

# **How College Men Feel about Being Men and “Doing the Right Thing”**

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**April, 2010**

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**Forthcoming in Davis and Laker: Masculinities in Higher Education: Theoretical and Practical Implications. Routledge, Kegan and Paul. Please contact the author for correct citation information.**

There is a pervasive theme in the literature on college men: men are uncomfortable with the way that they have been taught to be men. This creates conflict between how one wants to be and how one thinks one is supposed to be a man. Another theme is that men want to be accepted and appreciated by other men, to be seen as “normal” and as “one of the guys.” Men’s motivation to be accepted by other men results in many men not caring about women and tolerating other men’s abusive behavior towards men and women. In general, men – in all the different identities that men have – want and try to be accepted as manly by other men. These issues about how to be a man reflect a larger culture in which the masculine and feminine are out of balance, with dangerous consequences for each of us as individuals, and for the planet as a whole.

This understanding of men reveals a paradox that is the central theme of this chapter. Most men don’t want to be the kind of men they have been taught to be, but do not always know that other men share this discomfort. As a result men may squeeze themselves into an uncomfortable “man box” in order to be accepted by other men, even when other men don’t like the box either. The term used to describe the phenomenon of incorrectly thinking that one is in the minority when one is in fact in the majority is “pluralistic ignorance.” This phenomenon influences how people behave, for example, in places of worship, in social groups, with respect to political views, consumption of alcohol, sexual activity, prejudicial behavior and masculinity (Miller & McFarland, 1991). Simply put, the majority of men secretly disagree with how we have been taught to be men, but act as if we don’t. Why? Because we wrongly assume that most other men believe in what we have been taught to be as men, and also because we fear their disapproval were we to reveal the truth. The result is “role-conflict,” a state of inner conflict and stress resulting in impaired mental and physical health.

Men often conform to an ideal of masculinity that we don’t like because the consequences of non-conforming can be serious. A minority of men act as “enforcers” to punish and ostracize men who are seen as deviant. This is ironic, because the men who are labeled as “deviant” are probably the majority with the enforcers and exponents of “real” masculinity in the minority. Fear of being ostracized leads men to hide their discomfort in order to fit in with and be accepted by other men. The “enforcers” think that they speak for all men when in fact they do not. This pattern of behavior may occur among men in general, as well as within sub-groups of men who share a particular identity. As we have read earlier in this book (see, for example, Berila’s insights in Section B, Chapter 1) men from non-dominant groups can feel oppressed by perceived dominant norms of masculinity and struggle against it.

The power and influence of the “enforcers” comes from this misunderstanding – technically called “false consensus” – that they are the majority when fact they are the minority. As long as these men and the silent majority of other men accept that the enforcers

represent the kind of man that most men want to be, then they in turn will have the power to censor, ostracize, bully, and isolate men who are incorrectly perceived as not fitting in. This norm of masculinity endures because “for a norm to be perpetuated it is not necessary for the majority to believe it, but only for the majority to believe that the majority believes it” (Berkowitz, p. 261, 2003).

**How men feel about being men.** A recent ethnographic study paints a distressing picture of the perceived norm for collegiate male culture (Kimmel, 2008). The term “guyland” is used to describe a culture of men who perceive that they never measure up to their peers, to the masculine ideal, or to their own sense of self (see Chapter 1). Guyland is composed of men who feel inauthentic. It emphasizes the “guy code” – a sense of entitlement, of maintaining silence about one’s own feelings and other’s actions, and on men’s protecting each other from being accountable for misbehavior. Guyland guys get drunk, abuse women, take risks, dismiss authority, talk and behave in sexist and homophobic ways, and expect other men to protect them from any consequences. Kimmel notes: “men subscribe to these ideals not because they want to impress women... (but) because they want to be positively evaluated by other men” (p.47). Enforcement of the rules is by innuendo’s and challenges to men’s masculinity. Kimmel makes it clear however, that the majority of men are probably uncomfortable with this situation and only conform to it because they fear being ostracized by other men. In other words, “guyland” is perpetuated by men’s need for approval from other men, secret shame about not living up to the masculine ideal, and the false perception that most men believe in it.

Let’s take a deeper look at what the research says regarding how men feel about being men – i.e. how men feel about the man-box. Here is what college men have said regarding how they feel about the masculinity they learned as children:

(Insert Table One Here)

In addition, men are clearly uncomfortable with behavior of other men that is supposed to foster a sense of male bonding and proof of one’s masculinity. In answer to the question: “what are some things that men do when there are no women present that bothers you?” (Berkowitz, 1994), college men gave the following responses:

“When they talk about the sexual habits of girls that they know nothing about”

“Demands by friends to know how far sexually you’ve gone in a relationship”

“Bragging about sexual acts and giving details”

“Talking about women in crude sexual terms”

“Swearing”

These two sets of quotations, taken from men’s workshops I have conducted, indicate that college men would like to be different from how they have been taught to be men and that they are uncomfortable with “hyper-masculine” behavior. These anecdotal findings are supported by a number of empirical studies.

Gottfried (2002) surveyed college men to determine if they endorsed traditional masculine norms and to what extent they perceived other men as endorsing them. Participants overestimated the degree of other men’s belief in stereotypical male characteristics, with most men not endorsing them but thinking that most men did. In addition, lower self-esteem was reported by men who perceived a disparity between their own and other males’ beliefs about being a man. This study confirms the theme of this chapter that men are uncomfortable with how we are taught to be men, but try and act like “men” because we incorrectly think that other men expect us to.

Gottfried’s study also determined that men were not influenced by how they thought women defined masculinity. Fabiano et.al (2003) documented a similar phenomenon: men’s willingness to intervene to prevent sexual assault was predicted by what men thought other men would do, but not by what men thought women would do. In other words, what is important to men about being a man is what they think other men think, not what they think women think.

To demonstrate this phenomenon, we can use a perhaps humorous example pertaining to how one decides what to wear to a party.

(Insert Box #1 Here)

Recent qualitative research on men’s experiences supports this hypothesis and provides examples from the everyday experiences of college men. Edwards and Jones (2009) called it “Putting My Man Face On.” They conducted extensive interviews with ten traditionally aged college men from diverse backgrounds and found that “in order to try to meet these (society’s) expectations and be seen as men, the participants in the study put on a performance that was like wearing a mask.” (p. 214). Men moved through stages of “feeling a need to put on a mask,” “wearing a mask,” “experiencing and recognizing the consequences of wearing a mask,”

and finally, “beginning to transcend external expectations.” Men continued to put on their “man face” despite the negative consequences that it had in all aspects of their lives.

In another qualitative study of men’s experiences a similar conclusion was reached (Davis, 2002). “When these men were with a group of other men, even friends, there was some level of performance associated with their communication” (p. 515). Even though participants were clear “that they did not see themselves as typical of most men” and “communicated a general sense of unease with masculinity” they felt a need to hide this unease. Davis concluded that men had a strong inner need to be honest, empathic, communicative, and in other ways, break the “guy code,” and that student affairs practitioners should create intentional environments where this is possible.

These qualitative studies confirm what has been frequently documented in the quantitative research on men’s role conflict and gender-role strain – that men feel conflicted about how they are supposed to be men, which generates shame and which causes physical and emotion suffering. Underlying this problem is a “discrepancy between the real self and the gender role.” (O’Neil, 1990).

**The consequences of men’s mis-perceiving each other.** In this discussion we are following a thread to see where it leads us. If we accept the premise that men want to act differently as men but are held back by fear of what other men might think and shame about feeling deviant, what are the consequences? In what specific ways do men act differently than they would wish to act because of what they think other men think? And how might men act differently if they knew the truth about other men?

The assumption that misperceptions influence behavior is a central assumption of the “social norms approach” – a research-based theory that examines the impact of perceptions in different areas of life (Berkowitz, 2003, 2005A; Perkins, 2003). Social norms research has established that much human social behavior is based on misperceptions (or pluralistic ignorance), that these misperceptions are more extreme and influential among individuals who engage in problem behaviors, and that misperceptions predict how people act. Pluralistic ignorance is strongest when fear of social disapproval motivates behavior (Miller & McFarland, 1991). Thus, men’s fear of disapproval from other men intensifies the influence of pluralistic ignorance on men’s behavior.

Social norms research has established that high-school and college students consume more alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana when they think that their peers use more of these substances than they really do, and feel more pressure to have sex because they overestimate peer’s sexually activity. The belief that others engage in more of a behavior than is really the case is most strongly held by those who engage in more of the behavior themselves – i.e., the

false consensus group. In the case of masculinity it is the hyper-masculine men who are the most committed to believing that most men believe the way they do.

The social norms approach has been used to reduce alcohol and other drug use, increase use of seat-belts and other healthy-behaviors, foster healthy relationships and encourage individual's to act from a place of conscience to intervene against negative behaviors. It is also a cutting edge strategy for engaging men in the prevention of violence against women (Berkowitz, 2007, Kilmartin & Berkowitz, 2005). In almost all areas of human life the negative is seen as more prevalent than it really is and the positive is underestimated. Not surprisingly, this is also true for gender, with both college men and women misperceiving the attitudes and behavior of their own gender as well as the other.

What do we know about men's experience from the perspective of the social norms approach? Table Two provides examples of men's incorrect perceptions of each other that have been documented in empirical research:

(Insert Table Two Here)

These findings indicate that most men want to “do the right thing” and make healthy choices but may suppress this desire in order to fit in with what they think is true for other men. Men drink more alcohol (than they would otherwise), have more sex, blame sexual assault victims, talk and act in sexist and homophobic ways, and watch with silence when men degrade women verbally and physically because they think that these other men support these behaviors more than they really do, and also because they want to be accepted by these men.

Thus, although some men do terrible things and get bad attention for it, most men are “good guys” who don't agree with these behaviors but who are complicit by not acting to stop them. While men's bad behavior is broadcasted, much of men's good behavior is hidden or suppressed.

Let's look more closely at some of the studies that examine how men's misperceptions of each other influence men's behavior.

Three studies reported that college men (and women) over-estimate prevalence of sexual activity among peers and their average number of sexual partners while underestimating the prevalence of safe-sex practices (Lynch et. al, 2004; Martens et. al. 2006; Scholly et al, 2005). Among high-school students, Hillebrand-Gunn et. al. (2010) found that most boys over-estimated their peers support of rape myths and rape supportive behavior.

Lambert, Kahn and Apple (2003) examined the culture of “hooking-up” and found that “participants believed that other college students were more comfortable with the amount of hooking up than they were.” While this was true for both men and women, the pattern was more pronounced for men, who overestimated other men’s comfort with hooking-up culture more than women over-estimated other women’s comfort with it.

Other researchers report similar findings for college men in relation to attitudes about sexual assault, willingness to engage in behaviors which will ensure consent, willingness to intervene to prevent a sexual assault, and/or peers discomfort with inappropriate language and actions towards women (Brown & Messman-Moore, 2009; Burn, 2010; Fabiano et al, 2003; Loh et al, 2005; Kilmartin, et al, 2008; Stein, 2007).

In one of these studies, Loh et. al. (2005) reported that:

Compared to themselves, participants believed that the average college man demonstrated more rape-myth acceptance, was less likely to intervene in situations where a woman was being mistreated, and was more comfortable in situations where women are being mistreated. (p.1334)

In this study perceived rape-myth acceptance of peers predicted sexual assault perpetration for members of fraternities at a three month follow-up.

In two studies of rape proclivity and misperception of peer support for rape myths, men reported greater willingness to rape when they were given information suggesting that other men believed in rape myths, with this being strongest for men with greater rape-proclivity (Bohner et al, 2006; Eyssel, Bohner, & Seibler, 2006). Similarly, among domestic violence perpetrators, “men who are engaging in intimate partner violence tend to overestimate how often these behaviors are engaged in by other men” (Neighbors et al, in-press). These over-estimations were associated with violence against their partners during the previous 90 days.

Regarding alcohol use, college men believe that other college men drink more alcohol than they really do, with problem drinkers overestimating the most. Perceptions of how much other men drink is the strongest important influence on how much an individual man drinks himself, and is a stronger influence on drinking behavior than men’s perception of how much women drink (Korsusha & Thombs, 2003; Lewis & Neighbors, 2004). Most men also incorrectly feel that they are more concerned about other men’s drinking than are their male peers (Suls & Green, 2003). Among fraternity men, the strongest predictor of alcohol use is a fraternity man’s perception of how much his brothers drink (Bartholow et al, 2003). Furthermore, perceptions of fraternity brother’s alcohol use predicts personal drinking, with these perceptions being “largely responsible for the prevalence of heavy drinking among fraternity and sorority members” (Sher et al, 2001). Overestimations of other men’s drinking is also

correlated with personal drinking for men’s “pre-partying” drinking and for amount consumed during drinking games (Pederson & LaBrie, 2008). The way in which these misperceptions interact with other influences on men’s drinking is discussed in an insightful article by Capraro (2010).

Similar findings are revealed when researchers examine social justice attitudes, in this case heterosexual men’s (and women’s) homophobia. Thus, heterosexual individuals were found to overestimate the homophobia of their peers in two studies (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001; Dubuque et al 2002), and a social justice educator reported that sharing accurate norms about heterosexual’s homophobia – that it is less than what is perceived – empowers individuals to take more action against it (Smolinsky, 2002). Regarding men’s sexism, Kilmartin et. al. (2008) found that men overestimated other men’s sexism and underestimated other men’s discomfort with sexist behaviors. These findings are consistent with other research establishing that individuals are more likely to express prejudices when they believe that other’s share them (Crandall, Eshleman & O'Brien, 2002). Thus, in the case of prejudiced men, the false belief that other men are in agreement allows them to be vocal in expressing their biases, with the pluralistic ignorance of the uncomfortable majority causing them to be silent.

Cumulatively, these studies suggest that misperceptions of other men’s attitudes and behaviors with respect to alcohol, sexual assault, other health-risk behaviors, and social justice attitudes may inhibit men who are bystanders from intervening to stop them, and that they also function to facilitate violent and other abusive behavior in men who are pre-disposed to these problems. This supports the hypothesis that “guyland” is perpetuated by myths – the myth that the enforcers are the true men, and the myth that the bystanders are in agreement.

To test this assumption about “guyland” Vernon Klobassa and I created a survey about the central tenants of “guyland” – that men’s abuse of alcohol, violence, abuse of women, sexism and homophobia – are normative and accepted by most college men. The results of this mini-study are presented in Box #2.

(Insert Box #2 here)

**Misperceptions and willingness to intervene.** Recent research on bystander behavior supports the conclusion that misperceptions function to inhibit individuals from intervening against problem language and behavior. In one pilot study, Berkowitz (2006) assessed college students’ experiences of second hand effects of drinking and documented that students

underestimated of the extent to which their peers were bothered by these behaviors, and also their peers’ interest in having someone intervene to stop them.

A number of studies examining the role of college men as allies in ending sexual assault, have found that men overestimate other men’s adherence to rape-supportive attitudes and underestimate other men’s willingness to intervene to prevent sexual assault (Brown & Messman-Moore, 2009; Fabiano et. al, 2003; Stein, 2007). In these studies the strongest or only significant predictor of men’s willingness to prevent a sexual assault was a man’s perception of other men’s willingness to intervene to prevent a sexual assault.

In these studies men report having pro-social attitudes and intentions but are inhibited from expressing them because of the incorrect perception that other men are less pro-social. This misperception also functions to allow anti-social men to justify and encourage their misbehavior.

**Social norms efforts to reduce men’s violence against women.** Recent efforts to apply the social norms approach to men’s violence against women have determined that misperceptions can be corrected with this correction resulting in more positive attitudes and/or behavior, including reductions in sexual assault and increases in men’s intervening to prevent it. These results have implications for addressing other forms of men’s problem behavior.

In a three-part workshop for high school boys and girls Hillebrand-Gunn and her colleagues (2010) incorporated a normative feedback component for boys. At follow-up experimental group participants reported reduced misperceptions of peers’ attitudes conducive to rape coupled with a reduction in personal attitudes conducive to rape, without these changes occurring in a matched control group. Similarly, Kilmartin et. al. (2008) conducted a small-group social norms intervention to correct college men’s attitudes about rape and sexist attitudes and reported a significant decrease in perceptions of peer’s sexism in the intervention group at three-week follow-up. Finally, in a study by Gidycz et.al. (in-press) testing a rape prevention workshop for college men developed by the author which included group social norms exercises and bystander intervention techniques, the men in the experimental group committed fewer sexual assaults after three months than men in the control group, along with other beneficial effects.

A small-group norms intervention developed by the White Ribbon Campaign, (Berkowitz, 2005B) incorporates normative feedback into small group workshops that address gender stereotypes and promote gender equity for middle and high-school students. After filling out a survey assessing personal attitudes about gender equity along with their perception of the gender attitudes and behaviors of other students in the class, feedback is provided indicating that a majority misperceive their class-mates adherence to gender stereotypical

norms. Preliminary results show boys have extreme misperceptions of their peer’s attitudes about gender equity.

Bruce (2002) implemented a social norms media campaign to change men’s intimate behavior towards women. The campaign was followed by a significant increase in the percentage of men who indicated that they “stop the first time a date says no to sexual activity” and a significant decrease in the percentage of men who said that “when I want to touch someone sexually, I try and see how they react.” In a similar high school campaign focusing on healthy dating relationships, boys at two-year follow-up reported more accurate perceptions of other boy’s discomfort with boys “trash-talking girls” and this change was correlated with an increase in the number of boys who did something when they heard trash-talk (Moran & Berkowitz, 2009).

Collectively these studies, although preliminary, indicate that correcting men’s misperceptions of each other holds promise as a violence prevention strategy engaging men and boys in the prevention of violence against women, and more broadly as a strategy that gives men permission to act on pro-social impulses that are being stifled by a desire to fit in with a false norm of masculinity.

**Let’s tell men the truth about each other.** The research reviewed here indicates that men would be more likely to express positive attitudes and behaviors if they knew the truth about other men. Men’s role conflict, passivity in the face of other men’s problematic behavior and reticence to express a social conscience might all be reduced if men knew how other men really feel. Thus, student affairs practitioners should develop a research agenda that would document men’s misperceptions of each other, and implement programs to correct them.

While this strategy would not by itself create healthy men, or solve the problems of men’s bad behavior and men’s internal conflict about being men, misperception correction could act as a powerful catalyst nudging men in the right direction, creating a more permissive environment for men to be their healthy selves, and in turn creating a space for men to do the difficult emotional and transformational work necessary to be more mature, socially engaged human beings.

William Perry (1970), in his well-known study of college students intellectual development, used the terms “temporizing” and “retreat” to describe students who felt overwhelmed by a developmental challenge and who were either treading water in the face of it (temporizing), or actively moving in an opposite direction to avoid it (retreat). Perhaps among college men the silent majority who are bystanders are “temporizers” while the enforcers and perpetrators are in “retreat”. In either case men’s misperceptions of each other

reinforce and congeal these developmental regressions and may prevent men from moving forward.

Numerous researchers have written about the emotional and developmental challenges that men face as a result of our socialization to be male in unhealthy ways, of the guilt and shame that it engenders, and how this blocks men’s healthy development (for example, Davis & Wagner, 2005; and Johnson, 1997). Earlier in this chapter, Edwards and Jones (2009) examined how the culture of “putting my man face on” resulted in men’s moving through a series of developmental stages in relation to it: “feeling the need to wear a mask,” “experiencing and recognizing the consequences of wearing a mask,” and “beginning to transcend external expectations.” Research and theory reviewed here leads to the conclusion that men might move more easily through these stages if they knew the truth of how other men feel about themselves as men. Correcting men’s misperceptions of each other could unfreeze men so that development could move forward and other group and environmental interventions could be more effective.

If a social norms approach to masculinity offers benefits and could be part of a comprehensive approach to addressing men’s issues on campus, how should student affairs practitioners make use of it?

**Conclusions and recommendations for student affairs practitioners.** The following recommendations inspired by the social norms approach are offered to student affairs practitioners to help us understand college men, to design effective programs to foster men’s development, and to address men’s unhealthy behavior.

*Recommendation #1. Develop a social norms research agenda for college men.* What are the strengths and pro-social attitudes and behaviors of college men? For example, how many have intervened against a sexist remark or to prevent abusive behavior? To what extent are men interested in attending lectures or taking courses that are outside of the “gender box?” Briodo and Reason (2005), Edwards and Jones (2009), Davis and Wagner (2005) and others have identified critical ingredients of campus environments that serve to engage men (and women) in social justice ally behavior and in healthy development. What are men’s perceptions about these elements, to what extent are men willing to participate in them, and are these intentions misperceived with respect to other men? Are men with privileged identities uncomfortable with the behavior of other men in their group(s)? Finally, are the patterns of misperceptions suggested in this chapter prevalent in different communities of men, for example, gay and bi-sexual men, African-American, Latino and/or Asian men, etc? There are endless possibilities for examining the positives of men’s attitudes and behaviors and the misperceptions of other men that cause men to closet them. Emphasizing the positive and

revealing men’s misperceptions have also been recommended by Fabiano et. al. (2003) and Stein (2007).

*Recommendation #2. Integrate normative feedback and normative feedback exercises into existing student affairs programs at all levels of prevention.* Consistent with the principles of the social norms approach, normative feedback can be provided to individuals who engage in problem behavior, as Neighbors et. al. (in-press) have recommended for domestic violence perpetrators; to groups of men and boys, as Smolinsky (2002) recommends for homophobia education and as the White Ribbon Campaign proposes to foster gender equity (Berkowitz, 2005B), and in campus-wide media campaigns, as have been successfully utilized by Bruce (2002) and Moran and Berkowitz (2009). This can be done both for men in general, and for specific identity groups among men.

*Recommendation #3. Consider a social norms approach to masculinity as a student affairs philosophy.* The social norms approach, with its emphasis on the role of misperceptions, can be synthesized and integrated with other theories and approaches to men’s development, and should not be considered only as a specific strategy or technique. The phenomenon of pluralistic ignorance and false consensus are consistent with theories of men’s development, as well as student development in general, and help to explain many of the phenomenon described by them. Misperception correction could also serve as a catalyst to make existing student affairs practices more effective.

*Recommendation #4. Offer skills training to men who want to be change agents.* As men realize that they and other men want to “do the right thing” they become more ready to act on their pro-social impulses. This requires attending skills-training in order to overcome the emotional and interpersonal challenges to intervening and to learn how to do so effectively (Berkowitz, 2009).

I would like to conclude by sharing the results of an interesting study that examined how college men perceive other men’s and women’s attitudes towards alcohol (Suls & Green, 2003). When surveyed about campus drinking norms and their willingness to express concern about another’s drinking, men perceived themselves to be different from other men but similar to women. This can be interpreted symbolically. Privately men feel in some ways to be more similar to women but hide this “feminine” side from other men because it is incorrectly felt to be deviant. Providing men the opportunity to become authentic and whole requires giving men permission to acknowledge and express this hidden “feminine” and to realize that other men are similar. Men’s health requires replacing of denial of the feminine with acknowledgment of the male-female polarity that exists within each of us along with healthy expression of both.

Student affairs practitioners have traditionally tried to solve problems caused by men by focusing on the negative. In this chapter I have argued that an important element in changing men lies in a different direction – by focusing on the positive (on men’s desires to act and be men in a positive way) and on releasing men from a false and destructive sense of peer pressure and gender dichotomies by revealing the truth about men to each other.

### **Table 1: How Men Feel about Being Men**

“I would like to experience women more as human beings and not as sexual partners. My past has been marred by a male chauvinistic upbringing in school and at home”

“I would like to be able to be more outgoing and emotional with my friends, rather than being cool, too cool for words.”

“Being more comfortable with showing emotions – people are surprised when men cry.”

“I would like to express my emotions more freely.”

“I’d like to be able to be more human in the sense that I’d like to be more open to receiving help”

“I want to be able to be closer to male friends in the area of talking about problems. Many guys can’t open up when it comes to certain topics.”

“I definitely wish I could cook. My best effort in the kitchen is making toast.”

“I’d like to be more human in the sense that I’d like to be more open about receiving help.”

“I want to be closer to male friends in the area of talking about problems.”

“Why can women dance together but not men?”

*Based on responses in workshops to the question:  
“what would you like to change about how you were taught to be a man”*

### **Box #1: A Thought Experiment for Men about Perceptions of Others**

Imagine that you have been invited to a party by a group of people you are hoping to get to know better. You have the impression that this group likes to dress in black, and that it's “sophisticated.” Actually you don't like black and it doesn't feel like “you.” But you put your feelings aside and dress black. It turns out that almost everyone at the party does the same thing. Not caring for black, they dress in black.

Now imagine yourself at the party with these people who you want to be accepted by, who are mostly dressed in black. People say things like “You look so good!” “Black really becomes you,” etc. And what do people say or think about the few who are not in black? How would you respond if someone told a joke about someone one of them? Most importantly, how does it feel to dress in a way that is not “you” while thinking that for everyone else it is the “real” them? How does it feel to think that you are perhaps the only person dressed in black who does like black?

In truth, almost everyone dressed in black is uncomfortable but thinks that everyone else is. Dressing one way and feeling another creates a sense of in-authenticity and conflict between how one looks from the outside and how one feels on the inside. This is not the case for the few people who actually like black, who feel comfortable and a sense of belonging. They assume that they represent the majority when in fact they are a small minority.

Now imagine that this example is about something more fundamental, such as gender or another significant identity. Instead of “putting on black” you are “putting your face on” or “acting tough” or something else that allows you to fit in with what you think other men think about being male.

Now let's go back to the party. What if everyone found out that most people didn't care for black? How would they dress the next time? Would this change how those who like black feel and would they act differently? Would others behave differently to them?

While some may be non-conformists and do what feels right regardless of what others think, most of us take others into consideration to some degree. To the extent that we consider others it is important to know the truth about them. The truth about men is that most men are uncomfortable with normative masculinity but conform to this “false norm” because they think that this will produce acceptance from other men.

Now that the secret is out, how will you “dress” for the next party? Be yourself. And find out how your friends really feel about themselves. It will help you to be a happier person and the world to be a better place as a result.

## **Table 2: College Men’s Misperceptions of Each Other**

College men *overestimate* other men’s:

- use of alcohol and other drugs
- amount of sexual activity
- desire to “hook-up”
- belief in rape myths
- interest in gambling
- willingness to use force to have sex
- frequency of unwanted sexual activity
- acceptance of homophobia

College men *underestimate* other men’s:

- discomfort with language or behavior that objectifies or degrades women
- willingness to intervene to prevent a sexual assault
- desire to make sure that they have consent when sexually active
- desire for a socially just world and to act against injustice

**Box 2: The Truth about “Guyland” – Mens Attitudes and Perceptions of what it Means to be a “Guy”**

Insert results of Vern’s study of the culture of Guyland

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