

Exploring College Men's Perceptions about Interacting with Faculty Beyond the Classroom

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This article documents the results of a qualitative study of the perceptions of 14 first-semester college men about interacting with faculty outside of class. The research site was a large, public doctoral extensive institution in the Midwest. Each of the men participated in three depth interviews (Miller & Crabtree, 2004) that sought to explore the students' in-class experiences they had with faculty members, and their decisions about potential out-of-class interactions with professors. The findings present observations about perceived gains from interacting with faculty, identify key factors that help or hinder interactions, and shed light on decisions men made about interacting with faculty during the first semester. The results suggest that men are uncertain about the resource faculty members provide and that they display complex help-seeking behaviors. Implications and recommendations for college educators are discussed.

Introduction

For decades, American research institutions have been criticized for delivering an undergraduate experience that appears to be in dire need of improvement (Kuh, 1999). Substantive interactions between faculty and students, which seem particularly challenging at large research universities, have been one of the largest targets of such disparagement (Kuh, 2001). The quality of student-faculty relationships significantly impacts a myriad of student outcomes, including satisfaction with the college experience, academic achievement, personal and intellectual development, and persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Most of the interactions between students and faculty are reserved for the classroom; however, the opportunities for faculty to have an impact on students do not end when they part ways after class. To the contrary, research asserts that many meaningful interactions between faculty and students take place beyond the classroom, such as during faculty office hours, advising sessions, or chance encounters on campus (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005).

Interactions with faculty beyond the classroom may be particularly problematic for male undergraduates. Some suggest men may be a new at-risk student population in higher education (Kellom, 2004). Reasons for this include lower male college enrollment (Manzo, 2004) and a slower time to degree completion than women (Crissman Ishler, 2005). Men were found to interact less frequently and less positively with faculty (Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005). Men

seek help from student and academic affairs services less often than women (Kellom). Continued research about men and their experiences in college is needed to more thoroughly understand the apparent plight of men and its potential causes.

Relevant Literature

Two categories of the literature are specifically relevant to research on male student interactions with faculty outside of class. The first category encompasses a large body of literature that deals specifically with the nature, frequency, and quality of student-faculty interaction as well as interpersonal factors that determine student-faculty interaction. The second category consists of literature that discusses male identity development as it relates to having contact with faculty members outside of class. This body of literature is smaller than the first, especially in terms of college men's development and experiences; however, in recent years research on college men has become more widespread. To guide this literature review I consulted Cotten and Wilson's (2006) study because of its similarity in topic, methodology, and results.

Student-Faculty Interaction

Research on student-faculty interaction beyond the classroom has often discussed the nature, frequency, quality, and overall outcomes of such interactions. Jaasma and Koper (1999) found that interactions were typically very brief: an average visit to a faculty office only lasted 2.4 minutes, while the average informal interaction was even shorter (1.4 minutes). Other research suggests that the frequency of interactions between students and faculty beyond the classroom has been low for years (Fusani, 1994). More recent reports confirm this and suggest that students may interact with faculty out-of-class at less than optimal levels and less than they expected before coming to college (Gonyea, Kish, Kuh, Muthiah, & Thomas, 2003).

Interpersonal factors that affect student-faculty interactions have received some attention in the literature. Students are often too anxious or intimidated to seek out faculty beyond the classroom (DeLucia, 1994). Fusani (1994) found that students wanted personal attention from faculty and considered faculty accessibility behaviors the most significant predictor of satisfaction. Cotten and Wilson (2006) indicated that faculty empathy was positively related to students' interest in engaging in out-of-class interactions.

The body of research including gender variability in the study of student-faculty interactions outside of the classroom is still relatively small. However, it suggests that male and female students are affected differently by connecting with their professors, because men and women undergo different gender

identify formation processes, participate in different socialization processes, and demonstrate different *ways of knowing*. (Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Jaasma & Koper, 2002). For instance, women tend to favor relationship oriented interactions with faculty, and report gains of interpersonal competence and intrinsic occupational values from interacting with faculty (Jaasma & Koper). Men, on the other hand, do not value a relationship with faculty as much as women, report benefits of a cognitive nature from interactions with faculty, and are not influenced in their intrinsic occupational values as compared to women (Jaasma & Koper). Based on extant research it makes sense to include gender as a variable in the study of male student-faculty interactions.

Male Identity Development

One of the major tasks of college students is the construction of their identity. The literature discussed here focuses on the concepts of male gender role socialization and male gender role conflict as they relate to interactions with faculty.

Gender role socialization can be understood as the “process whereby children and adults acquire and internalize the values, attitudes, and behaviors associated with femininity, masculinity, or both” (O’Neil, 1981, p. 203). Czopp, Lasane, Sweigard, Bradshaw, and Hammer (1998) conducted a study on gender role socialization and male classroom behavior and found that boys concealed academic ability to avoid seeming more intelligent than what was acceptable by peers.

Gender role conflict is defined as negative or unwanted consequences resulting from stereotypical gender roles dictated by society (Schwartz, Waldo, & Higgins, 2004). For example, men may experience gender role conflict if they are socialized to be successful, powerful, and competitive but rather think of themselves as compassionate, collaborative, and passive. This means men feel conflicted when they admit needing help, when they recognize an emotional problem, or when they need to rely on others after being socialized to be self-reliant, emotionally tough, or self-controlling (Addis & Mahalik, 2003).

Good, Dell, and Mintz (1989) focused on the relationship between gender role conflict and help-seeking behavior in men and found that “traditional attitudes about the male role in society, concern about expressing affection toward other men, and concern about expressing emotions were related to negative attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help” (p. 299). Thus, male students may be less inclined to approach faculty if the reason for seeking help involves disclosing a potentially emotional subject.

Purpose of the Study

While we can gain a lot of knowledge about student-faculty interactions and male identity development from current research, gaps in our understanding remain. Most studies on student-faculty interaction are rooted in the quantitative paradigm. A qualitative methodology and method were chosen for this study to add to the understanding of why and how men come to interact with faculty outside of class. A qualitative study can explore how men perceive situations and make decisions which enable college educators to devise programs based on authentic experiences. More specific research on male experiences in higher education needs to be conducted as men are being considered as a new at-risk population. Although the body of literature on college men is growing, no study exists that explores the perceptions of male first-year students about interacting with faculty outside of class. This study will begin filling this gap.

A recent qualitative study on student-faculty interaction by Cotten and Wilson (2006) was identified for comparison with the current study. The authors explored the dynamics and determinants of student-faculty interactions using a focus group method. Results suggest that students had minimal contact with faculty outside of class and were mostly unaware of how they could benefit from such contact. In contrast to Cotten and Wilson's work, students in the present study were interviewed individually and sampled from among white men only. This was done to avoid gendered or racial power relationships between the researcher and the participants and to aid rapport building.

The specific research questions guiding the present study were (1) What did participants perceive they would gain from potential interactions with faculty outside of the classroom, (2) which factors did they perceive to help or hinder interaction, (3) how did they make decisions about interacting with faculty beyond the classroom, and (4) what was the connection between maleness and interacting with faculty beyond the classroom?

Methods

Qualitative studies aim to develop deep understanding of a certain topic and identify how individuals make meaning of their experiences with the topic under investigation (Jones, 2002). I chose the design of the basic interpretive qualitative study (Merriam, 2002). Such a design is utilized when researchers are interested in exploring and understanding participants' perspectives and perceptions. Consistent with the design was the method of data collection. The *depth interview* (Miller & Crabtree, 2004) fit as the focus of the inquiry was relatively narrow, the respondents were part of a homogeneous group, and the research questions were fairly specific.

Participants

Fourteen first-semester white men enrolled at a large Midwestern doctoral extensive institution participated in the study. All lived in residence halls on campus and were between 18 and 20 years of age. All of them were in-state residents.

Sampling and Recruitment

The sample for this article was taken from the dissertation study of the author. The original study explored the expectations of white, first-year, first-generation male college students about interacting with faculty outside of class. Therefore, it was important to find students who had not yet interacted substantively (more than 10 minutes of face-to-face) with faculty beyond the classroom and who were first in their family to potentially graduate from college.

Sampling procedures were random using summer orientation participant records of all white men. This list was given to the housing department who excluded all men who lived in residential learning communities, because it was assumed that these students would be predisposed to more frequent out-of-class interactions with faculty. The total sample based on these criteria yielded 1,235 students.

Recruitment started in late September. All men were contacted utilizing a staggered approach of two individualized e-mail messages. The first message asked individuals to indicate interest, introduced the researcher, the incentives for participation, and outlined the total duration of participant involvement. Those that replied (173 for a response rate of 14%) received a follow-up e-mail asking what first year students gain from interacting with faculty outside of class and whether the men had already had substantive out-of-class interactions with faculty. Sixty men replied to the second e-mail (35%); however, only 19 students matched the selection criteria of the original study. After some attrition, the final sample of 14 followed through on scheduling and completing all interviews.

Interviews

Before the interviews began, each participant chose a pseudonym to be used on interview transcripts and any potential subsequent reporting of the results. Three semi-structured tape-recorded interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes were conducted with each participant.

The first interview focused on creating rapport with the participants, and asked specific questions about student background, and student interactions with family, friends, and teachers in high school. The second interview focused

specifically on students' in-class interactions with faculty in college and on the participant's connection to college peers. The third interview asked students to discuss their decisions about whether or not to interact with faculty.

A total of 42 interviews were conducted between early October and early December. All were "spot transcribed" (B. Korth, personal communication, February 16, 2005) by the investigator; that is, most interviews were transcribed verbatim at first. However, after larger data codes had been identified, conversations about experiences less pertinent to the research questions were not transcribed verbatim or at all.

Trustworthiness

To achieve trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) this study employed several strategies. First, member checking occurred after all interviews had been transcribed and coded. The researcher asked all participants via e-mail to authenticate his interpretations. Eight of the 14 participants completed the final member check document. The respondents agreed with most of the researcher's interpretations but also presented useful corrections. Second, three peer debriefers familiar with qualitative research were used to check preliminary results, codes, and themes. Third, thick description and an audit trail were utilized (Merriam, 2002).

Data Analysis

An inductive approach to data analysis was used (Merriam, 2002). Interview notes and transcripts were read and re-read for meaningful words, phrases, or passages from the transcripts. These initial codes included constructs of (1) perceived gains of interactions, (2) facilitative factors of interaction, (3) inhibitive factors of interaction, and (4) decisions about interaction. These codes were very closely related to the research questions and provided the structure to be used in reporting the results. Within this structure, the researcher looked for more refined and specified codes as the next section will show.

Researcher as Instrument

According to Schwandt (2001) it is vital that qualitative researchers remain reflexive throughout the research process; that is, they employ continuous critical self reflection. This includes the articulation and clarification of one's biases, assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation to the study (Merriam, 2002). Identifying one's biases is not easy to do. One assumes that admitting to biases, possibly against first-year men and/or faculty, would render the self unfit to conduct research on the chosen subject matter. Bogdan and Knopp Biklen (2003) alleviate this by offering "you [the researcher] cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are,

what you believe and what you value...The goal is to become more reflexive and conscious of how who you are may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it” (p. 34).

My interest in researching student-faculty interaction stemmed from personal experience with faculty members during my undergraduate career at a small Liberal Arts college in northeast Iowa. Here faculty were academic advisors, out-of-class contact with them was high, and relationships were easily forged. Faculty also had a strong appreciation for teaching and mentoring students.

One bias or assumption I had at the onset of this study was that faculty members at doctoral-extensive institutions were potentially not as interested in teaching undergraduates as in conducting research. Another assumption, which was partially demonstrated by anecdotal evidence from working with first-year students, was that many freshmen did not seem to care enough about academic success to seek out faculty members outside of class. I assumed that faculty and first-year students were so different in their cultures, personalities, age, values, socialization on campus, beliefs, and their attitudes that interacting beyond the classroom would become daunting for both to do.

During my time as a residence life professional I have worked with hundreds of first-year students, which contributed strongly to my interest in conducting this study. Over the years students shared with me their experiences, their successes and their frustrations, and their views on faculty, which demonstrated that a formal study on student-faculty interaction would be warranted.

Results

Perceived Gains of Student-Faculty Interaction

All participants confirmed that first-year students likely benefit from out-of-class contact with faculty. In fact, consider the following representative statement: “I feel that first-year students gain a sense of comfort from interacting with faculty/instructors outside of class” (Jake, personal communication, September 10, 2005). When I probed students during the interviews about why they would perceive a sense of comfort several of them said knowing faculty may help to make the enormous size of the institution smaller and more manageable for students. Once the interviews began, students remained optimistic about potential benefits of interactions with faculty.

After experiencing faculty members in the classroom during the first few weeks of college, participants discussed what could potentially help or hinder out-of-class interaction with professors.

What Factors Help Student-Faculty Interaction?

Students cited positive faculty immediacy behaviors (Jaasma & Koper, 1999) as the main facilitators for potential out-of-class interactions. Faculty members display these behaviors when they show openness and flexibility towards the student, when they seem interested in the student's personal life, when they are friendly and caring, and when they give cues about their approachability. Several students indicated that some of their faculty displayed these behaviors when they were eager to learn students' names, when they stressed that office hours were important, when they had a sense of humor, were entertaining and passionate about teaching, and when they recognized students on campus.

Students were more interested in interacting with faculty who displayed the human qualities of care, interest, and passion. This mirrored their statements from the recruitment phase about perceived benefits of interaction. In fact, *humanizing faculty* became a consistent sub-theme. To introduce the idea, consider Jake's comment: "There is a sense of calmness knowing that these professors are human too, that laugh and make mistakes the same as you." (Jake, personal communication, September 10, 2005).

As indicated above, students perceived clear gains from and were thinking about interacting with faculty outside of class, especially if those faculty displayed positive immediacy behaviors. However, these were the only indicators mentioned that would make interacting with faculty outside of class easier.

What Factors Hinder Student-Faculty Interaction?

Although participants talked enthusiastically about perceived gains from interacting with faculty outside of the classroom, their expectations for such interactions were low. In high school the majority of participants enjoyed positive, long-lasting, and even friendship-like interactions with their teachers. It was common to hang out with teachers after school during projects (Lee), go to eat at restaurants with teachers (Kevin), or see them during sporting events (several). Now in college, all but one of the 14 participants stated they expected to interact less with faculty in college than they had in high school.

Participants cited institutional and class sizes as factors in these low expectations. Consider the following comment: "I felt like a marble that was dropped in an ocean of marbles. I felt like the smallest thing in the world dumped into this huge hodge-podge of everything (James, personal communication, November 10, 2005)." This statement, as well as others about the size of the institution or individual classes, suggests some anxiety the men felt about interacting with faculty on a campus with 28,000 other undergraduates.

As a perfect opposite of positive faculty immediacy resulting in a positive outlook on potential interactions, negative faculty immediacy behaviors were seen as major hindrances to interacting with them outside of class. For instance, Lee perceived that some of his faculty members were “secretive about their availability.” (Personal communication, October 25, 2005). Shane said negative faculty behaviors affected his level of comfort approaching the professor outside of class: “A kid asked a question and [the professor] said, ‘You should read the material.’ That makes me feel even less comfortable approaching her after class if I needed something.” (Personal communication, October 19, 2005). The participants were sensitive to how faculty communicated their willingness and ability to interact beyond the classroom, and determined, even perhaps after only one incident, that they would never seek out certain faculty members.

A large subcategory among hindrances of interaction was perceived peer pressure about students’ academic pursuits. Several of the participants struggled with saying “no” to peers when involved in academic activities. Tim noted:

I have a couple of friends, like I’m working on a paper and they call me “you want to go to dinner right now?”, and I’m like “no, I’m working on this paper.” They’ll show up five minutes later and they’ll just hang out. I’m like “I gotta do this paper.” It sucks. Some people don’t get it. They feel like I should partake in their laziness. (Personal communication, October 21, 2005).

Several students talked about pressure from peers specifically about visiting faculty members outside of class: “I don’t expect [to interact with faculty] anymore. When I was in high school I did. Absolutely [not] now. I would be an outcast if I still had those same goals” (Jake, personal communication, November 15, 2005). The participants who perceived social pressure from peers did not interact with faculty primarily because none of their peers seemed to be requiring any assistance. Shane was concerned that other students might look down upon a peer who needs to seek out the help of faculty members outside of class: “[T]o say that you’re going to go get help or getting tutored every night, you’re kind of like that kid that needs a lot of help to get through anything. You can’t just do it on your own.” (Personal communication, October 26, 2005).

Another hindrance was the sense of feeling awkward or uncomfortable about seeking out faculty beyond class. Hearing participants speak this way about faculty members is a clear departure from earlier statements, which were more enthusiastic and optimistic about interactions outside of class. Consider Tim’s statement about the seeming inappropriateness of a potential relationship with a faculty member.

I don't interact with faculty outside of class for the same reason you don't talk to the average guy on the street. It serves no purpose. If you're riding the bus, you don't talk to the bus driver and try to make friends with him. He's doing his job for you. You don't ever approach him and go, "hey do you want to go get coffee or something." (Personal communication, October 28, 2005).

Tim illuminates the students' lack of knowledge about the role of faculty as an important resource on campus, which is central to the argument of this article.

After exploring what helps and what hinders students' interactions with faculty beyond the classroom, students talked about why they had not sought out any faculty contact during the first 12 weeks of their first college semester.

Decision-Making to Engage in Student-Faculty Interaction

The decision not to interact with faculty came relatively easy to the participants: they did not perceive needing help in their academic endeavors. When asked how the men defined need, Shane replied, "Either getting really behind on a class or having a lot of trouble with an assignment that maybe no one else can answer. Kind of like a last resort." (Personal communication, October 26, 2005). This emerged as the most dominant and consistent data category of the study. Ten of the 14 participants used the word "need" or "needing help" during their interviews. Consider the following representative statement: "Because I really haven't had the need to. I pay attention in class, I don't miss classes, I study" (Phillip, personal communication, November 2, 2005)

The level of consistency among the student responses during the interviews suggests that they did not yet fully understand that faculty could serve as a resource for academic assistance; students thought of faculty as a last resort in case no one else was available for help.

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

What explains the overwhelming lack of participant-faculty interactions outside of the classroom identified by this study? Two overarching yet interconnected themes emerged to answer this question: (1) the participants experienced college as a world filled with uncertainties, and (2) they displayed distinct help seeking behaviors. The final research question guiding this study dealt with how maleness was connected to establishing relationships with faculty beyond the classroom. As a result, issues pertaining to the masculinity of the participants are infused in this discussion where appropriate. The literature reviewed served as a lens for interpreting the results. When relevant, implications and recommendations for college educators are noted throughout.

College as an Uncertain World

During the time of their participation in this study, the men were navigating a college community that felt like uncharted waters. The uncertainties this environment held were evident in the contrasting, even contradictory perceptions of potential interactions with faculty. On the one hand there were enthusiastic responses about likely student gains in senses of comfort, respect, and trust. On the other hand were disheartened statements about feeling unwelcome, awkward, or uncomfortable about the same interactions. These findings confirm frameworks asserted by student development theory.

The participants of the current study fit the theoretical frames of absolute knowers and dualistic thinkers. Baxter Magolda's (1992) tenet of *absolute knowing* describes this stage as one in which young students assume all knowledge as certain without questioning. Students in this stage take no active role in the creation of knowledge; rather, they expect to obtain knowledge from teachers. Two gender-related patterns characterize this stage: receiving and mastery. In contrast to Baxter Magolda, who asserted that men fit the pattern of mastery (using verbal and interactive approaches) more frequently, receiving seemed to fit the men in the present study. In the receiving pattern, students have few expectations of teachers, engage them only on a limited basis, and rely on peers for support.

According to Perry (1970), students bring to college an authority-oriented structure; they do not question what an authority figure says and accept statements made by authority as truth. Specifically first-year students, who generally move in *Position 1 – Basic Duality* may consider faculty as omniscient. Dualistic thinkers may not reflect on what faculty mean when they say "come see me if you need help." Consider Laz's statement: "They told me to come only if I need help, but I don't, so I am not going" (Personal communication, October 31, 2005). Unless students move beyond the early stages of cognitive reflection, they will continue to heed the faculty's words literally: "Only come see me if you need help."

In uncertain environments college students often try to retreat to their comfort zone. The men who participated in this study indicated a need to humanize faculty members; that is, in order to see them as potential partners in interaction they needed to be stripped of characteristics that could intimidate the students or make them uncomfortable. Students only considered faculty viable for out-of-class interactions if they appeared friendly, caring, entertaining, or passionate about teaching. These perceptions indicate overarching needs of affirmation, recognition, and the prime importance of establishing a social support network on campus. This confirms previous research which observes that first-year students have higher needs to create a

social network before seriously pursuing academic endeavors, which include connecting with faculty members (Bauer & Liang, 2003). Bauer and Liang suggest that first-year men are uncertain about college because they are unsure about their own identity, how they fit into the social network of peers, and what roles faculty members play. Even though participants perceived benefits of interacting with faculty outside of class, they were unable to articulate any reasons for such contact other than help with subject matter. The result is the participants' critical lack of knowledge about the roles faculty could play in their early post-secondary careers.

Participant perceptions and resulting behavior present non-trivial problems for college educators who would like more students to benefit from faculty contact beyond the classroom. Those students who do not interact with faculty may be without an opportunity to become more integrated socially and academically into the institution. Faculty may be able to avoid such problems if their pedagogy includes systematic messages and cues about 'showing students the ropes' of preferred interaction. During the first few class meetings faculty may need to explain to first-year students what office hours are, what can happen there, and how students can benefit from attending. They may also need to dispel the myth that students should only seek out faculty beyond the classroom if they need help with subject matter. It is also essential for faculty to indicate other modes of potential interaction, such as talking about major or career choice, research or academic interests, service learning opportunities, recommendations, or simply to get to know faculty better. Another approach would be to require an office visit. None of the faculty members of the participants did this but students could overcome initial trepidations more quickly if they are requested to attend.

Faculty who thoroughly introduce themselves to students, who present themselves in a personal and inviting manner, who emphasize their willingness to connect with students outside of class, and who spend enough time on non-academic issues before the start of the semester can increase student comfort. Consider Phillip's specific recommendation:

How you present yourself on the first day determines how we see you, what we tell others about you. The first days are really big because that's when we're most guarded. And then say, "I am really interested to meet with all of you. My office hours are always open." Just make it known that you really care to meet with us. (Personal communication, November 2, 2005).

While meeting every student of a large class might be impractical, faculty ought to be aware that most students desire some sort of interpersonal connection, even though they may be extremely hesitant about initiating one.

Distinct Help Seeking Behaviors

The lack of participant interactions with faculty because of a lack of perceived need hints at distinct help seeking behaviors that drive much of student decision making. Issues of masculinity and gender role conflict surfaced when participants discussed the concept of peer pressure. One participant in the current study went as far as to say he feared being ostracized by peers for wanting to connect with faculty outside of class. A stigma seemed to be associated with interacting with faculty outside of class and participants did not want to engage in behaviors perceived by their peers as socially unacceptable. This confirms the findings of Caboni, Mundy, and Duesterhaus (2002) who found that a normative structure was in place to accept most of the practices and behaviors modeled by peers. This was true for student-faculty interaction, engaging in which was not supported by peers.

Knapp and Karabenick (1988) indicated that while 94% of college students needed some form of academic assistance, as much as 80% did not use formal institutional help, such as tutoring, study skills workshops, or writing skills seminars. Previous research asserted that help seeking behaviors are connected to male identity development, which this study confirmed. Addis and Mahalik (2003) suggested that men may feel conflicted admitting they need help, when they recognize an emotional problem, or when they need to rely on others after being socialized to be self-reliant or emotionally tough. The men of the present study proclaimed that the only reason they would visit faculty outside of class is to receive help on course content, and the gaping lack of interactions prove that faculty were truly considered a last resort by the students. One explanation for the lack of interactions may be that the participants could have considered seeking help “unmanly.” Scholars have theorized that college men regard all attempts to seek assistance as a “return to ‘domesticity,’ in other words as reconstituting their own feminization, *because such programs are inherently nurturing*” [original emphasis] (Carpraro, 2004, p. 29).

Gender role conflict may well have played a part in the participants’ help-seeking behaviors. Participants showed they were sensitive about to whom to reveal they needed help, including peers and faculty. Restrictive emotionality (O’Neil, 1981), one of the components of gender role conflict, is a factor in explaining why men in this sample chose not to interact with faculty. The participants likely would have considered it a weakness having to admit they did not comprehend course content or they did poorly on a test. As a result, they refrained from seeking out faculty members beyond the classroom. This presents a dilemma for college educators. College men need academic and social support; however, they may reject the very services established to help

them because they consider it a weakness if they admit to needing help, specifically to male peers and male faculty members.

Looking at the big picture of young men on college campuses this study implies that we must help men develop and understand their gender identity (Davis, 2002) and explore potential gender role conflict issues. Engaging men in conversations about what it means to be male on a college campus has the potential to deconstruct stereotypes that men hold about themselves, other men, women, and what is socially acceptable male behavior. Carefully designed programs and interventions for college men are needed that address the dichotomous relationship of needs and perceived threat to their masculinity.

Men's issues are often considered implied when discussing student development (Davis & Laker, 2004); however, we must determine how to serve men more directly. Career services professionals could discuss traditionally male concerns for achievement, work, and success in terms of career exploration, development, or job search strategies. Residence life, judicial affairs, and health center staffs could offer all-male support programs that address socialized control and power in terms of community living, ethical and responsible decision making, and personal health and wellness. Counseling and Greek affairs staff could lead discussions with men about emotional development and how to develop appropriate relationships among cohorts of men.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The study was limited by the timing of data collection, which began perhaps too early in the academic year. At the point when the interviews took place students had only met a few faculty members. Participants had not spent enough time on campus to be comfortable with approaching faculty beyond the classroom. Collecting data during the spring semester could have yielded more nuanced student perceptions.

A second limitation was evident in the sampling procedures for the original study. Although 1,235 students were contacted by e-mail to participate in this study only 173 replied showing initial interest. The second recruitment e-mail was answered by only 60 students. When conceptualizing the study I hoped selection criteria would not be difficult to meet because of the large numbers of potential participants at the research site. However, it was difficult to find students who had not yet interacted with faculty outside of class who were also first-generation college students. Several students met either criterion but not both. I had planned on using a more purposive sampling strategy to create maximum variation among the sample. I set out to select students based on their ability to articulate their thoughts about potentially interacting with faculty outside of class. Five articulate, five moderately articulate, and five minimally

articulate students were to make up the final sample of 15. However, simply stated, the number of students, who matched the criteria (19), was too small to be more selective.

Additional research on student-faculty interaction is valuable as institutions continue to be pressed to create meaningful and personal learning environments and as new technologies threaten to make obsolete face-to-face student-faculty contact altogether. Terrific quantitative instruments exist that measure student engagement on campus. Perhaps one avenue new research could take involves mixed method research. Administrations of student engagement instruments could be followed up with qualitative methods such as focus groups or individual interviews. This promises to create highly triangulated research that continues to broadcast the voices and lived experiences of students.

Conclusion

A lot is known about student-faculty interaction as a key to student success in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Practically nothing is known, however, about how first-year men perceive these interactions, understand the benefits of these interactions, or make decisions about engaging in such interactions. It is noteworthy that these findings are based on 42 depth interviews with 14 first-year men at one large Midwestern research university. While many of the results confirm those of extant research, it cannot be stated with certainty that transferability exists into other contexts. Future qualitative research on male student-faculty interaction is necessary to determine whether findings can be replicated in different settings.

College educators need to encourage students to interact with faculty outside of the classroom, they need to carefully explain what these interactions could look like, and what benefits could result. Faculty members should display interpersonal behaviors inside of the classroom that facilitate rather than inhibit students from interacting with them outside of the classroom. To understand the potential problem men have in higher education more thoroughly, more research on male college students needs to be conducted. Men ought to be served directly and not treated as the dominant group that can be overlooked. If men are carefully guided by college educators to overcome stereotypes of their own masculinity, potential gender role conflict, and seeking help, they may welcome opportunities to interact with faculty outside of class and could begin to see that faculty members are more than just last resorts on campus.

It may take a shift in faculty and student affairs professionals' behavior when both approach students about the purposes and benefits of interacting with

faculty members in as many different ways as possible, including outside of the classroom. For faculty this may be difficult to do as it requires more time spent with each individual student, and faculty time is sparse, specifically at research institutions. Therefore, student affairs professionals need to assume a larger role in educating college students, specifically men, on the value of getting to know faculty outside of class. We should continuously be asking ourselves and our students in which ways they could be meaningfully connected to faculty. If we are successful we will help all students and work to combat the impending risk college men may be facing in higher education today.

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