender identity in a post-pandemic world to engage men in discussions about examining masculine expectations and understanding what healthy masculinity is. Residential life staff may consider creating cross-functional teams to assess, brainstorm, and implement programming around topics of masculinity. In particular, identifying the men who set the tone for masculinity on campus and engaging them in discussions about new norms and social expectations would be fruitful. In this study, participants focused on returning male students, athletes, and fraternities as the primary drivers of masculine culture on campus, so it's important to discover from men on campus who they believe defines masculinity in that space and then to create opportunities for intervention, engage-

... there has been a return to bro time on campus. Despite the gaps in social development that may exist for many men, they are back, and they are once again learning how to socialize in campus environments.

ment, and education. This might include creating peer-led mentoring groups focused on masculinity (Di Bianca et al., 2021) and could also take shape as living-learning communities focused on masculinity, which have the potential to provide men with the support they need to reject rigid gender expectations and develop a healthy identity (Jessup-Anger et al., 2012).

Residential life departments should explore opportunities for reorientation to communal living. Students who began their college experience during the pandemic may have missed opportunities to develop interpersonal skills specifically related to living in community, and addressing those gaps may prove beneficial to all students, including men. By identifying the lingering effects of the pandemic, professional staff can help creatively address gaps in social preparedness, navigating roommate relationships, maneuvering parental relationships, and identifying role models. In addition, engaging students in the reorientation process and seeking feedback might assist staff in determining what traditions and experiences are worth bringing back to a post-pandemic campus and what needs to change.

This study highlighted an opportunity to co-create meaningful dialogue with men about gender assumptions, behavior, and expectations on campus. However, focusing on how men have reconsidered masculinity on campus after the COVID-19 pandemic should not detract from a focus on women and the challenges that the pandemic has created for them. Continued research is needed regarding the effects—both short- and long-term—of the pandemic on the overall college experience. While this study captured a moment in time during the pandemic, longitudinal data would highlight the effects that resocialization is having on long-term student development. In particular, it is important to explore identities that co-exist and influence masculinity, including race, ethnicity, cultural background, and sexual orientation. In many ways, the pandemic shed light on the role of power and privilege associated with hegemonic masculinity and traditional gender roles, and the effects of that aspect of the pandemic response should be explored in further research to understand how it might be influencing masculinity on campus.

CONCLUSION

The participants in this study described the challenges associated with socialization on campus during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent enhanced understanding of themselves as men. Kimmel's (2008) *Guyland* provided a perspective on the tumultuous transition period between adolescence and adulthood for the men in this study. Analyzing data using Kimmel's *Guyland* as a framework allowed greater insight into how aspects of the pandemic disrupted and then shaped the development of masculine identities and influenced social re-entry. The participants in this study actually occupied *Guyland* and were beginning to define their masculinity by interpreting their experiences during the pandemic, including reflection on the expectations they have of themselves and that they perceive others have of men.

As participant Trevor articulated above, there has been a return to *bro time* on campus. Despite the gaps in social development that may exist for many men, they are back, and they are once again learning how to socialize in campus environments. As the data illustrate, perhaps *bro time* will take on a slightly different definition in the future as college men continue to emerge from the pandemic. The pandemic has allowed the participants to rethink and redefine masculinity, and they did so in generally positive terms. While the difficulties associated with the pandemic have altered the college experience for many students, an opportunity has also presented itself for many men to redefine their perspectives on masculinity. ■

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The researchers noted that participants measured their college experience against their expectations. Consider how and why it may be beneficial to help students process their expectations at different stages of their college experience. In what ways can programming efforts further students' growth in this area?
2. In the study's finding of managing social life on campus, participants reported a constant feeling of starting new even though they are no longer first-year students. What interventions can we employ to support students in managing change so they may begin feeling increased competence, an ideal comfort level, or hope of getting ahead?
3. Participants acknowledged the stereotype that men are less likely to follow rules. Simultaneously, they also expressed a feeling of guilt when gathering for RA programs after the pandemic-related rules started to lessen. What strategies can we borrow from our work in other instances of students trying to manage new freedoms from previous restrictions? Examine the ways we may unintentionally offer conflicting expectations between policy and action in our campus communities.
4. Like a pendulum swinging, students have experienced the extremes of being under-involved during the pandemic and now over-involved. As consequences of over-involvement may soon appear, how can we help students find balance instead of going back to being under-involved? How can we help college men make meaning of their experiences with regards to a balanced level of engagement?
5. Staff can help establish new and healthier social norms or expectations about masculinity. What types of interventions—through programming, policy, formal procedures, or the informal culture of how we operate—can build on these newly discovered realizations by study participants? New realizations include a changing definition of masculinity, the acceptance of self-care, a sense of interdependence, recognition of feelings, permission to care, and gratitude for relationships.

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