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# The Impact of Hypermasculinity on Students' Development in Fraternity Organizations

Cristian McGough

University of San Diego, [cmcgough@sandiego.edu](mailto:cmcgough@sandiego.edu)

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The Impact of Hypermasculinity on Students' Development in Fraternity Organizations

Cristian McGough

University of San Diego

**Abstract**

The purpose of my study was to explore the concept of hypermasculinity in fraternal organizations and how that may affect students' personal development during their collegiate years. My research question was, how can I work with fraternity students to understand what contributes to hypermasculinity and provide support that will better promote an inclusive masculine culture? My findings indicate that certain environments in fraternity organizations promote hypermasculinity traits and that students on the executive board of the Interfraternity Council are seeking spaces to have dialogue about their experiences to challenge the norms of fraternity organizations.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Terminology.....	5
Literature Review.....	6
Context.....	10
Methodology.....	12
Needs Assessment.....	14
Cycle 1.....	16
Action.....	16
Result.....	16
Reflection.....	19
Cycle 2.....	20
Action.....	20
Result.....	21
Reflection.....	25
Cycle 3.....	26
Action.....	26
Result.....	27
Reflection.....	29
Cycle 4.....	31
Action.....	31
Result.....	32
Reflection.....	34
Limitations.....	35
Recommendations.....	36
Conclusion & Reflection.....	38
References.....	41
Appendices.....	43
Appendix A: Consent Form for Fraternity Members.....	43
Appendix B: Consent Form for Professional Staff.....	45
Appendix C: Focus Group Form.....	47
Appendix D: Individual Student Meeting Questions.....	48
Appendix E: Staff Focus Group Questions.....	49

### **Introduction**

The values that I worked with were initiated during my undergraduate career and are an overall theme of what I hoped to use in this action research as I advised my students. My values are community, inclusivity, relationships, and growth, which all are important to me as I worked with a student population that is invested in their own social and leadership skills, aside from their academics. I used these values during my time as an undergraduate because it allowed me to understand who I am as a person and where I wanted to change. This has led me to understand that much of the fraternal community is not inclusive and I observed that there was not enough growth among student leaders. Students do not seem to be engaged in bettering their community and had lacked the effort required to build relationships with others outside their respective organization. I observed that many of the students who are in a fraternity identify as white, and come from affluent backgrounds, which is a concern in their ability to interact and understand others who may not have the same identities. I also noticed a trend that many students act more aggressively, demonstrating only masculine traits and they often wear certain clothes in order to appeal to their peers to prove they are worthy to be a fraternity member.

In Spring of 2018, three organizations at the University of San Diego went under investigation and this made me question if their hypermasculine behaviors were causing these conduct issues to arise. These observations and interactions led to my concern, that there is a hegemonic and hypermasculine culture in fraternities at the University of San Diego, which may be affecting the development of students and their engagement on campus. Through this, I hoped that I could help create a more inclusive culture among fraternity students, be able to engage in conversations that create meaningful change in their community and talk with them about how they can become dedicated leaders. My research question was, how can I work with fraternity

students to understand what contributes to hypermasculinity to better promote an inclusive masculine culture? which also led to a few sub questions. In order to further support my main question, I asked students, how does your identity impact your view of masculinity? and how do you define hypermasculinity?

### Terminology

These terms are aimed to better support the understanding of the role I have and terms that are used throughout my paper and research.

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
<b><i>Chapter</i></b>	A local group of the larger (inter)national organizations, including a special chapter name.
<b><i>Fraternity</i></b>	A group of men bounded together by various ties that include brotherhood, friendship, common goals, and ritual. Individuals in these groups put in time and effort toward common goals of the organization.
<b><i>Interfraternity Council</i></b>	A governing body of seven fraternities at the University of San Diego, operating under the affiliation requirements of the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC).
<b><i>Executive board member</i></b>	A member that holds an officer position on the Interfraternity council.
<b><i>Council member</i></b>	A member from a recognized chapter at the University of San Diego.
<b><i>IFC Advisor</i></b>	The direct advisor that oversees and advises the governing body of seven fraternities at the University of San Diego.
<b><i>Recruitment</i></b>	A process that occurs once a semester, in which a university undergraduate attends various events for two weeks to meet organizations in order to see if they might like to join.
<b><i>New Member Process</i></b>	An educational process that can take up to eight weeks in order for a new member to gain an understanding of the organization's founding, history, meaning, and brotherhood/sisterhood.

### Literature Review

As a graduate assistant in the Fraternity and Sorority Life department at the University of San Diego, I have been able to observe that students engaged in toxic leadership and were involved in environments that fostered negative behaviors. In order to gain some understanding, I further explored current literature that helped explain hypermasculinity, gender norms, and the emerging male adulthood in fraternity organizational settings. Much of the literature today helps professionals understand how to create environments that support positive behaviors for male engagement in fraternity organizations and how to embrace inclusivity that can help their personal development.

There were three main themes that were explored in the literature: emerging adulthood, gender norms and masculinity. Hypermasculinity is defined as engaging in activities that may be aggressive and dominating over others, especially toward women, while showing an excessive masculine behavior, valuing their own status (Corprew, Matthews, & Mitchell, 2014). This definition has helped me understand behaviors exhibited by male students in fraternity settings on campus and is important to my action research. The definition of hypermasculinity gave me the ability to engage with students in creating a more inclusive masculine culture among the fraternity and sorority community throughout my action research cycles. In order to support students to engage in healthy behaviors and conversations, I further explored what inclusive masculinity meant and how that might be represented in fraternity organizations. Anderson (2008) examined inclusive masculinity in fraternities, which is described as a modern form of masculinity that accepts a mixture of masculine and feminine traits without being afraid of not presenting a stereotypical masculine male. Fraternities tend to have a bad reputation, one that is mostly white men who identify as heterosexual, and they often take on the role of *macho man*,

which can contribute to current negative perceptions (Anderson, 2008). These negative perceptions come in various forms, depending on the fraternity culture, which can include negative behaviors towards drinking, hazing, sexual assaults, and impacting their personal engagement. Both definitions encompassed the reviewed literature about gender norms and males in emerging adulthood that are involved in fraternities during their undergraduate career.

### **Emerging Adulthood**

The emerging adulthood years are imperative for students to gain further understanding of their own identities and leadership as they navigate through college. It is a period of time where most students are engaging with various individuals who have different identities, opinions, or ideas that can challenge their viewpoints. Asel, Seifert and Pascarella (2015), further examined the level of engagement from students in fraternal organizations because of the lack of research and the current data that is complex and had mixed results. Understanding where students are at in their development can help researchers explain why students are either engaged or not engaged. Prior experiences and perceptions of college and fraternities has had an influence on students and their engagement with negative behaviors, academics and their overall college experience (Asel, Seifer, & Pascarella, 2015). In addition, researchers evaluated the effectiveness of the Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity education that focuses on active membership development in the areas of self-awareness, transformative learning, experiential learning, and meaning making (Reuter, Baker, Hernandez, & Bureau, 2012). The organization realized the importance of its members development and the support needed for them to become effective leaders in their community and in their own learning process. This study reinforced the idea that we need to take into account that each fraternity may have their own educational process for members and examine whether that is effective or creating a negative culture among their organization.

Goldfarb and Eberly (2011) explored the spiritual development of students in fraternities and how that is being impacted in a hypermasculine culture. Fraternal rituals are rooted in religious findings from the early 1800's and meant to enhance the value and leadership aspect of fraternities. Affiliated fraternity members had lower levels of spirituality and are more skeptical of religion, whereas non-affiliated members had higher scores of spiritual and religious developments (Goldfarb & Eberly, 2011). I found this to be important because of the religious context at the University of San Diego, and if that may be impacting students in their masculine traits during their fraternal experience. It was apparent that spirituality or religious affiliations had no impact in the way students perceived hypermasculinity.

### **Gender Norms**

Iwamoto, Cheng, Lee, & Takamatsu (2011) explored gender differences in college and how that may support male students to associate with risks at a higher level because of gender norms and male expectations. Researchers found through a survey that gender norms created a hypermasculine culture and expectation to binge drink in fraternities and created alcohol-related problems (Iwamoto, Cheng, Lee, & Takamatsu, 2011). Another research study conducted by Fereday (2015) at the University of San Diego, noted that the expectation of traditional gender roles hindered male engagement on the hearing board. Both research findings are especially helpful to understand the role of males and their gender development as leaders on campus, in contexts of predominantly female leadership. Masculine norms may have more of an effect on individuals and further explains the importance of supporting students in preventing hypermasculine behaviors.

**Masculinity**

Marco (2015) reexamined and challenged the negative perceptions of gay Latino fraternity members in how it may impact their view of masculinity, the effects of other intersecting identities in a male's development, and certain traits being fluid to fit the masculine culture in fraternity settings. This study related to my own identity as a gay Latino who was involved in a fraternity and how that impacted my personal development, which had some influence in the way I advised and approached my students. I had the ability to connect my identities with their privileged identities and challenged them in a way that can support their understanding of masculinity, especially the students who had differing social identities than their peers in my action research. Context mattered for students challenging negative perceptions of masculinity and brought new findings through my cycles. Arquette (2015) reflected on his fraternity experience as an advisor to the Interfraternity council, and further explored how factors influenced negative masculinity cultures among fraternity organizations. Further research explained why fraternity membership is associated with sexual violence and how it is becoming more accepted by fraternities who practice traditional gender roles (Seabrook, Ward, & Giaccardi, 2018). By acceptance of sexual violence, it meant that it is becoming more associated and recognizable by individuals in these organizations and has been a critical issue that needs to be addressed in the fraternal community. This current study focused on scripting theory in order to understand gender roles between men and women and how masculinity is a way to prove manhood in fraternities, which causes higher pressure to uphold gender norms (Seabrook, Ward, & Giaccardi, 2018). Scripting theory is the idea that both men and women follow cultural norms when it comes to relationships in order to behave a certain way by gender roles (Seabrook, Ward, & Giaccardi, 2018). All three articles on hypermasculinity emphasized the importance of

engaging in critical dialogue in order to prevent negative behaviors and begin to create an inclusive environment among fraternal organizations.

### **Context**

To provide some context, we must consider how my experiences and roles have supported me through my action research in order to engage in the work with my students. Over the past two years I have served as the graduate assistant for the Fraternity and Sorority Life department at the University of San Diego, specifically advising the Interfraternity council (IFC) and have had my personal experience in a fraternity organization at my undergraduate institution. The IFC is specifically comprised of male organizations, both social and cultural, which are eight organizations and have recently finished an expansion process that will add another social organization in the Fall of 2019.

### **Graduate Assistant**

Each calendar year, I have advised seven individuals who hold officer positions on the Interfraternity Council board, each representing their respective fraternity chapter. My positionality as the direct advisor to these students has supported the level of engagement and learning of my practice and future recommendations for this position. Advising these students comprised of weekly individual meetings, two group meetings, and attending various programs that are hosted by the council board. This position allowed me to oversee all aspects pertaining to fraternity meetings, recruitment, programs and chapter organizations. Fraternities can give students a sense of belonging, lifelong brothers, and leadership abilities. There are some challenges and advantages in having students engage in honest discussions because of how closely connected I am to students. They may have also been afraid to say certain things knowing that this is being used for my action research. I think that some students were not

interested in engaging in this type of conversation because they assumed that they don't exhibit or represent hypermasculinity. I approached this topic in a careful manner so that I could still engage and understand how to best support students as I collected my data or even learned about my own interactions as well.

### **Fraternity Experience**

I was involved in the Sigma Chi fraternity as an undergraduate student at the California State University San Marcos for four years. During my time there, I had similar interactions that I observed or witnessed over the past two years with students in fraternity organizations at USD. This experience hindered how I viewed myself as a student and leader, as well, it influenced my interactions with students that expressed hypermasculine traits. The current topic that is being addressed is personal to me because I saw the value that a fraternity can add to someone's life, and I do not think that these organizations at the institution I am working are taking advantage of bettering their members. Having previous experience as a member of a fraternity, it gave me the ability to relate to students around hypermasculinity and the lack of conversations available in addressing this issue. This topic is important because it can create change by addressing issues that have negatively impacted the students experience and the fraternity and sorority community at USD. I hoped that this work could begin a culture of healthy masculinity and the ability to understand how it is affecting student's leadership development. I am aware that I didn't understand what hypermasculinity was until I graduated and saw my experience from a different lens as an alumnus of the organization. My experience in fraternity life will give me the ability to relate to students and their experiences. I know that this action research will contribute to current literature in that fraternities tend to host toxic environments for both their members and guests, while providing an avenue for members to grow as a leader in their community.

**Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL)**

My graduate assistant position is located on the third floor of the Student Life Pavilion where most of student life is located. The office is shared with Associated Students, Student Organizations, and the Student Activities (Torero Programming Board) where other graduate assistants and professionals are located. This space, over the past two years, has allowed me to engage with fraternity members and other students that may be interested in fraternity membership. The office was known to be the Student Leadership, Involvement and Changemaking (SLIC), but due to the re-organization of the student affairs department, Fraternity and Sorority Life is now in a new cluster known as the Community and Leadership Development. This shift has allowed our office to find ways to re-engage with different offices that may support the needs of fraternity members and find ways to better promote my work with hypermasculinity and men. The office and space have allowed me to understand how students engage with the staff and whether we must include certain topics in our programs in order to enhance the student experience. It has influenced my ability to engage with students more authentically and have deep and difficult conversations in this area.

**Methodology**

The methodological approach that I used is the McNiff (2016) cycle method as I approached this topic during my action research. There are four initial steps, however, I combined two steps as my reflection process; Act, Observe, Reflect/Plan. This approach allowed me to critically reflect while still implementing changes that supported my own learning and the student engagement. It also enhanced my values of community, inclusivity and growth while adding the value of relational and transparency in order to connect with the students I advise. I had four cycles that supported me and my practice in engaging with students and dialogue on

hypermasculinity. This methodology supported my research in obtaining data from observations and focus groups while improving the negative perception of masculinity among fraternal students. My reflection and actions allowed me to support positive growth in conversations around masculinity. In these cycles, it has been important for me to help students who were struggling with perceptions of masculinity. This allowed them to understand the person they are, which is grounded in theory of self-authorship. It is important for students to develop self-authorship through crossroads because it gives them a better understanding of who they are and a realization if they are following the values their fraternity upholds. It is an internal reflection of their beliefs and ideals through the experiences they have in their development. Students are making meaning of their fraternity experience and need space to have these reflective moments in order to continuously change. Some of the strengths of using this model was the depth of engagement I had with the participants, but it was limited to few student's perceptions and opinions of the roughly 30% of students involved. Student participation was a challenge when we held a focus group around this conversation during the second cycle of the action research, which will be discussed later in the limitations section. McNiff's framework allowed me to adapt the third cycle because of the need to have further discussion around masculinity with the students I directly advised and did the focus group with. I changed it from initially being a focus group of general fraternity membership because I noticed that students in the second focus group cycle wanted to engage with this topic more. I was able to adjust the interview questions I was focusing on with students in order to dig deeper on the new findings of mental health and hypermasculinity. This allowed me to reflect and understand how theories supported the way I engaged with students in the past two years. Finally, this action research model allowed for new emerging themes, which then set the direction for future cycles and conversations.

### Needs Assessment

As a graduate assistant to the Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL) department, specifically advising the fraternity community (Interfraternity Council), I was able to observe and engage with the students on a more personal level with my previous experiences. This engagement allowed me to view how negative the fraternity culture is at the University of San Diego. I noticed behaviors that are extremely masculine during fraternal events and observed how students interacted with their peers differently depending on the context of the group. It worried me that the male students were not engaging in healthy forms of behavior and were being pressured to live up to this *fraternal standard* of being a *real man*. After a semester of advising a group of seven individuals who oversaw the fraternity community, I decided to have a conversation with my supervisor about various topics that interested me in furthering my own development and supporting the FSL department.

In approaching this topic, I had to reflect on what was important for the community but also for my own learning and ability to grow as a professional. Hypermasculinity has always been important to me because of the way I was raised with certain male gender norms and how that had a negative impact on my own ability to explore other identities that were important. My parents taught me that I had to play sports, wear specific male clothes, and act appropriate to my male gender which impacted that way I viewed feminine traits. I was even afraid of expressing my true self with my parents. This quickly changed when I began college and no longer lived under my parent's authority. I made the decision, that it was both important to the students and the staff, to learn more about hypermasculinity and how that may be impacting the students' development and the reason why there has been a negative culture within the fraternal

community. My supervisor and I confirmed the topic of my action research because we saw the value in bettering the community with positive dialogue and addressing the need for change.

Literature that was reviewed further informed my understanding of hypermasculinity and how to best approach this topic with males as they develop in college. The critical need to have these conversations with students to support them in their experiences at the college level is an interest of mine because it helped my development as a student affairs practitioner. Participants were the immediate Interfraternity Council executive board because of how often I interact with those students. These students were my main focus point and I observed and interacted with those students throughout the process. I asked them during an executive board meeting for their participation in this research and notified them that they will be observed over the course of a semester and invited to a focus group in October. It was important to remove my assumption that not all of them would participate, but all seven students were willing to engage in this topic and were excited to understand what hypermasculinity is and how it may impact their own development. My direct supervisor played a critical role in helping me collect data through observations and interactions of the group, along with two other staff members as peer supporters. I was excited to begin my research and observations because I knew this group would provide critical information based on the diverse group and having worked with them for a semester.

### **Cycles Overview**

When I began the exploration of my cycles, my intention was to not only focus on both my reactions and assumptions, but also with how students interacted with one another. This section will allow readers to understand the action that was implemented, along with what

occurred and the findings that emerged. Each cycle is followed through the action, results and reflection portion.

### **Cycle 1: Observations**

**Action.** This cycle consisted of ongoing observations of the seven executive board members through their activities and in our weekly advisory meetings. The observations took place from the beginning of the Fall 2018 semester through October. This gave me the ability to take note of what I saw, how I should continue to engage with students and how to intervene with hypermasculinity in future cycles. In this period of time students returned from their summer trips, internships they held outside of the classroom and were preparing for the two weeks of men's recruitment. I gave myself two months to observe in order to further understand how group dynamics are at play and to notice if fraternity recruitment played a huge factor in their actions and behaviors. These observations allowed me to gather data for the second cycle and how to gauge their understanding of masculinity. Observing behaviors and characteristics of students also allowed me to reflect on and understand my positionality as the advisor to the Interfraternity Council and how that may or may not affect the level of engagement from students. It was important to note that I had to remain as objective as possible and not let my own assumptions or opinions interfere with the observations. Through this I was informed on how I can collaborate with students and receive feedback on the work that we are all doing in order to better engage in the work for future cycles.

**Results & Emerging Themes.** After reviewing my notes from various meetings, activities and student's behavior, three different themes emerged. In providing the overall themes, I will further explain how these themes showed up with examples and how this understanding helped me approach the second cycle.

***Positionality.***

Throughout the two months of observation, I quickly identified that students behaved differently when they interacted with various professional staff members and other administrative staff that were involved with their meetings and programs. This had a profound effect on me because it made me realize that perhaps my position mattered to students in the way they engaged with their peers and staff. Students were more willing to engage in conversations with me than with other staff members. They would only approach me with questions rather than ask the Fraternity and Sorority Life staff who are also able to answer their questions, and they would behave in a more serious manner when staff members were involved. When new campus professional staff were engaged in fraternity programs, student leaders kept to themselves, were more serious and quieter, and behaved in a more *appropriate* manner. Student leaders were more inclined to act authentically, with more emphasis in their characteristics towards me as their direct advisor. Student leaders would joke more often or have certain masculine statements that offended others in front of me because, I assumed, they felt more comfortable. This was important because it made me realize that students engage with advisors differently depending on how well they know them or had underlying perceptions of other advisors. This shows that I have more formal authority with students than other professional staff in the office but would still respect them in a way that allowed their informal authority to be present.

***Individual vs. Group experiences.***

This theme was present when it came to social spaces and meetings that we had together. During our individual advising meetings, students were vulnerable and shared very personal experiences they were going through in their lives, which allowed me to connect with them on a deeper level. These meetings gave me the ability to understand their leadership styles and how

much I could challenge them in their leadership roles. However, when it came to the executive board meetings and IFC council, students were more reserved and did not express their feelings as much as they did during our individual meetings. I noticed they were less vulnerable and did not hold thoughtful conversations with their peers. They approached situations and conversations in a more masculine lens, which entailed not sharing their emotions and holding back on their opinions. What was shared during our individual meetings and the way they expressed themselves was not the same in group settings and this could be for various internal or external reasons. These reasons could be the lack of trust in their peers, the perceptions they had from others, or the fear of sharing their own emotions because they believed that it would be feminine, or no one would take them seriously.

Interfraternal council leaders engaged with their peers, who were not on the executive board, differently than those who were on executive board during recruitment week. Students were fist pumping, calling each other nick names and doing *guy stuff* with members who had a similar organizational identity but did not reciprocate that to members of the executive board. Recruitment week allowed the participants to engage with their brothers from the same organization more authentically and with brotherhood like attributes, which proved they were more comfortable with those of the same organizations. This made me feel that the IFC executive board members wanted to maintain their hegemonic status as being *cool* or *well known*, causing them to not act the same with their peers on the executive board. Being able to observe how fraternity men interacted at the University of San Diego, made me assume that them joining an organization can become a group experience that affects their development persuaded by peers and not an individual process. A student participant had exhibited characteristics, such as being empathetic and caring towards his brothers, which aligned more with his fraternity

organization and was able to be more of his authentic self than what I have originally seen in previous semesters. Recruitment shirts displayed heteronormative traits while events from the organizations exhibited excessive behavior. Examples include a recruitment event that consisted of a car bash where students only engaged with one another to destroy a car to show who had more strength than the other; hosting sports events with no alternatives; shirts displaying women, images of alcohol brands and brands that mimicked hypermasculinity.

*Coping mechanisms.*

During meetings and men's recruitment, students became defensive with how they reacted to peer feedback and became more aggressive if their peers did not agree with what was said or done. For example, students became defensive when they began to show any type of emotion to peers in order to prove that they were masculine enough and explained why they had expressed those feelings. One participant laughed at another because he attended a feminism session, which prompted him to immediately defend himself, "Call me a bitch for going to a feminism session." Name calling, laughing when something becomes uncomfortable and questioning others, why do you ask me that? were coping mechanisms of defending their masculinity to their peers. This was very interesting to observe without intervening because I wanted to understand how students dealt with those type of situations. It was difficult to not interfere or ask them questions because I did not want my data to be skewed. These behaviors led to students not speaking up in large groups which made me assume that they were tired of defending their feminine traits without being judged by their peers.

**Reflection.** Throughout the two months of observing the various events, individual meetings and group meetings, I was able to realize how students engaged with their peers and with their advisors. It became evident that context mattered to male students and how they made

meaning of their experiences with advisors was important in order to have authentic conversations. In doing this, it made me think about how my identities, my own advising and my contributions to their events further supported or inhibited environments of hypermasculinity. This gave me a better understanding of how being a gay Latino male may have had an effect on the way students engaged with me and others in settings where that they may already felt uncomfortable. I allowed my assumptions to get in the way, and thought that maybe this explained why they were more vulnerable during individual settings; however, it didn't explain why they acted differently with peers depending on which organization they were a part of and how often they had to defend their statements in order to express their masculinity, or be viewed as being masculine by their peers. Being able to see how students reacted and behaved in multiple settings gave me a better perspective of how they interact and how often they may exhibit masculine traits that can be excessive and, in a way, unhealthy for them as they led their peers. Through this, I knew that if I were to continue my cycles, students may engage with me differently as their direct advisor and I knew how they may act when they became uncomfortable. Therefore, a modification I made was to ask a peer of mine to partner with me on my second cycle in order to engage in conversations and activities that are not led by me. This would allow me to be a participant while I continued to observe how they engage with a staff member who had minimal interactions with them as students.

### **Cycle 2: Focus Group with the IFC Executive Board**

**Action.** Cycle two consisted of a focus group that included three executive board members during their board meeting, which was on a Tuesday night at 9:00pm. Four of the executive members were not able to attend. I wanted to engage and observe more on how hypermasculinity was present within the group dynamics while I was present as their advisor. It

is important to note that certain things were not shared in this group that were often shared during my one on one advising sessions. This cycle included a PowerPoint presentation from a colleague, that had various points on masculinity and it being intersectional, along with an activity that allowed students to engage in a manner that isn't formal and gave them the space to be authentic and reflect on their experiences. The activity consisted of a word bank that had descriptive words. Students then had to write down ten words that described who they were. Following this, the list reappeared as feminine and masculine traits where students were then able to realize whether some of those words that they chose to describe themselves were feminine and did not consist of only masculine traits. Through this focus group, students were able to realize that the behaviors they sometimes exhibited were wrong and they were living up to the social norms of what is to be a man. They acknowledged that there was a clear problem with hypermasculinity and how it is affecting the work they are trying to do in seeking spaces for support. Students were able to finally realize that their behaviors and actions aligned with a term they learned. Because of this, the participants were able to work together as a team to brainstorm a program or event that would allow other men to dismantle environments that provided hypermasculinity traits and to better promote healthy authentic conversations.

**Results.** Being a participant in this focus group and taking notes was difficult for me. It was hard to engage authentically with my students because I began to understand how I may be providing a space that is not healthy for students, throughout our engagements. There were three main themes that came out of this focus group. In the next section, these themes are represented using direct quotes from students and I will explain in further detail how students engaged in conversations or why they surfaced during the focus group. These themes were central to various conversations that were held in the focus group room and furthered the research with new

findings. Instead, it supported my future cycles and how I was able to connect these themes to the previous cycle of observations.

### ***Gender Norms.***

The topics that were brought up in the focus group were intense and emotional for some students. Students expressed that their culture, race, and upbringing had a profound effect on the way they perceived and expressed hypermasculinity. Students with marginalized identities stated that their fathers had a huge influence on the way they acted and the ways they continued to act in order to prove that they are man enough to support their family. Their intersected identities played a vital role in expressing certain male characteristics, which is why they expressed them more often in all male groups who also shared similar characteristics. One student expressed, “It’s something you do with males, it’s how we bond over similar experiences and yet it has been coined as a negative aspect which explains why we struggle to be authentic.” Another male student reaffirmed the previous statement by adding, “Masculinity is built by systems and people around us, then it is told for us on how to act or behave in a certain manner that is gendered, which is affecting who we are as we grow older.” Some students also expressed that women may indirectly or directly reinforce hypermasculinity in Greek life. The reason this came about is because students expressed how women seek men who have certain characteristics that fit their standards, and therefore led men to do or change certain behaviors to fit those standards.

### ***Mental Health.***

Mental health was critical in understanding how to best support male students as they navigate college and their experiences in fraternity organizations. This theme has enabled me to understand men’s mental health and find literature to support my findings in understanding how to change future cycles. Students expressed that they have been growing more anxious and

feeling depressed because they don't fit the certain standards of being a male or may not look muscular enough as they began to develop through puberty. "I didn't want to seek out support due to it being feminine and frowned upon in my upbringing," stated a student, connecting his personal upbringing to where he is at currently.

Student statements and experiences are supported by current literature on men's mental health and its intersection with masculinity, a new emerging topic by researchers. One article stated that, "Many men make the decision not to use mental health services, as this could be perceived (by themselves and others) as "unmanly" and a sign of weakness" (Affleck, Carmichael, & Whitley, 2018, p. 585). Students perceived that seeking out mental health support is related to feminine traits, which prevented them from actually sharing their experiences or noticing symptoms of mental health because they covered it up. It ties back to the idea of gendered attitudes toward mental health and how that is significantly impacting male students because of the societal and cultural norms in place. Some of the students also stated that they are seeking validation from people in order to show their masculinity, which has affected their own well-being and anxiety. One article stated that, "Social connections can act as a buffer against the impact of stressful or negative life experiences on mental health" (McKenzie, Collings, Jenkin, & River, 2018, p. 1247). This led to the exploration of how men seek out their support systems or with whom are they most vulnerable with, which can explain their willingness to share personal experiences with me during our individual meetings. There are two types of support systems, emotional and instrumental. The latter is where males socially connect with other males, and then they engage in emotional support with other females (McKenzie et al., 2018). This can explain how males engage with other males because of the masculine traits that an instrumental support network provides, which is tangible and physical for them. Students in the

cycle expressed that they don't share personal experiences because of how it is perceived to be feminine and then have no avenue to express how masculinity has impacted their personal health. Hypermasculinity and its gender norms are creating mental health problems among male students and this is being called as a *silent crisis* (Affleck et al., 2018).

A student asked the group, "Will the pressures always be there, to be a certain man?" and went on to ask, "Am I man enough?" These two questions allowed the group to have a conversation about how systems in place are causing us, men, to change the way we behave and the way we perceive masculinity because of the pressures. It is evident that the students struggled to be vulnerable, but they were seeking to have these conversations in a place without judgement. Students voiced that this is an unlearning process to understand gender norms and hypermasculine settings when they were growing up.

#### ***Individual vs. Group experiences.***

This theme became more present as I observed the group dynamics and heard experiences from students in the focus group. Students were able to share personal experiences, and their own opinions without feeling judged, and it was present when they spoke without fear. The group dynamic was more transparent and honest with one another unlike during an executive board or council meeting. My understanding is that these students are more willing to be vulnerable and perhaps because there was another male figure who they aspire to be. One student stated, "You can't fix others or the system until you fix your internal emotions and awareness of your masculinity. Others will become impacted or affected when you start to make a difference in yourself." He was able to connect his awareness and understanding of hypermasculinity, which allowed him to be authentic and share that he has realized his own struggles. As we were passing the one-hour mark of the focus group, students were beginning to

get tired. One of the participants had put out one last question, “Why can’t it be normal to have spaces for men in fraternities to talk about their experiences and be vulnerable?” This to me was a call to action. Students are seeking support as they navigate their masculinity, especially inclusive authentic spaces that allow them to understand who they are and reflect on their fraternity experiences. As a group they were able to realize that they are partaking in this environment of a male power structure, supported by fraternity organizations that provide environments of toxicity, especially during recruitment.

**Reflection.** The opportunity to engage with students and a colleague on a sensitive topic was one that impacted my experience as an advisor and furthered my interest in understanding how I can become a better resource to students. I was able to learn more about the students I advised on a personal level and witnessed them engage in dialogue that has impacted their own lives growing up and their experiences in fraternity organizations. If students, that I directly advise, are dealing with problems that I was unaware of are sharing their personal experiences and how it has mentally impacted them, I can only imagine the countless number of students that are not seeking advice or don’t have a space to do so. This opportunity allowed students to reflect and become aware of their environments and how that has been hindering their own leadership development, which is critical for their own development in understanding who they are. It reminded me of my own experiences navigating college and my organization as a gay Latino man who didn’t understand or grasp the concept of toxic masculinity until graduate school.

I had an expectation that students would disagree with one another, or that this space would allow them to further understand what hypermasculinity is and how fraternity organizations may provide these environments. This expectation was not fully met, but it proved

to me that students are seeking to be heard and want spaces to be vulnerable and understand their own realities. It also brought a new topic that I was unaware of, which is how hypermasculinity has an impact on their own mental health. This was critical for me to understand and navigate the third cycle, which changed from my initial proposal.

### **Cycle 3: Individual Experiences**

**Action.** My planned cycle was supposed to be a focus group with students who were not on the executive board to understand their experiences as fraternity men with no leadership roles and if they expressed an interest in how hypermasculinity may be impacting their development and experiences. Due to the nature of cycles having different results, I decided to further the conversations and understand the experiences of students on the Interfraternity Council, which consisted of seven students, three of which were in the focus group, by having individual meetings and asking them a set of questions, referenced in Appendix D, which followed after the second cycle. I did this because of how powerful the focus group activity was to the students and being able to observe the excitement and continued conversations the students had after the meeting. I also reflected on what I could do better to improve these conversations as their advisor. These individual meetings were an hour long with five questions that also included how hypermasculinity has impacted their mental health, as a new emerging theme. At the meetings I noted that all themes were consistent with the literature related to hypermasculinity in fraternities and its effects on mental health. My hope through this cycle was for students to understand their role as leaders on this campus and how they can create a positive environment to continue the dialogue with their respective fraternity organizations. I also wanted to reinforce the importance of this topic to the four individuals that were not able to attend the previous focus group cycle.

Table 2 consists of definitions on hypermasculinity from the students on IFC executive board and will help understand the emerging themes that came about this cycle.

Table 2

*Student participants definitions on hypermasculinity*

**How do you define hypermasculinity?**

- “Broadcasting hypermasculine tendencies are ways I compensate for insecurities that I have; that is being manly through how I dress, speak, act, my tone of voice, and my mannerisms”
- “The feeling that men have to be something they’re not; I don’t think of hypermasculine as a definition, but more of the feelings and how in touch people are with their emotions.”
- “Acting over the top masculine, making up for what they believe masculinity should like.”
- “Loud, controlling the room, not taking into consideration of other people’s feelings, strong, muscular and insensitive.”
- “I have to do this because I am a guy.”
- “When people take their preconceived notions to an extreme matter.”

**Results.** Through this experience, there were consistent themes that were being seen throughout my action research and some themes that supported the literature that is currently present and are affecting men’s experiences in fraternities.

***Recruitment and New Member Process.***

As students expressed their definitions of hypermasculinity, they were able to name experiences and moments that met their individual definitions. Recruitment is a time period that allows fraternity organizations to gain new members in their chapter and hold various events that support their mission. Each chapter at the University of San Diego holds various events that

allow students to engage in activities and dialogue in order to provide them the opportunity to find a new home at the institution and whether they are a good fit for the organization. A student stated that, “During recruitment, most chapters show their hypermasculine side to compensate for recruiting new guys.” This allowed both active and potential members to create environments that are inauthentic and provided an outlet for chapters to look or act like something they are not. “New members try to act differently when they join, this idea to be a certain way or else they think they won’t fit in. This is my own perspective and experience because I’ve had to do certain things just to feel like I fit in my chapter,” one student stated. Another student stated that, “Older members will flex on their power and is definitely seen in my chapter and during recruitment; it’s unhealthy but it happens to get the best guys out there.” These statements and the experiences that students expressed made me realize that this is a concern of mine, and how I could work to change the way recruitment is currently laid out. It seems to be an unhealthy environment for students, and this is obviously not something that we strive for. We strive to provide inclusive spaces for students to be authentic and find their sense of belonging.

### *One’s Upbringing.*

As students began to share their experiences in their respective fraternity organizations, I followed up as to why they felt this way and if these experiences were ever influenced by their own upbringing. This theme explained why students struggled with their male identities and finding connections authentically. The same students from previous cycles expressed that their identities and the way they were raised by their parents influenced how they perceived masculinity and gender roles. It influenced the way they interacted with peers in their organizations. One participant told me that, “Being in an all-male household, I was taught how to do things and how to act without any exposure to feminine traits. My first knowledge of

masculinity was in high school during a sports game.” This became evident when he began to express his own personal stories and how he engaged with me during our individual meetings. Another participant stated that, “My Mexican background taught me about Machismo and how often my dad enforced these values – of what it means to be a man. This further enforced my values and how I perceive masculinity with my leadership.” Upbringings were a significant impact to how students perceived masculinity and how they engaged with that in spaces that made them reinforce the values they held.

*Guys are being Guys (Gender norms).*

Guys are being guys has been a constant statement during this cycle, as if it is an excuse or a norm for them to explain the behaviors they express or are experiencing in their fraternity organizations. IFC executive board members expressed various moments that these behaviors happened frequently and are normal for students when they weren’t able to understand what hypermasculinity is. One student was explaining how he saw hypermasculinity culture in his organizations but then expressed, “This is how we build relationships, and it is engrained in me about gender roles.” Another student stated that “This is an outlet for guys to be guys, it’s how we complement each other during chapter meetings and anytime we interact outside of the classroom.” These statements demonstrated that students are battling with pressures and confusion not only by their peers, but by the systems created and the influence of how they were raised. It holds them back from being their true authentic self and has pressured them to act in a certain way because it is the norm, and most are not comfortable expressing emotions to other peers.

**Reflection.** This cycle took longer than expected because it was based on the same students from previous cycles availability and being able to hold that time without other

priorities they had. However, this cycle was the most impactful for me because of how vulnerable students became, and the emotions they expressed were something I have not seen in the two years of being an advisor. Through the various meetings I was able to reflect about how students were battling with themselves internally and are seeking for someone or spaces that show they matter, that they are perfect without having to express masculine traits, and that these pressures are affecting their mental health. Students are noticing the trends and also participating in these hypermasculine environments, but they are not doing anything about it. I was able to identify that I am providing these spaces if they are able to be vulnerable with me, but I wondered how my colleagues could also provide these spaces and approach students in a manner that allows them to be themselves. Furthering the conversation allowed students to engage in critical conversations that mattered, and they were willing to be vulnerable. Topics such as mental health, hypermasculinity, privilege and marginalized identities came about from these conversations. I was able to learn more about who they were and how I could interact with them on a daily basis. I also learned that the way I present myself is authentically me, and that I should not worry about my gay identity impacting my ability to advise these students.

Something that I struggled with during this cycle, is the feeling that I wasn't doing enough to provide safe spaces for students. Thoughts came up about how students normally don't engage in these conversations, or the group dynamics are never this authentic with the executive board. I began to have conversations with our Vice President of Health and Wellness to see what we could do to create spaces or programs that allowed students to find peers who may be feeling the same way or not knowing how to navigate the fraternity experience. This was a challenging time for me to understand how I could become a better advisor and how I could

help students create a program that will allow fraternity men that allowed them to engage in dialogues in dialogues about hypermasculinity and mental health.

#### **Cycle 4: How do Fraternity and Sorority Life Staff engage with Hypermasculinity**

**Action.** In this final cycle, I gathered all staff members that directly interact or advised fraternity and sorority students, which consisted of two professional staff and four graduate assistants. It took me longer than expected to have this cycle because of winter break and the various schedules that pushed back the cycle to begin. During this time, staff members were asked similar questions as the students were, but we engaged in dialogue and conversation about how we are all noticing hypermasculinity in their day to day work with students. It consisted of an hour and half during our staff meeting, which consisted of four prompt questions. This allowed for us to engage in deep dialogue and whether our own identities and advising styles are promoting or inhibiting toxic environments. I remained as a listener so that I could understand their experiences rather than be a participant of the focus group. Table 3 includes definitions that staff had on hypermasculinity, from three women and three men.

Table 3  
*Staff participants definitions on hypermasculinity*

#### **How do you define hypermasculinity?**

- “It’s bro culture and inauthentic, objectification, not too emotional.”
- “The context of fraternity encourages students to take on hypermasculine traits even if they don’t want to; consistent competition to determine the alpha; capitalize on their strengths to be seen as a man.”
- “Very patriarchal, high acts of violence and behaviors – anything that harms them emotionally and physically.”

- “Women are challenging men when they take on roles that men normally take which causes this rift of anger.”
- “Perceptions and fraternity culture differ at every institution.”

**Results.** This cycle provided a space for staff to understand each other’s experiences and how our advising may influence students to promote hypermasculinity, which gave way to three themes from this group. The environment during the dialogue with staff was very different than the student engagement, in that staff were more willing and excited to have these conversations in order to better understand how to be better professionals. They were fully aware of group dynamics, which gave the opportunity for more authentic conversations.

***Interactions and Fears.***

This theme was more prevalent in our conversations based on our own identities and the diversity of the staff present for this focus group, which allowed for an understanding on how we each engage with our students. Engagement with students differed when it came to male and female advisors, which was interesting hearing their experiences and understanding that we approach the work differently based on how we self-identify. One female advisor had expressed that, “I am nervous being a woman to advise fraternities because I don’t have the same understandings as a male.” Building relationships are crucial in order to understand how to challenge students and in order to build rapport with them. Another staff member said, “I’m very aware and salient with my multiple identities but it is hard to have these conversations with students who are not minoritized because we have different perspectives.” Identities that we hold may hinder the way we are authentic with our students and the level of comfort we have in challenging them. This is important to understand as we model behaviors and how often advisors

and staff are willing to challenge the norms. This led to a conversation on how prepared we are to have conversations with students that challenge the norms of fraternity and sorority organizations. We must put in the work ourselves to understand our own identities and how we may be providing spaces that permit hypermasculinity. This also goes back to our assumptions of how students perceive us may influence the way we advise and interact with students.

### ***Gender Roles.***

As staff to the fraternity and sorority life office, we don't only advise men or male organizations. There are nine sorority organizations that are in our community and play a vital role in supporting various events and programs that are hosted by individual organizations. This conversation allowed to us to look at how female organizations are influencing or promoting an environment that can be toxic for our male students. During our conversations, one female advisor brought up an interesting point and questioned, "What are the women doing to influence the men to act a certain way? There's such a partnership with both councils that we should understand what this means and does to male students. Are there counterparts influencing their behaviors?" It's interesting to understand how external factors are created to support hypermasculinity and that in some way we are a microcosm of the entire society. Another advisor reiterated that, "There is a consistent competition to determine who is the alpha and who will capitalize on their strengths to be seen as a man." This reminds me that male students exhibit characteristics that may become excessive in order to prove to their peers that they are man enough. Students want to be valued and respected at the end of the day, which means that they feel they have to change their external figure and battle with an internal emotion of how to present manly. A female advisor was curious and asked the group, "Does joining a fraternity organization make them conform to the culture and norms?" This made the staff question and

reflect about how fraternity organizations are meant to be an outlet for men to find a sense of belonging, but in reality, these organizations and especially at the University of San Diego are creating environments that are inauthentic and promoting hypermasculinity.

*Context Matters.*

Staff definitions in table 3, allow this theme to emerge as something important for fraternity men and how they are willing to be themselves. One male advisor stated, “The context of fraternity encourages students to take on hypermasculine traits even if they don’t want to.” It was later reiterated by an advisor that “Fraternity recruitment events tend to be very masculine and heteronormative.” Students are self-selecting their experience and are promoting a certain type of experience for other students, which has been interesting to see at various events. Context plays a huge factor in how students portray themselves and how they interact with peers or staff. This goes back to how students are aware what they see but are not doing anything about it.

**Reflection.** After three cycles with students, I was excited to understand how staff are viewing and experiencing hypermasculinity among the students they advise or events they may be attending. I was eager to interact and share data with staff, but I took a moment to find the purpose of this focus group. I initiated the conversation by thanking them for taking time to participate in my action research and understand that we all want to better the student experience and address issues that we see problematic in our community. I stated to the group “Today’s not about building strategies and ideas, although it is important, today is about understanding and hearing what others have experienced around hypermasculinity and how that might be present in our interactions with students.” I think this allowed for everyone to understand to switch their roles as participants and not advisors looking for strategies to change the fraternity culture.

Having this cycle and hearing my peers' experiences, made me reflect on my own and how I bring myself to meetings that are involved with the Interfraternity Council. As a gay Latino man, I have always been cognizant with how I present myself and whether or not students feel uncomfortable in having a gay advisor. My own identities hinder my ability to be my authentic self and how comfortable I am in challenging the students. Through this reflection and cycle, I have enabled myself to be more transparent and aware of my identities and the ways it may influence the dynamics of the group. I state my identities more often and share my own experience of my undergraduate days in order for students to understand how I was able to learn through various issues I had, knowing they aren't alone through this process. Knowing that this is the last cycle, it is not the end of having these conversations because I realize the importance of challenging students and allow them to reflect on their actions. Students level of acknowledging external influences and actions was different than that of the staff at the beginning of the cycles, and I learned this by interacting in the two different focus groups.

### **Limitations**

This action research presented some challenges through the process and had a few limitations in its effectiveness. Two general limitations presented throughout the research and should be adapted if someone were to take on a similar topic in the future. The first limitation was that the student experiences and student participants only consisted of males in fraternity leadership positions on the Interfraternity Council board at the University of San Diego. These students did not represent all seven fraternity organizations on campus and were leaders of the entire community, not a specific chapter organization. This hindered the ability to understand the entire experience of all fraternities and it did not represent the typical member from an organization. It was also only targeted to males who were affiliated in organizations on campus

and not male students who were not a part of a fraternity, which can provide different experiences they have on campus.

The last limitation is the amount of time. Having only one semester to have four cycles and to engage in difficult conversations with students, limits the ability to continue fostering these environments after they are finishing their own term of leadership. Students were barely getting comfortable with having these conversations and then had to finish their term in December. A normal officer term is December through December, but the winter and summer breaks do not include student leaders engaging in work, as they may have other obligations. This may impact the way advisors interact or have these conversations with students in the future, and therefore should be a topic that is fostered in the community with programs.

### **Recommendations**

After final reflections and an understanding of the limitations to this action research, there are a few recommendations that I will propose in order to enhance the student experience in fraternity organizations, but as well, to create a healthy masculine environment that promotes authenticity and inclusivity. These recommendations are provided with the intention for students and staff to revisit this topic and conversations in order to change and challenge the Fraternity and Sorority Life system.

### **IFC Student Programming**

Currently our Interfraternity Council executive board is trying to create a program that will provide a space for students to engage in conversations around hypermasculinity and mental health. This idea stemmed from our VP Health and Wellness was able to notice the importance of this topic and how it has impacted the way he perceives group dynamics and masculinity. This was a direct result from the focus group, individual meetings, and external influences that made

him want to program something different for fraternity men. The previous board had envisioned that we create a program for fraternity men to engage in dialogue once a month as a space for them to voice concerns and not feel judged by their peers, however, the timing of their leadership term did not permit them to follow through. It was said that the new 2019 executive board will continue the work and hoped to create something different that fraternity men are willing to attend without having to beg students to attend. In recent months, the Vice President of Health and Wellness has been navigating how to create an event that actually gives the opportunity for students to be real with one another. I know that the council is going in the right direction, they just need an advisor that will continue to challenge them and help them navigate how to create events that promote healthy masculine environments and nothing inauthentic. *I recommend that students create a Healthy Masculinity Week*, entailing a guest speaker, open discussions, and various events that provide students to understand what it means to be a fraternity man. Another institution, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, has a similar week and it would be great to see it be implemented on the USD campus. Students can explore their identities and how they can practice healthy masculinity.

### **Fraternity and Sorority Life Staff**

As new students take on leadership roles through the Interfraternity Council and new staff become advisors to this council, the Fraternity and Sorority Life office should continue to engage in these conversations and find effective strategies that will allow them to understand their student population. Without understanding what students need, we can't support them or provide programs that will be effective in their development. Our office navigates various topics throughout the semester, and this should be something that is included in the new member experience each semester. The office should partner with the new graduate assistant for Men and

Masculinities in order to create an effective and sustainable collaboration. This will ensure that students are also creating the Healthy Masculinities Week for fraternity men. In order to address the time limitation of the officers' term, staff should be able to continue the topic as they transition and be able to navigate the various external influencers that may hinder a male's ability to be authentic in their leadership role.

### **Further Research**

There is research out there that may affirm what is happening in the Fraternity and Sorority community at the University of San Diego. However, it is important to understand our own community needs and how other campus partners or systems at this institution are promoting hypermasculine environments. Due to the nature of my action research, I believe that it is important to continue this research and invite other students that are not on the Interfraternity Council executive board, to participate. This will help our office and the institution have a better perspective about how fraternity organizations are impacting the student's development and whether external influencers are affecting that development. This requires the previous recommendations to be implemented in order to have intentional dialogues and a continued education on hypermasculinity and mental health.

### **Conclusion & Reflection**

Doing this action research has allowed me to better understand who I am, my own advising style, and how I can provide spaces that are authentic and transparent with my students. There have been many difficult conversations and moments of pride, but it was definitely rewarding to see students engage in these conversations and activities. I can finally understand that students want to do something about toxic masculinity, and they are seeking support and spaces that provide them the opportunity to be real and talk about their fraternity experiences.

There is a fear of being vulnerable as men, and they are naming that, which to me is the first step in acknowledging the root cause. This experience has allowed me to reflect on my own experiences when I was involved in my fraternity organization. I can count the many experiences I have witnessed hypermasculine activities and the toxic environment it has created for students. However, my organization was entirely different because of the institution and how frequent we were exposed to a diverse community. I struggled navigating my identities as a gay Latino man in a predominantly white organization, which meant that I had to process and interact at a different capacity. This action research gave me the ability to be prouder of my identities and how I can use my skills to work with students that are predominantly white, exposing them to conversations they may have never had. I also thought about the amount of times I have modeled some form of hypermasculinity and them replicating it, which is not healthy. I have tip-toed around this and never realized how much of an influence I can have on students and the things that I do. I may say certain things or do certain actions that mimic hypermasculinity.

I was challenged by my personal assumptions based on previous experiences and began to collect an expectation because of my observations my first year of graduate school. I had an assumption that students did not want to engage in this topic or were unaware of what hypermasculinity really meant, but in reality, they are aware of what it is and are seeking for an advisor that will guide and support them. I definitely became more emotional when I built a rapport with my students and see them become vulnerable, even when they have doubted themselves multiple times. Being their advisor may have benefited students in being more authentic and providing answers they were comfortable in sharing because of that rapport. Having the Spring semester to build a relationship and an understanding of our dynamics, students may have felt more comfortable in sharing certain things than they would with other

advisors or stakeholders. I am excited for what is to come with this community and where they will take this program and my recommendations. Getting personal and real about our experiences allowed us to identify the root issues and understand that this problem exists, and we must act now to support men who are struggling with their own gender and various identities. We should not allow societal norms to continue. We should help them change these norms in order to better the fraternity and sorority community, but also to give them spaces that will support their development while they are in college. The entire time I was doing this research, I was anxious because I thought I would hear someone complain or not understand their privilege as men, but I was able to navigate this and gain confidence about this topic. Through this, I have been able to change my leadership philosophy and the way I approach my work with students, which is to cultivate spaces that are authentic, transparent and inclusive in order to develop dedicated leaders and build that foundation of trust in order to challenge them. This has been a self-reflecting journey and enabled me to better understand the fraternity community and the need to continue to challenge them. I am excited to continue this work in a different capacity as I navigate the job search in Fraternity and Sorority Life.

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## Appendix A

**Consent Form for Fraternity Executive Board**

<b>Study Title:</b> The Impact of Hypermasculinity on Students' Development in Fraternal Orgs		
<b>Researcher:</b> Cristian McGough	<b>Email:</b> cmcgough@sandiego.edu	<b>Phone:</b> 619-490-3152
<b>Faculty Advisor:</b> Cheryl Getz	<b>Email:</b> cgetz@sandiego.edu	<b>Phone:</b> 619-260-4289

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how hypermasculinity may have an impact on students' development in fraternity organizations. I am asking you to take part because you identify as a fraternity member at the University of San Diego. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this research is to explore the concept of hypermasculinity in fraternal organizations and how that may affect students' personal development during their collegiate years. This study will engage with students on how they conceptualize healthy masculinity through qualitative and quantitative methods. This is intended to improve my practice with promoting positive dialogue around masculinity with the fraternity community at the University of San Diego.

**What will I do?**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be observed through our individual, executive board, and council meetings, while being asked about your perceptions of masculinity in fraternity settings. Observations will include body language, comments, and how different settings may affect the way you present yourself. After a few weeks of observations, you and 6 other fraternity students will be in a focus group. The focus group will consist of a group activity and dialogue to engage in the work that you as student leaders are doing and how we can form a culture of inclusive masculinity.

**Study time:** The total study participation will take approximately 5 hours of the Fall semester.

**Study location:** All study procedures will take place in the Student Life Pavilion 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floor.

**What are the possible benefits for me or others?**

You are not likely to have any direct benefit from being in this research study. This study is designed to learn more about hypermasculinity in fraternity settings. The study results may be used to help you or others in the future and you might learn new things that will benefit the fraternity community.

**Possible risks:**

- Some questions or activities may be very personal or upsetting, you can skip any question or part of the activity if you do not want to answer.
- Others in the focus group may share your responses to individuals. We ask all participants to keep everything said during the focus group confidential. However, we

cannot control what others say, so it is best not to share anything you don't want others to know.

**Your answers will be confidential.** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I make public I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. I will be audio-recording this study to make sure that I remember accurately all the information provided. I will keep these recordings secured and they will only be used to help inform my study throughout the academic year. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I will take notes instead. I may quote your remarks in presentations or research paper resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name

### **What are my rights as a research participant?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to participate in this study, please feel free not to. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. You may withdraw from this study at any time, and you will not be penalized in any way for deciding to stop participation. Withdrawing from this study will not impact your position as a fraternity member or your position on the executive board. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the researchers will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used for this study.

### **Who can I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this research study?**

If you have any questions or concerns, you are free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you may contact the research, Cristian McGough, via email ([cmcgough@sandiego.edu](mailto:cmcgough@sandiego.edu)).

### **Consent**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form.

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

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Name of Researcher obtaining consent (Print)

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Signature of Researcher obtaining consent

Date

## Appendix B

**Consent Form for Professional Staff**

<b>Study Title:</b> The Impact of Hypermasculinity on Students' Development in Fraternal Orgs		
<b>Researcher:</b> Cristian McGough	<b>Email:</b> cmcgough@sandiego.edu	<b>Phone:</b> 619-490-3152
<b>Faculty Advisor:</b> Cheryl Getz	<b>Email:</b> cgetz@sandiego.edu	<b>Phone:</b> 619-260-4289

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how hypermasculinity may have an impact on students' development in fraternity organizations. I am asking you to take part because you identify as a professional staff at the University of San Diego that works closely with fraternity members. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this research is to explore the concept of hypermasculinity in fraternal organizations and how that may affect students' personal development during their collegiate years. This study will engage with students on how they conceptualize healthy masculinity through qualitative and quantitative methods. This is intended to improve my practice with promoting positive dialogue around masculinity with the fraternity community at the University of San Diego.

**What will I do?**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked a few questions during an interview and throughout the study to inform me of your experience as a professional staff with fraternity members.

**Study time:** The total study participation will take approximately 5 hours of the Fall semester.

**Study location:** All study procedures will take place in the Student Life Pavilion 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floor.

**What are the possible benefits for me or others?**

You are not likely to have any direct benefit from being in this research study. This study is designed to learn more about hypermasculinity in fraternity settings. The study results may be used to help you or others in the future and you might learn new things that will benefit the fraternity community.

**Possible risks:**

- Some questions or activities may be very personal or upsetting, you can skip any question or part of the activity if you do not want to answer.

**Your answers will be confidential.** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. I will be audio-recording this study to make sure that I remember accurately all the information provided. I will keep these tapes secured and they will only be used to help inform my study throughout the academic year. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I will take notes

instead. I may quote your remarks in presentations or research paper resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name

**What are my rights as a research participant?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to participate in this study, please feel free not to. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. You may withdraw from this study at any time, and you will not be penalized in any way for deciding to stop participation. Withdrawing from this study will not impact your position as an employee at the University of San Diego. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the researchers will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used for this study.

**Who can I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this research study?**

If you have any questions or concerns, you are free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you may contact the research, Cristian McGough, via email ([cmcgough@sandiego.edu](mailto:cmcgough@sandiego.edu)).

**Consent**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form.

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

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Name of Researcher obtaining consent (Print)

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Signature of Researcher obtaining consent

Date

## Appendix C

**Focus Group Activity Script**

Hello everyone, for those that do not know me, my name is Cristian McGough. I am the graduate assistant for the IFC here at the University of San Diego. I want to thank you for coming today and taking time out of your day to participate in this study.

We mentioned this before but just to remind you, this session is being audio-recorded. I will be using these only to help remind me of what was said today. Your names and identities will not be used for the study, only pseudonyms will be used. Does anyone have any questions or concerns?

**Ground Rules:**

Let me give you a few quick expectations for the group. First, everyone's opinion is valued and it's okay to disagree with each other or with me. I am interested in hearing about all points of view and want this to be an open experience. If at any time during the session you need to step outside, please do so.

**Introduction (Purpose):**

The primary reason we are here today is to engage in dialogue about masculinity and how that may or may not affect your daily activity being in a fraternity. Throughout tonight, you will be asked to engage in dialogue of your perceptions and thoughts, along with a short activity on description words.

Before we begin, can anyone explain what hypermasculinity means? What are your thoughts or perceptions of hypermasculinity or experiences? (Each person speaks)

**Debrief:**

- How did the activity make you feel?
- What did the activity make you think about?
- How does this activity allow you to understand hypermasculinity?
- Do you see or experience hypermasculinity in the fraternity community? If so, how do you think you can address the problem?
- Do you think you have hypermasculine traits within your role as a fraternity member?
- How do you think we can address hypermasculinity in the fraternity community? (Follow up with folks)

**Wrap-up:**

Are there any areas we did not talk about that you think are important for us to know?

Do you have any questions about this group or why we held it? Any comments you'd like to make?

**Thank you**

Thank you for coming. We learned a lot today and it was a pleasure talking with all of you. Thank you for sharing your thoughts.

## Appendix D

**Individual Student Meeting Questions**

Hey (student name), thank you for taking the time to attend the previous focus group activity during our executive board meeting. I want to spend some time today to further that conversation and ask questions that may support you to understand what hypermasculinity really is and how we can try to address this moving forward.

I mentioned this before but just to remind you, this session is being audio-recorded. I will be using these only to help remind me of what was said today. Your name and identity will not be used for the study, only pseudonyms will be used. Do you have any questions or concerns?

Questions:

- How do you define hypermasculinity?
- Based on your definition, have you seen or experience this in your fraternity or the community?
- How has this affected your personal or leadership development?
- Has your upbringing impacted your own perceptions of masculinity?
- How do you think hypermasculinity connects with men's mental health?
- What do you think would happen if this topic is not addressed in the community?
- Do you have any final thoughts or concerns?

**Thank you**

Thank you for providing insightful and personal experiences. Hopefully this has allowed you to reflect or understand more about this topic.

## Appendix E

**Professional Staff Interview Questions**

Hello, my name is Cristian McGough. I am the graduate assistant for the IFC here at the University of San Diego. I want to thank you for coming today and taking time out of your day to participate in this study.

I mentioned this before but just to remind you, this session is being audio-recorded. I will be using these only to help remind me of what was said today. Your name and identity will not be used for the study, only pseudonyms will be used. Does anyone have any questions or concerns?

**Questions:**

- How do you as a staff member define hypermasculinity?
- With your own definition that you provided; do you get a sense that there is a hypermasculine culture in the fraternity community? If so, can you describe the culture or observations you have made?
- How have your interactions with fraternity members impacted your role as a professional?
- What feelings or thoughts came about from your interaction with fraternity members?
- Do you think that your identities have influenced the way you interact with students?

**Wrap-up:**

Are there any areas we did not talk about that you think are important for myself to know?

Do you have any questions about this group or why we held it? Any comments you'd like to make?

**Thank you**

Thank you for coming today and thank you for sharing your thoughts.