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Fall 2009 Edition

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Low SES White Males and College Participation and Success
(Excerpt from dissertation titled, Factors Affecting Low SES White Males Persistence to Graduation)

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The current literature contends that specifically among low socioeconomic status (SES) students, whites graduate at higher rates than racial/ethnic minority students (Haycock, 2006), women represent the majority of low SES graduates (King, 2006), and those from high SES backgrounds are the largest share of the national white male graduating cohort (Sax, 2008). Rarely, however, are SES, race, and gender analyzed simultaneously in this body of research, especially as it concerns the persistence to graduation trends of low SES White males. Despite this oversight, King (2006) notes that low SES males of all racial demographics face significant challenges in their efforts to graduate. Consequently, national data reveal a strong relationship between White males' SES and college success. Based on simple cross-tabs using BPS: 96/01 data, 40.6 percent of low SES White males will leave school without a degree never to return. While this percentage is slightly lower than their Black (47.3) and Latino (45.2) low SES male peers, it is nearly twice the percentage of low SES Asian males (22.3) and nearly tripled that of their high SES White male counterparts (66).

Several scholars have qualitatively surveyed and examined the educational experiences of low SES White males (Archer, Pratt, & Phillips 2001; Freie, 2007; MacLeod, 2009; Quinn et al., 2006; Weis, 1990; 2004; Willis, 1977). Though typically based on the experiences of urban men and men from the United Kingdom (UK), this research does share consistent themes with studies of rural low SES men and studies of American low SES White males (Whiting, 1999). The themes consistent across studies of low SES White males and schooling include school as a site of lowered expectations, overtly policed behavior, curriculum tracking, and

persistent disengagement. Though Morris (2005) notes that Whiteness is generally privileged in secondary and postsecondary education, when coupled with low SES, White teachers, specifically, tend to view these low SES Whites as particularly unexceptional, even aberrant and backwards. Based on the research on low SES White men and schooling, low SES White males' experience in education follows a rather predictable pattern of marginalization, resistance, and failure.

In the only study specifically dedicated to low SES males and their attitudes towards postsecondary education participation, Archer et al. (2002) use discussion group data from 64 males from working-class and ethnically diverse backgrounds to examine how definitions of masculinity lead to self exclusion from postsecondary education. Using data from the University of North London's Social Class and Widening Participation in Higher Education Project, Archer et al. (2001) conducted multiple focus groups organized around student decisions about their education and their constructions of participation or non-participation in higher education. Participants were from North and East London and ranged in ages 16 to 30, and were equally represented across race/ethnicity. Researchers found that the non participation of low SES White males in postsecondary education is a direct result of the males' perceived incompatibility of schooling and notions of working-class masculinity. Based on their extensive work with young low SES White males, these researchers consistently found that low SES White men conceptualized college attendance as a largely middle-class and anti-masculine endeavor. Within this framework, low SES masculinity is marked by physical prowess, endurance, and mechanical expertise, traits constructed in direct opposition to managerial masculinities that are deemed soft and effeminate (Leach, 1993; Pyke 1996; Willis, 1977). Coupled with the traditional expectation of men as providers for the domestic household, work, specifically physical labor, and masculinity become fused (Leach, 1993). Consequently, it is here that education,

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especially postsecondary education, is inextricably linked with the masculinity of middle- and upper-class males.

In addition, the males in Archer et al.'s (2001) study appear to lack any role models from similar class origins who were successful in higher education, and this lack of success among their social class contemporaries appears to have leveled the aspirations of the low SES men in the study. Furthermore, they found that low SES White males perceived higher education as too difficult and with little to no guarantees for success. This finding is also consistent with MacLeod's (2009) work with low SES White males. The males in Archer et al.'s research note that participation in higher education was a frightening proposition given risk of loans and other related debt, and that early entry into manual labor provided immediate money. Lastly, while not all participants in the study had entirely ruled out enrolling in college, many simply felt that as a result of their social class circumstance non participation was a choice that had been made for them.

Overall, upon realizing that they are not well positioned to assume one of the limited spaces in the social, economic, and political class hierarchy, low SES males--rather than trying and potentially failing in their schooling--choose to either not engage or set their expectations for success much lower (Clayton, Hewitt, Gaffney, 2004; MacLeod, 2009). The status inconsistency experienced by low SES males and the sense of emasculation that accompanies school failure results in a rejection of the contemporary US achievement ideology and adherence to an alternate success criterion (Clayton, Hewitt, Gaffney). Despite the privilege often afforded them as a result of their Whiteness and gender, low SES males perceive a sense of powerlessness within the context of school and seek out other ways to assert their masculinity (Barker, 2005). Thus, not only are low SES males structurally marginalized as a result of low expectations and curriculum tracking, but they also construct versions of masculinity that "may prevent them from perceiving participation [in school] as a 'manly' option" (Archer, et al., 2001, p. 434). As noted, low SES White males have traditionally used manual or "blue-collar"

labor as a site to negotiate and perform a unique version of masculinity centered on physical ability and in direct opposition to education (Connell, 1989; Willis, 1977).

It appears that this opposition to school is very much a social group sentiment, as low SES males as a collective may serve as negative influences on one another in persisting to graduation. In their ethnographic study of Black teens at a racially diverse, yet divided, affluent California high school, Ogbu and Davis (2003) sought to understand the barriers to academic achievement and engagement faced by these students. One barrier that the authors detail is the degree to which peer influence undermines academic engagement. In line with Bourdieu's (1987) conceptualization of social capital and peer influence, Ogbu and Davis note that many of the Black teens abandoned or slacked in their academic efforts because they wanted to avoid teasing and accusations that they had abandoned their race. In the same way that Ogbu and Davis' students reported immense pressure to not appear smart to their friends as to avoid being accused of "acting White," both Willis (1997) and MacLeod (2009) note that the low SES White males in their study also resorted to such disengagement as to avoid a similar ostracism based on their class.

Gibson (2005), in her replication and critique of Ogbu and Davis' work, found that these negative peer influences were most prominent in a particular group of underachieving males. This is similar to Harris (2006) and Edwards' (2007) work on masculine identity formation and the role that masculine gender role expectations play in academic aspirations. Harris and Edwards each found that the males in their studies were reluctant to reveal their academic talents and success to male peers for fear that they would be denigrated for their intellectual efforts. Leach (2003) states that this form of masculine solidarity is used by low SES males as a means of coping with the limited prospects they have in the labor hierarchy. Specifically, among low SES males this deference to male peers may be employed as a defense mechanism to garner male peer acceptance and support when they perceive that they have little hope of social mobility and when school has little to offer them

in way of affirming their masculinity (Barker, 2005).

In summary, for low SES White males, entering the labor force stands as a masculine rite of passage, a masculinity marked by provision, caretaking, and production (Leach, 1993). It is in their labor, despite their often low status as hourly wage earners, that low SES males derive their unique sense of masculinity apart from the marginalization of the larger society and the organizational context of school. However, as the US continues its shift to a knowledge- and technology-based economy, marked by rapid deindustrialization and labor union dissolution, education beyond high school will be required to maintain the most basic standard of living (Fine, Weis, Addeleston, & Hall, 1997; Freie, 2007; Weis, 1990; 2004). Overall, what the current research on low SES White males share in common is a basic belief that due to their economic marginalization, low SES White males employ a hyper-masculinized and labor focused sense of self to combat the emasculation they feel in not attaining the power and privilege, both inside and outside school, they feel should be afforded them as White and male. I suggest that despite their privileged status as White and male, their low SES background greatly influences their underrepresentation among postsecondary enrollees and graduates. Consequently, without a postsecondary education in the changing labor market, masculinity as constructed and performed through manual labor may fail to be a viable and sustaining option for low SES White males in the years to come.

Despite the merits of the literature reviewed above, little to no research has been dedicated to examining student success across SES, race, and gender concurrently and more specifically, the factors affecting low SES White males' persistence to graduation. While SES, race, and gender all appear to play a significant, and as theorized here, overlapping, influence on persistence to graduation, it is evident that more research is warranted. Moreover, as research (Freie, 2007; MacLeod, 2009; Weis, 2004) and national data reveal, regardless of race and gender, SES plays an essential role in determining postsecondary success. While race and gender are acknowledged in my dissertation

as having mitigating and perpetuating influence on persistence to graduation when intersecting with SES, little research has been conducted on the complex relationship of these varied identities and their collective influence on student success in college. This is especially true for low SES White males, whose privileges of race and gender are implicitly thought of as having a positive overriding influence on their postsecondary success, above and beyond their SES.

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Masculinity at the Intersections: An Exploration of Hegemony, Oppression, Performance, and Self-Authorship

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Much of the scholarship devoted to college-aged men explores the influence of society on masculinity. For example, gender role conflict, a cornerstone concept in this literature, describes how men are socialized into restrictive roles, often prescribing one narrow way to be a man (Pollack, 1998; O'Neil, 1990). Congruently, socially prescribed masculinity has been depicted as a "mask" which illustrates how men hide their true selves in order to live up to society's expectations (Pollack, 1998; Edwards & Jones, 2009). Research has also described how men's fear of femininity is a central to the social construction of men's identity, and how student affairs professionals can use this knowledge to foster men's development and the development of social justice attitudes (Davis, 2002; Davis & Wagner, 2005).

Studying men and masculinities fits within a larger umbrella of identity development research. Identity development has received significant attention in recent Student Affairs literature. This scholarship paints a picture of a fluid, multidimensional process that respects the complex interaction of social context and internal processes (Jones & McKwen, 2000; Weber, 2005). This research also asserts that individual identity dimensions must be understood in conjunction with one another, not as disjointed entities. For example, in their study of 10 college women, Jones and McEwen write "for all the participants, gender was an identity dimension to which they all related. However, the description of what being female meant to them was quickly connected with other dimensions (e.g. Jewish woman, Black woman, lesbian, Indian woman)" (p. 410). Other literature has explored a continuum of self-authorship that describes a journey toward understanding knowledge as uncertain, developing the ability to analyze and interpret

information in light of context, and making decisions based on this analysis in conjunction with internalized values (Kegan 1982, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001).

The Cutting Edge

Because much of the literature on college men focuses on the impact and influence of society on men, it appears natural to explore the space between the individual and society, especially in light of the meaning making style of self authorship. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) added a filter to the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, which represents how individuals making meaning of contextual influences. In this reconceptualized model, the greater an individual's cognitive complexity, the more sophisticated the cognitive filter, and vice versa. This model is helpful in conceptualizing the internalization of socialized or otherwise contextual influences. However, there are relatively few studies that explore the reciprocal negotiation of the internal and external influences of identity related to performance.

Recently, Jones (2009) published an article that begins to illuminate this phenomenon. Jones' participants noted a distinction between a more *internally* driven process of "identity negotiation" and a more *externally* driven process of "managing the perceptions of others" (p. 298). Individuals engaging in an "inside out" process of constructing who they are based on experiences and analysis of context are engaging in a process of identity negotiation. Individuals engaging in a more "outside in" process of analyzing perceived perceptions of others and determining how they will present themselves based on that analysis are engaging in a managing perceptions process. One of Jones' participants said: "I don't know if my identity necessarily changes depending on where I am but the person I present or chose to present may shift" (p. 299). This quote highlights the complex relationship between negotiating identity and managing the perceptions of others. An individual may have gone through extensive identity negotiation, yet may present (or

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perform) themselves based on perceptions of the context. The context may, for example, shift identity salience and/or behavior based on experiences of privilege and/or oppression. Jones found differences in how individuals with privileged identity dimensions (e.g. White) and individuals with targeted identity dimensions experienced these processes. Jones writes:

Individuals from more privileged identities (e.g. White) are able to more closely connect to the internal process of negotiating their social identities and sense of self, where as participants of color were expressing the need to manage the perceptions of others – presumably because of how they are treated by others and the realities of the external contexts they must negotiate (p. 299).

This finding further advances our understanding of how privilege and oppression impact how individuals develop and perform identity (i.e. negotiate identity with context).

In light of the reality of identity performance, it is reasonable to question current conceptualizations of self-authorship. Kegan (1982, 1994) and Baxter Magolda (1992, 2001, Baxter Magolda & King, 2004, 2007) have done significant work exploring the concept of self-authorship. Kegan (1994) defines a self-authoring individual as one who operates under the assumption that knowledge is uncertain and has the ability to analyze and interpret information in light of context. Self-authored individuals, therefore, can make determinations based on this analysis and internally constructed values and beliefs. Baxter Magolda (2001, Baxter Magolda & King, 2004, 2007) has utilized this concept to promote understanding of how college students make meaning and become self-authored. The research has gained utility for promoting learning in higher education. However, if performance demands in the environment, particularly those related to targeted dimensions of identity, influence one's ability to self-author, what does that mean for identity theory and student affairs practice? Baxter Magolda and King (2007) write:

Self authored personas have the ability to explore and reflect on, and internally choose enduring values to form their identities rather than doing so by simply assimilating expectations of others (Kegan, 1994). They

use the internal identity to interpret and guide their experiences and actions. This internal identity that is not overly dependent on others is a crucial aspect of standing up for one's beliefs (an aspect of cognitive maturity) (p. 492).

Jones' (2009) findings and the preliminary findings of our study challenge any conceptualization of self-authorship that does not account for identity performance based on privileged and targeted dimensions which are always contextually situated. Jones argues that individuals of marginalized (i.e. targeted) identities may be forced to negotiate their internal identity based on the context. She wrote: "the identity (re)construction process involved both internal foundation and external formulas, and the powerful influence changing contexts determined what it meant to be 'true to [our]selves'" (p.301). This statement suggests that individuals should not be seen as more or less cognitively mature or self-authored independent of reading a person's behavior in context; rather, the identity processes and self-authorship needs to be seen as continually being reconstructed. What it means to be true to ones' self is therefore relative and may be easily misjudged.

Concurring Findings

Preliminary results from an ongoing qualitative inquiry of a similar topic involving men of targeted identity dimensions yield concurrent findings to those of Jones' (2009) study. Specifically, initial analysis expands upon Jones' perception management concept. Preliminary themes that appear to be congruent with the perception management concept include *The Chameleon* and *Pressure to Break Stereotypes*.

The Chameleon

We found that the participants in our study had to navigate context and negotiate their performance accordingly in order to avoid paying the penalties of oppression. Part of this negotiation, at times, included engaging in activities in which they were not interested or did not enjoy. For example, one participant, Tom, who identifies as African American said: "I feel like I can get along with anybody because

it's like [I'm] a chameleon. I can easily, I don't like being in uncomfortable situations so that means that I have to be interested in something I'm not necessarily interested by nature to make someone feel comfortable" (Davis & Klobassa, 2009). The use of a chameleon as a metaphor for this concept is very fitting. A chameleon will shift its color in order to blend in with its environment. This can serve as a defense mechanism for chameleons to avoid predators. In much the same fashion, individuals of targeted identities find themselves in situations where they are required to negotiate their identity based on the context in order to avoid paying the penalties of oppression. The point of avoiding the penalties was expressed by Tom as he continued, saying "I'm trying to get them to see past that I'm Black. You know, I want them to see that I'm just [me]. I am an African American, but I automatically avoid anything that I can do that would cause me to segregate myself from them" (Davis & Klobassa, 2009). This quote emphasizes what Tom's ideal situation would be, others seeing him for who he is, as well as his reality – that he must negotiate his identity and performance in order to avoid "segregating" himself from others.

Another participant, Michael, who identifies as gay, said: "I guess it could be as simple as watching a sports game with a bunch of guys, and like, I'm not really into sports, but I would rather not be singled out as – you're the only guy not watching the sports game" (Davis & Klobassa, 2009). Both Tom and Michael found themselves in situations that required them to engage in activities that were of no interest to them in order to avoid paying the penalties of oppression, which, in these cases, were the awkwardness of discomfort and being singled out as a non-participant. While we do not know the specific context to which Tom was referring, Michael's situation is a product of hegemonic masculinity. The pressure to conform in this situation comes from the hegemonic assumption that in order to be a man, one must be interested in sports. In order to live up to this standard, we see Michael negotiating his performance by watching the sports game, thus avoiding the penalty of being singled out and possibly seen as less masculine.

Pressure to Break Stereotypes

Preliminary results from this qualitative inquiry found that participants were reading perceptions of others and negotiating their performance in order to disprove stereotypes. Tom spoke to this in a discussion about his experience on a primarily White residence hall floor: "I was like their first Black friend... their perception of Blackness was typical hip hop, do rag, you know I speak like this son... what's up... why do you go, you know that type of thing. So they thought, you know, that that's Black identity, which I had to break that stereotype." This quote illustrates the perception management concept, as well as the effect oppression has on the process. In this case, Tom reads a perception of a stereotypical understanding of what it means to be Black in this context and proceeds to engage in a perception management process by taking on the obligation of disproving this stereotype. Similarly, in Michael's discussion of watching sports games in order to avoid having his masculinity be questioned, he continued by saying: "I don't know, so I'm kind of proving that stereotype wrong. In an ideal situation it would be a big deal if I was not [into sports]." This part of Michael's discussion indicates a second motive for watching sports – disproving stereotypes. During the perception management process, Michael is not only negotiating his context in order to avoid negative perceptions for not being into sports, but he also feels added pressure to watch sports in order to disprove stereotypes.

Discussion

Examining data from this ongoing qualitative inquiry in conjunction with Jones' (2009) recent article further illuminates a story where hegemony, oppression, performance, and self-authorship are at the center. Jones' article reiterated the important influence that society and context plays in identity construction and reconstruction. The voices of Tom and Michael in our study tell a story of the powerful influence of hegemonic masculinity. A seemingly simple task of "staying true to one's self" becomes exponentially more complex when the societal norm, the standard by which one is perceived, judged, and in which one is required to operate, is so contradictory to the internal sense of self.

It became apparent that Tom and Michael are constantly confronted with situations where they must negotiate their identities with the context based on a process of perception management. This process appears to be important because they seem to be continually confronting the reinforced barriers of hegemonic masculinity – the unreasonable and unhealthy standards our society sets for manhood. To combat these barriers, Tom and Michael found themselves trying to disprove stereotypes, and in the process, engaging in performances of their identities that are not “true” to who they are – and in ways that call into question our ability to clearly witness self-authorship. This begs the question – does our current understanding of the self-authoring process speak to the experiences of *all* our students?

Further exploration of the self-authoring process and the space between the individual and society is necessary. More specific to men and masculinities, research is needed that explores masculinity at the intersections of identity dimensions. How does hegemonic masculinity affect the self-authoring process? Would research on men of privilege be consistent with Jones’ findings; would identity negotiation come more naturally or would findings indicate that hegemonic masculinity impedes this process? How can we more effectively begin to break the cycle of hegemonic masculinity that keeps self-authorship at bay in favor of adhering to externally driven demands? Understanding the answers to these questions could lead to developmental strategies that help students become critical consumers of the messages they receive and ultimately to healthier conceptions of self.

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Men in Elite, Undergraduate Scholars Programs Distinct from Peer Women in Stress Management, Self Assessment and Goal Setting

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Overview

A large gap in both literature and practice exists in understanding and supporting both college men and women at the high end of the performance scale, particularly those who are members of the growing number of competitive, highly selective undergraduate scholars and scholarships programs. The differentiation of experiences, actions, and behaviors of typical college men and women is well studied.

Belenky, Clinchy, Golberger, and Tarule (1986) and Baxter Magolda (1992) provided insight into the differing cognitive development of male and female college students. These, and other studies, described the “average” college student, leaving less understanding at those students at the upper end of academic achievement. To augment the current literature and fill the void, the Undergraduate Scholars Program Administrators Association (USPAA) conducted a research study in spring 2009 to better understand the unique characteristics of undergraduate scholars population. Several significant results emerged that distinguish men from women in these programs and suggest that men feel stress and pressure at higher levels than women, yet do not exhibit the same resultant emotional responses to stress.

Method

The study was administered via an online survey tool in January 2009 and consisted of 114 items. The 688 participants who completed the survey were members of 11 scholarships programs from nine medium to large institutions (three private, six public) across the United States. Subjects can be considered the top students at their institutions, having completed a rigorous and

competitive application, interview and selection process. Subjects also present a high level of quantitative academic accomplishment. For example, one program’s students average an SAT of 1500 and ACT of 34 over a 10-year period, with all members ranking in the top 1% of their high school graduating classes. Most of these scholarship students are also members of their school’s honors program or honors college.

The survey queried the amount of challenge, stress, and support experienced by students; the students’ satisfaction with college; their engagement in and out of the classroom; and their perceived similarity to other students and other scholars based on social, academic, and leadership criteria.

Results

Of the 688 participants, 58.7% were women, slightly higher than the 57.2% females who comprise general college enrollment, as reported in the 2009-2010 Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac. Compared to the general college enrollment, the current sample has fewer African American and Hispanic responses and more White, Asian American, and multi-racial respondents (see Table 1).

While Protestant (35.9%), Catholic (13.4%) and “other Christian” (13.4%) made up the most frequent religious preferences, a quarter (25%) of the participants identified as “non-religious”. Politically, twice as many scholars described themselves as more left of center than right, with 53% identifying as “very liberal, liberal, or somewhat liberal,” and 24.5% as “very conservative, conservative, or somewhat conservative.” Men, however, identified as conservative at a statistically significantly higher rate than women (27% versus 22%).

The findings of this study present gender-specific differences among academically high-performing students, particularly in regards to stress and support, religious engagement, and life management and goals. As differences between sexes are discussed, mean ratings by sex along with the response scale for that item

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are provided in parentheses.

Discussion

Experiencing and Managing Pressures

Being a scholarship student means being a member of a high profile organization and receiving significant financial awards. This study investigated how scholars experience and manage stress. The results painted a significant divide between men and women.

While men reported feeling pressure from parents to succeed at a statistically significantly higher level than women (men=3.21, women=2.95 out of 5), women were more likely than men to feel overwhelmed, depressed or like quitting school (see Table 2). The study data supported similar findings of Dyson and Renk (2006) in that women were also more likely than men to meet with a professional (such as a counselor or therapist) or non-professional (such as an academic advisor or club advisor) to discuss personal concerns. Interestingly, men and women do not differ on the amount of pressure created for themselves, which is considerable, with both groups rating their amount of self-induced pressure very high on the scale (men=4.47, women=4.53 out of 5).

While both men and women in scholarship programs create a large amount of pressure to succeed, they differ in how their family backgrounds and support networks impact their college progress. As in Dyson and Renk (2006), Sorokou and Weissbrod (2006), and Trice (2002), women in the present study reported a significantly higher number of parental contacts (via phone calls, emails, texts, instant messages) during a typical week than men. Whether initiated by the student or a parent, women reported between 4 and 6 contacts per week, compared to 1 to 3 for men. In this regard, female scholars (who report greater frequency of feeling overwhelmed, depressed or like quitting school) may be relying on parents for support to a greater degree than men. Women may also be receiving social support from religious networks. Women rated their religious beliefs as significantly more important to them than did men (women=2.69, men=2.46 out of 4) and also described greater religious participation than men (women=2.61, men=2.41 out of 4). In addition, women report a significantly higher

level of participation in community service activities compared to men (women=3.12, men=2.98 out of 4). The combination of increased contact with parents along with increased involvement in religious life suggests women seek and receive social support to a greater degree than men in scholarship programs. These findings support Sorokou and Weissbrod's (2006) conclusion that women received more need-based and non-need-based interactions with their parents than did male participants.

The educational background of the scholars' parents had significant interactions with several student characteristics. First, as a father's educational attainment increased, so too did both men and women's feelings of pressure to succeed. Also, the more educated the father, the more likely students reported feeling like their college choice was not "good enough." However, as a mother's education attainment increased, the idea that "success is more important than the experience" decreased for both men and women. Also, a mother's increased education makes it less likely for both men and women to feel like quitting school at any point in a semester. These findings suggest that high-performing undergraduate scholars have distinct impressions of expectations (spoken or unspoken) from their parents. A highly educated father seems to put more competitive pressure on the student while a highly educated mother seems to foster greater emphasis on the experience than performance. These findings are consistent with Baxter Magolda's (1992) assertion that male students showed a propensity toward individualized thought, achievement and goal attainment, whereas female performance patterns trended toward the gathering and valuing of other's ideas and perspectives.

Life Management and Goals

The final section of the results highlights significant differences in how men and women in these programs characterize their current achievements and assess their future plans. Comparing themselves to both their fellow scholars and their general campus populations, men reported a significantly more positive self-

assessment in academic performance, leadership and self-confidence (see Table 3).

In a range of questions asking whether respondents accept the opinions of others (religious leaders, college leaders, professors, parents, and friends) over their own, men showed considerably less independent thinking than women. Men reported being significantly more likely to accept the opinions of both their friends (men=2.15, women=1.98 out of 5) and their professors (men=2.33, women=2.2 out of 5) over their own, suggesting that men may lag behind women in developing critical thinking and analytical ability. Men also reported working harder in class than they thought they would in college to meet an instructor's standards or expectations (men=2.30, women=2.24 out of 4). Such findings may depict male patterns of authority figure imitation as a means of seeking approval (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

While men demonstrated the stereotypical preference for team competition, they also indicated an appreciation for group accomplishments. Men responded at a higher rate than women that individual competition brings out the best in people (men=3.34, women=2.90 out of 5), that there should be winners and losers (men=3.33, women=2.89 out of 5), and that they believe projects are best accomplished in groups or teams (men=3.0, women=2.69 out of 5).

Both groups continue to demonstrate a competitive mindset. Men rate themselves smarter than most of their friends (men=3.00, women=2.75 out of 4), and men believe they will be smarter than their parents when they are adults (men=3.03, women=2.72 out of 4). Both findings mirror the male academic overconfidence identified by Sax (2008). Men also indicated a higher level of importance than women of being well-off financially (men=2.57, women 2.40 out of 4) and of winning a major award (men=2.01, women=1.84 out of 4) later in life, both are consistent with previous research findings (Sax, 2008).

Men's confidence in their intellectual ability translates to high self ratings in comparison to their peers. When comparing their abilities to other students at their college, men demonstrate greater self-confidence in their academic ability

(men=4.51, women=4.31 out of 5), in their leadership ability (men=4.16, women=3.92 out of 5), and in reported self-confidence (men=4.01, women=3.72 out of 5). Likewise, when comparing themselves to others in their scholars program, men again demonstrated greater confidence in their leadership ability (men=3.63, women=3.46 out of 5) and reported self-confidence (men=3.68, women=3.42 out of 5). Sax (2008) found lower female self-confidence levels even when prior academic performance showed otherwise. The authors' study thus reinforced Sax's conclusion and further illuminated the academic overconfidence of male college students.

Of perhaps greatest interest is the difference between sexes in preparation for life after college. Compared to women, men reported significantly stronger feelings of preparation academically (men=3.67, women 3.58 out of 4), intellectually (men=3.73, women=3.55 out of 4), and professionally (men=3.49, women=3.38 out of 4).

Implications for Practice

Scholars and scholarships programs can make several immediate, feasible programmatic enhancements to ensure they meet the needs of their students as they recognize and manage their stress, build support networks, and develop their confidence and competencies. These programs should be targeted to all members, since male and female high-achieving students feel high levels of stress. However, given that each program and campus has unique missions and cultures, male-specific endeavors can emerge that will work for one program but not another.

First, formally incorporating the campus counseling centers early into the new scholars' first year, both to introduce them to the center services and to help them recognize collectively the pressures they will face, is vital. Since all of these high-achieving students will face stress at a high level, this is sound practice. Further, program-specific administrators and advisors should meet with all students individually each semester. Staff should ask questions geared towards helping the students find outlets to relieve their stress and to encourage them to share their challenges with parents, peers and, if

needed, professionals. Peer mentoring and pairing new students with older students will be effective at allowing the new students to feel comfortable in acknowledging and addressing stress; a senior sharing his or her personal struggles with classes, professional planning and personal issues will likely have more impact than the same message coming from only staff.

To ensure that scholars and scholarships programs better understand the unique characteristics of high-achieving men and develop best practices to support male students, future research should focus on:

- Determining why men report higher levels of pressure and stress, but do not indicate resultant psychological impacts of stress (depression, feeling overwhelmed, and feeling like quitting) or seek out professional or paraprofessional counseling.
- Examining why a father's increased educational attainment increased feelings of pressure to succeed, whereas a mother's increased educational attainment was related to increased appreciation for the process of learning for both men and women scholars.
- Investigating why men are more likely than women to subvert their own opinions in favor of the opinions of their friends and professors.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Race	Percent
White/Caucasian	69.5%
Asian American	11.8%
African American/Black	8.4%
Multiracial	4.4%
Hispanic/Latino	3.8%
Other	1.3%
American Indian/Alaska native	.4%

Table 2. Pressure experienced by gender

Item	Mean for Men	Mean for Women
Pressure from parents*	3.21	2.95
Success is more important than experience*	2.53	2.36
Felt overwhelmed*	2.98	3.36
Felt depressed*	2.20	2.37
Felt like quitting school*	1.28	1.41
Met with a professional to discuss stress*	1.19	1.34
Met with a para-professional to discuss stress*	1.52	1.65

* Significant difference at $p < .05$

1-never, 2-almost never, 3-usually, 4-almost always, 5-always

Table 3. Self-comparisons with other students

Comparison Group	Item	Mean for Men	Mean for Women
General college population	Academically*	4.51	4.31
	Socially	3.64	3.51
	Leadership ability*	4.16	3.92
	Self-confidence*	4.01	3.72
Scholarship program	Academically	3.58	3.47
	Socially	3.67	3.61
	Leadership ability*	3.63	3.46
	Self-confidence*	3.68	3.42

* Significant difference at $p < .05$

1-Not prepared at all, 2-Minimally prepared, 3-Prepared, 4-Very prepared

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Redefined, Retrained, and Rejuvenated: Displaced Male Students Head to College

Dr. Christopher L. Giroir Chris Burke

It is once again that time of year when the seasons are beginning to change and across the country institutions of higher education are gearing up to welcome students back into the classroom. Higher education at all levels (two and four year schools and graduate schools) has steadily seen growth in enrollment numbers over the years, but this fall many institutions are reporting record numbers of students (NCES, 2009). The current state of the United States economy is not necessarily considered a positive thing, but for many college administrators, especially at the community college level, they are seeing positive enrollment gains. Enrollment at many community colleges across the country has tripled this fall primarily because a new group of students are making their way onto college campuses. However, these students are not your typical college students (Streitfield, 2009). Many campuses are seeing a growing number of students who are identified as displaced workers (defined as being at least 20 years old and have lost employment due to business closure or cut-backs) trying to make the best out of a harsh reality that is associated with the current state of the economy by exploring options to advance their education.

Community colleges are attractive options for displaced workers because of their location, cost, open admission standards, and the curriculum offerings (Bradley, 2009). The federal government has passed The American Recovery and Re-investment Act of 2009, which will assist in making such an education a reality by expanding financial aid options and adjusting federal unemployment requirements. In light of this important legislation, community colleges are seen as key players in helping jump start the educational training of America's displaced workers.

Although the economy is not discriminatory when it comes to who is impacted, a larger

portion of displaced workers are men because the majority of industries in decline are predominately and historically staffed by men such as manufacturing and construction. According to US Department of Labor statistics (2008), the number of men displaced is close to 56% and the number of men adding to this statistic is steadily increasing. Finding employment in other fields is difficult for these men since most are limited when it comes to transferable work skills and to the amount of education they possess. Many displaced men find themselves in situations where they need to learn a new marketable skill or trade, which means they are looking at educational institutions to provide the training and skills needed to secure a job in today's market. The age group of men being most impacted by job loss is 24-54 years old, which would identify these men as non-traditional college students (NCES, n.d.). In an effort to make the overall college experience positive for these displaced men, it is imperative that student affairs administrators, especially those at community colleges, become conversant with issues impacting displaced men and implement developmental practices and strategies designed to make sure displaced workers are successful in achieving their educational pursuits.

Administrators need to recognize they will need to be proactive in dealing with some of the issues displaced men may encounter. Men may be reluctant to seek out help or assistance because of fears of being seen as weak or vulnerable. Cultural beliefs and traditional male gender role stereotypes that men need to be independent and self-reliant are drilled into young boys at an early age and stays with them their entire life (Courtenay, 2004). Research repeatedly shows men are often discouraged from seeking help and if they do seek assistance, they report incidents of ridicule and shame (Courtenay, 2000). Displaced men on college campuses may encounter situations where they need extra help or assistance in order to be successful. One such area could be in academic/study skills, as displaced men are

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having to re-learn what it means to be a student and will need a quick refresher course in note-taking and study skill strategies.

The issue facing student affairs is that displaced men may not seek out this help on their own because many believe it is a sign of weakness if they do. Furthermore, they believe they should be able to figure out how to survive the college environment on their own. One suggestion for student affairs administrators to combat such a belief structure is to assure these displaced men it is common and understandable for them to struggle when it comes to entering today's academic classroom. Conversations around different learning styles, taking time off from being in an educational setting, and utilizing available resources can help men feel more comfortable as they attempt to be successful in their academic pursuits. In addition, the promotion of academic tutoring centers where all students who need extra academic help attend would be a good step for administrators to make with displaced men. Reassuring them anyone in their situation may need extra help could help decrease embarrassment or shame these men may feel for seeking help. If these displaced men see that traditional college age students often times need help and attend tutoring centers, this can help normalize their own feelings and hence, their overall college experience. Helping these displaced men realize if they are successful with their educational pursuits, it will greatly help them secure employment in today's economy could also provide some of the encouragement they need to seek out additional resources.

Much like your typical first year student, displaced men are often naïve when it comes to understanding how the university environment works, but these students will need an orientation session that is more tailored to address their essential issues. This orientation session should encourage displaced men to ask questions that they have. Administrators may assume they have all the answers and develop orientation sessions they think can be helpful, but that may not be the case. Displaced men need an orientation session that is designed to acquaint them with basic services provided by the institution in simple and clear terms to adjust the transition to the university. Providing

contact information for follow-up is key because many men often feel intimidated to speak up in situations with others present, but may feel compelled to on their own later. Administrators humanizing that it is acceptable to have questions should stress to displaced men that attending college, many for the first time at an age outside of the traditional college aged population, can be intimidating, but not impossible to conquer. Answering their questions and stressing that it is acceptable to have many, will hopefully allow displaced men to put all their fears and worries out in the open and create a culture of institutional concern and desire for all students to make a smooth transition from the workforce to the classroom, regardless of age.

For displaced men, dealing with the anxiety and stress of trying to provide for their families, paying bills, and the fear of not finding another job, may create negative self-esteem. As research has shown, men tend to use maladaptive coping mechanisms such as alcohol and stimulants to find an escape from reality (Courtenay, 2004). Repeated use of alcohol leads to violent behaviors and periods of aggression in some men. Administrators need to be proactive and educate faculty and staff about warning signs of alcohol abuse and aggression. Finding healthy ways for men to deal with their stress is often a challenge, but college administrators need to make this a priority for displaced men. Counseling services on college campus is an obvious option; however, that option may not be available for many campuses, especially at the community college level. Finding other alternatives for helping displaced men deal with their issues should be taken into account. One suggestion is to point displaced men to volunteer activities such as "Make a Difference Day," where they can make a positive difference by actively contributing to others that are in less fortunate situations than they may be experiencing. Getting them to focus on a project where they are seen as needed and wanted can help them get their mind off their worries and see that there are other more productive ways to deal with life's current challenges (McCafferty, 2009). Another alternative would be to seek out free or low cost counseling options in the community, which

would provide them an outlet with a certified professional. In addition, working with faculty in social sciences and humanities courses to build seeking out such resources into their curriculum could minimize the anxiety on behalf of men not wanting to take more time out of their already busy days to seek the help they likely need.

Creation of support networks or of a student group for displaced men where men come together to discuss their issues and challenges without being judged can lead to encouragement and positive affirmation. In addition, displaced men could recognize they are not alone in the challenges they face. Involvement with men who are seen as having been successful from the community could be invited to mentor and help displaced men through their academic challenges, which could also be an initiative to help retain displaced men. One technique that has the potential to be successful is to utilize a coaching model that promotes teamwork to accomplish tasks. Getting displaced men to rely upon each other and keep each other accountable for completing all their academic endeavors could be a successful solution administrators can employ to keep these displaced men on track and finish whatever academic goal they set out to accomplish.

One functional area that has the potential to make a great impact on displaced men is career services. Displaced men are interested in learning skills and receiving an education that will help them secure new employment so they can contribute back to the workforce, thus helping to promote positive self-esteem. Having displaced men meet with career service staff members who can educate them on what career fields are growing and hiring would help these men choose an academic major that would be a good fit for their educational pursuits during an orientation session. Another benefit career services staff can provide for displaced men is to identify what occupations may be a good fit for their personality and overall interests by introducing them to career assessment inventories such as Holland's Self-Directed Search. Oftentimes, men often times are skeptical when it comes to seeing how the education they are acquiring will benefit them. If administrators can bring in employers from

industries that are hiring to meet with the displaced men and inform the workers of what skills and education they are looking for in their employees, then it could provide inspiration for displaced men to continue their education and earn the necessary credentials to land another job.

In addition to helping them find a career that fits for them, these men will need extra help in making them top quality candidates, especially during a competitive job market. Showing men (either in person or through social outlets like Youtube) resume tips, job databases to search, interviewing techniques and appropriate attire are definitely beneficial tips that will make displaced men stand above their competition when it comes to landing their next job.

In a recent interview with unemployed and displaced workers conducted by *Time* magazine, displaced men report incidents of desperation for any type of employment so they can provide for their families (Ramo, 2009). The traditional male gender role stereotype of needing to be the financial bread winner and provider is a common source of anxiety for displaced men, many of whom feel as though they must seek any type of employment rather than thinking more long range and finding something that could benefit them and/or their family in the future. Administrators need to educate displaced men on financial opportunities that are available both on and off-campus while they are students. Informing displaced men on how and where to look for such jobs would prove beneficial as many have little to no idea where to turn and could likely not want to ask out of embarrassment. Educating displaced men on the steps to take and deadlines to secure federal grants, scholarships, and loans are available to them will help ease their minds about adding another expense like tuition costs to their tight family expenses.

The challenges for all displaced workers seem insurmountable; however, it is not the end of the road for men. Displaced men must realize the traditional gender role stereotype with them playing the role of a as a factory man and financial provider may no longer be a reality for them. However, differently defined role of what it means to be a man, including a new career, is certainly capable. Displaced men must adjust

their attitudes in order to succeed in this significantly changed economy. The economic challenges have to be understood and the past needs to be forgotten. The path ahead may appear daunting to them, but opportunities are available and continually being developed.

As student affairs professionals, we need to be aware of where economic growth lies for the future and direct displaced men to consider such careers. These are the opportunities men must take advantage of and educators must emphasize the long term benefits of such opportunities and career fields. Career choice is vital and displaced men must choose a new career where one finds an interest. Employers are skeptical of jobseekers only interested in a paycheck, and are looking for employees who have a genuine interest in their field (Van Noy & Zeidenberg, 2009). Men have to embrace this fact and if they do not want to be in the same situation ten years from now they must make smart decisions regarding their livelihood. A quick fix is not the answer, but being committed to a new and possibly unknown career is the ultimate end result. Individuals must exert will power to act in the face of uncertainty to reach the highest ideals they can set for themselves (Dalton & Crosby, 2009). As student affairs professionals, we can do our part and help these displaced men by rejuvenating their outlook of the future by providing them with the services and education they need to find their niche in an ever-changing American economy.

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I Am Struggling – Can You Help Me?

Zach Nicolazzo

In my job, I take great pride in my ability to connect with the students with whom I work. In fact, over the past year, I felt as though I had done a much better job at this. Having experienced the loss of my grandfather on December 11, 2007 and the dissolution of my marriage last summer, I took the risk of being highly vulnerable with my students, especially the men with whom I worked. To me, this not only symbolized my ability to live authentically, but also a way to help these young men realize that it is okay to struggle with life's challenges. Over the year I had many conversations with the Interfraternity Council Executive Board I advised about what was going on in their lives, what was going on in my life, and how we as men dealt with conflict, struggled with failure, and coped with difficult situations.

As a group and as individuals, I was starting to see this group of five men become more cohesive and make meaning of their experiences in ways I had only hoped possible. The compassion and vulnerability these men showed was remarkable, and something that was very special indeed. It was certainly not all rainbows and sunshine with the IFC Executive Board, but it was apparent these men were turning a corner in understanding a side of masculinity they had not previously allowed themselves to explore, namely the vulnerability that goes along with being able to express emotions beyond the anger and lust we were socialized to be comfortable sharing.

As the spring semester rolled to a close, I found myself in a similar position to many around the country: it was time for my annual performance evaluation. Having confidence that, while I was by no means perfect at my job, I was doing above average, I went into my meeting with my supervisor with mild optimism. My outlook on performance evaluations is they are always a great chance for me to find out where my gaps are as a professional so that I can work to rectify these in the upcoming year.

Typically, these evaluations end up being rather affirming, as I know the areas in which I struggle, and can have some constructive conversations with my supervisor about ways in which I can improve in trouble areas. However, this particular meeting would throw me a curveball.

When meeting with my supervisor, I read the following statement on my performance evaluation:

Colleagues suggest that you think more about how you are communicating with students and the language that you use. Sometimes you can be too professional and not connect with students on their level.

When I read this, I was not incensed or angry. More to the point, I was hurt and curious who would say such a thing. 'Surely this person has no idea what I truly have done with these men this year' I thought. 'This cannot be true in the least.' However, the more I turned the words over in my mind, I started to doubt myself and the work I thought I had done. Furthermore, a previous conversation with another White male student affairs educator who heard the same feedback came back to me. Was there a connection to the fact that we were both White men and receiving this feedback? What were we doing to create the perception that we needed to be seen as experts? Were other White male colleagues in the field hearing this feedback, too? Was I just thinking I was being more vulnerable than I truly was being? And if so, why was I hiding behind the shroud of professionalism and a glorified vocabulary?

After my meeting ended, I fired off an email to three trusted colleagues, all White men, asking them first if they had heard the same feedback and secondly what meaning could be made from it. I wanted so desperately to disregard the feedback, but the awareness of my privilege and being able to disregard such feedback due to this snapped me back to reality. I had an obligation, both professional and personal, to make meaning of this feedback and use it to alter my behavior. Furthermore, the work of Baxter Magolda's *Knowing and Reasoning in College* came flooding back to my

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mind. Was my use of highfalutin language rooted in a need to depict my mastery in my job? Moreover, if this was the case, who was I silencing and/or unintentionally making to feel less than adequate through my behavior. My privilege as a White man kept acting like a devil on my shoulder telling me to forget it, but I knew better than to let this go now.

What followed from my email was a flurry of conversations with my male colleagues. Out of the four of us, we had all heard this feedback, two of us hearing it very recently. Furthermore, we were all young professionals when we heard the feedback, bolstering my thought about this somehow being linked to our desire to be seen as needing to display mastery in our respective roles. While there were certainly terrific points made by all parties involved in the conversation about the need to not coddle students and challenge them to live up to the educational mission and values implicit in membership in institutions of higher education, I was uncomfortable having that be the end of the conversation. While I truly believe we need to heighten, rather than lower, our expectations of students (as well as ourselves and our professional peers), I also understand the need to speak and work in ways students can comprehend and appreciate.

In my next one-on-one with my supervisor, I decided to share with her my lingering discomfort with the performance evaluation comment. I shared with her I was not yet ready to fully discuss it with clarity, but that I was connecting with other colleagues who had heard the same feedback. I also told her my feelings about the feedback being tied to my identity as a White man, which she found interesting. She asked that I follow up with her when I felt ready to do so, and told me she would be curious to hear more about the conversations I was having with my male counterparts across the country. She then confirmed I had done some great work with the IFC Executive Board during the past year, and that perhaps the feedback was given by someone who may not be as intimately familiar with this as we both were. Perhaps the feedback was related to interstaff relations rather than the work I was doing directly with students. Even still, I told her it was something I was curious

exploring more to ensure I was being as productive and effective an educator as possible.

It has been about three months since my initial performance evaluation meeting, and while I do not have complete clarity, I have been able to come to some resolutions about the feedback I was given. First off, in talking with my IFC President, I have learned this may indeed be feedback given more in terms of working with other professional peers than with students. While I do think I can incorporate this feedback in the work I do with some fraternity men (ie, new members and chapter leadership, most notably some presidents), I have been told I have done well at concurrently being down to earth, challenging the process, and encouraging vulnerability. Additionally, I was given feedback by my IFC President that it has been meaningful for he and the rest of the IFC Executive Board to see me share my whole person with them as the year has unfolded.

Secondly, I have come to the conclusion that I am uncomfortable with still being in an entry-level professional position, especially as this relates to my male gender role socialization of needing to be successful (as if where I am currently is not a sign of success). Despite this being unconscious, it manifests itself in visible ways, most notably my apparent need to use certain words, phrases, and a professional vernacular that others may perceive as haughty. There are certainly ways I can express complex thoughts in a more accessible way, and this is a challenge I need to take seriously if I want to further develop as an educator.

In addition, one of my colleagues who was a part of the original conversation regarding language has recently challenged me to think more deeply about why it was I believed myself to be doing an above average job in the first place. Perhaps this is linked to the fact that, as he stated so poignantly, “maybe the people who wrote the rules about what is above average look like you and I, so we are more confident playing the game” (R. Barone, personal communication). It is a terrific point which warrants much more thought, but it is clear that, as a White man, I go into such meetings with the assumption that I am doing a good job. This is clearly bolstered by the fact that other White

men wrote the rules on how to be successful in the workplace, so how could I not know how to succeed? In addition, how do I work to deconstruct these rules and build a set that works for all, regardless of privilege? How do I engage students in this work? These are all questions worth considering, as the impact extends far broader than just my personal situation.

The third lesson I learned from this all was the strong need for me to find and stay connected to professional colleagues around the country. I rarely experience conversations like those I had with my three White male counterparts due to this experience, and oftentimes, these only happen when I attend professional conferences. However, in an attempt to feed my soul as well as develop as a more complete educator, I was reminded of the importance of sharing and connecting with others around the country. Not only are others struggling with some of the same things we are, but as a man, I find it continually important to sometimes take a moment and say, quite simply, “I am struggling – can you help me out?”