College Men's Perceptions of Their Leadership Practice: Unpacking Power and Influence

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Abstract

This qualitative exploratory study focuses on the leadership experiences of college men who held leadership roles in campus organizations. The researchers examined the students' experiences of leading their organizations and group members and the students' perceptions of gender roles influencing their leadership practice. Four male participants at a medium-sized, religiously-affiliated university engaged in in-depth interviews and a focus group with the researchers, who used a blend of qualitative approaches to conduct the study and analyze the data. Key themes emerged around a balance between task and relationship-building; the distinction between power and influence; a desire to do better; understanding leadership as generative; and resisting the masculine/feminine leadership dichotomies. Implications are presented for professional practice and research.

Introduction

Much of the research on leadership and gender draws distinctions between men and women's ways of leading (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt & Simon, 2015). Further, masculine and feminine approaches to leadership are distinguished in the literature, with masculine ways of leading characterized by assertiveness, hierarchy, task, and power, and feminine ways of leading characterized by relationships, shared decision-making, collaboration, and process (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Powell, 2011). These distinctions are overgeneralized and create a dichotomy, rather than a continuum, of leadership approaches. Research shows some gender differences in leadership style exist (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt & Simon, 2015), but these differences are not as pronounced as one may think; differences are often slight and there are often more similarities and overlap in leadership style by gender than there are differences (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The research base on gender and leadership continues to grow, and within this research base is a subset of literature examining women's leadership (see the *Women and Leadership Theory and Practice* book series from the International Leadership Association and *Advancing Women in Leadership* journal). There are unique challenges facing women and leadership, and this focus is clearly warranted.

However, within this literature, scholars suggest men and women often experience leadership differently (Carli, 1999; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Liu &

Sedlacek, 1999). Carli (1999) explains men have greater access to social or interpersonal power than women, which is often connected to systems of authority and access within leadership settings. Given that the United States is a patriarchal society, men still maintain privilege due to their gender, which is reflected by their overrepresentation in leadership roles steeped in power and authority (Carli, 1999; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Johnson, 1976). Much of the research conducted on gender and leadership is framed from the perspective of understanding the differences between men and women in leadership positions in formal business or work settings (Carli, 1999; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000).

There is a gap in the research on the leadership experiences of men, particularly young men. Often men are included as participants in studies on leadership, but not through the lens of gender that considers their experiences *as men* and *as leaders*. In our experiences of working with young men on college campuses, we felt the *traditional masculine male leader* prototype portrayed in the literature did not match our impressions of young men and how they lead. Thus, the focus of our study is to expand the conversation of gender and leadership by exploring the leadership experiences of college men who hold leadership roles in campus organizations.

Gender and Leadership in College

The literature base on college student leadership development with a focus on gender is limited. Some research exists on gender differences in leadership measures among college men and women. Scholars report college men tend to have greater confidence in their ability to practice leadership than women (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000), yet women typically demonstrate greater competence in practicing democratic and transformative leadership than their male peers (Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2008; Eagly & Carli, 2004; Haber & Komives, 2009; Shankman, Haber, Facca, & Allen, 2010).

A growing body of literature examines the experiences of college women. There is limited understanding of college men as leaders and the role that their gender identity plays in their leadership practices. A few studies, each over 20-years old, exist examining college men and leadership. One study examined the experiences of six men who participated in a fraternity leadership institute; as a result of the institute the men viewed leadership with a greater focus on relationships, collaboration, and personal values (DiPaolo, 2002). Another study focused on the influence of fraternity membership and student government involvement on a variety of college outcomes; the four participants reported their organizational involvement helped contribute to development of a range of leadership skills including a greater sense of responsibility, collaboration with others, interpersonal skills, and goal-setting (Byer, 1998). A final study examined leadership perceptions of African American college men involved in fraternities (Sutton & Terrell, 1997). The men reported a number of outcomes as a result of their fraternity and student organization involvement: organizational and planning skills, self-reliance, independence, autonomy, comfort with racial identity, and interest and openness to cultural and non-cultural programs and activities. Although outdated, these studies suggest a number of outcomes as a result of leadership and organization involvement among college men; the studies do not, though, specifically focus on the participants' identities and experiences as men engaging in leadership.

In her study on college women who held leadership roles, Haber (2011) examined participants' perceptions of their leadership experiences with a focus on their identities as women. She argued it would be helpful for a similar study to be completed with college men which "could suggest possible ways in which men and women experience the leadership roles similarly and differently, and contribute to a better understanding of the role of the college environment on student leadership experiences for men and women" (Haber, 2011, p. 95). This study aims to fill that gap in the literature and provide further insights into the gendered perceptions of college men on their leadership practices.

College Men and Masculinity

Similar to the research on gender and leadership, much of the literature on gender in higher education is largely focused on women and their development, which was an outcome of feminist critiques of foundational scholarship in higher education that had previously only used males as their participants (Davis & Laker, 2004; Harper & Harris, 2010b). However, Davis and Laker (2004) argue this critique negates the fact that although the participants may have identified as men, gender was never used as a lens to understand how participants' male identity played into the larger implications of the foundational research. Harper and Harris (2010b) note, "Classic studies with all-male samples are not necessarily synonymous with men's studies. The latter hinges on questions asked, particularly the insights into various aspects of a male student's lived experiences as a gendered being" (p. 7).

In recent years, increased attention has been paid to gender roles and expectations within American society. As a result, scholars have explored how the socialization of masculinity plays out and how these messages affect boys (Pollack, 1998) and men (Brannon, 1976; Davis & Laker, 2011; Harper & Harris, 2010a; Kimmel, 2008; O'Neil, 1990). Brannon's (1976) foundational work on masculinity is still relevant to the experiences of many men today; he found four key tenets of masculinity: (1) "No Sissy Stuff!," or avoidance of anything perceived to be feminine; (2) "Be a Big Wheel," or the importance of wealth and success; (3) "Be a Sturdy Oak," or stoicism and the ability to be calm and collected in times of crisis or chaos; and (4) "Give 'em Hell," or embracing risk without consideration of consequences.

These notions of masculinity are rooted in and interconnected with hegemony, which Kimmel and Davis (2011) define as "the process of influence where we learn to earnestly embrace a system of beliefs and practices that essentially harm us, while working to uphold the interests of others who have power over us" (p. 9). Hegemonic masculinity is pervasive within society, reinforced throughout life through gender scripts and expectations, and enforced by individuals and/or organizations (Harper & Harris, 2010b; Kimmel & Davis, 2011; Pollack, 1998). Kimmel and Messner (2010) emphasize this, stating:

> The important fact of men's lives is not that they are biological males, but that they become men. Our sex may be male, but our identity as men is developed through a complex process of interaction with the culture in which we both learn the gender scripts appropriate to our culture and attempt to modify those scripts to make them more palatable. (p. xvii)

This statement highlights the notion that identity (or one's gender identity as a man) is a social construction (Kimmel & Messner, 2010). In fact, one's identity is a complex, multi-faceted, intersectional, and context-grounded concept influenced at the individual, group, and systemic levels (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2013; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). As a result, one's gender identity as a man is influenced by multiple factors, such as one's race, geographical region, educational experiences, and family and peer interactions.

A recent influx of research in the past two decades focuses on understanding college men and masculinities (see Tillapaugh, 2015a). New insights emerged on college men's developmental needs (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper & Harris, 2010b) as well as gender role expectations (O'Neil & Crapser, 2011). These insights on the developmental processes for college men reflect the ways in which the socialization of masculinity are well integrated into the confines of colleges and universities (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Tillapaugh, 2015b). With such powerful messages about masculinity in our society – and the impact it has on college men's lives (Kimmel, 2008) – it is important to consider how masculinity affects men in terms of their leadership practice.

Recognizing a need to bridge this growing research base on college men with the growing research base on college student leadership, we examined the leadership experiences of college men holding formal leadership roles. The methods and findings of the study are presented below.

The Study and its Methods

In this exploratory study, we examined the leadership practices and self-perceived leadership gender roles, norms, and expectations of a small sample of college cisgender men who held leadership positions in campus organizations. Due to the nature of the exploratory study's aim, qualitative research methods were used. Qualitative methods help "achieve an *understanding* of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). The methods used for this particular study do not fit within one specific type of qualitative approach; instead, we blended two approaches - case study (four specific individuals each serving as a case around their leadership practices) and phenomenology (understanding the social phenomena involved in the experiences of men's student leadership). Two research questions guided our work:

(1) How do college men lead their organizations and the organizations' members?
(2) In what ways do the men feel they are influenced by leadership gender roles, norms, and expectations?

Participants. Participants were four college men who held at least one significant leadership position on campus, a medium-sized, religiously-affiliated university in the southwest region of the United States (see Table 1).

Table 1
Demographics of Participants

Name	Class Year	Race	Major	Campus Involvement
Matthew	Recent Graduate	White	Business Administration	President of Interfraternity Council, Resident assistant
Cameron	Senior	White	Business Administration	President of business fraternity, director of campus radio, director of campus concerts
Ed	Senior	White	Accounting	Resident assistant, admissions ambassador, former president of club lacrosse
Dustin	Senior	White	Communications	Student coordinator of community-service learning, executive board member of fraternity

Each of the men identified as White and were enrolled in the university's undergraduate leadership minor. Three of the participants were in their senior year; one was a first-year graduate student who had recently earned his undergraduate degree at the university. Using purposeful sampling, we chose these four participants for their prominence as student leaders on campus as well as their varied experiences on-campus. Additionally, we focused specifically on White men in leadership positions given Kimmel's (2008) findings that White men often tend to uphold, reify, and perform hegemonic masculinity. We were interested in understanding if hegemonic masculinity informed the participants' leadership practice.

Data Collection. We collected data through a demographic information sheet, qualitative one-on-one semi-structured interviews, and a focus group interview with the four participants. The semi-structured interview guides for the individual interviews and the focus group were adapted from Haber's (2011) study on college women leaders. Questions within the semi-structured interview guide (Patton, 2002) ranged from participants' experiences in positional leadership roles; leadership strategies and approaches; factors they believe influenced their leadership approaches; and how they believed gender roles, norms, or expectations may have played a role in their leadership practice.

We also conducted a focus group in order to gather additional data and further explore themes that emerged from the initial interviews. We began the focus group by presenting the themes that emerged from the initial analysis in order to garner insights from participants. The participants engaged in dialogue on the findings of the study and expanded upon the themes as necessary. They answered additional questions related to the two research questions for the study, sharing their experiences and insights, building off each others' ideas, and together grappled with concepts of gender and leadership. The focus group allowed for triangulation of data and a member-check, thereby aiming to minimize researcher bias and work towards trustworthiness.

Data Analysis. We transcribed verbatim the interview and focus group audio recordings. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. We used initial, axial, and thematic coding to analyze the data, consistent with qualitative coding procedures (Saldaña, 2009). In our analysis,

we aimed to honor participants' voices, but also kept in mind our own perspectives as the researchers and how our relationships with the participants (we were both instructors in the minor and had the participants in our classes) influenced the data (Saldaña, 2009). Initial coding was used in line-by-line analysis, whereby we used Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method via axial coding to relate codes to one another. We then used thematic coding to categorize codes into emergent themes that highlighted significant concepts (Saldaña, 2009). To address issues of validity and reliability, themes identified from the data were continuously compared back to the data sources. Additionally, to address intercoder reliability, we examined the data independently and collectively during the various stages of the data analysis process to compare and finalize themes and to confirm the assignment of themes of the data (Klenke, 2008).

Findings

Five key themes that emerged from the data: (1) balance between task and relationship-building; (2) understanding the distinction between power and influence; (3) desire to do better as leaders; (4) viewing leadership as a generative process; and (5) resisting the masculine/feminine leadership dichotomies. The themes were connected to the socialization the participants experienced growing up, the environmental impact of their particular university, and the influence of the peers with whom they interacted in their organizations.

Balance Between Task and Relationship-Building. When describing their leadership styles, each participant discussed strategies and behaviors that could be seen as relationship-oriented and task-oriented behaviors. Three of the participants expressed relying more heavily on relationship-oriented behaviors than task-oriented behaviors, while the fourth participant relied more heavily on task-oriented behaviors than relationship-oriented behaviors (Table 2). In describing their approaches to leadership, the men spoke more generally about their leadership style (*personal* in Table 2) as well as their leadership style when holding their formal leadership roles in their organizations (*organization* in Table 2).

Table 2
Participant Organizations and Leadership Styles

Participant	Organizational Type	Relationship-Orientation (personal)[1]	Task-Orientation (personal)[1]	Relationship-Orientation (in organization)[1]	Task-Orientation (in organization)[1]
Matthew	Greek (all-men), Resident Assistant	High	Low	High	Moderate
Cameron	Greek (co-ed)	Moderate	High	Moderate	High
Ed	Athletic (all-men), Resident Assistant	High	Low	High	Low
Dustin	Service-Learning (co-ed), Greek (all-men)	High	Low	High	Moderate

[1]options are none, low, moderate, and high and were assigned by the researchers.

Each participant expressed a desire to adopt a leadership style that encompassed a focus on both tasks and relationships. Ed, Dustin, and Matthew each had a high relationship orientation as leaders yet would increase their task-orientation when a situation called for it. Dustin explained:

> There are times when it is crunch time, I took on more of a dictator role, and I say, "Okay, you do this. You do this. This is how it has got to be right now." Because I had the authority position on that, and sometimes, you've gotta go and move down the path and make sure that everyone's moving the same way. But other than the few times that it's the crunch time, I'm about everyone being on the same level and all being inclusive.

Ed described how he drew upon task and relationship leadership styles depending upon the situation. In athletics, he expressed being much more assertive:

> If you're the leader, you're the captain, you're the guy out front leading stretches, you're the guy doing the coin toss. You're the guy calling the plays, calling the shots, that's your job…If someone's not doing what they should be doing, it's your job to literally pick them up and move them to where they should be or yell at them or pull them and say, "Look. This is what you need to do."

Meanwhile, he felt as though the work he had done in the leadership minor exposed him to more relational-oriented leadership styles. He continued:

> With other leadership styles and approaches, you can get buy in from people you're working with, get a give-and-take relationship going where you can learn from them, they learn from you, and eventually you guys can accomplish something or work toward something or even have a relationship developed where it's a lot more beneficial for both people rather than just "I'm the leader. I'm gonna tell you where to go all the time."

This ability to tap into both relationship- and task-oriented behaviors was important in being responsive to organization and member needs.

Instead of viewing relationship and task as opposite ends of a continuum, participants expressed how building strong relationships with others served as a foundation for leadership success. Matthew shared how spending time developing relationships with group members allowed him to shift to task when needed, saying, "hopefully…those relationships [are] built so that when it comes to be the time to do the task that we need to do, we have an understanding of each other and that will help us accomplish that." Similarly, Cameron stated, "It isn't just some task that's for me, me, me. It's part of the relationship. It's a joint effort….The relationship is a necessity in order to accomplish the task to its fullest." This emphasis on relationship also was characterized by a minimization of hierarchy. Dustin shared how he would "keep everything on an equal level" with his group members. As a result, he found that by doing this,

> People aren't look[ing] at you as a negative position of leader. They're look[ing] at you [because] they want to work with you, and as a whole of the group or organization, so that they don't feel like they're serving you, but serving a cause that they're a larger part

of.

This understanding of relationships serving as a positive foundation for successful leadership connected with the participants' distinctions between the concepts of power and influence.

Understanding the Distinction Between Power and Influence. Within their leadership practices, the participants discussed the relationship and distinction between power and influence. For the participants with low or moderate levels of task-orientation (Table 2), there was less reliance on hierarchy in their leadership approach and an increased understanding of the responsibilities inherent in being a leader. Dustin stated, "Regardless of whether I have a higher position than [others] or not, we're all the same." Similarly, Matthew enjoyed the power and prestige of having the title of interfraternity president on campus but felt a strong sense of responsibility to keep measured in that pride. He said, "that [pride in the title] never really influenced my work with the organization and how I operated within it, but I think that it had something to do with my communication with people outside of the organization." Maintaining a clear understanding of power, authority, and influence became a core philosophy for the participants, particularly given the need to consider the good of the entire group. Dustin stated:

> Now that people are relying on you to make the decision, it's like, "Damn, you'd better make the right decision. You'd better make sure that you're taking everyone down the right path because if not, you've spent a whole lot of time and energy to do something wrong." I think it's nice to have that ability in terms of saying this is how we're gonna do it, this is how it's gonna be done. But that time also brings a lot more stress, and a lot more responsibility so you've gotta be conscious and aware of that.

As leaders with low or moderate task-orientation, Ed, Dustin, and Matthew stressed lower importance on power and authority than Cameron, who had a high task-orientation.

For Cameron, the connection between power and authority was important and was used intentionally to direct and influence the work of members of his organizations. The authority of being in charge of an organization was connected to the idea of "respect." He stated:

> I don't want to say "I really like the power," but I really like the power. You know what I mean? It's fun and convenient to be able to pick the times that certain things happen or have more of an influence on when it comes time to make a decision and to be able to weigh into those…and there's a certain element of respect too when you come to know that when you're speaking, you're listened to, and I think that definitely comes along with that power.

Cameron's views of leadership as involving a high degree of direction through power and authority to accomplish the necessary tasks of the group's work reinforced his need to be respected and heard as the leader.

Some participants shared how mistakes they made often taught them about their relationship to power and influence. As the captain of his lacrosse team, Ed's leadership was tested during a particularly difficult season his junior year. His team made it to the playoffs, but

the team lacked cohesion and often got into trouble. Ed claimed:

> Really, if I had stepped up and done my job better, I think I could have prevented a lot of those [issues] or dealt with them better. So there's definitely the feeling of responsibility and at the end of the season, it was my job to have handled that better, so I definitely feel like I screwed up that responsibility.

Ed knew he had power and authority to influence the group positively as the team captain, yet in reflecting upon the experience, he knew that he did not adequately use that authority in ways that could have made a difference. Ed's experiences of learning from his mistakes provided him critical self-awareness.

Desire to Do Better as Leaders. Throughout the interviews, the participants shared how they learned from their peers, particularly those who previously led their organizations. The participants expressed a strong desire to lead differently from their peers. Dustin mentioned:

> I think that it's very important to be watching [leaders] – for what to do, but also what not to do – because most times that's what's keeping the organization running. And I think some of those things is [*sic*] what you build upon.

Similarly, Matthew spoke about the transition process between organizational leaders being critical to the success of the organization. He referenced his experiences in Greek Life where leaders often "struggle with starting from scratch in a lot of positions just because of the failed transition period" and went on to say, "I would argue that happens in lots of student organizations too." Dustin agreed, stating:

> The transition is really crucial in switching leadership roles. And that was something that in one of my leadership roles in [Fraternity] I didn't get transitioned very well, and because my predecessor moved up to president and he was getting transitioned to president, I kinda started over, and I tried to log everything I did. Because in one of our leadership classes, it emphasized the fact, and I learned from that, so I was like, "if you want the organization to step forward, why take a step back and keep progressing?"

In addition to emphasizing the importance of transitions, participants also expressed a desire to lead differently in order to address the needs of the organization. Cameron's leadership team lacked a great deal of experience. Therefore, he had a strong desire to engage in high task behaviors as well as moderate relationship behaviors to lead his team. He shared, "When I came in as president, I wanted to be as good if not better than the people who were there before me. Because that's who you will be compared to by everyone." This philosophy was grounded in his belief that leaders needed to help with the creation of a leadership pipeline that allowed emerging leaders to be supported in leading the organization after student leaders graduate or move on to other leadership roles.

Viewing Leadership as a Generative Process. Considering the dynamic nature of student organizations, the men emphasized that an important part of their roles was to mentor and groom others to become leaders. This type of mentoring was done to ensure the

sustainability of their organizations and reflects participants' understanding of leadership as a generative process. Dustin mentioned it was important for him to understand that "the way that you're leading is also gonna influence someone else's style later on as well."

Most of the participants emphasized having a clear and well-detailed protocol for transitioning the incoming leaders into their current roles. Some of the men expressed challenges coming into their leadership roles without proper training or insights from their predecessors, which created additional challenges in establishing direction and a vision for their group. Others shared how they worked proactively to institute that transition period. For example, Cameron discussed his desire to help with this type of work:

> I've always thought that the hardest part of leadership is when you have to go somewhere else, you have to make sure everyone else is prepared. If you care about the organization…where that person's going to have to be better than you if they want to be memorable and if they want to have the organization thrive. So you, as outgoing leaders, have to set that person up with everything they need, with everything that you did when you thought you were doing more than enough, and then expect them to be more.

This emphasis on holding incoming leaders to high standards was seemingly important and connected to the relationship-oriented leadership behaviors. The desire to be generative was driven by a deep concern for the success of the organization. Dustin reiterated this point:

> Even if we don't hold the title, your leadership continues on. I honestly think there's no way that you fall out of leadership. If you really do care about the organization or you care about what's going on or your work in the past, you should never be out of a leadership role.

However, some participants were very conscious of wanting the new leaders of their former organizations to have the freedom to move things in a different direction while also be available to provide help and insights. Matthew discussed his relationship with his fraternity's new president after he had graduated:

> The president…would come to me and ask me for advice, which was good, and that's where I felt the responsibility to still be active and a leader within that organization. But where I drew the limit was trying to pass on that I was no longer the one who made the decisions; it's the next group. It's their turn.

For the participants, this generative mindset signaled their dedication to their organizations.

Resistance to Feminine/Masculine Leadership Dichotomies. The final theme describes participants' resistance to feminine/masculine leadership dichotomies. As students of leadership, each participant spoke articulately about how much of the existing literature on leadership often attempts to uphold a gendered binary of feminine and masculine leadership. They challenged this dichotomy. Matthew stated, "The task-relationship, authoritarian-democratic is very much literature driven. Masculine-feminine is society driven. Even, if you think about this, masculine/feminine is very different than man/women or what it means to be a

man or a woman." He went on to say, "Because it seems like masculine and feminine is still behind in how that's perceived in society…what it means to be male, what it means to be woman is changing and growing." Matthew's point represented a shift also present among the other participants of feeling as though gendered norms around feminine and masculine leadership felt constraining and antiquated.

Cameron agreed, saying, "I don't think it's fair to say that anything more task than relationship is automatically masculine or anything that's more relationship than task is automatically feminine." The participants believed relationship-oriented and task-oriented leadership behaviors were important to be successful; therefore, all leaders, regardless of gender, needed to be able to practice these behaviors for effective leadership.

That being said, the participants did acknowledge one important point: context matters. Some of the participants outlined the ways in which they led others may shift depending upon whether they were with a same-gender group or if they were in a mixed-gender group. Cameron shared:

> If I'm with a bunch of guys, I'm way more likely to just get things done. I'm way more tasky….And I think when I'm working with a group of five or six girls on a project, I'm way more likely to let them say certain things or even a school project, let them take charge. I think that with guys, often times,…can be so apathetic that no one's going to step up and do anything, so I'm more likely to bite the bullet and take charge.

Ed reflected on his role of serving as a resident assistant and discussed how he often consciously chose to practice more relationship-oriented behaviors with his residents on his co-ed floor rather than his residents in an all-male hall the year prior. He stated:

> When you're with all freshman guys, you can be a little bit more, "Hey assholes, listen up. I'm trying to tell you something that will help you out." Where in my relationship now, I'm like, I have to think a little bit more about how to reach out to people, or get their attention, so you kind of respond to whatever type of response you want from them, whether you're trying to get them to a program or getting them involved on campus.

Dustin recalled how his work in same-gender and mixed-gender groups had slight differences. He said, "I think [both groups] all still get the same thing done, and in the end, the end result is still good, but that the pathway that we get there is different." The differences of the pathway or process were often connected to the socialization of masculinity.

Each participant spoke to varying degrees about the ways messages around masculinity were internalized to them throughout their lives. Ed's response was illustrative of the experiences of the men faced in terms of performing masculinity. Speaking about how masculinity has influenced his life, Ed said:

> You're supposed to be very stoic no matter what, whether something's very upsetting or disheartening. You're allowed to show a lot of excitement and a lot of pride and a lot of ego, but if it goes the other way, you're not supposed to show being hurt.

Ed attributed much of his ability to work through hegemonic masculinity and engage with other males in leadership roles to the college experience. He stated, "I don't think that if I'd gotten a blue collar job and started working right away, that I wouldn't have the experiences or learned the things that – I don't want to say understanding, but more experience." As an athlete, Ed also discussed how his experiences playing lacrosse reinforced important notions of masculinity around competition, achievement, and teamwork.

Some participants felt constrained by hegemonic masculine norms and actively worked to interrogate this. As someone who demonstrated high relationship-oriented leadership behaviors, Dustin argued:

> So for me, I have no problem defining masculine or feminine [leadership], but it's more describing whether it has to be a masculine or feminine type of role. Does a male have to lead this way? Or does a female have to lead this way?

Dustin's experiences of navigating his masculinity and leadership practices from a standpoint of emphasizing relationships was done out of a concern and care for making a difference within society, which requires a great deal of understanding the importance of relationships and collaboration. His masculinity was not challenged because he was a relational leader. Instead, he felt he was able to be more effective as a leader by disregarding the traditional gendered norms of leadership practice and being more focused on the larger picture.

Discussion

The men in the study expressed contemporary and democratic approaches to and understandings of leadership. Across the findings is a focus on valuing relationships, the process of leadership, and the betterment of their organizations, which contradicts the traditional, hierarchical stereotype of male leaders. This was evident in the participants' understanding of the relationships and distinction between power and influence, with three of the four men expressing a strong feeling of responsibility to the organization and its members; they viewed their role as a way to positively influence the organization and its members rather than as a platform from which to exert power and control.

When describing how they practice leadership in their organizations, the participants stressed the importance of focusing on task and relationships. They felt building and maintaining relationships was a necessary foundation for effective leadership and organizational effectiveness. This range of leadership behaviors and approaches reflect leadership styles present in the literature as masculine, feminine, and androgynous (Eagly & Carli, 2004). The blended approach to leadership identified in this study, which encompasses both relationship-oriented and task-oriented behaviors, is found to contribute to greater leader effectiveness and organization success (Appelbaum, Audet, & Miller, 2004; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

In examining the findings from this study alongside Haber's (2011) study on college women, there is a similar finding on the importance of incorporating both task- and relationship-orientated behaviors in their leadership practice. The emphasis on relationship-oriented behaviors and relationship building was prominent among the men in this study, as it was among

the women in Haber's (2011) study. What emerged as different in the current study is the men's apparent propensity to engage in task-oriented practices; they expressed greater comfort in using assertive and agentic behaviors, whereas some of the women in Haber's (2011) study struggled with engaging in assertive behaviors and experienced challenges in their role and organization because of this. This reflects Carli's (1999) research, in which she found that college men report using a wider array of influence strategies and especially more direct strategies conveying competence and confidence than their female peers. Additionally, Carli (1999) posited that college men persisted more often than women in attempting to influence others.

The participants' ability to engage in a range of leadership practices could be explained in part by their dominant group privilege as men within the United States (Kimmel, 2008); their privilege as men allowed them to lead in ways that are deemed as more masculine and in other ways that are deemed as more feminine; men often face less of a stereotype threat and double bind than women when leading, and thus often face less resistance (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Another prominent theme that emerged from the data was participants' emphasis on generativity within their leadership style. The participants felt the need to cultivate leaders within the group and demonstrated a care and concern for the future of the organization and its members. This reflects the generativity stage of the Leadership Identity Development Model, a model describing the process by which college students develop a leadership identity and engage in relational leadership (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006). The generativity stage is characterized by having an interest in organizational sustainability, taking responsibility for mentoring, and teaching the next group of leaders within the organization; this stage reflects developmentally complex understandings and approaches to leadership (Komives et al., 2006).

The participants' more contemporary and democratic, and less traditional and hierarchal, approaches to leadership was also reflected in their resistance of masculine/feminine leadership dichotomies. The ways in which the participants conceptualized their leadership in conjunction with the performance of their gender as men and masculine expectations of leadership reflected their approaches to leadership. There was a conscious desire to resist masculine/feminine leadership dichotomies. The men felt comfortable using relational practices (typically characterized as feminine) and task-oriented practices (typically characterized as masculine). They did not express experiencing a double bind in gender expectations and stereotypes often felt by women in leadership (see Haber-Curran, 2013 for more discussion on this among college women leaders).

There was substantial agreement by the participants that the traditional notion of a leader who is a man is outdated today; they disagreed with the idea that men had to be more authoritarian or engage in high levels of task-orientation and low levels of relationship-orientation. This challenges the gendered dichotomies of leadership approaches present in the literature (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt & Simon, 2015; Powell, 2011). By acknowledging the ways in which their own performance of leadership from a gendered perspective shifts away from traditional thinking, the men also accepted more masculine styles in women and more feminine styles in themselves and each other. It seems likely that the men in this study aim for leadership practices that are more often rooted in androgynous and balanced leadership (Eagly &

Carli, 2004, 2007). In addition to challenging gendered dichotomies of leadership, the findings also suggest the men were aware of hegemonic norms of masculinity and found ways to resist these gendered expectations when leading. They consciously embraced more inclusive masculinities (Edwards & Jones, 2009).

The participants not only held leadership roles in campus organizations, but also were enrolled in the leadership minor on campus. The minor emphasized leadership as a relational process with a focus on the sustainability and wellbeing of organizations and its members. With this in mind, the experiences of these men, and thus the context of this study, is unique. It is likely that their leadership coursework contributed to their views on and practices of leadership.

This qualitative examination of men's leadership approaches illuminates the leadership approaches of college men; the study highlights the practices and behaviors of the men, providing additional depth and explanation to the existing quantitative studies that identify small, yet significant differences among college men and women in leadership style (Dugan et al., 2007; Haber & Komives, 2009; Shankman et al., 2010). Findings from this study suggest college men are able to skillfully use relationship-oriented and task-oriented behaviors when leading their organizations, focus on the process of leadership, and seek to better their organizations.

Implications for Practice

Although the current literature on leadership often emphasizes a gendered view of leadership, our findings infer that there may be a false binary of masculine and feminine leadership behaviors and practices. The dichotomy of masculine and feminine leadership may no longer truly be useful. Leadership educators must be cognizant of the ways leadership is discussed from a gendered lens that may reinforce sexist and hegemonic viewpoints of gender and leadership. By moving away from these dichotomies, in-roads can be made to open up leadership practices to be more inclusive for all students, regardless of gender, and highlight how everyone can and should practice task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership in myriad ways.

The participants' engagement in formal leadership education, alongside their leadership roles, provided them opportunities to learn about and practice relational leadership. Leadership educators who adopt curriculum that aligns with post-industrial views of leadership, such as the Social Change Model of Leadership Development and the Relational Leadership Model, may provide a useful framework to inform college men leaders' perspectives on and practices of leadership. Each of the participants indicated that their involvement in the leadership minor helped illuminate the positive learning that comes through relationship-building approaches within their organizations.

Another implication is the importance of self-examination of gender norms and expectations. The participants' engagement within student organizations and leadership curriculum allowed for critical self-reflection around their identities, including their sense of gender identity and masculinity; this allowed them to have a greater understanding of their gender played out within their leadership practice. Leadership educators should consider the ways that they can infuse activities and exercises within existing curriculum that encourage all

students to consider the ways that identity, power, privilege, and oppression show up within their lives. By engaging in this type of discourse within leadership curriculum, leadership educators can help students, particularly college men, become exposed to the ways in which male privilege both rewards them in a patriarchal system, but also hurts them in terms of the gender role expectations and conflict (Kimmel, 2008).

Areas for Future Research

Given the exploratory nature of this study, it would be helpful for this study to be replicated with a larger group of college men who hold leadership roles. The participants within this study are not representative of all college men, and additional research is needed to gain additional insight into the leadership experiences and practices of college men. There is a need to understand how other aspects of social identities (such as one's race or sexual orientation) may connect with one's identity as being a college man in a leadership role and how their experiences may resonate or be disparate from the White men who participated in this study. With the fact that all of the men in this study were students in the campus leadership studies minor, a comparative study looking at college men student leaders who have participated in leadership education curriculum compared to peers who have not would be helpful in understanding the impact of these curricular pursuits.

A longitudinal study exploring the experiences of the same cohort of college men leaders over a span of their college careers and after may be helpful in providing further insights to leadership educators on how they can work to support these men in their campus engagement and leadership development. Last, examining college men's leadership through other perspectives and data points, such as through the perspectives of their peers or through participant observation, would allow for additional insight in college men's leadership.

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations of the research. First, the participants shared their self-reported personal reflections on their leadership practice; thus, we did not observe these behaviors nor gain insights from the participants' peers within their organizations. The researchers knew the four participants, and each of the participants had at least one of the researchers as a faculty member in the leadership minor. Although the researchers believe the prior level of trust developed between the researchers and participants served as benefit in the study, allowing participants to explore the concepts openly, it is possible this relationship could have influenced the participants' responses during the interview and focus group. Additionally, the participant pool was composed of all White men enrolled in a leadership minor and who were visible leaders on a single campus. Likely their experiences differ from other college men holding leadership roles on college campuses. Although the participants were selected intentionally with attention to their identities, it is important to note this specific student population as a delimitation of the study. Last, there were only four males in this study; therefore, the findings cannot be generalizable.

Conclusion

In his interview, Cameron stated, "I think it's very interesting because I'm not a very masculine leader at all. … But I really don't care as long as the message is getting through." This response is indicative of the feelings of the participants in this study. The labels of masculine and feminine leadership practices used within scholarship and leadership education felt disconnected to the participants. The participants used both task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership practices to lead their organizations. They focused on the process of leadership and on the betterment of their organization. Further, they used opportunities presented through their leadership roles and curriculum to engage in critical self-reflection of power, authority, and identity to make meaning of their gender and leadership. There are many powerful findings within this study that can provide leadership educators with hope to infuse these powerful practices within curriculum to help college men develop as students, as leaders, and as men.

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