

Higher Education's Effort to 'Reeducate' Men is Getting a Tad Creepy (and Counter-Productive)

In recent years, Americans have been having two parallel conversations about the problems with men in our society. On the one hand, there is the conversation on college campuses and in the media about how men have created a poisonous environment—that they are privileged and sexist; they don't treat women well; and they are frequently violent toward them, contributing to a "rape culture" that threatens women. And the more they act like men, the worse it gets.

The other conversation—which is happening outside of elite circles—is about how the life outcomes for men seem to be getting worse and worse. They are less likely to get a high school, let alone a college, degree. They have higher rates of unemployment and smaller social networks and the opioid epidemic has hit them particularly hard.

In one of these stories men are the victims of social forces beyond their control. In the other story men are the forces controlling everyone else. And the only way to get them to change is through re-education. A recent [story](#) in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported on some of the ways this reeducation is happening:

At the University of Redlands, Reggie Robles, associate director of campus diversity and inclusion, directs [Dudes](#)—Dudes Understanding Diversity and Ending Stereotypes. Its activities have included a "dialogue series" in which students responded to presentations by professors, student-affairs officials, and a campus minister on such topics as

pornography, guns as totems of masculinity, and “hook-up” culture.

But maybe the problem is not a problem of bias and stereotypes or one that can be fixed with more “Dude” dialogues. According to the *Chronicle*, men are having (and creating) problems, not just because of confusing abstract notions of what it means to be a man, or gun culture, or media stereotypes of manhood. Maybe there are more concrete factors as well. Take men’s higher rates of alcohol consumption, for instance:

Reformers point to data like the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism’s finding that [one in four college students report](#) that drinking causes them to slip academically. Similarly, [research shows](#) that male students spend far more time playing video games, watching television, and going to the gym than female students do, but participate far less in campus and community organizations. They are also less likely to seek assistance from tutors, advisers, counselors, and potential mentors.

All of these factors seem to have made college-age men less healthy and less happy. Time spent in solitary activities—especially staring at screens—is not correlated with good mental health outcomes, let alone a productive life. In his [book](#), *Men Without Work*, Nicholas Eberstadt chronicles the lives of ten million able-bodied American men between the ages of 25 and 54 who have simply dropped out of the labor force. They are watching 21.7 hours of television per week and playing another 6.7 hours of video games. This is not a recipe for success.

And if you want to know why the men who do go to college often find themselves failing out or failing to participate in any meaningful way, it could be the ways they are choosing to spend their free time.

For years we have known that too many idle young men in a society creates problems. Mostly we think about these in terms of violence and revolution. But in the case of America today, it seems that too many idle men has simply created too many idle men. Maybe it's time that colleges spent more energy on finding ways to help men learn to use their time more productively than on reeducating them about their so-called toxic masculinity.

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Naomi Schaefer Riley's new book, [Be the Parent, Please: Stop Banning Seesaws and Start Banning Snapchat](#), will be published January 8, 2018.