Collaborative participatory action strategies for re-envisioning young men's masculinities

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Abstract
To address gender relations, sexual violence, and differing cultural masculinities, we collaborated with a community organization and young, male stakeholders at a mid-sized public university in the Northeast United States. We employed a directive inquiry method to design, assess, and critique a participatory action research pilot program for young men renegotiating masculinities in a primary prevention context. Our process expanded upon 'healthy relationships' programs, but was distinctive in its focus on the challenges and resiliencies of young men in diverse communities. Specific process strategies are discussed critically in terms of feasibility for future full-scale programs and contributions to theory-based participatory research on masculinities and violence.

Violence perpetration can begin early. In Connecticut, more than 34 percent of arrested family violence perpetrators are under age 25, with some as young as six years old (Crime Analysis Unit, 2008). Violence is conceptualized here as explicit, conscious or implicit, culturally ingrained psychological, verbal, and/or physical harm. Young men receive, enact, and maintain violent norms as victims,

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perpetrators, *and* challengers (Kimmel, 2006). Diverse masculinities operate in young men's acceptance of, and resistance to, violence in their own lives (Anderson, 2012). Thus, we approached interpersonal violence prevention by and for men as a 'worthwhile practical purpose' (Reason, 2006, p. 188).

We collaborated with a community organization and young residents to design a theory-based participatory action program (e.g. Bradbury & Reason, 2002) that focused on diverse masculinities in an interpersonal context (as opposed to empathy- or hegemony-focused education). The resulting program was distinctive in its use of strategies tailored to challenges and resiliencies of young men in patriarchally based communities. Our discussion focuses on this collaborative development (i.e. needs, design, and implementation strategies) process, rather than on quantifiable program outcomes. Here, we a) illustrate practitioner means for fostering healthy communication among young men capable of personal and social change, b) highlight collaboration with 'local problem owners' (Levin, 2012, p. 138), and c) contribute nuance to theorizing on 'good' or 'rigorous' action research and primary prevention education strategies. We begin by situating our participants.

The target group

Very densely populated, Connecticut possesses two entirely disparate ways of life; it is one of the wealthiest US states, yet has 'some of the most severe and concentrated pockets of poverty in the nation' (Owusu, Davis, & Tarala, 2009, p. 20). Young men in southwest Connecticut are representative of diverse men across the US. Almost 44 percent of Danbury residents identify as non-White[1] and over 40 percent of households speak a language other than English (more than 48 languages reported by Danbury High School, 2009–10). The US Census Bureau (2012) reported Danbury with the most foreign-born people (over 34%) of any Connecticut city (Mejia & Canny, 2007). A ongoing out-migration of White citizens adds further cultural plurality to the area, with substantial Portuguese, Brazilian, Italian, Greek, Lebanese, Ecuadorian, African American, African, and Atlantic islander (e.g. Puerto Rican, Dominican, Jamaican) sub-cultures (Coelen & Berger, 2006).

Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) remains one of the centers of this community. Nearly half of Connecticut State University System students are first-generation college students (CSUS, 2011). Summative interactions with students, staff, and community members at local schools and community events, published accounts of area practitioners, and feedback from program participants reveal specific cultural dynamics in this community. Obviously not descriptive of every person, trends include loyalty-based subcultural norms and hierarchal, patriarchal families with relatively rigid gender expectations for men and women. Cultural, ecological-level generalizations situate Danbury's subcultures as 'high' in uncertainty avoidance (e.g. resist change), power distance (e.g. respect sex- and age-based authoritarianism), masculine ideology (e.g. value achievement, strength, and sexual labor-division), ethnic collectivism (e.g. emphasize

cooperation, duty, and tradition within subcultures), and hetero-exclusionism (e.g. view difference suspiciously) (Pérez-Jiménez, Cunningham, Serrano-García, & Ortiz-Torres, 2010; Vale de Almeida, 1996). Such values, practiced inside and maintained outside the subculture's confines, can positively strengthen social codes for young men and/or inhibit personal change, contributing to 'risk' in gendered relationships.

A challenge faced by students is confronting violent norms in their communities. Assaults are consistently underreported and extremely prevalent on US college campuses (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000), but many colleges are not equipped to handle these issues, especially via *primary* prevention methods. On the Connecticut Campus Consortium Against Sexual Assault (CCASA) 2006 and 2012 Campus Report Cards WCSU self-reported fewer interpersonal violence policies and programs than most other local and national universities (CCASA, 2007/ 2012). WCSU recently began addressing generalized violence (e.g. WCSU's Campus Alliance for Response and Prevention; Student Affairs, 2010), but has focused on *tertiary* victim services and *secondary* offender policies. Presently, WCSU has no consistent violence prevention programs for students, staff/faculty, the fraternity/sorority system, or even the judicial board hearing incidents. Thus, our critique parallels Greenwood and Levin's (2000) call to remedy universities' 'anti-praxis' orientation. Although simplistic to attribute violence to lack of programming, the fact remains that systematic and individual means of handling interpersonal violence do not exist on this campus. WCSU needs programs that target underpinnings of violence.

The program

Collaborative background and needs assessment

Formal partnership occurred between the Women's Center of Greater Danbury (WCGD), a WCSU faculty member, and the stakeholders.[2] Program sessions were held on campus, but were not a WCSU initiative, due to institutional challenges (e.g. Greenwood, 2007). We collaborated with WCGD on needs assessment and program planning and the male stakeholders contributed program planning, data formation, and ongoing reflective analyses; these collaborations resulted in content, format, and implementation different from the program currently used by WCGD.

Our action program was based on a multi-phased needs assessment. First, WCGD identified a community-need (based on annual reports' systematic surveys and descriptive data from local communities, government organizations, and community stakeholders) for primary prevention curricula tailored to men. We then conducted individual and focus-group interviews across a four-month period in 2009 with people involved in advocacy positions at and students attending WCSU. These data informed curriculum goals, programming and recruitment logistics, content delivery strategies, and evaluation methods. As such, our approach was

based on a priori assumptions – at the directive end of the participatory-didactic continuum of action research methods. It was created to a) institute a primary prevention program for WCSU and b) embrace young men as participatory agents negotiating cultural masculinities.

Theoretical underpinnings and goals

Piloted in spring 2010, the program emphasized interpersonal relationships, advocacy efforts, and consciousness-raising for men to re-evaluate masculinity, sex, and violence and to create cultural shifts on indirect, systemic and direct, individual levels. We grounded the program in established theory and incorporated 'many ways of knowing' (per Reason, 2006, p. 189). Nine weekly sessions (see Table 1) were informed by Connell's (1995) work on masculinities, inclusive masculinity theorizing (e.g. Anderson, 2012), violence intervention work (Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, & Stark, 2003), and Berkowitz's (2001) 'critical elements' in men's programming. We understood manhood as historical, fluid, and narratively perceived (e.g. aggression as an exaggerated ideal in particular *kinds* of gender enactments). As the program evolved from participants' collaboration, its structure, content emphases, and formats were unique.

The program targeted dominant discourses of hegemonic masculinities (differentiated from actual individual practices) tied to interpersonal violence. Shaping principles embraced men as potential victims of female and male perpetrators and as responsible *with* women for ending perpetration and acceptance of violence. Beyond 'mere' education or increased awareness, our objective was to provide tools and confidence of disinhibitory social influence to act against violence and sexism. We built on successful notions of male empowerment like intervention-level resistance (Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, & Stark, 2003). A primary contribution[3] of this program was providing a space to practice countering restrictive social expectations placed on young people.

Implementation and process evaluation methods

Balancing prioritization of participants' input with cognizance of 'quality' scholarship in academic- and policy-focused environments (per Levin, 2012), we relied primarily on images and narratives to shape assessment of content *and* implementation (e.g. Reason, 2006). Process outcomes were evaluated via three methods with which participants felt comfort (as 'recipients') and helpful (as 'advisors'). First, weekly debriefings scrutinized successes and failures, concepts with which men struggled, and future challenges to address. Debriefings resulted both in overall *gestalt* impressions and in specific factors to track change and adjust program delivery. In addition to providing ad-hoc feedback in terms of process (e.g. timing, intensity) and content, the men also completed open-ended pre- and

Table 1. Curriculum[a] by session and weekly goals.

Session[b]	Assumptive Rationale: *Young American men...*	Goal/s: *To...*
1. Male & female images	† are surrounded by identity & status concerns.	• Demonstrate restrictive media- & peer-stereotypes
2. Sexuality & violence	† are unaware of implicit norms, prejudicial connections, & social outcomes.	• Practice communicative self-reflexivity • Illustrate impact of self-monitoring on others' behaviors
3. Dating/domestic violence	† struggle to articulate un/healthy relationship composition.	• Identify & practice tactics to counter unhealthy relational behaviors
4. Sexual harassment & assault	† possess misconceptions about consent & assault.	• Create forum to dispel & challenge popular myths about sexual violence & consent
	† are exposed to dated, didactic curricula delivered in co-ed groups silencing honesty &/or confrontation.	• Teach positive & revolutionizing conflict
5. Varying masculinities	† understand certain masculinities as revered. † may obliviously perpetuate dominant 'manhood'.	• Emphasize susceptibility to influence • Deconstruct accepted/excepted masculinities
6. Cultural differences[c]	† lack awareness of cultural specificity/diversity of self & others' gendered beliefs.	• Conceptualize masculinity as cultured • Reiterate power as relational
7. Porn culture	† are exposed to pervasive imagery of a denigrating & potentially violent nature.	• Foster debate on pornography's role in sexual, gender relations
8. Socializing male hegemony	† reference peer- & self-beliefs to form opinions about 'how men think/behave'.	• Compare traditional beliefs about 'what men think' to actual lived experiences
9. Men as leaders	† may feel helpless to enact social change, be overwhelmed, or feel apathy.	• Re-cap prominent curriculum issues • Articulate specific, feasible action strategies

Notes: [a]Full weekly-session curriculum available on request.
[b]Ordered for progressive stages, with sessions intended for full semester. Combining sessions minimizes this approach.
[c]Full integration of *situated* identities was prioritized each week. Incorporating (particularly in predominantly White male groups who may assume they possess no 'culture') race, ethnicity, and class in every session is crucial to avoid viewing 'culture' as unique to only some men; critical to our design was *intersectionality*.

post-test questionnaires assessing views on gendered relationships: personal goals; strategies they disliked; concerns related to relationships, conflict, and sexual contact; and hypothetical practice-scenarios to gauge communicative responses. Finally, post-program semi-structured interviews were added to these data.

Results were subjected to ongoing processes of open, axial, and theoretical coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Perceptual bias in process interpretation is always a potential limitation of collaborative action research. Participants' awareness of content prior to program involvement reduced our concerns about potential priming biases. Further, both pre- and post-test questionnaires were framed as soliciting feedback, rather than assessing objectively-framed abilities. We asked for help in designing a more effective program and communicated a desire for co-generative knowledge creation, as opposed to mere learning assessment. Feedback suggested that any methodological biases affected the research practice (i.e. our evaluation of the program's outcomes; exhibited in this writing) rather than the collaborative nature of the program itself (i.e. participants' generated knowledge; exhibited in the experience overall). We present exemplars to illustrate particular action strategies, future challenges to address bringing the program 'to scale', and implications for theoretical models of primary prevention education.

Findings

Approximately 30 people participated in a formative focus group; a significantly smaller group of students participated in the entire program.[4] An all-female pilot group ($N = 6$) concurrently practiced the same masculinity-focused curriculum described here. Except where female inclusion contributed to a specific strategy, present analyses focus on the men's group experiences.

The men

All men who committed in the first week continued throughout the entire program. Between the ages of 19 and 22 ($M = 20.6$ years), two men identified as Caucasian White, one as native Brazilian, one as Puerto Rican, and one as Italian American (adopted as a child, he passed as Asian American). Three men were practicing Roman Catholics, one was a born-again Christian, and one identified as agnostic. One man considered his background 'upper-middle class'; all others identified as 'working class'. The size of this group ($N = 5$) was ideal for pilot purposes – sufficiently diverse to foster divergent viewpoints, but small enough to comfortably contribute to interactive inquiry or communicative space (Wicks & Reason, 2009). Men met for the first time in this group, did not provide surnames, and agreed to group confidentiality. For process evaluation of a pilot, this group size was ideal for tracking individual changes and obtaining in-depth data for an emergent, participant action research design.

Action strategies and outcomes

We present four participatory action strategies derived from this program to address limitations of past or existing primary prevention curricula and college-based action research. These include: a) female collaboration, b) extended and incremental exposure, c) male-only groups, and d) subculturally specific adaptation.

Action strategy: Integrate women. In contrast to empathy-elicitations or curricula in which primarily men are held responsible for belief-change (e.g. 'White Ribbon Campaign' or 'Walk a Mile in Her Shoes'), women in this program participated several times, for a portion of weekly sessions. In addition to providing men with an opportunity to hear women's perspectives regarding different masculinities (which women comply with, support, or enforce), this strategy also functioned ideally in male-female collaboration at a curricular level, as recommended by Berkowitz (2002) for program planning.

To illustrate, for a session on the derogatory potential of language, each sex-group separately ranked behaviors according to perceived severity of harm. The behavior 'using phrases like "to get some", "to hit it", "to bang", or "to tap that ass" to describe sex' was seen as harmful by neither group. Participants rationalized these phrases as common sexual slang and therefore unproblematic. After gentle questioning from facilitators, men and women discussed the phrases as equating sex with mechanics, commodities, or violence; the students *themselves* then suggested their usage as harmful. While mostly converging, groups diverged on sexual norms; the men evaluated 'using alcohol or drugs to "loosen up" a partner' as trivial while the women saw it as very harmful. In heated debate, some men excused it as 'women having a good time' while some women protested it implied manipulation.

In this activity, as with all sessions, the use of a participant-informed approach is crucial, because only the stakeholders are familiar with actual terms and behaviors used by peers. Facilitators – no matter how 'in touch' they are[5] – will sound 'corny' or 'lame' if they themselves introduce words/behaviors as culturally popular or 'in' common parlance. In this program, the men were asked not only to participate in their own learning, but also to act as advisors in shaping future sessions and large-scale programs. From a research perspective, a limitation (or contributing factor) to these men's change processes could have been the sense of empowerment they felt to influence others in future iterations of the program. Removing that aspect of 'participant-as-expert' in future full-scale implementation may reduce the amount of self-efficacy felt by these men given a piloting role. An essential consideration of resources for implementing large-scale program-versions: facilitators must possess enough immediacy and similarity with their audience to connect, but specific examples and language-content should be constantly updated *by youths* for youth culture.

Ultimately, men and women glimpsed how their perspectives converged (to the men's surprise, and reinforcing the need for female groups on masculinity on a

larger scale) and diverged along gendered and sexed lines. We did not plan this strategy to create empathy, but it may have done so, as suggested in post-assessments; almost all of the men voluntarily indicated they had, since the program began, *consciously participated* in a situation where they chose to not endorse (e.g. laugh at a sexist joke, agree with derogatory slang) sexist language used in their outside peer groups. As illustrated in the follow-up from one man, 'Now, even if I slip up and say "fag" or "that's so gay", I immediately remember I'm not supposed to. I think about how it can hurt somebody who's not even there. I still forget and say it sometimes, but at least now I see what I'm doing.' At its most fundamental, this action strategy is inescapable. Having young men and women realize – just once, through personal encounters, as opposed to didactic methods – the potential consequences of their language triggers an inability to ever view certain words or behaviors the same (as un-sexed) again (i.e. *automaticity*). They may not always act or speak up against sexist language in every situation, but these men and women now have become incapable of ignorance about its potential to harm.

Action strategy: Expose to extended and incremental, stage-specific intensity. For young men in particular, social pressures to conform to gender-communication norms and relational-identity struggles may be exacerbated by transitional periods in their lives (Bem, 1993). It is an immense onus to add expectations to practice different masculinities *and* to change violent systems. Further, using uncomfortable and/or challenging topics can cause program attrition; thus, we were cognizant that personal and organizational biases[6] not 'take over' the curriculum or otherwise 'scare away' participants (e.g. *strategic mindfulness*; Snoeren, Niessen, & Abma, 2012). At times, we silenced our own beliefs to facilitate the men's ways of knowing. Post-program, this 'mindsight' was recognized by participants as effective. Men commented on the unexpected 'tone' of the training, noting 'it wasn't as bad' as they had anticipated, especially 'coming from feminists. . . nothing like what they said to us in high school' (referencing former community education experiences).

Knowing that limited-session programming can thwart sustained opportunities to address concerns in interpersonal contexts, because restricted exposure to ideas may cause participants to feel culpable, helpless, and/or hostile (Townsend & Campbell, 2008), we piloted nine sessions ($M = 83.33$ minutes) over a 15-week semester to address potential frustration, hesitancy, or resistance, and to increase feelings of efficacy. Participants confirmed once-a-week implementation as ideal for content absorption and reinforcement. We also desired to moderate the intense involvement according to men's readiness.

Applying the Stages of Change Model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984) to primary prevention efforts (as discussed by Berkowitz, 2002), we first introduced topics targeted to men who were *precontemplative* or *contemplative* (e.g. beginning to see their role in the problem). Later, after the men felt involved in program-shaping, we included issues tailored to *preparation*, *action*, or *maintenance*

(e.g. communicating or being ready to intervene in violent situations) stages. The curriculum sequence was based on understandings that a) men's comfort discussing certain topics would increase in conjunction with their familiarity with one another, and b) foundational concepts must be laid before inclusion of challenging ideas.

This action strategy – incremental exposure through gradual topic incorporation based on change-readiness – was rewarded by the program's end. However, men were initially defeatist, viewing changing violence against women and restrictive masculinities as an impossible goal (e.g. 'I'm not gonna change how other people think or do things, so why bother?' or 'I agree this is a huge problem, but none of us here can change that'). Although it is possible that larger groups would create an esprit de corps to reduce men's feelings of isolation, larger groups also introduce potential for negative groupthink reinforcing pessimism. We acknowledged that our encouraging 'nudges' toward self-efficacy played less of a collaborative role (and more of an advisory/mentoring one), but by moving beyond what the men thought possible, we solicited active involvement when they might have otherwise quit (psychologically or physically). By the end of the semester, individual men *had* in fact become optimistic about their change-potential.

As an exemplar of progress, we used in later sessions (i.e. suited for later Stages of Change; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984) an activity to inculcate situational awareness (e.g. Snoeren et al., 2012) in the stakeholders. Each man was challenged to wear in outside contexts a purple 'bracelet' and/or a bright pink pin labeled with rape statistics as visual reminders of gendered relationships in daily life. After one week of public display, the men returned to debrief. Each man had worn the items throughout the week, when not precluded by work uniforms, and reported having had at least one conversation with others about what the accessory meant. One man described, 'Everyone I ran into at the bar asked about the bracelet. So I told them it was about violence against women. They asked me stuff about women's experiences and then just thought it was cool.' Rather than feeling sent out into the world as evangelists for the group cause, the men felt their personal topic-expertise was less important than the conversations initiated, because 'it was more about letting them know I give a damn, personally, than about preaching to them about all the facts or stats of rape.' Perhaps less altruistically, some men noticed that while other males were more likely to confront them individually with 'Why are you wearing that?', women would approach them 'after I explained to the dude how I cared'. The group's all-male environment, previously established as non-judgmental and supportive in earlier program stages, provided practice space for using strategies or conveying ideas that were challenged by others later in their change process. This particular activity showed the men that although they faced particular situations independently, other men were striving for change with them – separate, but not alone. As another participant observed, 'I told them I was wearing it for this group and that other guys were too.'

Without foundational knowledge and the confidence it instilled, it is unlikely most of these men (some self-identified as 'shy' or 'laid-back') would have

ultimately felt empowered. Gradual exposure and practice in a safe space addressed, if not completely eliminated, the challenge of defeatism initially raised by participants. We observed incremental, stage-specific exposure as successful in micro-level alterations of these men's willingness to communicate.

Action strategy: Employ all-male group and facilitator. We demonstrated myriad possibilities for gender enactment through use of an all-male peer group and primary facilitator. We privileged some types of masculine enactment (e.g. those that challenge sexism, like *inclusive masculinity*; Anderson, 2012) as positive and highly functional in interpersonal relationships. Although Berkowitz (2002) noted some men's preference for all-male members may be indicative of exclusionist beliefs on which they should be challenged, we were conscious of an ideological balancing act. On the one hand, we wanted to avoid explicit overtones of a 'correct' view of masculinity, as men can actively resist or feel silenced by this approach (Davis & Laker, 2004). Conversely, we avoided a 'man's club' mentality and implicit heroization of men as saviors of women. Based on prior research and formative interview data, we resolved that these two perspectives could appropriately be tackled in a same-sex group. Exposing young men in small groups, which closely mirror everyday peer culture where unproductive masculinities and sexist stereotypes are reinforced (Kimmel, 2006), to constructive foci can benefit men, who have expressed preference for being challenged in these supportive, yet confrontational settings (Berkowitz, 2002).

Although men's programs can be led effectively by females, our program was built around primary use of a male facilitator – something the men continually appreciated. Self-reflectively, we were a heterosexual male facilitator with a relatively relational orientation and a heterosexual female researcher with a relatively instrumental approach to interpersonal interactions (Bem, 1993); these were features of our *gender communication styles*, not related to our physical embodiments. It is possible that our gender-sex-contradictory communication confounded expectations in this context, provided nuance to our encounters, and allowed us to minimize the extent of stereotypical behaviors sometimes exhibited by facilitators and stakeholders. Further, our cross-gendered communication styles capitalized oppositional perspective-taking; we balanced 'communicative space' (inclusion, control, intimacy phases; Wicks & Reason, 2009) establishment with less empathic/identity-validating approaches such as argumentativeness and non-hostile antagonism.

Due to the graphic, sensitive, and purposefully intense nature of our program, it was essential that the facilitator, state-certified in crisis counseling and equipped to provide referrals and conduct safety planning, be professionally trained to deal with sensitive disclosures, prepare the group for provoking themes, and provide external support for the men. Davis and Laker (2004) highlight the importance of providing a forum for constructive confrontation or open dispute, along with male support, in campus programs for men. Thus, an essential tactic of our implementation was to challenge all beliefs – not merely the ones considered derogatory to women. Even men with 'positive' anti-sexist perspectives benefit from

reinforcement through critical thinking, argumentation (as opposed to aggression), and rational defense strategies. Analyses of group feedback and individual assessments support our perceived success in fostering this space.

Opinions were shared enthusiastically; the men were frequently animated in their discussions, with friendly shouting, joking, and exaggerated movement around the room. They comfortably disagreed with one another; hearing 'No, dude, that's not right!', 'Ha ha! That's sick!', and '*Seriously*? That's fucked up, man!' was common. They heard other men who supported their own 'positive' views: 'Of course no one's gonna say rape is a *good* thing. It's not socially acceptable to say it. That's why you have to go out of the way to *say* something about how bad it is' (emphases by speaker). They also were exposed to men who disagreed with their 'negative' (e.g. sexual consent as conquerable) beliefs: 'Wow, that's really messed up. You should be stopping that shit right away!' Although the 'communicative space' no doubt aided, we attributed their openness to the same-sex nature of the group; men were noticeably politer in speech patterns on the co-ed occasions.

The men freely expressed themselves in terms of race, class, sex, and sexuality. Garnering fervent agreement from all, one White heterosexual man noted, 'I'm so fucking sick of being seen the same as every other guy.' Members shared a spectrum of relationship experiences and beliefs: contradictions of others' veneration of sexual 'hook-up' culture; conflicts about what constituted (un)healthy romantic relationships; arguments about (non)verbal behaviors indicating sexual consent; differences in personal-familiarity with intervening in aggressive situations; and disputes of appropriate dress, behavior, and communication for men and women. The all-male forum seemed to increase their willingness to express thoughts, no matter how offensive or culturally specific to their own lives. This openness may have fostered visualization of men's own masculinities as unique *and* as fluid and open to change.

We observed this change over time. Men were initially disparaging or avoidant during role-plays to intervene in others' unhealthy behaviors. Consistent with dominant social norms, even men who never commit violence or are rarely blatantly sexist may still be hesitant to interfere in other men's offenses. Instead, these men exhibit their own 'benevolent' or 'ambivalent' form of sexism (Anderson, 2012). After a few weeks of practicing with the male-group, men not only demonstrated effectively, but also reported feeling comfortable using tactics of distraction, checking-in, and addressing abuse non-confrontationally. In the pre-test, one man expressed trying to avoid conflict whenever possible ('I don't like to fight. It makes me uncomfortable when people disagree.') and another stated, in reference to other men's inappropriate behavior, 'It's usually not my business.' It is unrealistic to expect one program to change a man's conflict style. Nonetheless, weekly and post-test self-reports of outside behaviors suggest men gradually increased abilities to recognize unhealthy situations, communicative changes, and occasional follow-through of learned techniques in their own peer groups, even while acknowledging, 'I admit, [it] wasn't easy.'

Action strategy: Program to subculture. Initially targeted aspects of "subculture" involved young, emerging, technology-driven interests. We incorporated personal self-tests, group discussions, role-playing, competitions, 'take-home' challenges, controversial and explicit (i.e. involving sexual, racial, and other controversial imagery) films, and Classroom Performance System© 'clickers' used to anonymously share divisive beliefs in a game-show format. Technology and popular culture were used in every session, which included films, music, web postings, blog controversies, or phone/texting usage. We used all materials, including food and beverages, to provoke and focused on evolving inquiry action, rather than didactic education. Formal theorizing and current research were used only in contexts of *concrete* activities or *dynamic* dialogue proposed by the men.

We incorporated a second aspect of 'culture' as understood by Berkowitz (2002), who noted very few programs exist to specifically address race or ethnicity as intersectional with masculinity. A primary feature of quality campus programs for men has been acknowledgement of different understandings of masculinity (Davis & Laker, 2004). Our community represents a type of masculine culture that values conformity, strength, stoicism, leadership, and willfulness – factors believed by some to put young men into high 'risk' categories for perpetrating violence. Certainly, some of the men's culturally held viewpoints were less than constructive (e.g. most believed women innately desire children and so 'should go be mothers'). Nonetheless, many of their convictions located them as uniquely progressive, on a continuum of personal and social change, compared to more conventionally gendered counterparts. There is an immense potential for change among this generation of men, many of whom have already begun to re-envision culturally specific masculinities (Pérez-Jiménez et al., 2010). Therefore, we saw it valuable to emphasize the unique, situated, and intersectional nature of these men's ethnic, religious, racial, and class masculinities. We also sought to create a program inclusive of men at high or low risk for violence perpetration (based on Stephens & George, 2009). The diversity of our group was a direct result of the community in which it occurred. Each of the men socialized with different peer groups in their daily lives. Outside this assemblage, it is unlikely they would have met, let alone discussed personal topics with one another.

Men in our group highlighted physical strength/appearance ('I look to see if I could "take" another guy if I had to') as a dominant theme in their understandings of cultural representations of young masculinity. Contrasting themselves, they often positioned their own peer groups as separate from 'typical' US mainstream cultural understandings of these concepts. For example, when discussing physical prowess and risk-taking, these men distanced themselves from what they termed 'stereotypical frat[ernity] boys'. To our participants, manhood was not associated with physicality or risk-taking, but rather was dependent on how one *handled* these situations. The rules for these men were: show your strength only when challenged and avoid risky behaviors leading to violence or conflict with other men. In other words, as Dancy (2011) found in young men's messages about maintaining personal expectations, these men did not connect manhood with a need to 'show off'

physicality through aggression toward men or women. Men's bodies, they held, should be used only when strength, courage, or heterosexuality have been explicitly questioned or threatened. In keeping with the stoic American male who only fights *back* (Kimmel, 2006), these men exhibited their understanding of culturally appropriate masculinity as silent, strong, protectors of all (not just their 'own') women. In a community where jobs are frequently lost and workers are replaceable, the subcultures teach that men, who guard their families from harm and poverty, can lose everything (and thus, their masculinity) if they take risks (Dancy, 2011). From these men's perspectives, legal culpability or jeopardized freedom were foolish risks better left to men who could 'afford' these liberties.

The stakeholders in this group had a pre-existing awareness of male hegemony and privilege, unexpected in our initial design. On development of the community of practice, it emerged that the subcultures of these particular men lent them resiliency. Consequently, we adapted curricula when participants illustrated it unnecessary to convince them of their dependency on/in society. As one man reported on the first day, 'I don't make the laws and I don't have the money to get away with breaking them, especially'cause I'm not White.' The men appeared to easily accept ideas that society can grant or retract benefits. Studies of other college-aged males, who resisted ideas of culture as discriminatory, included young White men who may have been unaware (or resistant to ideas) of the privileges they possessed. As Pérez-Jiménez et al. (2010) argued, culturally diverse groups who already understand racial privileges and are less defensive to the notion that hegemony exists, may be more apt to embrace concepts challenging their 'dominance' and to immediately begin working on change strategies. The challenge with men in our group was not fostering recognition of oppression or of violence as masculine, or even as a particular type of masculinity, but rather was in seeing *gendered* victimization issues, rather than solely as class or ethnic victimization of themselves. We do not believe a complete awareness of the *situatedness* of their attitudes and behaviors was achieved by the end of the program; however, their ability to enact reflexivity and gender-centeredness was constantly evolving.

Moving forward: Men's capacity for change

Drawing from process analyses and a grounded theory approach (albeit informed by existing theories of masculinities and violence prevention) to creation of an action research program, we conclude that the curriculum's effectiveness was not in any one variable of its structure, programmatic nature, or content, per se, but rather in its participatory stakeholders – young men desirous of honestly re-envisioning their identities. Our collaboration with this particular group reinforced some existing strategies supported by published primary prevention research, while also challenging some common assumptions of education theories proposing 'ideal' strategies. We come away from this partnership highlighting the value of extended curriculum exposure; incremental and stage-specific topics;

collaboration with female-centered organizations and association with female peers addressing masculinity; an all-male group and facilitator; and designs informed by young, male and non-White cultures in the community. Practitioners of any education or intervention program targeting young people can benefit from the feedback – both positive and negative – formalized here.

The biggest obstacle to this project was participation quantity. Our recruitment process included mass emails to WCSU students and faculty and targeted contact with leaders of all-male groups (e.g. fraternities, coaches). We used social technology and peer-networking (e.g. Facebook invitations) and posted on supportive faculty web pages. Students indicated, in the preliminary focus group and during the pilot, that WCSU-recognized credit would have elicited enthusiastic participation. We frequently received feedback throughout the term from other students indicating desire and inability to attend. In addition to a full-time course load, the typical WCSU student works 30–40+ hours per week. In future iterations, institutional support and/or rewards are necessary for program success (Greenwood, 2007). Our exhaustive recruitment campaign proved inconsequential compared to programming offering student-valued external incentives; two-thirds of men attending did receive extra credit from cooperative faculty. Considering the differential between focus group and program group participation, combined with the 100% completion-rate of those who did attend, we attribute the lack of involvement to the semester-long time commitment, rather than to the content or intensity of the program. Due to the dedication required to participate, incentives must be institutionally-supported – either through funding and optional 'credit' (e.g. course material) or merely institutional acknowledgment (e.g. extra-curricular WCSU-endorsed certificates or resumé-entries) – to implement the program large scale. In hindsight, we recognize the necessary first step is to communicate to administration how aiding communities of practice serves as a reciprocal investment from which all benefit (Greenwood & Levin, 2000).

The results of this participatory action research should be encouraging for anyone working with young men to foster healthy relationships and come to terms with the diverse, negotiated nature of possible masculinities. Ultimately, as shown through the strategies of this program, in a process of social change, young men can be extremely productive participants and active agents for ending interpersonal violence.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Danbury's Brazilian and Portuguese citizens often identify as White in the same category as Anglo-Americans.
2. The first author works daily with students and researches relationships. The second author, formerly WCGD's 'Men's Initiative' coordinator, conducts national community education.
3. We appreciate a reviewer's distinction between AR totally informed by participants (pure co-creation) and AR topically directed by outsiders; this program represented the latter.
4. Attitude assessments were conducted in the first week of the full program, so no data exist on differences between initial focus groups ($N = 13$ men and 17 women) and long-term participants in the program ($N = 5$).
5. Both authors were aged late 20s (with youthful demeanors) during implementation.
6. We consciously avoided replication of 'violence awareness' or 'sensitivity training' programs.

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