

Challenging Heterosexual White College Men to Engage in Campus Diversity Efforts: An Orientation Imperative

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Most college orientation programs include sessions on diversity-related topics (NODA, 2014). Yet, bias-motivated behavior continues to affect post-secondary institutions. Heterosexual White college men are often responsible for this behavior and also disengage from campus diversity efforts more than any other student group. The Straight White College Men Project, a multi-institutional qualitative research study with 92 participants, explored what attracts or repels students from campus diversity efforts. Findings directly inform the ways orientation professionals can challenge heterosexual White college men to engage in diversity efforts during and after orientation programs. Recommendations for orientation professionals are presented.

Orientation professionals interact with college students at one of the most critical times of their undergraduate career: their introduction to the mission, the values, and the culture of their new institution. The first day, the first interaction, and the first co-curricular activity set the stage for how new students will navigate interpersonal relationships, develop new ways of thinking, and behave as developing adults. Orientation professionals play critical roles in these first impressions for new college students, and have a large responsibility to ensure students acclimate to their campus environment (Sedotti & Payne, 2010).

Yet, higher education institutions face worsening campus climates, run students through major programs of study without engaging them in diversity content, and fail to institutionalize community and institutional values regarding inclusive excellence (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Spanierman, Neville, Liao, Hammer, & Wang, 2008; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). Specifically, students with primarily privileged identities, including White heterosexual college men, struggle to engage in diversity coursework and conversations (Banks, 2009; National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), 2014; Vaccaro, 2010). Orientation professionals are vital in setting the stage to communicate institutional values of diversity and social justice and to engage privileged learners in the creation of a welcoming and supportive campus culture. This priming of students' minds may serve them well throughout their entire time on a given campus. If college students move through orientation without the initial understanding of how inclusive excellence affects them and their peers, orientation professionals may have missed the chance of influencing critical learning outcomes, including self-awareness, cultural competency, and empathy.

The Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education (NODA), is the leading organization for orientation professionals and has long been committed to

diversity and inclusion as its core values. According to data gathered across a wide variety of U.S. and Canadian first-year orientation programs, 73% of institutions include sessions on diversity or multicultural awareness (NODA, 2014). While a commitment to inclusive and diverse communities is clear for orientation, transition, and retention professionals, what is less clear is how these programs affect the students who participate in them. Even less is known about how orientation programs affect the propensity for heterosexual White college men, often the most privileged social group on campus, to critically engage in courses, programs, and discussions centered on diversity or social justice on campus.

Heterosexual White College Men's Learning and Resistance

Existing research documents that college men were less likely to demonstrate an interest in intercultural and social change programs, or study abroad, as they did not believe these activities had concrete benefits for their post-college careers (Thirolf, 2014). Yet, White male students benefit from their engagement in diversity initiatives (Hurtado, 2005; Spanierman et al., 2008), often at greater rates than women or students of color (Engberg, 2004; Sax, 2009). Despite these benefits, White students, and especially White college men, are also least engaged in diversity initiatives on campus among any racial, ethnic, or gender groups (NSSE, 2014; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). Hu and Kuh (2003) examined over 50,000 undergraduate student responses to the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) and found White students were less likely to interact with students of color, but reported greater gains from those interactions with diverse populations. Similarly, men were less likely than women to become acquainted with students of a different race and to have discussions with students with different values and religious beliefs (Hu & Kuh, 2003).

Beyond having less contact with diverse groups and being less likely to attend diversity events, White men are also often the originators of unacceptable behavior, including social, racial, gender, and sexual discrimination and violence (Harper & Harris, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). In their study on bystander intervention behaviors, McMahon, Postmus, and Koenick (2011) found men were less likely than women to interrupt sexist language on their college campuses. Cabrera (2011, 2014) identified White male students as "hyper-privileged" and found they used racial joking, particularly in White-only spaces, including residence halls, student organizations, sports teams, or fraternities.

Beyond their lack of engagement, White college men also often feel left out or are frustrated by diversity initiatives (Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011; Roper, 2004). They may also actively resist the exploration of diversity and social justice issues inside and outside of the classroom (Bondi, 2012; Heinze, 2008; Johnson, Rich, & Castelan Cargile, 2008), or they feel they do not contribute much to diversity on campus (Banks, 2009). White men may find diversity efforts unnecessary and discussed too frequently on campus, or threaten to withdraw financial support as alums if institutions continue to foster diversity (Vaccaro, 2010).

Not in all cases will Whites ardently resist diversity initiatives and education; however, they may indicate not needing additional training or development in issues of power, privilege, and oppression because they perceive themselves as progressive and anti-racist. White fragility, or the lack of stamina for racial issues, is an attitude or behavior educators may consider as a form of White resistance to topics of diversity and social justice (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014). When engaging in diversity coursework, many Whites expect the same kind of racial comfort they are afforded in society: comfort that prevents the challenge of engaging in critical content on issues of privilege and oppression. Such securities should not be given in educational programs and coursework interrogating centuries of American oppression at the hands of Whites and their cultural ancestors.

We argue that college men's behaviors, attitudes, language, negligence, or resistance around and about diversity makes them campus climate creators. By their actions or inactions, the environments they actively or inadvertently create are often unwelcoming or hostile to individuals with diverse or minoritized identities. Should this trend continue, consequences will be dire not only for the specific institution, but also for society when White heterosexual men will hold or share positions of social influence throughout their careers (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003).

Orientation for Heterosexual White College Men

Most orientation programs for specific populations (e.g., students with diverse genders or sexual orientations, commuters, transfer students, first-generation students, students of color) focus on minoritized student groups rather than privileged ones, such as heterosexual White men or women (Sedotti & Payne, 2010). It is likely also true that the majority of orientation activities for minoritized students are organized and led by practitioners who themselves identify with one or more minoritized identities. This continues to perpetuate that minoritized campus staff carry the responsibility and burden of educating members of dominant social groups on issues of diversity and social justice. We argue that more professionals with privileged identities, specifically heterosexual White male practitioners, should take on this work (Svoboda & Vianden, 2015). Because of their dominant status, the voices of heterosexual White college educators carry considerable weight and college students with privileged identities tend to listen to these voices more than to those of minoritized faculty and staff (Littleford et al., 2010).

While well-conceived efforts to orient minoritized students to campus exist, orientation professionals have only sparingly developed orientation programs that engage heterosexual White men in diversity conversations during the initial first-year orientation. For these initiatives to take place, Orientation professionals should re-design programs to explore content related to diversity and social justice. Practitioners also need to know that privileged learners may receive and process information related to diversity differently than minoritized learners (Curry-Stevens, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to inform orientation professionals of the perceptions heterosexual White college men have about diversity and social justice on campus or in their communities. Understanding how White college men conceptualize issues of systemic inequities, including power, privilege, and oppression, is crucial when challenging and supporting their development of self-awareness and advocacy. The information provided in this study may aid orientation professionals to develop heterosexual White college men to be stronger and more accountable advocates for social change.

Methods

A constructivist epistemology guided the present study assuming individuals seek to understand the world in which they live through subjective experiences in their natural settings (Charmaz, 2006). In this case, the settings were the individual institutions where the participants experienced encounters with the phenomena of diversity and social justice.

Research Sites and Sampling

The data that inform this study stem from the Straight White College Men Project, a nationwide qualitative research study. For the purposes of this study, data from 21 focus groups at 10 individual four-year institutions of higher education were gathered.

Most U.S. regions are represented in the study, but because of cost restrictions, the majority of the research sites were located in the Midwest. All institutions were predominantly White and featured mostly female-identified student bodies. The specific research questions guiding the larger study included: 1) How do heterosexual white male college students perceive campus and community diversity issues? 2) How do participants conceptualize their privileges relative to race, gender, and sexual orientation? And, 3) How do participants articulate their own perceived responsibility for social change?

The study used purposeful and convenience sampling strategies (Patton, 2002). The researchers chose all sites because their colleagues who served as expert nominators of students worked for the specific institution. At all but one institution, colleagues who recruited students were student affairs professionals. At one institution, the recruiter was a faculty member who asked students in her classes to participate in the study. The colleagues recruited participants either via e-mail, in classes, or by word of mouth. The colleagues then scheduled the participants in focus groups according to when the researchers were on campus. All participants who appeared for a focus group were included in the collection of data. No participant was turned away. Selection criteria included male-identified students who had to also identify as White and heterosexual, and who were full-time undergraduates. By the end of data collection in July of 2015, 92 heterosexual White men had participated in the study.

Focus groups, the chosen method of data collection, were appropriate for the constructivist approach to the study. Constructivists assume that reality is created by interactions with individuals within the lived environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The exchange between participants and researcher, one of the hallmarks of focus groups, allows for multiple realities to exist (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Specifically, constructivist focus groups are designed as a participatory model, allowing students and researchers to co-construct meaning within the specific context of the group interview (Rodriguez, Schwartz, Lahman, & Geist, 2011). Incentives for focus group participation included \$10 in cash; on one campus, students received extra course credit.

A team of four researchers shared focus group moderation duties at the research sites. Each member moderated a focus group alone, which is appropriate for applied research (Fern, 2001). Team members included two heterosexual White male-identified associate professors (Higher Education and Psychology), one bi-racial female-identified assistant professor (Higher Education), and one male-identified African American graduate student. All faculty had conducted and published qualitative research at the time of data collecting, including employing focus groups. All faculty involved had also taught research design, methods, or assessment courses in which qualitative methods were included. The graduate student had taken a research methods course from one of the faculty and received additional training on focus group moderation and qualitative data analysis.

In qualitative research, scholars address their potential biases and understand that removing such biases entirely is impossible. The research team took the following steps to address potential preconceived notions about the study, the participants, and the resulting data. First, as Smithson (2000) suggested, the moderation and participants should come from similar identity backgrounds to engender the comfort and potential disclosure of student participants. The first author identifies as a cis-gender, heterosexual, White man and conducted the majority of focus groups with heterosexual White male participants (18 focus groups moderated). We did not analyze focus group data on whether results varied depending on racial or gender background of the moderator. However, it is possible that straight white men were more reluctant to disclose personal information with the woman-identified moderator (one focus group moderated) or the African-American graduate student moderator (two focus groups moderated).

Second, before the start of each focus group, the moderators informed the participants of the nature and goals of the study, about wanting to hear divergent viewpoints, and about the participants' freedom to answer or skip any question about which they felt uncomfortable. We aimed this to address potential groupthink or conformity to singular ideas, and the participants confirmed they understood the intentions of the researchers to study participants' lived experiences with the topic (Hollander, 2004).

Third, during focus groups the moderators did not confront or correct participants' potentially racist, sexist, or homophobic language or behaviors. As Fern (2001) asserted, the moderator of a focus group must accept responses and comments from all participants during data collection and analysis. As the moderators recorded each focus group digitally and transcribed each group verbatim, the authors considered each participant's comments for analysis.

Finally, in order to concentrate fully on the participants and their contributions, the moderators did not keep any notes during the focus group interviews. Note-taking, which is considered a good practice by Krueger and Casey (2000), has the potential to alarm or unnerve the participants; if moderators take notes after a specific statement, participants may perceive disagreement on the part of the researcher which can result in participants withdrawing from further participation (Yakoboski, 2010).

Before each focus group began, participants completed an informed consent form and a brief survey assessing demographic and campus engagement data. Table 1 displays the aggregated demographic characteristics of the 92 men. We collected these data to explore the diversity among the participants, as well as to show their overall type of engagement in campus life at their institution. "Contact" describes how many hours per week participants estimated they spent in close personal interaction (longer than 30 minutes) with someone different from them, including those with different race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion. "Intramurals" and "Arts" capture the percentage of participants who engaged in athletic or artistic student activities. "Student Organization" reports the average amount of registered student organizations of which the participants were members. "Campus Job" refers to the average hours per week the participants worked on campus. "Office Hours" captures the average number of faculty office visits over the previous academic year. "Diversity Programs" reports the average number of diversity-related out-of-class activities in which the participants engaged during the previous academic year. "Diversity Electives" refers to the average number of elective diversity courses the students completed beyond diversity requirements over their entire educational careers at their respective institution.

Table 1
Sample Demographic Information

	Heterosexual White Men (n = 92)
Age (Mean)	21.3
Contact (Hours/Week)	5.52
Intramurals (Percent)	62%
Arts (Percent)	12%
Student Organizations (Mean)	1.2
Campus Job (Hours/Week)	5.4
Office Hours (Hours/Year)	7.2
Diversity Programs (Mean of all Participants/Year)	1.7
Diversity Electives (Mean of all Participants/Career)	0.6

Focus groups ranged from 3 to 8 participants and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Sample focus group questions included 1) Describe experiences you have had with people different than you; 2) What is it like to be a heterosexual White male student on this campus?; 3) How does your institution teach you about diversity?; 4) What is your responsibility, if any, as a heterosexual White man to reduce or eliminate issues of racism, sexism, or homophobia on this campus or in this community?; and 5) What has to happen to get heterosexual White male college students to attend diversity programming or to enroll in elective diversity courses?

To ensure trustworthiness, the researchers performed member checks with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This involved asking participants to review, authenticate, and critique a one-page document that included initial interpretations of the specific focus group data. The researchers invited all participants via e-mail to complete the member checks; participants either agreed with initial interpretations or did not reply. Additional trustworthiness strategies included maintaining an audit trail of all focus group transcripts, focus group protocols, field notes, and memos written about interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Audit trails “attest to the use of dependable procedures and the generation of confirmable findings” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 9).

Data Analysis and Reporting

Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested that data analysis of focus groups should follow a systematic and sequential process. While optimal analysis develops among a team of moderators and debriefers, data emerging from focus groups analyzed by a single or two researchers are not inappropriate or invalid (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The researchers used a constant comparative method, a way to ensure ongoing data collection takes place alongside data analysis and comparisons between emerging codes and themes (Charmaz, 2006). After each focus group was transcribed, designated researchers read the transcript and marked it for expected and unexpected participant conceptualizations of diversity or social justice. After this preliminary analysis, the research team met to establish an initial code list and reached agreement about what codes should be included and which discarded. Second, one of the researchers and a graduate assistant utilized Dedoose, a cloud-based qualitative data analysis software, to finalize the coding scheme before letting larger categories and final themes emerge. From the data, nine final themes emerged; however, for the purposes of this study, data from four themes specifically spoke to orientation practice: 1) learning from diversity, 2) gauging motivation to engage in diversity or social justice, 3) sensing responsibility for advocacy, and 4) responding to -isms and homophobia.

Limitations

Although this study is among a few to advance new knowledge on social justice advocacy behaviors of heterosexual White undergraduate men, it has some limitations. First, the perceptions reflected here are those of 92 college men at 10 specific institutions. Hence, the transferability of results to other institutional or regional contexts should be approached with caution. Next, the 10 research sites enrolled more than 36,000 total male undergraduates, which means a multitude of different conceptualizations of diversity or social justice exist; yet, their voices do not emerge from this study. Finally, the number of focus groups and the number of participants differed on each campus, resulting in a non-standardized way of data collection that limits the transferability of the results to other contexts.

Findings

The findings report the themes that emerged from the data that were particularly useful for orientation professionals. We communicate the themes as a continuous narrative that explores how the participants articulated growing up thinking about diversity or social justice, what they perceived they learned from diversity or social justice education once in college, how they described their motivation to engage in diversity or social justice education, what level of responsibility they sensed to advocate for marginalized peers to bring about a more welcoming campus climate, and how they articulated responding to racism, sexism, or homophobia on their campus. Representative quotes and conversations bring the narrative to life from the perspective of the participants. All participant names provided here are pseudonyms.

Growing Up White and Male

Many of the men we studied grew up in racial isolation; that is, they experienced communities and schools in which they had little contact with individuals who were different from them relative to race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation: “I went to an all-White high school and the first [time I experienced] diversity was coming to college. I never had a Black friend until I came to college” (Chris, Liberal Arts College, Midwest). Even if they did have contact with peers who were different, the interactions were not necessarily deep and long-lasting: “I grew up playing basketball [and] more African Americans play that sport. [But] after practice, we all would have other stuff to do whereas [the African American guys on the team] would just go home and hang out with friends” (Kyle, Doctoral University, South). In their high schools, participants became aware of difference but there was little challenge of privilege by teachers or peers: “I grew up in a small town, majority White. They teach us things so White males don’t look bad, [like] we killed a bunch of Native Americans. They don’t talk about that. It makes us look like heroes” (Jason, Master’s University, Midwest). For many participants this lack of challenge continued once they entered college. Consider Tim’s (Major Public Research University, Midwest) thoughts as representative:

We’re all [required] to take world culture classes. I guess in that way you are exposed to other ideas. But I also feel like that’s pretty minimal just because you view it as, “This is my class, I’m learning and then I’m done.” So how much do you really interact with people? I don’t really know that’s the best way of gaining cultural views.

Perceived Learning Gains

It is important for orientation professionals to know that heterosexual White male college students may articulate they learn from diversity and social justice courses, programs, or conversations in a variety of ways. Responding to the question, “What do straight White college men gain from diversity education,” in nearly every focus group participants shared perceived gains in personal growth and development or understanding other people and their identities:

A lot of [us] have said that we’ve grown up in small towns and I didn’t get any experience dealing with anybody other than White people. Coming [to college] it’s more diverse and there are more minorities. I didn’t have to deal with that [before], having to build relationships or communicate with people other than White people... [D]iversity programming gives you some ideas to why they’re treated differently. (Connor, Master’s University, Midwest)

Several participants indicated that diversity education would provide valuable information to prepare the men for careers. Alex (Master's University, Midwest) discussed summer internship interview experiences where both interviewers asked, "Do you have any experience with diverse populations," and I said 'no' because I [don't]... That's a direct benefit [of diversity education] especially if I want get into criminal justice where you are dealing with all sorts of populations."

A few participants also stated diversity and social justice education could provide information about what behaviors or attitudes are hurtful to others, specifically minoritized peers: "I think it's important, when you learn why things are hurtful to other people. Or why things were hurtful when they were happening in the past, because then it makes you actually think about it" (Phillip, Master's University, Midwest).

Contemplating Engagement in Diversity

Despite articulating that they learned from diversity and social justice education, the majority of participants did not engage readily in courses, programs, or discussions on the topic because they indicated that diversity is not inherently about them, that they are the norm, the control group against which diversity is measured. In addition, some participants expressed attending co-curricular diversity events as awkward, or that they did not want to be the only White men who sought out such programs:

I think it's intimidating like you're the symbol of majority. You're the White guy and you're going to an event with all these diverse people. For me it's just like the anxiety and the idea that I could go there and do the ultimate faux pas...like me stomping on someone's cultural belief just in sheer ignorance rather than taking the time to grow. (James, Liberal Arts College, Midwest)

In response to the question, "How do we get more White college men to attend diversity programming or enroll in an elective diversity course," the most consistent response was that institutions should make diversity a required part of the curriculum. Consider this discussion between Alex and Michael, both students at a Master's University in the Midwest.

Alex: I think just with the emails from the teachers, if they recommend it, then that has more weight than just seeing a random poster about it...cause then it's just another random program. But if a, yeah, if it's recommended by a teacher, I'm much more likely to go to it.

Michael: I'd agree. It's definitely good when its actually in the curriculum that you actually have to go. I can't say that I've gone to any presentations that I didn't like that I was required to go to. They're all interesting, I just need someone to make me go.

The men knew that even though they articulated learning gains in diversity or social justice, they would not seek out events, discussions, or courses unless they were encouraged by faculty or required to go. Requiring students in their major or minor coursework provides a captive audience for deeper diversity or social justice discussions. Of secondary importance was that participants wanted to attend events with friends and that they wished they could be personally invited.

“What’s my Responsibility?”

Participants used the focus groups to begin exploring a personal or collective sense of responsibility in responding to the question, “What is your responsibility as straight White college men, if any, in reducing or eliminating racism, sexism, or homophobia on your campus or in your community?” A few participants indicated they had no responsibility or struggled to understand how they could advocate for their minoritized peers. However, the vast majority of participants underscored their role in improving campus or community climates and reducing isms or homophobia. This responsibility started with being open minded, respectful, or serving as role models for other White men. Consider Dave’s comment (Liberal Arts College, Midwest) to be representative: “It’s up to us to break the mold of how things used to be. I think it’s already progressing towards people being more open minded and more diverse...it’s up to us to continue to be progressive.” The most consistent response to the question about collective responsibility included the need for self-education, -reflection, and -critique among the men. Bryce’s (Master’s University, Midwest) statement received head nods in his focus group:

Absolutely, there’s a responsibility. It also begins with making personal changes. If you are having trouble not seeing racism or sexism, just realize that it exists. And then connecting with other groups to kind of understand what their challenges [are]. [Also], I think we have a responsibility as White straight men to at least call [racism or sexism] out when we see it. We just have to learn, when those things are happening, because we might not see it. Like we might not think it’s racist...but it could be horribly so. So, I think it’s a matter of making sure we learn that, and making those personal changes if we need to. Just at least, talking about it, and, sharing what you’ve learned with whatever groups you talk to.

Despite the articulated standard the participants wanted to set in terms of diversity or social justice advocacy in their lives, the majority of them indicated they were inactive or passive in their efforts to reduce racist, sexist, or homophobic behaviors or attitudes around them. Discussing the question, “How do you react to jokes told about women, people of color, or LGBT students,” the most consistent response included the participants’ difficulty in speaking up, or confronting friends or family members: “There are repercussions...If you’re in your friend group and you’re the only guy who [throws] a wet blanket on the joke that everybody else gets. [Y]ou’re the guy who ruins jokes. You don’t want to be that guy” (John, Liberal Arts College, Midwest). Several other participants articulated the need to advocate but feared social consequences from their peer groups whom they wanted to please. Interrupting oppressive behaviors is something the vast majority of our participants felt ill-equipped to do.

In sum, despite indicating that they gain from diversity and social justice education and sensing responsibility to advocate for marginalized peers, the men in the Straight White Men Project were largely inactive in engaging in conversations, programs, or courses about human difference. To avoid continued inaction, the participants articulated the need to require engagement in diversity and social justice topics through programs of study. In these mandatory settings participants can be challenged to explore in more depth their roles in social justice advocacy and responsibility for social change.

Discussion and Recommendations for Practice

The findings point to several conclusions about the 92 heterosexual White college men in the present study. First, the participants indicated that they learned from diversity courses and discussions on campus, confirming research conducted on the benefits of diversity engagement for White men (Engberg, 2004; Hurtado, 2005; Sax, 2009; Spanierman et al., 2008).

We also heard that despite the apparent learning that occurs, the participants typically did not attend diversity programs or conversations and did not enroll in diversity courses beyond what the institution required them to take. This finding corroborates research and data on White male disengagement in topics related to diversity and social justice (Banks, 2009; Hu & Kuh, 2003; NSSE, 2014; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014; Thirolf, 2014; Vaccaro, 2010). Beyond merely not attending events or discussions, some participants seemed to actively question or resist their engagement in diversity or social justice initiatives at their institution. A relatively large body of research suggests similar findings (Bondi, 2012; Heinze, 2008; Johnson et al., 2008; Plaut et al., 2011; Roper, 2004; Schueths et al., 2013; Vaccaro, 2010).

Next, our participants struggled to conceptualize how they would confront inappropriate language or behaviors by their college peers. The main reason for their inaction was fearing social consequences from their friends. Their reticence to stand up to discriminatory language and behaviors implies the potential for a chilly or hostile campus climate (Cabrera, 2014; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Harris, 2010; Vaccaro, 2010). This climate may be fueled not necessarily by their overt offensive actions, but by the inability of heterosexual White college men to challenge statements or behaviors by other dominant members of the campus community. The final conclusion about the participants suggests some of them may be willing to accept their own or collective responsibility for furthering diversity and social justice initiatives; however, most were unsure about what forms that responsibility would take, corroborating extant research by McMahon and colleagues (2011). The small focus group environment allowed the participants to voice their trepidations around this advocacy as well as their beginning exploration of what should come next for them.

So that White heterosexual college men can have discussions that both challenge and support their engagement with diversity and social justice, orientation professionals must provide spaces that set the stage for this learning and development to occur. To meet this goal, we have the following specific recommendations for orientation practitioners.

First, we suggest that orientation programs, at a minimum, must include some required content on diversity, inclusion, social justice, and equity. Better yet, we argue that this content should be the framework of orientation programs on any college campus. In practice, this may involve implementing one or more sessions on the institutional values surrounding diversity and on the mechanisms to create inclusion in- and outside of the classroom. Further content should explore issues of hate, bias, and discrimination facing students, faculty, and staff, as well as targeted bystander intervention programming, specifically for students with multiple privileged identities. Students who attend these orientation sessions should know what the institution stands for, what appropriate behaviors for students are, and how to begin supporting diversity initiatives.

We further recommend that orientation professionals should offer extended orientation events around diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice, including first-year seminars, sophomore experience programs, learning communities, and educational programs. We also encourage orientation professionals and orientation leaders to take these conversations into other campus spaces throughout the year. These spaces include committees, university departments, lunch tables, special events, student organizations, residence halls, athletic or intramural teams, classrooms, and sororities and fraternities.

This means professional and student orientation leaders become educators on issues of diversity on a continuous basis rather than over a short summer event. In a perfect world, orientation professionals would have all resources at their disposal to extend the conversation on diversity beyond initial orientation events; however, not each institution will.

To this end, we recommend that orientation professionals collaborate with academic administrators and faculty on continuing the conversation in courses, and with other student affairs professionals on continuing the conversation in co-curricular settings. This will make the orientation and early engagement with diversity and social justice content more effective for all incoming students, and specifically for White college men.

In existing orientation programs, professionals should also pay attention to allotting space and time for smaller orientation events, including one-on-one or small-group conversations between White male students and their peer orientation leaders or orientation professionals. This ensures that orientation events challenge or even force White male students to engage in more intimate conversations, rather than allowing them to withdraw from the conversation in a large lecture-style forum. Research on masculinities has long supported the use of small-group conversations between men to foster their ability and willingness to disclose personal beliefs (Harper & Harris, 2010).

As White college men may be ready to have conversations about how to advocate for and support campus diversity efforts, more White male orientation professionals or student leaders ought to lead this work (Svoboda & Vianden, 2015). Should an orientation department lack White male peer or professional leaders, we suggest recruiting White heterosexual men more specifically to do this work. White male peer orientation leaders may be most effective in communicating institutional values to incoming White college men. Research has long supported the positive effects of peers on student learning and development in college (Astin, 1993).

One of the biggest problems in social justice advocacy work are Whites who deem themselves too evolved or too arrived to engage with those who we perceive are not as far along, or who display racism, sexism, or homophobia. Professionals who behave this way often distance themselves from privileged students to show solidarity with individuals with minoritized identities (which is important). Yet, professionals likely also distance to demonstrate their own innocence in the social injustices of this society. Whites, and specifically those of us who identify as heterosexual White men, cannot afford to disassociate from younger heterosexual White male college students with whom we interact. If orientation professionals feel that White male students trigger these disassociating behaviors, we suggest practicing self-reflection and dialogue with colleagues to refocus on self-awareness and to re-center the advocacy for and support of students from minoritized backgrounds.

Conclusion

Orientation professionals play a vital role in orienting and inculcating new college students to their campus community. This requires professionals to introduce students to institutional values and standards around diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice. Heterosexual White college men, specifically, will learn from their engagement in diversity content and they may also show signs of withdrawal or lack of interest in these topics. Orientation events need to provide structured opportunities for White men to challenge privilege and to begin raising their self-awareness, support, and advocacy for issues of human difference. It is especially important that these programs extend beyond traditional timeframes of typical orientation programs, and that orientation professionals and student leaders see themselves as educators on diversity and inclusion on campus. If orientation professionals manage to achieve this, they will play an important role in the continuous education, growth, and development of college students, specifically of those who hold the most social privileges in society.

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