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Are men's centers essential for college campuses?

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Currently, more women than men attend college and that isn't expected to change any time soon: According to the National Center for Education Statistics, female enrollment is expected to increase by 16% from 2011 to 2021 while male enrollment is only projected to increase by around 7%.

Miles Groth, a psychology professor at Wagner College, spoke on Sept. 27 at the University of Toronto on the need for men's centers at colleges in Canada. He feels men's centers are needed to help male students feel welcome in the face of changing college demographics. He thinks U.S. colleges should be addressing the same issue.

There are those who even feel that colleges now discriminate against males.

"I often ask students to write about their experience of overt and covert gender discrimination against males in academic environments, and they routinely describe instances of public humiliation and systemic indifference," writes Dennis Gouws, an English professor at Springfield College, in an e-mail.

In an interview with Metro News Canada on Sept. 26, Groth said freshmen date-rape seminars are partially why men do not feel welcome on campus.

"The freshman seminars on date-rape are far in excess of the actual occurrence of date rape," writes Groth in an e-mail.

According to government statistics, 19% of undergraduate women experienced attempted or completed sexual assault since starting college, and 3% of college males reported surviving rape or attempted rape in childhood or as an adult.

Jonathan Hanks, a senior at Springfield College and secretary of the men's center there, felt his freshmen orientation sexual assault awareness program discriminated against men.

"One of the focal points of the discussion was the stigma that males carry to be a potential sexual predator and it's just a pretty bad generalization. In my eye, I see it as unfair," Hanks says.

Other students and experts argue such programs are necessary to curb sexual assault occurrences on campus.

"Try being someone who feels trapped inside their own body after being violated. That's isolation. It's not isolation to be a man in a discussion about date rape," says Sofie Karasek, a junior at the University of California at Berkeley.

Jackson Katz, a pro-feminist male filmmaker and author, agrees men can be held accountable for sexual assault in a way that is not anti-male.

"It's just like racism. It's like, are white people guilty of being white? No, but they ... have a responsibility to work to end those unfair advantages," Katz says.

Difficulties fitting in with other male students may also make men feel uncomfortable on campus.

Some men reported feeling pressure to conform to stereotypes of masculinity on campus. “If an individual does or likes something that is considered unmanly for whatever reason, it is hard to embrace it for fear of losing that connection to a group,” writes Cameron Michelsen, a senior at Gustavus Adolphus College and co-president of M-Pact, a men’s mentoring program there, in an e-mail.

Distress over fulfilling gender norms can lead to depression and anxiety for college men, according to data analyzed by the American Association of Suicidology. Men between the ages of 20 and 24 were four times more likely than women to commit suicide.

Yet there is debate whether men’s centers are the right way to address suicide and other issues facing college men.

“Men’s centers are so important, because they invite men to come together and break down the barriers of isolation,” writes Jonathan Taylor, founder of A Voice for Male Students, in an e-mail.

However, Lisa Maatz, vice president of government relations at the American Association of University Women disagrees.

“People supporting this idea think that women’s advances must have come at the expense of men, that they have lost out because women have made advances and the reality is that’s not the case.”