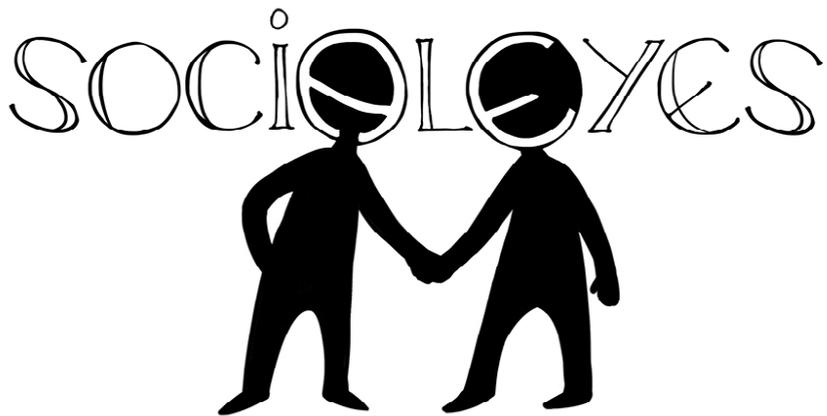# SocialEyes

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Editors' Introduction

"My eyes are my favorite part of me, not for how they look, but for how they see."

-Frau Feuerameise

Some compare the human eye to a camera, a device that collects, focuses, and transmits light through a lens to create an image. In a camera, this image is imprinted on film; in the eye, it is imprinted on the retina. As light enters the eye, it is refracted by the lens. Each resulting image is bent, slightly distorted. Unique. Each individual's interpretation of their surroundings, then, is bent, slightly distorted, and valuable in its uniqueness.

The pieces in this journal represent snapshots - authors' attempts to capture reality as they see it. As sociology is interdisciplinary, the themes in these snapshots may be familiar to some readers. They may surprise others. Beginning with an exploration of personal identity and sexuality, transitioning to a conversation of health and privilege, and ending with a focus on the interaction between gender and ethnicity, this collection of pieces highlights the intersectional nature of sociology and of society in general. Both the perception and presentation of these themes is inherently subjective, influenced by the beliefs and experiences of our talented authors. We hope that each snapshot will therefore grant you, our readers, access to a new lens, a new perspective, a new reality.

Some have asked us what "sociology" really encompasses, what it really "means." At its core, we view sociology as the study of these images and the inextricable way they interact with one another. Sociologists attempt to understand the social world, give voice to all perspectives, and dismantle notions of objectivity and normativity.

Too often, our world is defined through the lens of those with privilege and power. The study of sociology encourages us to adopt an alternative lens, one that witnesses, questions, and confronts the inequalities, systematic marginalization, and social constructions that fuel society. We invite you to zoom out of these snapshots, to challenge yourself to see the greater influences constructing the scene before you. In doing so, we hope you are moved to react, resist, and reconstruct what you see.

Onward,

Kelley Monzella
Senior Editor-in-Chief

Kristin Gordon
Senior Editor-in-Chief

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SUMMERTIME SADNESS

Patrick Dunne

Patrick Dunne, a member of the class of 2018 from Mequon, WI, is pursuing a major in Economics and a minor in English. On campus he is involved with the Jenks Leadership Program, 4Boston, Stylus, and Model UN. Outside of class, he enjoys running, reading, and writing short stories. After graduation, he intends to pursue law school.

My heart dropped. I never felt so cornered in my life, and a lump formed deep inside my throat, restraining me from saying anything at all. At that moment, I wanted nothing more than to open the door of the car and sprint somewhere, anywhere but there. She continued to berate me with the same question. I couldn't handle it; there were too many thoughts buzzing around my head like a swarm of worker bees. How did she find out?

"Well, Mom," I said after an awkward pause, "I'm sorry."

The first week of summer had arrived. I had three months to practice and compete with my crew team until I left for college. One early Tuesday morning, I hopped down the stairs to the boathouse and felt the heat of the sun on my face. My teammates greeted me at the bottom, and we complained about our grogginess and recounted how much fun we had the previous night with each other. As usual, we were cut short when my coach barked orders at us to bring down oars to the dock to start practice. After filling my water bottle, putting on my baseball cap, and falling into a serious mindset, I jogged over to join my teammates who were congregating near our boat, "The Lucky," which we named after our winning streak.

We put the massive boat on our shoulders and carried it to the water's edge, where we gingerly placed it down. The weight of the vessel didn't hurt anymore; I had been rowing since the eighth grade and had learned how to ignore and had grown to love the sharp pain that bruised my shoulders. The boat wobbled back and forth as each of us attached our oars and cautiously sat down in our respective seats. With that, we started a difficult practice filled with high-intensity workouts and a lot of sweat.

The river that day was oddly serene; the water was more like that of a pond than a river, unmoving with no visible current. Looking at my reflection in the water, I made faces at myself and then distorted the image with a swipe of my fingers. I watched intently as we snaked through downtown Milwaukee, silently naming the buildings and bridges in my head as we rowed. Lulling myself into a trance, I did everything as usual, the familiar mantra ingrained in my thoughts: legs back arms, arms back legs, legs back arms, arms back legs. Eventually we arrived at the junction where the river empties into the lake and we took a break.

I swung each leg over the sides of the boat so they were just submerged and laid back on my teammates shins to relax my back. I squinted my eyes, looking at the morning horizon, and watched the seagulls gather on top of the lighthouse while fishermen sat pensively below them.

My friends suddenly erupted in laughter and I shifted my attention back to them. My entire boat wanted to swim and we held a competition

to see who could make the biggest splash as each of us leapt in. I knew I would lose, so I executed a simple pencil dive into the water. We spent the rest of our time that day splashing each other, making jokes, and swimming to the other boats to pull our younger teammates into the water. After the water cooled us off and relaxed our fatigued muscles, we heaved ourselves into our glossy boat and rowed back to the boathouse.

At the end of practice, we docked the boat and jumped out. I bent down to take the boat out of the water and when I stood up, I saw her before she saw me. My mother stood behind the fence scanning the dock, looking for me. I wondered why she drove all the way downtown to pick me up when I had a car of my own. She wore all black: black shoes, black pants, a black shirt, and a black purse. Her blonde hair remained the only colorful thing on her body, which she had pulled back into a ponytail. She looked like the grim reaper, I thought. I scrounged my brain for any details of something I had done to upset her. Was she mad about last night? No, nothing went wrong last night. I remembered to pick my sister up from basketball practice two days before, so she couldn't be aggravated about that again. "Hi," I said as I walked up the dock, "What are you doing here?"
"Get your things and go to the car. I'll meet you there," she said.

My friends mouthed the words "what happened?" as I walked to the car in silence. I opened the door and sat down in the passenger seat. Waiting for me with a scowl, my mother sat to my left with crossed legs and her sunglasses in her lap. My phone flooded with text messages from concerned teammates. I put it in my pocket and waited for her to say something.
"Who's Jim?" she asked.
My heart dropped.
"Well, Mom," I said after an awkward pause, "I'm sorry."
I didn't want to explain to her that I had dated Jim for almost a year, that I was bisexual, that I had gone against her conservative values. All I could think of saying at the time was that I was sorry. And then I cried. It felt like I had gotten the wind knocked out of me.

We screamed at each other throughout the entire car ride home which felt like an eternity. She challenged everything I said and told me that this was just a "phase." I emphatically told her that I didn't decide to live this way and that, contrary to her belief, I could not switch my bisexuality on and off like a light switch. It didn't bother me that she found out; I had previously decided to tell my family about my bisexuality before I left for college. Perhaps I should have prepared myself for this, but I never had a reason to believe that my mother would not accept me for who I was.

For the rest of the summer my mother actively tried to "fix" me. She gleaned facts from the internet about how others would discriminate

against me for the rest of my life and later confronted me about them. She sat me down and talked at me for hours about my "choice" to be bisexual. She tried to control who I befriended, and she did not want me to leave the house without knowing my exact location. She took an exciting time, my last summer before college, and made it exhausting with her constant quest to prove that I didn't understand myself.

"But mom, I really, really like him," I told her one August afternoon.

It didn't matter. She argued with me again, telling me how I ruined my life while I sat on the couch in silence. I wasn't paying attention to her; I was tired. Resting my head on my hand, I thought. I thought about Jim, and reminded myself that being with him and remaining who I wanted to be was worth withstanding my mother's disapproval. He was funny, smart, genuine, and much, much more than worth it. I closed my eyes and shut her out. In my mind, I reminded myself of my friends who loved me for me. They accepted me for who I was, why couldn't she? Even though things with my mother were difficult, I thought, life always drove on. The leaves still fell slowly to the ground in autumn, the sun still rose in the morning, and I still had incredible friends and a boyfriend to guide me through anything. I told myself to find the bravery to be me. I promised to smile more, to laugh more, and I began to believe in the person I wanted to become: someone honest and genuine, without self-doubts about myself and my beliefs. I wasn't afraid anymore.

"Are you even listening to me?"

I habitually searched for a way to reason with her, but I couldn't anymore.

"No," I said, "and I won't be."

Role of Parents in Children's Gender Conformity

Monica Maloney

Monica is a graduating senior of the class of 2015 in the College of Arts & Sciences. She is pursuing a BS in Biology and a minor in Medical Humanities. She is currently looking at post-graduate opportunities and is preparing to apply to medical school in the near future. She is a council member of the Laughing Medusa literary-arts journal on campus. Her piece was originally written for the course Women and the Body, taught by Sharlene Hesse-Biber. She would like to thank her friends and family, here and at home, whose constant support and encouragement have motivated and inspired her to pursue her passions. She would also like to thank her professors for sharing their wealth of knowledge and giving her an opportunity to find her own voice.

In November of 2013, a thirteen-year-old Kansas boy named Skyler was suspended from his junior high school because he refused to take off his Vera Bradley purse. He claimed suspension was unjust due to the fact that girls were allowed to wear purses to school. The school's administration responded by saying that Skyler was suspended because their policy forbade students from wearing purses in the classroom. The matter has been a source of heated debate in the local community and has sparked conversations between parents, adolescents, and school administrators around the nation (Jordan 2013). It seems extreme that a small and harmless accessory engendered school suspension. The true matter of this story is not that a student broke dress code, but that a male student broke dress code by accessorizing with a feminine accessory. Skyler's mother knowingly allowed her son to go to school with this purse and has since stated her support for her son (Jordan 2013). However, this open-minded approach to parenting is not shared by all. Parents promote and enforce the gender binary of male/female gender identities in areas such as sports, education, behavior and subsequently experience conflict when their child displays behaviors of gender nonconformity.

Parental interference in shaping gender identity can be seen in simple social situations, as depicted in the ABC television show, What Would You Do?. What Would You Do? is a hidden camera reality television show that sets up scripted scenarios with actors in an unscripted social environment and features the reactions and responses of unsuspecting civilians. The show creates scenarios based on contemporary social topics and aims to discover who (if anyone) will respond, in what ways they respond, and for what reasons (revealed in post-interviews). In an episode entitled "You Can't Be a Princess," which aired during Halloween 2012, a mother and her child (both actors) go to a costume store in search of an appropriate Halloween costume for the child (Okumura 2012). In the first scenario, the female "mother" (Diana) is accompanied by a male "son" (7 year-old Quentin). The son scours the racks and finds a princess dress costume, for which he expresses fervent desire. The mother reacts by immediately nixing his dream to be a princess and says: "Girls wear princess costumes, not boys". From here, the scenario takes off and multiple patrons approach the mother over the course of the day. First, a mother of three sons completely agrees with Diana's standpoint. When Quentin directly asks for her opinion, she replies, "I think that you can't really wear a princess costume. I know you like it, but that's for a girl, and you're not a girl, right?" (Okumura 2012). With this interaction, it is obvious that some parents approve of interference in children gender identifications.

In the wake of this example, one must ask: are instances of hardline gender separation echoed by other parents featured in the episode? More

importantly, are these ideas supported and elucidated in the current research? According to Goldberg, Kashy, and Smith (2012), who investigated the effect of family structure on children's gendered behavior, the structure of parental models (mother, father, heterosexual parent unit, homosexual parent unit) influences the type of gendered behavior performed by children. According to Thomas and Blakemore (2012), children's nonconformity to traditional gender roles is often met with conflict by parental units. The conflict caused by deviant gender nonconformity on the part of the child stems from parental preference for his or her child's adherence to traditional gender norms. This preference stems from two sources. First, parents want their child to conform as a way to avoid further conflict from external social groups in the near and distant futures (Thomas and Blakemore 2012). Second, parents enforce traditional gender roles based on their understanding of their own gender sphere and, by extension, that of their children (Thomas and Blakemore 2012).

As the What Would You Do? scene continues, one mother, who tries to convince Quentin to abandon the princess costume, is asked by the host of the show what she would do if her own daughter asked to wear a traditionally male costume like Spiderman. She responds by saying, "Well it's funny because they make those outfits into girls now...it's a little less of a...stigma..." (Okumura 2012). Do parents and other adults view male gender stereotypes as more static and female gender stereotypes as more dynamic? Michael Messner (2011) conducted ethnographic research examining this phenomenon in the realm of adolescent sports involvement. Messner (2011:155, 161) defines such ideology through the term "soft essentialism," the post-feminist, modern idea that views females as having less rigid roles and males as having narrowed, traditionally masculine roles.

Messner (2011) further examines the interplay of soft essentialism in interviews with parents of children involved in youth sports. He finds that adults enforce and celebrate the masculinization of boys in sports by encouraging aggression on the field, allowing coaches to verbally criticize their children, and ignoring emotional displays by younger boys after injury or loss of a game. Thus, coaches and parents view boys as having unchanging, natural predilections for aggressive, testosterone-fueled behavior that can and should be displayed on the field. Accordingly, soft essentialism can be extended to make the statement that boys who choose to partake in non-traditional male activities, such as dance or cheerleading, exemplify nonconformity to their supposed naturally aggressive and competitive masculine natures.

In contrast to boys, who are inherently assigned a 'natural' gender script, Messner (2011:164) states that the female gender identity is fluid and shaped by changing social structures. For females, soft essentialism

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dictates that parents view their daughters with a broad band of opportunity to explore their gender role in sports. According to Messner's (2011) research, the parental view of girls in sports is dynamic and accepting of female participation in a wide range of activities including both traditionally feminine and masculine sports.

One limitation of Messner's (2011) ethnographic research is that he does not explicitly state the locations, racial backgrounds, or socioeconomic backgrounds of his subjects. These factors impact the sports in which children of different groups partake. Therefore, this information may be very important when detailing the breakdown of female and male sports participation.

The cultural shift to soft essentialism is supported by Friedman's (2013) interview-based research. Friedman (2013:32) found that parents encourage their daughters to participate in more athletically combative and aggressive sports endeavors, as seen in a statement made by a father of a seven-year-old girl:

> ...I don't like her to be a girly-girl....You know, I don't want her to be a cheerleader – nothing against that – but I want her to prepare to have the option, if she wants to be an executive in a company, that she can play on that turf.

This father equates early-life sport competitiveness with later-life professional career success. The father also expresses his distaste, and his desire for his daughter to avoid, stereotypically female sports such as cheerleading. In this way, the father supports soft essentialism and encourages his daughter to participate in traditionally competitive sports. His distinction between traditionally female sports (cheerleading) and traditionally male sports (soccer) teaches his daughter that there is a difference between what sports girls do and do not traditionally play. While the father's mentality reinforces the existing gender binary, it also emphasizes how its application in American society has changed. It seems from Messner (2011) and Friedman's (2013) research that it is easier, and even encouraged, for girls to cross the boundary between traditional female sports into traditionally male sports than it is for boys to do the opposite.

Parents also enforce gender conformity through their child's educational performance. Many popular culture sites including blogs, human interest forums, and teacher network forums highlight the belief that girls tend to perform poorly in mathematics compared to boys due to the cultural scripts perpetuated by parents and teachers. Grohol (2008) highlights these beliefs in his blog article, arguing that parents and teachers believe that girls flounder in math and science. In doing so, they not only perpetuate this

idea amongst themselves, but they also help to frame the girls' own self-construction.

As a result, according to Leaper, Farkas, and Brown (2012), girls tend to believe that they cannot do math because their mothers do not think that they can. This research – which included a mix of races and parents with varying educational backgrounds – explores this phenomenon by comparing girls' abilities and motivation in math, science, and English when supported and when not supported by parents and peers (Leaper et al. 2012). In this study, researchers asked the girls a series of questions concerning their intellectual abilities based on a predetermined scale of answers ("How good are you at math [science, English/literature]?" 1=not good at all, 2=somewhat good, and 3=very good) (272). Researchers then assessed the amount of encouragement and support the girls received from their parents (272). They found that girls' motivation to do well in science and math was positively correlated with mothers' supportive views on their daughters' abilities. Interestingly, this trend did not occur for fathers' support of science and math abilities in their daughters: a correlational relation of 0.18 for mothers compared to -0.09 for fathers (276-8).

These results display that mothers serve as an effective social model for their daughters, thus shaping the girls' self-identity. When daughters feel positive motivation from their mothers – feedback that tells them that they (and females in general) can succeed in math/science – they are more confident and believe that they can succeed in the roles that are stereotypically delegated to males. When their fathers are the source of motivation, the role model schema breaks down, as girls are less likely to model their behavior after that of a male figure. In this way, each parent has a different effect on a girls' perception of her ability to succeed in math.

One shortcoming of this study is that the researchers defined the general ages of the girls (ranging from middle school-aged to high school-aged) and did not organize participant results into separate groups of definite age brackets. With defined age brackets, researchers may have found other important age-based correlations. For example, younger girls might be more influenced by parents while older girls might be influenced by teachers. Additionally, the researchers could have further investigated whether this phenomenon of parental influence on gendered education ability is present in boys as well as in girls.

Thirdly, parents enforce the social construction of their children's gender binary by managing their child's behavior. In this analysis, behavior is used as an umbrella term that includes how the child presents himself/herself through clothing choice and toy choice. Many references in past literature and popular culture use these areas as benchmarks for future child behavior. Revisiting the What Would You Do? scene reveals further

examples of how parents enforce child gender conformity through their clothing choice.

A second mother comes up to Diana and Quentin and tries to convince the boy to choose more traditional male Halloween costumes, rattling off a list that includes: Spiderman, a fireman, a police officer, an army man, and a ninja. In doing so, she falls back on the stereotypical male costumes that would define Quentin as a child with an active, physical, and aggressive behavior instead of a sparkly, demure, and feminized behavior. In this example, the second mother tries to control the boy's behavior by changing his choice of costume to one that she deems appropriate for a male. Quentin himself, makes the connection between costume and perceived behavior, rejecting the woman's costume choice of army man and ninja by saying: "...no, war is bad....I don't like ninjas, they fight..." (Okumura 2012).

Sociological research maintains that parents shape children's behavior in accordance to their beliefs regarding appropriate gendered behavior. One article, "Gender-Typed Play Behavior in Early Childhood: Adopted Children with Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Parents," examines this interplay and investigates and juxtaposes the role that both heterosexual and homosexual parents play in gendering a child's behavior (Goldberg et. al. 2012). Goldberg et al. (2012) selected a balanced group of lesbian, gay male, and heterosexual couples who adopted children (aged two to four years in the study) two years prior to the study. With these parameters, the researchers ensured that children were old enough to express gendered play behavior, eliminated the role that biology could play in child gendered behavior, and provided enough time for parents to understand their child's typical pattern of behavior. Furthermore, family income, exact child age, and parental education level were controlled for in order to eliminate extraneous variables. One limitation of this research was the lack of racial variance within groups: the parents were mostly white (88%-92% among the three groups) and the adopted children were more diverse (54% white, 46% of color). Note that the term "of color" is also ambiguously stated.

The researchers asked parents to fill out the Pre-School Activities Inventory (PSAI) which included three aspects of play behavior: toys (e.g.,: tea set, tool set), activities (e.g.,: pretend care of babies, climbing), and characteristics (e.g.,: child avoids getting dirty, enjoys rough play) (507-9). Their research displayed that children's behavior is highly susceptible to parental influence. The researchers found that the children of homosexual couples demonstrated less gender normative behavior – meaning that the boys and girls demonstrated gender-based behaviors to a lesser degree than other groups (Goldberg et al. 2015:510-11). On the other hand, the children

of heterosexual couples demonstrated more gendered-typed behavior, with boys playing with masculine toys and demonstrating aggressive behavior. Girls, in contrast, played with feminine toys and demonstrated less aggressive behavior (510-1). To further support parental involvement in gendered play behavior, researchers found that sons of lesbian couples exhibited less masculine behavior when compared with boys in gay male and heterosexual families. There was no statistically significant difference in feminine behavior among girls in gay male, lesbian, and heterosexual families (511).

Children with both a male and female parental unit displayed behaviors and played with toys deemed characteristic of their gender (Goldberg et al. 2012:510-11). One infers that the child's adherence to gender norms stems from their observation of two biologically-different sexes who display and perform gendered actions. For example, girls in a heterosexual parental family develop more feminine characteristics as a result of role-playing the actions of their mothers. They view their mothers in direct contrast to the actions of their male fathers. Consequently, the girls grow to believe that they should act feminine, depictive of their similar mom, rather than masculine, which is depictive of their dissimilar dad. In homosexual couples, this difference is not as extreme. Because both parents are of the same sex, there is no conflict between behaviors that should and should not be performed. As such, both parents perform intrinsic behaviors that are classified by personality, not by sex. The children in the study, all under the age of four, therefore do not have many examples of adults that display a behavior that is necessarily defined by gender (511).

Why do parents interfere in the social construction of their child's behavior? Parents may interfere subconsciously, in an inactive manner – when parents go through their everyday actions and their children model their behavior. This influence is not done with purpose or directionality. However, definitive actions such as those seen in the What Would You Do? episode exhibit an active participation on the part of the parent to change or modify the child's behavior to conform to the traditional gender identity. This begs the question, why do parents participate in such forms of active behavior modification? Thomas and Blakemore's (2012) research presented two reasons for this behavior. The researchers examined adults' attitudes about child gender nonconformity in terms of four outcomes for the child: 1) predicted gender-related traits, behaviors, and interests for the child in adulthood; 2) expected pressure to change from external societal factors; 3) predicted psychological adjustments in childhood and adulthood; 4) predicted sexual orientation once the child reaches sexual maturity using the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS) short version. Answers were measured on a 5-point scale where 1= not at all likely and 5= extremely

likely. Notably, 85.5% of participating adults did not have children of their own. That said, this study, which examines how adults generally view the pressures surrounding child gender nonconformity, assumes that these beliefs hold true for parents as well as nonparents.

According to this research, adults may practice active parental involvement in gender binary reinforcement because they believe that nonconformity would result in conflict for the child later in life: "Participants thought nonconforming children of both sexes would feel pressured to change their behavior" (Thomas and Blakemore 2012:407). Moderately feminine and strongly feminine boys as well as moderately masculine and strongly masculine girls were perceived by adults to experience more pressure to change (3.85 and 4.08 for boys, respectively, and 3.74 and 3.95 for girls, respectively) than their gender conforming counterparts (404). Parents may therefore encourage their child to practice gender conformity to avoid negative experiences later in life from external sources such as school institutions, peers, and the media. This ideology is also seen in the anecdotal social setting of the What Would You Do? scene when the second mother states that she advises Quentin to change costumes because she believes that he would be bullied due to his blatant gender nonconformity, "...kids are cruel. I didn't want him to get picked on in school..." (Okumura 2012).

Thomas and Blakemore's (2012) research highlights a second reason for why adults experience conflict with gender nonconforming children. Results show that adults believe that children who display gender nonconforming behavior are more likely to engage in same-sex behavior. The adults measured, 96.5% of whom were hetersexual, believed that very effeminate boys were more likely to participate in same-sex behavior than moderately effeminate boys. Additionally, the adults believed that moderately effeminate boys were more likely to participate in same-sex behavior than all other boys. The adults believed that masculine girls were more likely than other girls to participate in same-sex behavior (406).

This finding is also seen in the media. Returning to the What Would You Do? skit, only one woman supports Quentin's choice in costume. She interprets the motivation behind Diana's opposition to gender nonconformity by saying, "...[Diana]...was...so worried about her kids turning gay" (Okumura 2012). In this way, the scene displays how parents associate young boy feminine behavior and adult male homosexual orientation. The parents try to moderate their child's gendered behavior to prevent the child from exhibiting a homosexual orientation in later life. Thomas and Blakemore's (2012) research supports these findings in a quantitative way – displaying that parents believe there is a correlation between gender nonconforming behavior early in life and same-sex orientation later in life.

Less than four years ago, there was an Android phone application

entitled "Is My Son Gay?" which claimed to identify a child's sexual orientation via a list of 20 questions ranging from clothing choice, involvement in football, and participation in fights (Huffington Post 2011). Clearly, parents are curious about their children's sexuality and are willing to take steps to change nonconforming behaviors (Dickinson 2013). However, such parental involvement may not, in fact, be beneficial to children, as societal and personal stagnation occur when young individuals are placed into narrowly defined gender roles (Friedman 2013). To enhance gender relations and to allow children to understand their greater purpose in life – instead of their trivialized gendered role in society – adults should consider adopting a new outlook on parenting.

Parents must realize that both boys and girls do and should be able to experiment in sports activities, study plans, clothing preference, and toy choice that may not be gender conforming. Parents should let girls play football and boys participate in dance numbers so that kids can cross gendered boundaries and explore their interests based on personality rather than traditional gender norms. They should encourage children to explore all areas of study to become well-rounded and fully-educated. As supported by the scientific research, exploration of all types of behavior is important in developing a child who is independent and adventurous, open-minded and creative, skillful and enlightened:

Our finding that the children of same-gender parents may be somewhat less gender-conforming in their play behavior than the children of heterosexual parents can be interpreted as suggesting that the children of same-gender parents may possess certain strengths that may aid them later in life (Goldberg et al. 2012:512). Parents must learn the benefits of exposing their children to non-traditional behaviors. Doing so fosters children devoid of prejudices and binaries that predetermine their perceived abilities and hinder their growth. One never knows the gender of the next genius in the field of science or the next great American writer.

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The Psychological Health, Support, and Future of Sexual-Minority Youth

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Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) culture has become more prominent in the last decade than ever before. Individuals in the community have become strong, vocal activists for political rights and social assimilation, ultimately working toward total equality and acceptance—two concepts which may not necessarily coincide. Currently, 17 U.S. states and Washington D.C. legally allow same-sex marriage as well as clearly prohibit discrimination against transgender people (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU] 2013, Pros and Cons of Controversial Issues 2014). Yet, it is difficult to anticipate what the community and its allies will achieve first: legal equality or social normalization. It is arguable that in order for laws to pass, LGBTQ individuals must first defeat existing social prejudices. However, one can also argue that prejudice will dwindle after voters are forced to abide by equalizing laws. While everyday citizens may not be able to directly affect government policy, it is possible to normalize and advocate for equality between LGBTQ peoples and not-identifying peoples. In order to accomplish this, we must promote social change within our own homes, schools, and communities. By educating and encouraging youth to accept all sexual and gender orientations, and also increasing Sexual Minority Youth (SMY) resiliency, we can decrease serious mental health risks and issues in LGBTQ adolescents (Grossman, D'Augelli, and Frank 2011; Hatzenbeuhler et al. 2014).

This cause deserves our attention for both positive community building and preventative health reasons. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among youths aged 10- to 24-years-old, with Sexual Minority Youth (SMY) at a significantly higher rate of suicide ideation, plans, and attempts (also known as suicide risk outcomes, or SROs) than non-SMY (Stone et al. 2014; Hatzenbeuhler et al. 2014). SROs stem from risk factors such as depression, substance abuse, social isolation, peer conflict, and victimization caused by minority stress. Instances of minority stress often develop in non-supportive, stigmatized, or hostile environments where homophobia has been internalized (Stone et al. 2014). Transgender adolescents often face such an environment, as they are more likely to have experienced both verbal and physical abuse from a young age due to the atypical gender behavior (Grossman, D'Augelli and Frank 2011). 17.4% of the 88,463 hate crimes between 1995 and 2008 targeted LGBTQ peoples[1], as reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which is a grossly disproportionate percentage when compared to the relatively low percentage of sexual minorities (Duncan and Hatzenbeuhler 2014). While popular press has spread awareness of the dangerous effects of social ostracization of LGBTQ individuals, it has not done much to promote positive thinking toward LGBTQ cultures. However, suicide attempts by SMYs prove 20% lower in counties with more supportive

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1 "...sexual orientation hate crimes are more likely to be violent and to involve weapons than other types of hate crimes, including hate crimes that are race-related" (Duncan and Hatzenbeuhler, 2014, p. 274).

environments (Duncan and Hatzenbeuhler 2014). Based on this evidence, communities should work to establish Positive Youth Development (PYD) programs that promote positive attributes in adolescents, instead of establishing programs that simply prevent negative behaviors. Encouragement of positive behaviors and attitudes would empower SMY youth to openly express themselves and have a positive influence on their social communities.

SMY Background and Current Theory

Many individuals do not understand how prevalent the SMY population may be in a community. Six percent of boys and 13% of girls report having same-sex attractions, a non-heterosexual orientation, or engagement in same-sex activity during adolescence. Approximately 2-5% of these individuals identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, while 2-3% describe themselves as unsure about their sexual orientation (Steinberg 2014). However, many individuals do not share their personal preferences with others out of fear of prejudice and persecution. Such prejudice is the result of cognitive distancing, which allows people to justify their immoral actions by ignoring, stereotyping, or devaluing a certain social group (Lott 2002). Individuals informed about the facts and the details of SMYs are more likely to take a stand against any injustice against them.

First, one must understand the basics of sexuality and gender. There are three aspects to one's identity: sexual orientation (to whom one is attracted), sex-role behavior (behavior consistent with the sociological expectation of a gender binary), and gender identity (the gender with which one identifies regardless of biology). These three aspects are mutually exclusive and do not have to "line up" (e.g. a heterosexual feminine female who identifies as a woman) with one another. In fact, transgender individuals report the same variety of sexual orientations as do cisgender individuals, a term used for heterosexuals whose gender aligns with their biological sex. However, information on the transgender population is scarce; current estimates state that 1 in 100,000 people are transsexual women (male to female, or MTF) and 1 in 400,000 people are transsexual men (female to male, or FTM) (Steinberg 2014). These estimates are extremely conservative due to individuals' reluctance to either come out or report their identity to a census or authoritative institution.

There are no consistent predictors of LGB orientation regarding same-sex experimentation in adolescence. Sexual orientation in general is not usually an either-or attribute, as individuals are rarely exclusively heterosexual or exclusively homosexual. Ten percent of the adult population does not have exclusive heterosexual preference and, of this population, only one-third identify as exclusively homosexual while the

other two-thirds identify as bisexual (Steinberg 2014). An adolescent's sexual orientation is likely shaped by a complex interaction of social and biological influences. Some researchers believe that prenatal hormone exposure may affect the organization of hormonal pathways that later influence one's sexual orientation. Yet, studies often find little differences between children of same-sex parents and those of opposite-sex parents, as gay parents are no more likely to have gay children than straight parents are likely to have straight children (Steinberg 2014).

The understanding of the basics of sexuality and gender is important because prejudice and ignorance about homosexuality can lead to significant psychological distress in SMYs, especially if they encounter hostility from those around them. SMYs often encounter less social support than heterosexuals, as growing up, LGBTQ students are more likely to be harassed, physically abused, and verbally abused by peers and adults than their heterosexual peers. They are also more likely to have distant family relationships. This is especially true if the youth are gender non-conforming, as individuals are more intolerant of gender atypicality than sexual orientation (Steinberg 2014). Because of this, SMYs have higher rates of depression, suicide, substance abuse, running away, and difficulties in school (Steinberg 2014). Schools with more hostile LGBTQ environments are typically in rural settings or lower socioeconomic status communities, have fewer explicit rules for student behavior, and have less racially diverse school populations (Steinberg 2014). An increase of school-based education programs designed to promote tolerance, such as Gay-Straight Alliances, in schools with these characteristics would provide SMYs with a better chance of resisting psychological disparities that may persist into adulthood.

Sexual Orientation and SROs

In their study, Stone et al. (2014:262) were alarmed by the fact that "SMYs not only make more medically serious [suicide] attempts but also have greater intent to die." The researchers investigated the differences in rates of SROs in youths who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) as well as in youths who reported same-sex or both-sex sexual contact. The authors differentiated these two types of youth due to the fact that SMYs "may engage in sexual contact with same-sex partners but not identify as sexual minorities because of social stigma" (Stone et al. 2014:263). The researchers used the Youth Risk Behavior Surveys (YRBS) from 2001 to 2009 in order to contract overlapping data about adolescent sexual orientation, experience/contact, and SROs. After merging available data, the researchers concluded that regardless of the sexual orientation measure used, most SMY subgroups had increased odds of all SROs compared to their non-SMY peers.

Stone et al. (2014) agree with current adolescent theory that social

stigma is the root of minority stress caused by hostile social environments. Such environments are characterized by prejudice and discrimination. However, subgroups experience different stigmas and are therefore likely to contract different mental health issues. For example, all SMYs except same-sex contact males had increased odds of suicide attempts. While Stone et al. compare the differences in SROs among sexual-minority subgroups, SMYs were mostly contrasted with their heterosexual peers rather than each other. As a result, any difference in risk factors between the two were grouped together, e.g. "LGB and unsure youths indicated approximately 2 to 3 times the prevalence of all SROs compared with their heterosexual peers" (264). Though self-reporting is less reliable than a methodological approach, additional research regarding the differentiation of treatment of different subgroups and their mental health would be valued, as other factors that come into play such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and self-expression could aid protective and educational programs in helping individuals address and overcome specific harmful stigmas.

Transgender Youth and Psychological Resilience

Grossman, D'Augelli, and Frank (2011) define transgender as a person's self-identification or gender expression that goes against the culturally defined norms of their biological sex, also known as gender dysphoria. Transgender is inclusive of transsexuals, cross-dressers, and gender-blenders (whose gender is ambiguous). The gender binary of our society causes transgender youth to become "marginalized and vulnerable minority groups who tend to experience more psychological and mental health problems than other social groups" (104). However, when faced with adversity, some youth are able to develop a psychological resilience that allows them to adapt positively and decrease their risk of health disparities.

The researchers investigated four potential predictors of psychological resilience: a sense of personal mastery, self-esteem, perceived social support, and emotion-oriented coping. The interpersonal study used multiple regression analyses to examine a sample of 55 transgender youth aged 15 to 21, their experiences, as well as various aspects of their social adjustment and mental health, such as depression, internalizing and externalizing problems, and trauma symptoms. All of the youth experienced feeling 'different from others' while growing up; two-thirds were explicitly told that they were different during their early childhood. Many of the participants' parents strongly disapproved of their non-conforming gender behavior from a young age, often using verbal abuse as reinforcement. The results of the study indicated that, while emotion-oriented coping was a significant predictor of negative mental health, higher senses of self-esteem, personal mastery, and greater perceived social support predicted positive

mental health outcomes. This supports the movement to implement more PYD programs in our schools and communities in an effort to improve self-image of struggling SMY teens, including those who identify as transgender.

This article is rare in that its main focus is on transgender youth. Most studies in this paper (Stone et al. 2014, Hatzenbeuhler et al. 2014, Mustanski et al. 2014) utilized the YRBS, which does not assess gender identity, to gather information on their samples. Given that the prevalence of SROs varies significantly based on sexual identity and the sex of sexual contact partners, one can hypothesize that it might also vary based on gender identity. To gain more insight into this "hidden population" of youth and their psychological well-being, I encourage national surveys such as the YRBS to inquire about gender identification or confusion. Such inquiries would better inform psychological researchers and programs of ways to assist transgender youth, a population that continues to be stigmatized by society's strict gender binary and behavioral expectations (Grossman, D'Augelli, and Frank 2011:106). In addition, such inquiries would allow wide surveys to more accurately predict transgender numbers and identify the differences in social treatment, behavior, and mental health status of sexual-minority subgroups.

Hate Crimes and Suicidality in Boston SMY

Duncan and Hatzenbeuhler (2014) explored unrecognized social determinants of suicide risk factors among LGB adolescents at the social-ecological level—specifically neighborhood communities. Existing research suggests that exposure to neighborhood-level violence is associated with suicide in non-LGBT populations, and due to the high percentage of sexual-minority-targeted hate crimes, Duncan and Hatzenbeuhler (2014) predicted a likely correlation between LGBT hate crimes and sexual-minority SROs as well. The research sample consisted of high-school-aged students from 22 of the 32 Boston Public Schools who had participated in the Boston Youth Survey (BYS) during the 2007-2008 academic year. Students answered questions regarding their sexual orientation as well as reliable YRBS-based questions regarding suicide ideation and attempts. Using hate-crime incident reports from the Boston Police Department, Duncan and Hatzenbeuhler (2014) identified overlap between poor psychological health in LGB youths and LGBT hate crimes in their neighborhoods. Overall, SMYs residing in neighborhoods with higher rates of LGBT assault hate crimes were significantly more likely to experience suicide ideation and attempts than SMYs residing in neighborhoods with lower rates. The hate crimes increased SROs in only LGB youth and not in heterosexual youth, providing evidence for the specificity of the study.

Reducing SMY Suicide Ideation with Protective School Climates

Studies have revealed that LGB youth who claim greater school connectedness and safety report lower suicidal ideation and attempts. Hatzenbeuhler et al. (2014) wanted to confirm this research with a methodological approach that offered more reliability than adolescent self-reports. Objective measures of school climate were used, including Gay-Straight Alliances, LGBTQ safe-spaces, relevant LGBTQ health curricula, prohibition of harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity, staff training in supportive environments, and facilitated access to off-campus LGBTQ health services. Data regarding student sexual orientation and suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts was gathered from the 2005 and 2007 YRBSs from eight different cities across the U.S. The results demonstrated that "LGB youths living in states and cities with more protective school climates were significantly less likely to report past-year suicidal thoughts" than those living in jurisdictions with less protective school climates (Hatzenbeuhler et al. 2014:282). Protective school climates, therefore, prove extremely effective in eliminating sexual orientation disparities in suicidal thoughts.

Hatzenbeuhler et al. (2014) recreated interpersonal evaluations of school protectiveness using objective measures of social programs, policies, and services for LGBTQ youth in comparison to the LGB students' mental health as gathered from the YRBS. These evaluations established evidence of the significant positive effects of protective school climates on LGB youth, supporting the theory that environmental factors largely affect adolescent mental health. The statistics demonstrating increased SROs in LGB youth who reside in neighborhoods with high LGBT hate crime rates also support this theory, suggesting that communities and schools should take action to protect their Sexual Minority Youth (Duncan & Hatzenbeuhler 2014).

Multilevel Societal Implications

Mustanski et al. (2014) used multiple studies to envision social change on each level of the Bronfenbrenner ecological multisystemic model, which determines different factors that contribute to an individual's psychological development. They predicted three components of the macro- and mesosystems would help break down social prejudice against sexual-minority individuals: the intolerance of compulsory heterosexuality, which assumes heterosexual orientation is normative; the establishment of social policies and laws against sexual-minority discrimination; and the acceptance of sexual-minorities in social institutions such as religious organizations, schools, and neighborhoods.

Institutional prejudice may be combated through the legalization of same-sex marriage, which would benefit adolescents both directly and

indirectly. Children of same-sex parents often have limited access to healthcare due to restrictive state laws. With the legalization of same-sex marriage, these children would be provided access to healthcare equal to the access provided to the children of heterosexual parents. Secondly, the possibility of legal marriage may inspire hope in sexual-minority adolescents who are maturing and looking to enter romantic relationships. Furthermore, the promise of a future in which they would be recognized as socially and legally equal to that of opposite-sex couples may decrease risky sexual behavior and spare them consequential psychological misfortune. This would make sexual minorities as socially normative as heterosexual orientations.

Families can take the steps to support LGBTQ adolescents by researching and attending educational programs, making an effort to equip their children with the skills to face the amplified challenges of LGBTQ life, advocating for protective policies, and most importantly, normalizing LGBTQ identities with guidance from health care and social providers. On the individual level, efforts can be made to increase healthy coping skills by attending school-based, family, or individual interventions and counseling. The use of cognitive-behavioral therapy can also be used to help break the stress of stigmas associated with certain avoided activities. Finally, if individuals learn to balance their self-worth across multiple domains, build up their self-esteem, and have access to social support, they can better develop effective resilience that will follow them into adulthood.

All adolescents have the right to a healthy development. Sexual Minority Youth experience mental health problems and suicide risk outcomes to a much greater extent than their heterosexual peers, due to social stigma and lack of support that could be easily provided. Mustanski et al. (2014) envisioned a future without these problems and suggested many possible ways in which research could be applied to every level of the Bronfenbrenner system. Their ultimate goal was to see equal treatment and opportunities for all adolescent youth regardless of their sexual-orientation or gender identity. They utilized research that mostly focused on LGB youth, though they acknowledged that transgender youth--who may have additional specific needs--would also benefit tremendously from their suggested programming. Although it will take years of progressive action to accomplish their proposals, envisioning a future with thriving LGB youths is a necessary step toward change. Ideally, any effects on a larger-scale will trickle down and eliminate the need for change at an individual level.

Case Study: Application

On April 16, 2014, The Ohio Board of Education voted to exclude sexual orientation from its nondiscrimination policy—though local districts may still adopt such legislation (Doza 2014). Currently, my alma mater Chagrin Falls High School does not specify sexual-orientation or gender identity in the nondiscrimination or bullying and hazing sections of its handbook (Chagrin Falls Exempted Village School District 2013). I use CFHS as a model to demonstrate how Positive Youth Development (PYD) programs could be introduced into a school that lacks such support for Sexual Minority Youth.

CFHS recently hired a part-time Social Advocates for Youth (SAY) counselor, Julie Beckerman. She has been trained to specifically aid adolescents with emotional, psychological, and substance-abuse issues; however, nowhere on the SAY website or in her online introduction does it mention services for sexual-minority youth (Chagrin Falls PTO, SAY). Sexual-orientation and gender identity is rarely discussed at CFHS, creating an environment in which LGBTQ students do not necessarily feel welcome or accepted. Duncan and Hatzenbeuhler (2014:276) state that "social cognitive and learning theories posit that individuals learn behaviors and norms that are passively observed in the environment, independent of actual reinforcement." I was pleasantly surprised to hear that in the last few months of the current semester, a group of students organized a Gay-Straight Alliance, though it has not been very active and few are involved. This is most likely due to its recent formation and the school's negative stigma toward homosexual associations. Therefore, protective programs could create a new school culture in which SMYs are seen as valued members of the student body.

The most important installment of this program would be training sessions in which teachers, students, and parents can learn how to create a safe, inclusive environment for LGBTQ students both inside and outside of school. Sessions would be held once a month on campus during school hours so that teachers and students without access to after-school transportation could attend. Public sessions would also be held twice a month in the evenings in order to accommodate parents, students, teachers, and interested Chagrin Falls citizens who could not attend during the school day. There could also be specific sessions in which only one group of people would be invited (e.g., solely teachers or family sessions).

A remarkable organization called the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has a chapter in Northeast Ohio that provides professionals to lead these training sessions "free of charge to districts" (GLSENNEO, personal communication, May 8, 2014). GLSEN also encourages the creation of safe spaces within schools, in which teachers and counselors who are working toward LGBT student equity can label their

classrooms or offices with stickers and posters indicating that it is a zone free of prejudice or harassment. GLSEN also provides Safe Space Kits, which schools can purchase for fifteen dollars each. This kit includes ten Safe Space stickers, one Safe Space poster, and a 42-page handbook titled Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students that provides concrete strategies for supporting SMY and educational methods that fight anti-LGBT bias while teaching respect for all peoples (GLSEN N.d.). These kits can be bought and utilized around CFHS as employees learn more about the necessity for positive learning environments for SMY.

As authority figures become more comfortable addressing these issues, teacher-lead group meetings can be established. Such meetings would foster positive relationships between peers with differentiating sexual identities in Gay-Straight Alliance gatherings as well as between SMY who previously lacked support from fellow sexual-minority students. These meetings would foster personal relationships between members of a fixed group sustained over time, eventually creating family-like bonds. These meetings can be held as often as necessary, or whenever a student requests for one to be held.

Additional training of the school's SAY counselor would also be desirable. LGBTQ students can only benefit from a professional adult who has the proper training on how to address adolescents' questions on sexual orientation, as well as the ability to advise on peer relationships and inner turmoil. LGBTQ students do not have to feel alone or resort to emotional-coping methods in order to solve their own problems, for these negative coping strategies can lead to increased internalizing disorders and higher risk of SROs in SMY (Grossman, D'Augelli, and Frank 2011). Beckerman (the SAY counselor) has the opportunity to make her office the official Safe Space of the CFHS, a place where all students can feel comfortable entering and talking about personal issues. One-on-one meetings should be available not only to students, but to teachers and parents who want to address the strategies involved in educating and raising LGBTQ students, respectively. These individualized meetings could act as supplements to those who do not feel comfortable attending the larger GLSEN sessions where one may feel exposed when asking questions about personal matters. Beckerman should also provide mediating meetings between peers and between parents and their adolescents over issues of LGBTQ-related arguments, misunderstandings, or miscommunications. If individuals do not feel comfortable talking to Beckerman directly, the school should provide recommendations for off-campus LGBTQ counseling services.

Health education classrooms should offer similar information, as well as information about LGBT health services and providers. Health classes in particular should act as additional required Safe Spaces for all students, as many personal inquiries and doubts can arise during these courses. If

the school is not ready to implement LGBT health information into their general curriculum (both during the school year and in summer sessions), the school can start by offering an anonymous question box in which students can pose questions to the health instructor, who would need to be properly trained by GLSEN. In order to further educate students, literature on LGBTQ healthy lifestyle in the form of pamphlets, flyers, posters, or assigned readings, can reach those who are too afraid or ashamed to speak up and ask questions. Similarly, school assemblies that address LGBTQ topics either once a year or once a semester can help supplement topics not covered in class and reach students not enrolled in health education courses. Beckerman can speak at these assemblies to spread the word about her services.

In proposing these ideas, I am not asking administrators of Chagrin Falls School District to denounce any personal or religious beliefs they may hold, nor am I asking individuals to endorse gay marriage or become activists for sexual-minority rights. Rather I am asking them to help protect students from experiencing psychological torment that may stem from the schools' indifferent and hostile environments. If we were to apply national population SMY statistics to the population of Chagrin Falls High School, approximately 75 students out of 400 have a sexual-minority orientation— that's about 19 SMY per grade that could be experiencing suicide ideation due to discrimination against their identities. The ultimate goals of these social programs would be to acknowledge the value of our students and employees by one day implementing non-discriminatory policies specifically targeting sexual-orientation and identity, incorporating LGBTQ health and information into school curricula, and developing a positive learning environment in which all students, employees, and families--regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity--can feel welcome. If decreasing the amount of suicide risk outcomes in our adolescents can be achieved by establishing these simple support systems, why wait to do so?

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Retirement as a Predetermined Privilege

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Retirement is often thought of as a time of relaxation and leisure after decades of laboring away in the workforce. It is supposed to be a time of removal from society, a step down from a role and its expected duties. In 2015, it is generally assumed that an individual will retire at 65 (or 67 if you born in or after 1960), move to Florida and play golf, or move into a retirement community. After working for 40-plus years in the labor force, retirement is seen as an earned right. However, retirement is a fairly new concept in American society, only receiving full recognition in the past 100 years with the passing of Social Security in 1935 and Medicare in 1965. In that time, the average number of years spent in retirement has increased due to the increase in life expectancy (Costa 1998).

We first must explore the history and the development of retirement to understand what it is like today. Next, we must examine the factors that determine who can retire in 2014 as a result of cumulative advantage. However, even if an individual has the resources to retire, he or she often struggles to adapt to the role of a retiree. Women especially struggle with the transition to and the stage of retirement itself because they often simultaneously transition into widowhood. We must survey the experiences of widows and their fewer counterparts, widowers, to understand their compounded struggle. As an individual's advantages and disadvantages from health, race, education, and employment accumulate, retirement can be viewed more of as a predetermined privilege. On the surface, retirement seems like the ideal vacation every worker dreams about, yet not all people have the ability to retire and reap the rewards of a lifetime of labor. Finally, this paper suggests some policy changes that could allow for retirement to become an earned right for all American workers.

Retirement is defined as the withdrawal from one's position or active working life. At the individual level, it means a withdrawal "either to enjoy more leisure or freedom or to cope with health problems" (Atchley 1982:263). At the employer level, it means a "removal or withdrawal from a position of employment of someone eligible for retirement" (263). Stereotypically, it is the time when people above the age of 65 enjoy leisure time after decades of hard work. Sociologically, retirement is a social institution that determines the size and composition of the labor force (264). A social institution consists of a body of alternatives as provided by the culture, its corresponding rewards and punishments, and the people (264).

Retirement in early America from the years 1700 to 1865 would be unrecognizable compared to today's conception of retirement. If a man lived to his mid-sixties, he would pass down the deed of the homestead to his sons, usually the eldest (Atchley 1982). In return for the property, the son would provide financial support for the rest of his parents' lives. Retirees were much more "dependent on their families and friends" instead

of a government run system (Costa 1998:25). Because most people worked for themselves, particularly on farms, or for small organizations, "socially initiated retirement" was not common (Atchley 1982:266). An individual worked until poor health prevented him or her from doing so. There was also a shift occurring at this time from traditional authority in the hands of the "elderly elites" to an egalitarian society with rational-legal authority in the hands of the "high achievers" (266). The more wealth one had, the more power and status one held. To maintain this status, one would work for as long as one was physically able.

The early industrial period began in 1865 and lasted until about 1900. While three new trends influenced the growth of retirement, older people's labor participation remained relatively high with only "sporadic" retirement (Atchley 1982:267). These trends were the "emergence of industrial work organizations and labor unions," the "emergence of mandatory retirement rules," and the "development of a new ideology of retirement" (267). The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad created the first step toward modern private pension and retirement plans by specifying that workers age 65 with at least 10 years of service to the company were entitled to a pension. This and other private pensions were used as a means to respond to union demands for seniority. Senior workers were more expensive, and offering pensions helped the companies save money by bringing in young and cheap employees.

Alongside these corporate changes came a new theory of biological aging, the "wear and tear" theory (Atchley 1982:269). This theory stated that people have a "fixed capacity to work" (269). Older workers were increasingly seen as "useless," not just expensive as they had been seen during the early industrial period (270). With migration into the United States at its height, new labor could replace those who were too old, contributing further to the growth of mandatory retirement.

From 1930 to 1941, the United States developed a "strong mandate for federal initiative" which allowed for Social Security legislation to pass in 1935 (Atchley 1982:271). The Great Depression generated the need to reduce the size of the labor force. Social Security simultaneously reduced the size of the labor force and managed unemployment. The minimum service requirement set aside benefits for those who had already contributed to the system. The minimum age (65) requirement limited the benefits to those who would be most likely to need them. Sixty-five was not a revolutionary choice at the time: Otto von Bismarck chose it in 1883 for his welfare initiatives in Germany. The Pension Bureau began granting pensions to Union army veterans at least 65 years old in 1890. The Massachusetts Commission on Old Age Pensions defined "the old" as 65 and older because it is the "one fixed as the pensionable age in most pension schemes" (Costa 1998:11). From this history, age 65 now marks the "beginning of 'old age'"

(9). Therefore, Social Security is a "product of retirement [rather] than a cause of it" by granting economic security to older people who could not work due to mandatory retirement, age discrimination, and the necessity to decrease the size of the labor force (Atchley 1982:271).

World War II (1941-1946) continued industrial development and maintained a strong federal government. The war led to a labor shortage at home and, as result, employers turned towards women, blacks, and older workers. However, older workers were screened for their abilities before being assigned to new jobs. After the war, retirement began to mature and saw significant advances from 1946 to 1964. Private pensions increased in prevalence and size. In 1945, there were 7,400 pension plans that covered 5 million workers. By 1955, there were 23,000 plans that covered over 15 million (Atchley 1982:272). Social Security broadened its coverage to almost all workers, and the minimum retirement age was lowered to 62 for women and to 61 for men. Overall, this created a positive shift in the image of retirement from the point of view of workers.

From 1965 until 1980, retirement saw a period of "intense legislative effort on behalf of older persons" (Atchley 1982:272). In 1965, the Older Americans Act (OAA) and Medicare were put into effect. In 1974, the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) became available, which ensured a basic annual income to individuals, regardless of work history. In 1978, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, which had protected workers 45 to 64 years old from age discrimination in hiring, firing, layoff, promotion, and other practices was extended to 69 (274).

In the relatively brief history of retirement, other factors have affected retirement besides history and policy. One of these factors is the social institution of family. A social institution is an "established and organized syste[m] of social behavior with a particular and recognized purpose" (University of Minnesota 2012). The family serves specific social functions, including caring for and raising others all the way through college admission and attendance. During the past century the college attendance rate has increased. Along with the attendance rate increasing, tuition has increased as well. Thus, the cost of educating one child has grown exponentially over the past 100 years. At the same time, there has been a shift from pyramid to beanpole family structures. A pyramid family structure has multiple children in each generation. This structure was useful when children were seen as workers, or an "economic asset" who could add to the family's income during the period of (family) farming. Now, children are seen as a burden due to the high price of education (Ruggles 2007:968). Most parents cannot afford to pay $200,000 per child when they have three or more children, thus leading to the beanpole family structure that has only one or two children in each generation.

Along with this change in the family structure, there has also been a decline in intergenerational co-residence households since 1950. Steven Ruggles (2007:965) argues that past literature "overemphasize[s] the effects of the rising income of the older generation and underestimate[s] the role of growing economic independence of the young generation." In the past, the younger generation did not have enough income and/or assets to live on their own and had to live with the older generation, their parents. However, there has been a rise in opportunities available to the younger generation. Ruggles (1984) found a powerful inverse relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and intergenerational co-residence by 1950. With children out of the family house, retirement can become more of a reality for the older generation.

Unfortunately, retirement cannot be a reality for all older people. Retirement from the work force and its salary is not economically feasible for people of lower socioeconomic statuses. On the other end of the spectrum are people who can afford to retire early (before 65) because they can afford to not work. The literature shows that those who can and cannot retire are determined very early in the life course. This inequality results from a concept called cumulative advantage.

Cumulative advantage traces back to Merton's "Matthew effect," defined as "the accruing of greater increments of recognition for particular scientific contributions to scientists of considerable repute and the withholding of such recognition from scientists who have not yet made their mark" (DiPrete and Eirich 2006:271). Merton had three presuppositions: 1) resources are finite and therefore limited, 2) talent is difficult to discern, and 3) distribution of these resources is overseen by the "norms of universalism" (recognition should be awarded based on the quality of the work) and "communism" (resources should be assigned to maximize the overall efficiency of the community) (281). In terms of retirement, cumulative advantage is a method in which the advantage of one individual over another accumulates over time. A person with more advantages at birth generally continues to accumulate additional advantages as he or she grows older, allowing the person to retire. In contrast, a person with fewer advantages or even disadvantages at birth falls further behind as he or she ages, preventing this person from retiring.

Kenneth Ferraro and Tetyana Shippee (2009) expand on cumulative advantage and cumulative inequality to create a new theory for the social scientific study of aging. They find that "gestation, infancy, and early childhood are critical periods in the life course" (Ferraro and Shippee 2009:338). Early childhood infections increase the risk for "chronic adult morbidity" (340). These illnesses could prevent an individual from being

able to work enough to earn sufficient money for retirement. These illnesses might also cause individuals to pass away before they reach the normal retirement age. Not only do early disadvantages increase inequalities over time, but early inequalities lead to differences in how individuals are "exposed to risk factors" that harm health (338). A disadvantaged childhood increases the possibility that an individual will engage in unhealthy behaviors such as smoking. Along with physical health disadvantages, stress also accumulates over time, further increasing the inequalities. Being chronically stressed has been shown to wear out the immune system and consequentially accelerate the aging process (339). Stressed individuals are more prone to illnesses throughout the life course, which is particularly detrimental to older adults whose immune systems begin to biologically weaken with age.

Matthew Dupre further explores cumulative disadvantage and integrates it with an opposing process called age-as-leveler hypothesis. This hypothesis states that health inequalities decrease at older ages (Dupre 2007). Specifically, Dupre focuses on the correlation between level of education and health patterns. Following cumulative disadvantage, Dupre finds that the probability of having a condition is negatively correlated to education. Illness can prevent individuals from attending school and pursuing further education. The rates of disease onset are also notably lower for people with higher levels of education. Using a longitudinal study, Dupre finds that people with a college education have a "57 percent reduction in the risk of dying" compared to people with only eight years of education (10). Yet, he finds that educational disparities are great in middle to late adulthood but then decline, thus supporting the age-as-leveler hypothesis. From birth, the inequality of resources impacts health inequalities. These inequalities accumulate with age and can prevent individuals from going to school or pursuing higher education, therefore adhering to the cumulative disadvantage hypothesis. Over time these health inequalities remove the sick from the society. The remaining group is much more homogenous in resources and health, thus living to older ages.

There appears to be a chain of events: 1) access to resources increases overall health, 2) higher overall health correlates with higher educational attainment, and 3) higher levels of education increase asset levels. Here, assets are defined as the "sum of accumulated private assets plus the present value of pension and Social Security benefits" (Miah and Wilcox-Gök 2007:1931). An individual with more health problems (chronic illness and limitations) accumulates fewer assets. On the other side of the socioeconomic spectrum, the higher an individual's earnings while in the workforce, the more likely the individual is to retire (1933). While chronic health problems do not directly affect retirement, they do indirectly affect

the probability of retirement via the level of assets available for retirement (1934). Therefore, the cumulative advantage hypothesis begins at birth and affects individuals through the retirement decision.

Now, we can better understand how advantages or resources accumulate for some individuals while disadvantages accumulate for others. This increase subsequently affects individuals over the life course. Next, we look at the specific effects of health, race, education, and employment status in more detail. First, health begins to be determined before an individual is even born: "Childhood health is a function of parental [socioeconomic status]" (Haas 2006:339). Individuals with fathers who completed 12 or more years of education have childhood health scores 0.12 higher than individuals who fathers did not complete high school (346). Parents of a high socioeconomic status are also less likely to have low-birth-weight children. Then, low-birth-weight children have childhood health scores 0.13 lower than children with normal birth weights (347). Childhood health is also a predictor of adult health: healthy childhoods correlate with healthy adulthoods, whereas poor childhood health correlates with poor adulthood health. Excellent childhood health connects with 22 percent higher earnings and 104 percent more assets for adult SES (348). These results illustrate that health is both a "cause and a consequence" (349). Childhood health affects adulthood health, with parents' SES affecting children's birth weight and childhood health.

Likewise, emotional health problems affect later life outcomes. Externalizing problems are "manifestations of distress that are expressed in outward behavior" such as disobedience or aggression, and internalizing problems are "manifestations of distress that are expressed in inward feelings, such as depression or moodiness" (McLeod and Kaiser 2004:641). Internalizing problems are associated with the likelihood of repeating a grade in school. The effect of internalizing problems is associated with a "26 percent reduction in the likelihood of high school [graduation]" (647). Externalizing problems reduce this likelihood by 31 percent. While both of these emotional problems affect high school graduation, only externalizing problems continue to influence educational attainment in subsequent years. Both physical and emotional health affect the number of resources that can be attained later in life.

Second, an individual's race also impacts later life, particularly life expectancy. Even with the reversal of Plessy v. Ferguson's "separate but equal" in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954, there is an "alarming persistent divide" between races in the United States (Olshansky et al. 2012:1804). Race indirectly affects longevity through level of education and "its socioeconomic status correlates" (1806). While controlling for education at age 25, whites have a higher life expectancy at

birth compared to blacks. However, Hispanic females come in first with an even higher life expectancy than white females, Hispanic males, and white males (Olshansky et al. 2012). These differences are attributed to lifelong stress associated with disadvantage based on race (1806). Overall, Hispanics and whites are more likely to live long enough to reach retirement age, be able to leave the workforce, and enjoy the associated relaxation as compared to blacks.

Third, higher education can mediate the effects of race. Both blacks and Hispanics with sixteen or more years of education lived 7.5 years and 13.6 years longer, respectively, compared to whites with fewer than twelve years of education (Olshansky et al. 2012:1806). In contrast, having less than twelve years of education in this day and age has a "much greater negative association" with life expectancy for whites than in the past. This educational gradient is also seen with mortality. The gradient is "visually steeper" for men compared to women (Montez et al. 2009:631). It is more probable that a college—or even higher—educated individual will live longer and thus experience more years of retirement. Education's effect on mortality could be minimized with marriage, though. In Montez et al.'s study of education, marriage, and gender, they find a "steeper gradient" for unmarried men as compared to married men (630). While the difference is small, it is significant enough to suggest that, not only does education predict life expectancy, but it also has a selection effect. Lower-educated, unmarried men could have histories of poor health, rendering them "undesirable spouses and accelerating their mortality risks" (633). In general, the literature implies that an individual's life expectancy rises with the level of education received. The more education an individual has, the more likely he or she will live long enough to reach retirement age and reap its benefits.

Scott Davies and Neil Guppy's (1997) study narrows education down to college selectivity and student inequalities in higher education. Following the literature about SES, more advantaged students are more likely to enroll in more selective colleges (Davies and Guppy 1997). These students from wealthier backgrounds are exposed to cultural resources and thus also gain "cultural capital" that adds to the educational advantage (1432). This finding supports the cumulative advantage hypothesis. A higher-SES family can afford access to more cultural events (museum visits, orchestra concerts, live theatre), which serve to educate a student on their own merit. Cumulative advantage appears to determine who continues to be wealthy and who continues to be poor. Education from elementary school through college determines and is determined by race, health, gender, and socioeconomic status for the life course.

Fourth, researchers associate employment status with an increased

risk of mortality and therefore a shorter life expectancy. One study followed 49,321 Swedish men from their compulsory military conscription in 1969 and 1970. Researchers collected data regarding 1. Their mortality and hospitalization from 1973 to 2004 and 2. Their employment statuses from 1990 to 1994 (Lundin et al. 2010). They find a strong relationship between unemployment from 1992 to 1994 and mortality from 1995 to 2003. Even so, researchers find that the absence of sickness most strongly contributes towards mortality risks. The relationship between unemployment and mortality suggests that individuals with risk factors for mortality more often lose their jobs (2010). In short, this study concludes that overall health (including risk factors) is the ultimate cause for later employment or lack thereof. Having poorer health prevents individuals from earning a higher income due to unemployment, and this loss of income then affects an individual's ability to retire. If he or she does not work long enough, he or she will not earn enough money to set aside for retirement when there is not a salary. These studies illustrate how health, race, education, and employment status accumulate as advantages or disadvantages.

Today there is a new work mantra, "Do what you love. Love what you do" (Tokumitsu 2014). While this idea keeps the individual "focused on [himself or herself] and [his or her] individual happiness," it diverts his or her attention away from the necessary working conditions of others by justifying his or her choices (2014). "Doing what you love" (DWYL) blinds the casual worker from the secret motive behind the following phrase: the "handshake of the privileged" (2014). There is a class-based division between those who do what they love and those who do not (or cannot) do what they love. High-SES individuals can afford to work in jobs they love because they are not as concerned about their paycheck: "[B]eing able to choose a career primarily for personal reward is an unmerited privilege" (2014). Most individuals are not high-SES and, thus, cannot do what they love because they cannot afford it. However, if all people, high-SES included, acknowledged their "work as work," regulations could help standardize work hours and compensation in hopes of eliminating some of the inequalities that result from cumulative advantage (Tokumitsu 2014).

On the surface one would think that it would be easy to adjust to a life without work. Yet, the literature shows that the transition to retirement (for those who do) is not necessarily easy or smooth. The resource theory holds that the "ease of adjustment is the direct result of individual's access to resources" (Wang et al. 2011:3). If an individual does not experience a change in his or her amount of resources, the individual can continue his or her prior lifestyle and activities, making the adjustment much smaller and therefore smoother.

Unfortunately, the decision to enter retirement is not a choice

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made by all who retire. This is known as involuntary retirement. About 25 percent of older workers say that their decision to retire was "not (entirely) voluntary" (van Solinge and Henkens 2007:S300). There are two central factors that impact the retirement decision: choice and motivation (Szinovacz and Davey 2005). Choice concerns disability and labor-market "circumstances" (36). Individuals experience involuntary retirement when illness and job displacement lead to their removal from the work force. Motivation concerns the worker's "inclination to retire" and the related benefits-costs ratio (36). Social timing plays an important role in motivation. Workers who retire at younger ages are more likely to view their retirement as involuntary or forced. Although there is no longer a mandatory retirement age, there remain "robust social norms" about the "appropriate time for retirement" (van Solinge and Henkens 2007:S301). With health and worker displacement as common elements that cause involuntary retirement, this finding reinforces retirement as a result of cumulative advantage or disadvantage. If an individual accumulates advantages, retirement is a choice and therefore labeled voluntary retirement. This group is "more educated, ha[s] higher incomes, and [is] more likely to be retired from managerial and professional positions" (Shultz, Morton, and Weckerle 1998:52). Those who voluntarily retire report higher life and retirement satisfaction, better self-reported physical and emotional health, and lower levels of depression than those who involuntarily retire (1998). Consequently, voluntary retirees continue to accumulate advantages even after the work years have ended.

After successfully transitioning into retirement, older Americans who stay engaged in activities and/or work are more likely to be satisfied with retirement. The more hours a retiree is engaged, the more likely he or she is to be very satisfied with retirement. Older adults have three role identities: spouse, parent, and employee (Greenfield and Marks 2004). When an individual retires from the work force, he or she loses a role: the role of the worker or employee. Being engaged gives an individual a new role to replace the recently vacated one. Conversely, those with less roles experience lower levels of psychological well being (2004). To fight the cumulative disadvantage of losing at least one (or more) role(s), volunteering helps an individual's psychological well being and thus helps him or her be more satisfied with retirement.

One of the roles previously mentioned was that of the spouse. Widowhood is a very common aspect of retirement, especially for women who have longer life expectancies than their typically male spouses. For most women, marriage produces a "protective effect" and lowers mortality. Subsequent widowhood generates a "spike in mortality immediately following bereavement" (Elwert and Christakis 2006:18). For some women,

marriage does not increase longevity. In this case, the loss of a spouse does not impact mortality risk. For example, an unhappy marriage does not provide any psychological benefits so the loss of a spouse creates fewer (if any) psychological problems (2006). Still other women gain a "survival advantage" from marriage that is not lost after bereavement (2006:18). Studies find that endogamously married black men and women do not experience the significant widowhood effect experienced by white men and women (2006). While being white is an advantage for most of the life course, it becomes a disadvantage with the onset of widowhood and its resulting mortality risk.

Besides mortality risk, widows and widowers differ in levels of depression. Widowers have higher levels of depression than widows (Lee et al. 2001). This gender gap is largely due to the greater psychological advantage men gain with marriage compared to women. In addition, men provide less assistance to their children after widowhood compared to women (2001). Such interactions diminish the depressive effects of widowhood. Through interactions with their children, women, moreso than men, replace their spouse role with a grandparental role or a more involved parental role. Widowers are also less likely to be involved outside the family. For example, they are less likely to attend church, an institution that provides both emotional support and a social network to widower. Such supports are necessary after the loss of a spouse who is often considered a "confidant" (Jung-Hwa 2008:307). To counter the cumulative disadvantage of losing a spouse and a confidant, widowers should interact with their children (and grandchildren) and attend church or other similar institutions more frequently.

Women face an additional problem when retiring because the procedures to claim Social Security benefits reinforce the traditional family structure. As it stands, Social Security benefits are based on lifetime work history, and because women often have lower lifetime earnings than men, women tend to rely on survivor benefits from their husbands (Sass, Sun, and Webb 2007). However, with men retiring earlier, their wives receive fewer benefits by the "time when only the wife is likely to be alive" (13). Widows then continue to struggle after already losing their spouse with this decreased income. Husbands should decide when to claim benefits based on the wife's life expectancy instead of his own, because she will most likely outlive him (Munnell and Soto 2005).

Due in part to the nation's increased life expectancy, retirement is a continuously evolving institution. As such, policies regarding retirement need to keep pace. Recent policy-implemented programs focus on preventive screening, modifying smoking abuse, increasing exercise, and improving nutrition (Mechanic 2002). These programs "depend on voluntary

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involvement," causing the disadvantaged to experience more obstructions: voluntary involvement often requires that participants take time off from work and find their own transportation and childcare (51). That said, the interventions often target problems prevalent for low SES groups including desegregation, simpler and less costly treatments, and research on illnesses that generally affect the poor. While these interventions prevent inequalities from increasing, some argue that they should focus on eliminating the root causes of inequality.

The main legislation for older adults, Social Security (1935) and Medicare (1965), are both dated programs. With both high and low socioeconomic groups experienced survival gains in the 1990s, life expectancy increased by only 0.2 years for the bottom SES decile compared to the 0.8 years for the top decile. In addition, there has been a $2,624 increase in spending for the bottom decile compared to $1,214 for the top decile as lower income groups use more family physician services and hospital services to "ameliorate the socioeconomic differences in mortality"(Skinner and Zhou 2004). These individuals, however, use specialist services less than higher income groups. These trends have the potential to "widen the socioeconomic gap in health" (Veugelers and Yip 2003:427). Since the increased use of physician services does not decrease existing disparities, policymakers need to change to the system to help those in the bottom decile. Some suggest that specialist services be made more readily available to low SES individuals who lack quality treatment in certain geographical areas (Skinner & Zhou 2004).

Policy changes are needed to reduce the inequalities that build up due to cumulative advantage across the life course. The first step to reducing the disparities is to bring "explicit attention" to the mechanism of cumulative advantage (DiPrete and Eirich 2006:292, Ferraro and Shippee 2009). Second, we must educate the public, especially lower income and older adults about health care and social security (Mechanic 2002). As shown, education increases resources and accumulates advantages. By giving more information to lower socioeconomic groups, they can learn what "intervening variables" produce healthier outcomes, including longer life expectancy (Mechanic 2002:55). Third, we must continue to provide support as a "safety net" to ensure the success of these interventions (Mechanic 2002:55). The sooner cumulative advantage is recognized, the sooner the policies can change. As the policies begin to change, people will begin to see how early advantages and/or disadvantages accumulate. This knowledge will help prevent retirement from continuing to be a privilege for the higher socioeconomic groups. Then, more (if not all) adults can have the option to enjoy some relaxation and leisure as their earned right after 40-plus years in the work force.

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Privileged Cultures: An Autobiography

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I was born on October 6, 1994 in the urban city of New Haven, Connecticut, a place where only the most determined of students succeed academically, since the public school system lacks the money and resources to produce academically competitive students. As a result, most New Haven high school graduates do not have the privilege of pursuing degrees at four-year universities. I spent my early adolescent years in a densely populated African-American neighborhood which was ten minutes down the street from my elementary school on Dixwell Avenue. In fifth grade, I attended a college-preparatory middle school, whose sole mission was to bridge the achievement gap between underprivileged urban black students and wealthier suburban white students.

After eighth grade, I relocated to New Canaan Public High School due to its better school system, resources, and opportunities. At the time, I did not realize that my new high school was located in one of the whitest and most affluent towns in the nation. Living in New Canaan became an eye-opening experience. The financial and socioeconomic differences between New Haven and New Canaan drastically impacted the two school systems, fostering two completely different cultures, both of which have influenced who I am today. Yet, while these two cultures may appear different on the surface, both environments fostered the same idea: more money meant having more privilege. The importance of privilege and income were evident in both environments and I was able to witness how these factors manifested themselves in each education system. Living on both sides of the academic and poverty lines has not only raised my awareness of privilege, but it has also blessed me with the cultural capital to overcome socio-economic barriers.

According to Sternheimer (2010:149), "it is well documented that gender and race intersect with class and that these factors determine our relation to power and privilege." As a black man growing up in one of the most urban cities in the U.S., I have to agree. In New Haven, it was common for the small number of students who were able to spare a few dollars a week to ride home on the city bus to be viewed as socially elevated above the "school bus kids." The city bus, in this way, was a status symbol. Although I always took the school bus in the morning, in the afternoons I usually took the city bus so that I could spend time with my friends. Much like a dual-citizenship, I experienced two sub-cultures that came to mold my friendships and experiences. Something as small as being a part of a 20-minute city bus ride eventually solidified my status as a more privileged member of the school community. Sternheimer (2010:25) notes, "Sometimes our cultural practices are rooted in our family backgrounds or ethnic heritage, and some of our cultural practices are based on our social class or our age." Because I shared similar ethnic roots and was part of the same social class as the locals of New Haven, I naturally developed similar cultural practices. On the other hand, in

New Canaan, I had to work harder to develop a new set of cultural practices in order to properly assimilate. Although I did not own an expensive German car like many of my New Canaan peers, I did obtain my license relatively close to the time they did—a less likely feat for the average student in New Haven due to finances and resources. My license allowed me to bond with my New Canaan peers over the thrills and horrors of the driving test. In doing so, I gained a role as one of the members of the "in-group." In this way, both high schools provided me the opportunity to join two vastly different communities.

One's education level is influenced by the social class of one's parents (Domhoff 2006). Because lower-class students in New Haven struggle to attain high school degrees, it is unlikely that they--and consequently, their future children--will be able to graduate from an institution of higher learning in four years. This is an example of systematic oppression that perpetuates a cycle of non-college graduates. Giddens et al. (2010:45) argue that "education is an important dimension of social stratification," meaning that education usually predicts which social groups people will belong to in society. Due to New Haven's poor education system, many people are trapped in the lower rungs of society and, as a result, cannot obtain the social or cultural capital required to escape. Social capital is the collective value of an individual's network and the relationships he or she forms with the people around him or her. Cultural capital refers to non-financial assets that can promote social mobility beyond money, for example: clothes, education, style of speech. In today's society, it is especially evident that education and its relationship to race has a direct impact on both the types of jobs for which people are qualified and by extension, the level of income they can expect to attain (Sternheimer 2010:153). I found this to be evident during my high school experience, as was manifested by the wealth gap between New Canaan and New Haven.

In the academic realm, New Haven residents with little academic background cannot hope to compete with New Canaan elites due to the amount of systematic obstacles placed before them. The main obstacle to academic success for residents of New Haven is the nature of the school system to which students are exposed. The New Haven school system was and is currently failing its students because of a lack of economic resources. As a result of poor academic performance and a lack of funding, my elementary school was shut down immediately after my fourth grade graduation ceremony. My middle school opened the same year I enrolled, but it had insufficient funds to compete with other middle schools. The school chose to focus on reading and math skills in an attempt to produce urban students of color who could compete academically with their white suburban counterparts. This approach did better prepare me for denser

readings and more critical thinking; however, juxtaposed with my peers in New Canaan, it was not nearly enough to bring me to their level.

On my first day of high school in New Canaan, I learned how to properly use and program a SMART board (a virtually interactive whiteboard). I was learning from the most innovative classroom technology at the time, while most of my peers in New Haven had merely made the transition from chalk boards to white boards. As educational as the SMART board experience was, that day was eye-opening for many other reasons. I learned how much further behind I was academically than the students around me. For example, most of my peers relied on their previous years of Spanish classes, stemming all the way back to middle school, while I struggled through the most basic levels of the language. Growing up with so many resources, such as SMART boards, better qualified teachers, and parents with college degrees, New Canaan students were in a better position to succeed academically. In contrast with New Haven high school graduates, New Canaan grads almost always continued onto college. From my experiences, I have witnessed the accuracy in Domhoff's (2006) statement that people's education level is often influenced by the socioeconomic status of their parents.

Too often at Boston College I do not feel as academically prepared as most of the people around me because, unlike most of my peers, I am a Black, economically modest, first-generation college student. I have observed that a good portion of students only associate with others that mirror their socio-economic background. Many students arrive on campus with more economic and cultural capital than I may ever acquire, and I understand why that may be. Giddens et al. (2013) state:

Wealthy elites often have social connections that give them and their children access to elite schools, highly sought-after professional positions, membership in elite social organizations, and access to romantic partners and potential spouses who hail from very wealthy backgrounds. In these ways, wealth and its rewards are perpetuated from one generation to the next.

I find this to be very evident on campus. Despite the fact that we attend the same college, we all took different paths to get here. Unlike some of my wealthier peers, I did not have access to resources that might have facilitated my acceptance into BC. Therefore, my academic ability and determination were necessary to overcome social barriers. These factors motivate me to achieve more, despite feeling like I am behind most of my peers. Domhoff (2006) explains this motivation saying:

Although most people are keenly aware of differences in social status levels primarily in terms of income, occupation, and

education (but especially income), they emphasize...that a person's social standing is in good part determined by such individual qualities such as initiative and the motivation to work hard.

While people may initially judge me based on my outward appearance or social-standing, BC students understand that I have worked hard to get here. They may not understand the extent of how hard I had to work to be here, but overall, there is a mutual understanding that everyone had to show "initiative and motivation to work hard" in order to attend this college, which allows me to loosely fit into the BC culture. In hindsight, I believe that my experience in New Canaan helped me develop the social and cultural capital I needed in order to interact with members of the social upper class. French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) viewed social class groups according to their levels of cultural and economic capital. Contrary to Bourdieu's (1984) beliefs, Giddens et al. (2013:200) argue that people often distinguish themselves "not according to economic or occupational factors but on the basis of cultural tastes and leisure pursuits." I support Gidden et al.'s (2013) beliefs over Bourdieu's (1986), because Gidden et al. more accurately describe how I relate and interact with the students around me.

"Cultural tastes" refer to the backgrounds and interests that bind people together into a unified community. Regardless of a person's socio-economic background, every student has the ability and opportunity to share cultural tastes with the people around them and help them to further develop their identity during their time at BC. Often at BC, people are segregated by their friend groups. Friend groups are usually determined by connections, one of the more common being socioeconomic backgrounds. If the BC student body as a whole is to truly be a unified community for men and women, it must challenge the economic and academic barriers that exist between students and embrace our shared cultural tastes and identities.

Every BC student shares the common privilege of attending one of the most prestigious and respected universities in the world. Despite that common achievement, there seems to be one consistent obstacle preventing the student body from unifying: egotism. Egotism, in this case, is when a student feels the need to differentiate from other students in order to feel or appear better in one way or another. I have personally observed this on campus as early as orientation, when freshmen ask other freshmen if, for example, they were admitted early decision, regular decision or taken off the waiting list. Even more so, I have witnessed how students value and devalue other students based on majors, specifically focusing on the certain level of prestige and respect given to Carroll School of Management majors as opposed to Arts and Sciences majors. Additional segregation happens when

friend groups evolve into cliques founded on common factors such as social class, outward appearances, and exclusivity. Over time, these screenings hurt confidence and ultimately affect academic performance. This especially affects minorities who already have to deal with the social pressures of competing on a predominantly white campus. As university students--especially BC students--form friend groups, they should be aware of how we construct our own social barriers, and we should actively work to overcome those barriers together. Privilege does not have to define our relationships.

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Latino Masculinity: Underlying Factor in College Persistence Levels in College-Aged Latino Males

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Latinos are increasing in number and influence in the United States. By 2050, Latinos will comprise 29% of the population (Passel and Cohn 2008). Despite growing numbers, Latinos lag behind in higher education compared to their white counterparts; only 13.5% of associate's degrees and 8.8% of bachelor's degrees were awarded to Latino students in 2010 (U.S. Department of Education 2012). Of those dismal figures, only 37.6% of associate's and bachelor's degrees were awarded to Latino males (U.S. Department of Education 2012). The discrepancy between Latino female and male college enrollment and graduation rates can be linked to sociocultural factors, such as gender roles, socioeconomic status, criminalization of the Latino male, and neighborhood and environmental contexts. This paper investigates the academic, social, and psychological factors that influence Latino males' decisions about postsecondary education and their associated implications.

Literature Review

Despite the recent increase in research about ethnicity and higher education, there remains a large gap in the literature on Latino men in college. Ojeda, Navarro, and Morales (2010) documented the link between family, identity, and college persistence intentions for Mexican-American men, concluding that the family's centrality to gender identity and high parental involvement positively impacted college persistence intentions. Researchers have demonstrated a strong relationship between Latino male identity and the concept of family, not only for Mexican-Americans, but for Latinos of all ethnic backgrounds (Arciniega et al. 2008; Castillo et al. 2008; French and Chavez 2010; Ovink 2013). Specifically, the importance of "familismo," which "encompasses the loyalty, commitment, and dedication to 'la familia'" is repeatedly identified in the literature as a significant influence on the Latino consciousness (Ojeda et al. 2010:223). Latino males are expected to support their families financially and emotionally—a reality that undeniably affects educational, professional, and personal development (French and Chavez 2010). The concept of family can be a double-edged sword—providing extensive support and generating positive involvement, but also demanding a level of commitment that often interferes with college persistence (Ojeda et al. 2010). For the purpose of this article, college persistence will be defined as completing a college degree.

The complex topic of Latino males' college persistence involves the interaction of a variety of systems and factors. The literature identifies four prevalent themes that largely influence Latino males' college access and completion: (a) level of awareness of educational obstacles on behalf of communities and administrators, (b) the importance of family, (c) the impact of male peers and mentors, and (d) the absence and value of

outreach programs specifically designed for Latino males (Nuñez, Sparks, and Hernandez 2011; Cerezo and Chang 2013; Clark et al. 2013; Ingram and Gonzalez-Matthews 2013; Ojeda et al. 2013).

Clark et al.'s (2013:458) study of educators' perspectives on Latino male educational pursuits revealed that "the strong influence of the Latino patriarchal and cultural norms imposes unique demands and expectations on Latino men." Family pressure to fulfill the male role, paired with institutional and financial barriers to Latino male college access and retention, create an environment unsupportive of Latino males' educational pursuits. The researchers also found that peer and mentor relationships enhanced the educational success and persistence of Latino men in both high school and college. Thus, understanding the unique cultural experience of Latino males seems to be a key component of Latinos' success in higher education.

Contextual variables contribute to the lack of Latino males' access to higher education. Administrators and students identified failing high schools (i.e. lacking in materials, committed teachers, mentors, helpful counselors) and home environments with little to no knowledge of the college admission and application process (financial planning and aid for college, university culture, etc.) as serious impediments to getting into and persisting through college (Cerezo et al. 2012, Cerezo and Chang 2013). Negotiating the financial stresses of college, acquiring financial aid, and paying for school without familial help often create an "uphill battle" for students (Cerezo et al. 2012:359).

In addition, numerous psychological factors strongly influence Mexican-American students' decisions to pursue and complete a college degree (Cerezo et al. 2012). Precollege racial micro-aggressions and family pride are significant factors in Mexican-Americans' intentions and abilities to complete college. Cerezo et al. (2012:357-8) documented that teachers, administrators, and peers discouraged college aspirations, claiming that college would be "too difficult," that Latino male students would not be "capable," suggesting military enlistment, attendance at a trade school, or even "engage[ment] in criminal activity" as more viable options.

Although the literature identifies issues that Latino students face in accessing college, it primarily focuses on Mexican-American college students. While Mexican-Americans constitute the largest percentage of the Latino populations of the United States (Pew Research Center 2011), it is essential to gather information from a diverse and nationally representative sample to make generalizations to Latinos as a whole. The literature is also lacking in student voices. While there is extensive input from scholars, administrators, and psychologists on the issue of college persistence in relation to male Latinos, only a handful of researchers ask Latinos themselves to speak on the issue. Few studies are qualitative and provide space for students to voice

their experiences in all their nuanced complexity as this current study does (Neuman 2006).

The present study explores a more diverse group of male Latino college students and their constructions of the factors that influence their ability to complete a college degree. The study seeks to provide an opportunity for Latino males to discuss their access to college, the challenges they face once they get there, and their understandings of how their identity and cultural background could influence whether or not they graduate.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand, through the lens of a sociocultural framework, how Latino men define the obstacles and challenges they have encountered and/or may currently encounter as they attempt to complete a college degree. In other words, what factors do Latino males describe as impacting educational options, decisions, and experiences?

Thirteen self-identified Latino men ages 18 to 23 and currently enrolled in four-year universities in the Greater Boston area were individually interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. Participants attended predominantly white, private, four-year institutions. Original participants were recruited through campus organizations that tailored to first-generation Latino college students. Using a snowball sampling method, these participants reached out to other Latino men who qualified for this study.

Participants were selected by ethnic background to ensure diversity in the final sample, which consisted of mostly American-born Latinos with ethnic ties to Mexico, El Salvador, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Guatemala. One participant was born in Puerto Rico but immigrated to the United States at the age of ten, while another self-identified as a second-generation Chicano. Participants attended high schools in California, Florida, Texas, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York; all identified as low to low-middle income. The names used in this study are pseudonyms. Given the study's inductive nature, interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format that allowed participants to focus on specific topics of their choosing.

Results

Findings addressed academic preparedness, family dynamics, and gender roles. There was also an emphasis on gendered understandings of help-seeking behaviors specifically relevant to college navigation, success, and well-being. In this study, "help-seeking" was defined as academic

assistance (e.g., tutoring, professor office hours, etc.), career and financial advising (e.g., professional preparation programs, addressing additional funding needs, etc.), and psychological assistance (e.g., stress management, emotional support, etc.), in both formal (professional) and informal (peer and family network) settings.

Previous Academic Experiences

Participants identified high school environments and interactions as strongly influencing perceptions of college access, academic preparedness once in college, and awareness of resources and services supporting college adjustment. The academic rigors of college contributed to participants' beliefs about self-efficacy. Many participants explicitly feared they would not be able to overcome poor preparation, thus creating a sense of inadequacy and failure. Limited exposure to minimal academic resources exacerbated feelings of hopelessness. Participants highlighted resource awareness and willingness to access resources as essential to academic success.

Family Influence

Family contributed to participants' conceptions of education, success, and well-being. Participants did not enroll in college to promote individual success, but rather to provide a better future for their parents and their future family. The role of the family was paradoxical: family encouragement and support were important to participants' intentions and decisions to attend and persist through college, but family expectations and responsibilities negatively influenced the ability to graduate. Participants talked about financial stresses and familial care-taking as barriers to college persistence.

Masculinity

Gender played a significant role in how Latino males situated their education in relation to their identity, family, and future. Participants perceived education as necessary for the financial independence and security needed to support a family. While some participants wanted their future partners to be financially independent, most identified the male as the primary provider. The drive to be a self-sufficient and a successful provider influenced their educational decisions. Masculinity also played a major role in how participants sought help during college. Participants' constructions of masculinity blended traditional Latino constructions of gender with mainstream American notions. Gender policing in the Latino community proved to negatively impact help-seeking considerations and behaviors among participants as well.

Discussion

     Many participants saw the role of the family and the importance of having resources in high school and college as a significant point for first-generation students. The lack of secondary school resources not only rendered the college application process difficult, but also affected college adjustment. Andres, a sophomore, illustrates this point:

> I didn't know that you could get free tutoring...I didn't know that there were people on campus that you could go to and talk to and try to appeal a financial aid decision. None of that stuff was available to me in high school, so the possibility that they would be available in college...didn't even cross my mind.

Andres' experience showcases how disadvantage can continue to affect individuals even as they move into more encouraging environments.

     Family support and expectations for higher education permeated the discussion on factors that influenced participants' goals of going to college. Families demanded that sons avail themselves of American privileges, a theme that pervaded all interviews. One participant talked about his family's immigration to the United States in this context, explaining how they struggled by taking the worst jobs, and acknowledging that: "Going to college meant showing them that all they had sacrificed was not done in vain. My job was to get to college and I did." Attaining a college degree seemed to be individually and family-motivated; participants emphasized their families' support and expectation of a college education as fundamental to their enrollment and graduation intentions.

     The intersection of gender and culture and its role in college persistence was indisputably the most critical finding of this study. Participants deconstructed their journeys to and during college within the context of their identity as Latino men, noting how gender and culture shaped their conceptualizations of education, success, and ability. Gender construction, defined by one participant as an "all-consuming way of thinking that tells you how you have to live as a man," saturated the discussion of college access and success. This identity linked closely to participants' construction of their personal and professional aspirations. Attending college was not only something that participants felt they owed their parents, but also something that was closely tied to their feelings about themselves and their functions as males.

     Definitions of success included the ability to "support my family, have a house, and take care of my wife and kids." The concept of family itself, for many of the participants, corroborated the literature on the concept of "familismo." Interviewees perceived an expectation of

responsibility, not only to future families, but also to parents and siblings, and extended that responsibility particularly to female family members. As David, a senior, shared, "If something were to happen to my father, or any of my brothers, I would have to take care of my mother and sisters...it's what would be expected of me and what I would expect, too." This self-imposed obligation to support family members—specifically women—reinforces "male as provider" as an integral component to Latino male identity.

Most participants identified a direct expectation from family members, both male and female, to fulfill the "man of the house/provider" role by virtue of being the only, or oldest, male in the home. "When my dad died...my mom told me that I was the man of the house now...I had to be strong and take care of the family," shared Gustavo, whose father died when he was nine years old. He shared: "Those words stayed with me—I still feel like I am the man of the house, like I have a family to take care of, like this [college] isn't just about me." The interplay of gender-based family expectations and success yielded very specific reasons why Latino men were in college. Going to college, therefore, meant guaranteeing the ability to assume the role of provider and support current and future families. This created a paradoxical effect: a motivator for college success in the face of positive family involvement and support, and a stressor in the face of family hardship and adversity.

Participants' constructions of masculinity were at the crux of the conversation on college achievement and persistence. Participants branded the ideal Latino man as possessing qualities that coincide with traditional masculine norms, such as independence, virility, emotional control, industriousness, aggression, and dominance (Mahalik et al. 2003). Yet, participants identified Latino masculine norms to be "exaggerated" and "much more intense." As Benny noted, "Latinos have very clear separations between men and women. It's very traditional in a sense and not open for negotiation." Gender roles in the Latino community are closely tied to cultural identity, and implicit and explicit modeling where "being a man is not thrust upon me, it's shown to me. I know I will make them proud if I do what they did" (Juan, senior).

Women also sustain and adhere to these conceptions of Latino masculinity. Leal, a junior, explained that his mother instructed him how to be a man: "[B]e strong...stand up and dominate—to not let anyone disrespect or put you down. My father wasn't around and so she said I had to be strong for her and the family." His aunts and sisters agreed: "Men can't cry. They have to provide. They have to be tough." Cousins and sisters saw men who did not fit these ideals as unattractive because they "[weren't] acting like a man should." Gender roles are so entrenched in the Latino community that women uphold and co-construct them in spite of a movement away from the

traditional, and often destructive, understandings of gender in the Latino community (as cited by other participants). A few participants shared how some people in the community challenge Latino gender norms, but these individuals seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

All but one participant identified help seeking in relation to masculinity as a major determinant of success in both the academic and socio-emotional domains of college. Asking for help was an essential but difficult behavior, as what it meant to be a Latino man clashed with the ability to engage in help-seeking. "A man has it all together, doesn't need to ask anyone for help—they're independent and strong and have it all under control," shared Cesar, a sophomore. He continued, "You go for help and... it sounds stupid, it's almost like you are no longer a man."

Seeking academic help resulted in psychological and social difficulties. Cesar explains that he was profoundly reluctant to admit that he might be having a hard time: "If I admitted that I needed help [then that] meant that I didn't have everything under control—that I needed somebody else to help me out, to do what I couldn't." Taught to be independent, Cesar viewed asking for help as losing self-sufficiency: "I definitely didn't want my friends to see me struggling—they looked like they had it all together and I pretended to, too." Help-seeking as dependency was common among most participants and clashed directly with internalized constructions of masculinity—signaling both a lack of independence and a suggestion of failure.

Gender policing, a social phenomenon that imposes normative gender expressions on individuals perceived to be non-conforming to the expectations of their perceived sex (Helgeson 2011), was especially salient among participants. Hyper-policing of gender systematically prevailed in the Latino community. As one participant shared:

> You start acting a little funny, like too sensitive or like you care too much about a girl or a test or something, your [Latino] friends will check you...they'll let you know you're not being a man and they won't let you live that...down.

Another participant agreed: "My Latino friends are so much more obsessed with acting manly and being stereotypically male than my friends [of other ethnicities]."

This hyper-policing also seems to affect socio-emotional, help-seeking behaviors. Nelson, a sophomore, explains:

> You can't be weak—you don't cry, you don't let people get you vulnerable...you act strong and you keep your cool. The only

time you let emotions get in the way is when someone disrespects you or your loved ones.

The importance of emotional stoicism is critical to Latino men's psychological well-being; needs are shrouded to present the façade of incontestable "maleness." Participants talked about facing stress, anxiety, emotional, and interpersonal problems during college but not feeling comfortable disclosing such experiences to anyone due to the dissonance between emotional expression and male identity. Men dealt with such issues privately and independently:

> When I feel stressed out...I just go and hang out by myself. I don't need anyone to listen to me—I don't like talking about my feelings. I feel uncomfortable doing it...I don't know how to go to people and talk to them about my private life—I can't even describe how I feel to myself, how am I supposed to go and do that with someone who will probably just judge me for it?

Fear of judgment and gender-policing prevented many participants from self-disclosing, thereby encouraging them to make fine distinctions between support networks in their lives.

Several men discussed talking to distinct friend groups about specific problems depending on whether or not those friend groups ascribed to prevailing Latino understandings of masculinity. Joseph, a junior, said, "My Latino friends just make jokes...they tell me to man up and that everything will work out fine—but sometimes you just need someone to say they understand how you feel and that it's okay." Dealing humorously with emotional or psychological needs was also a prevalent theme among participants' reflections. That Latino men felt more comfortable talking about emotional topics with non-Latino friends amplifies the validity of exploring Latino males' concepts of masculinity and gender-policing and their effect on college persistence.

Participants identified emotional and relational difficulties as negatively impacting academic involvement and achievement. Not talking about emotions led to distress and inadequacy: "I was too easily overwhelmed, I felt so much pressure; school started to become harder and harder for me," discloses one participant. Believing that he had to do everything himself, another participant remarked that, "any challenge that comes your way becomes ten times bigger...harder to overcome...more likely to break you down." The fact that Latino males identify help-seeking as especially pertinent to college persistence showcases that help-seeking is relevant not only academically, but also socio-emotionally. This is, therefore,

a critical variable in the context of Latino men's low rates of college persistence.

Limitations of the Present Study

There are several limitations of this study. First, the small sample size prevents generalizability of findings. Second, the snowball sampling method, albeit necessary in transferring trust, is a limitation as it can result in a homogenous sample in terms of experiences, values, and beliefs. A study that uses a random probability sampling method would minimize such a risk. The unique educational composition of the sample is a third limitation. Given that all participants attended predominantly white, private universities, findings cannot be linked closely to the experiences of students at public or ethnically diverse universities. The role of the university environment and the presence of greater academic and social supports for Latino men may have influenced the shared experiences of the current study's participants.

Strengths of the Present Study

The paucity of literature that includes ethnically diverse Latino male voices on the topic of college persistence significantly motivated this research. Thus, this study contributes to the literature by including an ethnically diverse sample in an in-depth, qualitative exploration. This study's sample demographics is also a strength in that it reflects the present demographics of a significant portion of America's Latino population. Participants' ethnic ties reflect the majority ethnic composition of the Latino population in the United States, and their identification as first-generation also reflects the immigratory make-up of Latinos between the ages of 18 and 25 (Krogstad and Lopez 2014).

Conclusion

Constructions of masculinity appear to be the most salient influence on Latino male enrollment and persistence intentions in college. Despite the importance of resources and support services in high school and universities, participants described their struggles in college as primarily influenced by their cultural understandings of identity and masculinity. Participants' positionality as first-generation Latino-Americans encouraged a hybrid gender identity of both cultural influences in an "Americanized machismo" paradigm.

The inflation of gender roles in the Latino community creates an environment of hyper gender policing that restricts many Latino men in college from engaging in behaviors that would threaten their masculinity, even when such behavior might facilitate academic or personal success.

Masculinity as a performance seems to be more significant for Latino males than for males of other ethnic backgrounds, as well. The interplay of gendered identity constructions and help-seeking behaviors was another significant finding of this study. Participants explicitly related internalized understandings of masculinity to their inability to engage in help-seeking behaviors, yielding a dynamic with very real academic, financial, and psychological ramifications. Participants needed to overcome issues pertaining to academic and financial help-seeking (e.g., attending professors' office hours, making use of on-campus tutoring resources, seeking financial aid advocates, etc.) to "make it through" college.

Cultural conceptions of manliness were closely linked to psychological and emotional well-being, undoubtedly important factors in college persistence and success. Participants' inability to seek help in all domains for fear of appearing dependent and not masculine, in addition to the inability to access sufficient emotional support from friends, were related to psychological and academic well-being. Participants explicitly linked their emotional and psychological health to feelings of self-efficacy and motivation for college completion. The implicit role of masculinity in mental health, specifically through gender role conflict, as essential for college persistence was another unexpected and highly relevant finding.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

The current study highlights the complexity of factors that influence Latino men's college persistence levels. School administrators must strengthen their support systems to better address Latino men's unique academic and social needs. Intervention and outreach programs must validate and understand the role of family in the lives of Latino men as well as its influence on their academic and professional decisions. Additionally, educators and psychologists who seek to promote Latino male degree attainment must understand both the role that masculinity plays in Latino male identity development as well as definitions of appropriate and inappropriate help-seeking behaviors. Finally, future research should further explore the intricate relationship between masculinity, help-seeking, and psychological distress. Participants noted psychological well-being as critical to college success and persistence, yet these students refused to access the available support systems. Exploring the reasons for such contradictory behavior may uncover ways to develop a more productive synergy between gender identity, help-seeking behaviors, and academic, social, and emotional well-being among Latino men in college.

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"A Ella Le Gusta Agresivo"[1]: An Analysis of the Negative Representation of Women in Reggaeton Songs

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Isabel Ramos is currently studying abroad in Santiago, Chile. She is a member of the class of 2016 and a student in the College of Arts and Sciences at Boston College. Originally from Puerto Rico, Isabel is majoring in Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies. Isabel often participates in international volunteer programs serving as a woman for others. This past summer she was able to put in practice all of her passions, creating social awareness of women's unequal treatment while helping those in need, leading a Girl's Empowerment Camp in Ghana. During her free time she enjoys baking and rock climbing.

1"She Likes It Aggressive" Lyric excerpt from the song "Agresivo" by Jowell & Randy

Women's representation in mass media and in music is increasingly negative and serves to reinforce and perpetuate male supremacy. The relationship between female presentation and male supremacy is evident in the case study of reggaeton lyrics. It is in the tradition of various researchers to look at how more powerful groups define less powerful groups. In his iconic work, Edward Said (1977:3) defines how the West dominates, reconstructs, and has authority over the Orient by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, and describing it. Stuart Hall (2012:256) emphasizes the connection between the domination of others and the production of negative imagery about them. Furthermore, he notes that the subjected people may come to see themselves in a negative way. Bell Hooks explores this notion in negative imagery of black created by whites (1992:1). In this paper, I analyze the imagery of women created by men in reggaeton lyrics. These lyrics are not only worrisome because they encourage others to think negatively about women, but because they may also encourage women to think negatively about themselves.

As a Puerto Rican woman, born and raised on the island, I find that reggaeton, a popular native music genre, is one of the forms of mass media that most negatively depicts Puerto Rican women today. In the last few decades, reggaeton has become a very popular genre of music in Puerto Rico, the United States and the rest of Latin America. With its growing commercialization, the genre has become problematic and has abandoned its previous focus on Puerto Rican ghetto realities. Instead, artists write extremely sexualized lyrics that promote violence against women. Growing up in Puerto Rico made me particularly aware of the popularity of the genre and of the negative effect that it can have on the culture.

From an early age, children (including myself) from all socioeconomic classes grow up mindlessly memorizing the lyrics of reggaeton songs. Many of the lyrics can become unconsciously embedded with the violent behavior they promote. My close contact with this sociocultural phenomenon in combination with my recent awareness of the problematic nature of the genre as a result of my identification as a feminist motivated me to explore reggaeton's promotion of violence. With this preoccupation in mind, I conducted a content analysis of 15 popular reggaeton songs produced in the last ten years to understand their negative representation of women. I chose songs that were often played on the radio, at clubs, and during parties in Puerto Rico. All of the lyrics are originally in Spanish. With my knowledge of Puerto Rican slang, I translated them into English. While analyzing the content of the lyrics, I developed five broad categories to demonstrate the violent nature of the songs: 1) verbal violence against women, 2) sexual objectification of women, 3) objectification of women to prove men's masculinity, 4) women as willing participants of

violent sex acts, and 5) demeaning representation of female femininity.

I define the first category as instances when men refer to women with epithets such as "bitches, sluts, horny bitches, or animals" and refer to their bodies in a dehumanizing way by breaking their bodies into parts. I describe the second category as times when the singer mentions a woman's presence exclusively for male sexual pleasure and refers to their bodies simply as objects of male pleasure. I define the third category as examples when male singers allude to women as instruments to prove domination or sexual reputation, and when women are regarded as a prize in competitions with other men. I define the fourth group as times when the male singer refers to the pleasurable enjoyment of women during rough, painful, aggressive and non consensual sex. Finally, in the fifth category, I include when women are seen as submissive sex partners who, they themselves, always ask for sex or even rape, in a sexually crazed manner, as if born to please men sexually. I also include when, because of their feminine bodies, women are referred to as provokers who tempt and seduce men.

In my study, two dominant themes appeared: the demeaning exemplification of female femininity (13 cited examples) and the representation of women as sex objects (10). Other frequently cited themes included: women as objects to prove men masculinity (8), women as willing participants in violent sex acts (6) and lastly, verbal violence against women (4). Since reggaeton's organizing register is heterosexual sex, the presence of women in the lyrics is essential (Jiménez 2009:231). With reggaeton's recent commercialization, the genre has been "increasingly produced and promoted as the soundtrack of highly sexualized dancing, highly sexualized objects of the male gaze" (Marshall 2009:49). Since the audience allegedly demands these types of songs, singers and producers depict women sexually to increase profit, which reinforces such negative representation of women.

It is important to define the genre of reggaeton in order to better understand its development towards the violent, obscene, and demeaning depiction of woman. Reggaeton developed during the late 1980s as an underground movement in Puerto Rico. It started as a mixture of Jamaican reggae, Spanish rap and Caribbean rhythms (Marshall, Rivera, and Hernández 2009:4). When reggaeton was underground, its songs were mainly about the blackness of the lower socioeconomic classes in Puerto Rico. As it became mainstream and made its way to Latin America and the United States, the genre focused on the male gaze and the sexualized dance of "perreo" (doggie style). Thereby, the lyrics began to depict women in a negative way. As Félix Jiménez (2009:232) states in the book Reggaeton, "reggaetoneros" (reggaeton singers) "created a generic woman that, in essence, could always be invisible and that in most reggaeton lyrics appears as a woman who satisfies-as a verbal robot." Without the roles that

reggaetoneros have assigned to women in their songs, the genre would not be as successful as it is today. The songs invite the male audience to engage in sexual dances and relations with women while inviting the female audience to comply and please men.

The ideas of masculinity and femininity depicted in songs come from gender role expectations in a "machista" society, like the one still present in Puerto Rico today. "Machismo" has been described as a set of behavior, attitudes and even a syndrome of Latin American and Caribbean men. Puerto Rican sociologist Isabel Picó (Ramírez and Casper 1999:17) clearly defines the socio-cultural nature of the attitudes many Puerto Rican men hold towards women, stating:

> [It is a] set of attitudes, beliefs and behavior that results from the belief in the superiority of one sex over the other. Within this vision of the world the superior sex is the male. [...] 'machismo' is expressed through habits, traditions, and attitudes that are discriminatory of the female sex.

The way that reggaeton songs lyrics portray the female sex legitimizes and perpetuates a "machista" behavior by presenting women as subordinate, sexual beings and dependent on men.

As previously described, my analyses found the use of women to prove a man's masculinity to be a prominent theme in reggaeton songs. Masculine ideologies in Puerto Rico, as in many other cultures, are very demanding, and Puerto Rican men are expected to continuously act to affirm them (Ramírez and Casper 1999:59). In Puerto Rico, masculine ideologies stress sexuality. As Ramírez (1999:44) states, on the island of Puerto Rico, "[T]he male is an essentially sexual being, or at least he should look and act like one. He should enjoy his sexuality, declare it, boast about it, feel proud of it, and above all, show it." This statement might explain why reggaetoneros refer to themselves as "the man that makes you sigh," "the man with the best 'tronkey' (penis)," "wild in the bed like a monkey" and tell women that "no one is going to make it to you like me," "no one is going to touch you like I do," "I'm going to fulfill all your fantasies," "babe, remember me, remember my 'matraco' (big penis)" and "scream my name loud because I am the man." Since these ideologies rely on the belief that women are inferior beings, singing about them is a way of affirming the characteristics of male supremacy.

Puerto Rican men also prove their masculinity by competing with other men. They compete by showing each other that one has more masculine attributes than the others. In the reggaeton songs that I analyzed, the singers explicitly say phrases such as: "look at me how I devour this

bitch," "look at the cell phones recording us as we dance," and "I have my whole crew here with me." Michael S. Kimmel (1996:7) would refer to the aforementioned homosocial actions as times when "success with women allow[ed] men to prove their manhood to other men." Possessing a woman, for sexual pleasure or as a domestic commodity, characterizes "machista" and masculine ideologies. Therefore, as reggaetoneros sing about women as prizes and as objects, they construct their masculinity. As Jennifer Domino Rudolph (2012:136) concludes, "[I]mages and characterizations of gender in Don Omar's songs, as well as in much of reggaeton, largely represent a homosocial hierarchy wherein groups of men support each other in confrontations over territory and women." Reggaeton allows men to prove their dominance to other men.

Another prominent theme in the songs analyzed was the sexual objectification of women. In ten out of the fifteen songs, women's presence in clubs and any other environment was described exclusively as a way to sexually please men with oral, vaginal, or anal sex. Most of the time, the lyrics alluded to rough or aggressive sexual encounters that demean and dehumanize women. As Ann Cahill (2011:8) argues, "[O]bjectifying reduces women to things, therefore non-persons, thereby robbing them of the respect that persons demand." By referring to women as objects, men are able to sing about sexually mistreating them. In some of the songs, men tell women what they are going to do to them, most of the time sexually, as if they were animals who must obey. They say things like, "I'm going to leave you numb," "I'm going to devour you," "she knows that she's the one that bites the fish hook" (referring to his penis) and refer to "doggie style" position with the lyric, "with my hands on her back and hers at the floor."

By objectifying women, men in a patriarchal or "machista" society ensure their male superiority. As Cahill (2011:4) refers to Simone de Beauvoir's analysis, the crime of a patriarchal structure is rendering women as "things, a passive, flesh-bound, immanent creature, existing only as a means for others' ends." Reggaeton songs not only portray the dominant ideology in Puerto Rican society in regard to women's sexuality, but also serve to legitimize it, since many reggaetoneros have become very successful and respected individuals. By objectifying women and promoting the dance of "perreo," reggaetoneros have become "heroes" and a source of pride to Latino and Hispanic communities all over the United States (Bosch 2009). Instead of being criticized, their behavior and their verbal treatment of women as sexual objects have been and continue to be rewarded by society.

To objectify women is to degrade them. All of the reggaeton songs analyzed, in some way or another, degrade women. It is problematic that reggaetoneros depict women as enjoying their degradation and joyfully accepting the sexual interactions that objectify and dehumanize them. As

Cahill (2011:10) claims, it has to do with the notion that "the degradation itself becomes erotic (almost certainly for the objectifier and sometimes for the objectified)." The songs describe how a woman becomes sexy through objectification, thus making the encounter even more erotic. Women enjoying their objectification, as a female singer says in one of the songs, "keep giving it to me," "harder 'papi,' harder," and "I know you like it that way." These lyrics rob women of their sexuality. In Cahill's (2011:10) words, "women's sexuality is used as a weapon against her personhood [...] the persistent sexual objectification/dehumanization limits women's ability to express freely their sexual desires, experiences and delights." This quote captures how reggaeton songs negatively portray feminine sexuality and thereby perpetuate sexual myths in Puerto Rican culture and society.

In all of the songs in which women engaged in sexual relations with men, they are depicted as wanting to do so. Women are portrayed as desiring aggressive, violent, sex since all they want to do is "quench their thirst," as one of the songs states, no matter what it involves. For reggaetoneros, women only "quench their thirst" by sexually satisfying the men themselves. These notions of sex come from traditional assumptions made about sex: that it is "dirty, sinful or evil" and that women are either good, by tolerating sexual advances of their partners, or bad, by seeking, desiring or enjoying sex (Cahill 2011:11). In the song "Agresivo" (Aggressive) by Jowell and Randy, the singers focus on how the woman likes it aggressive and on how it is the man's responsibility to satisfy her. The song starts by stating, "I have a bitch that loves it rough" and then the chorus says "don't you see and hear her? She's asking to be dragged around the floor, she likes it aggressive." In the lyrics, women embrace violence. Then, as non-persons, the women give the men all of the power to exert brutality over them during sex.

Reggaetoneros not only sing about violent sex, but also about women's fantasy of being raped. Within the songs that I selected, two of them explicitly sing about women wanting to be raped. These are "Descara'" by Yomo (produced in 2008) and, "El funeral de la canoa" by Jowell and Randy (2013). As explained before, in the early beginnings of reggaeton, prominent themes were about race, power and distinctions among social classes, but with time and popularity, reggaetoneros seem to feel more comfortable singing about rape, since it is what sells. In "Descara" the singer says that a woman is begging for him to "make love" to her, but at the same time says "[she is] saying to you, screaming, don't stop, never mind the pain." Even though the woman is in unbearable pain, she wants to satisfy the man. Similarly, in "El funeral de la canoa," the reggaetonero says, "the women coming here, the ones who enter, know for what they are coming here, to get it buried in her."

As Alfredo Nieves Moreno (2009:255) analyzes, "[I]n terms of

discourse, reggaeton also reproduces a male domination, one that enhances the figure of the man and situates him in a position of constant symbolic authority." Viewing rape as a symbol of authority over women explains why reggaetoneros sing about it. They want to reinforce their male domination by stating that they have complete control over women's bodies. The singer also refers to his penis as a truncheon, a weapon and symbol of authority. Even though feminists have worked extensively to change patriarchal power structures and ensure women's rights as citizens, they still cannot control the ways in which they are represented in reggaeton (Hooks 1992:1).

Many well-recognized reggaetoneros like Don Omar, Tego Calderón and Daddy Yankee have stated in interviews that their songs merely reflect the reality of many Puerto Ricans, on and off the island. As Daddy Yankee stated, for him, reggaeton songs do not promote violence as many criticize, but rather "we (reggaetoneros) are the 'espejo' (mirror) of 'el pueblo' (the community)" (Bosch 2009). Throughout history, women in Puerto Rico have been recognized as inferior to men simply because of their gender. Since the 1920s, when women began to demand rights that positioned them equal to men, they were still regarded as sexualized objects (Matos & Delgado 1998:157). Is this still the reality that exists in Puerto Rico almost a century later? Fortunately, women have made great progress in terms of education, professional life, health care, economic independence, among other areas. Therefore, Daddy Yankee's belief that reggaeton songs mirror the realities of the country is inaccurate. Keith Negus (1996:4) offers one explanation as to why popular music is unable to reflect society, arguing that the world, society and individual life are "far too complex for any cultural product to be able to capture and spontaneously 'reflect.'"

The perspective of these reggaetoneros might also be erroneous due to the commercialization of their music. Music, besides being a form of art, is an industry and a market with the primary goal of making a profit. In order to make a profit, songwriters are advised to make melodies and lyrics that fit rigid formulas and patterns (Negus 1996:34). The songs are written to capture the attention of a specific audience, that which buys the albums. Reggaetoneros may want to believe that through their music, they are able to reflect and raise consciousness of the negative realities that exist in their countries. But in order to be literally heard, they have to abide to certain demands of the public. If sexualizing women captivates the attention of female and male audiences, reggaetoneros will continue to promote that "machista" behavior, which unfortunately gives them the power to create and reinforce negative ideologies regarding women. Hobson and Bartlow's (2007:2) definition of the music industry is particularly pertinent. They state, "[I]t is a multi-billion dollar business that markets music as a profitable entity while simultaneously inculcating worldwide audiences with dominant

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ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality." These dominant ideologies regarding gender and sexuality reflect male supremacy.

To understand the negative representation of women in reggaeton songs, it is necessary to comprehend where these ideologies originated. Many Puerto Rican reggaetoneros have been socialized and have subconsciously internalized "machista" attitudes that reinforce their male supremacy. One should keep in mind that a vast majority of individuals in the reggaeton industry are men who legitimize their supremacy by promoting the subjugation of women in the songs. It is also important to recognize the financial incentive that motivates reggaetoneros to sing sexualized songs. As I have stated, these songs do not accurately represent all of the reality of Puerto Rican society. They do, however, reinforce and exacerbate cultural traditions and beliefs that exist in the hegemonic culture.

This argument suggests that in order to challenge the negative representation of women in reggaeton songs, it is necessary to change Puerto Rican "machista" ideals and replace them with ones that regard women as equal to men. Despite women's efforts to be treated equally, they have not been successful in procuring equal representation in the mass media. Women need to become more aware of the connection between domination and imagery and redouble their efforts to change the imagery of reggaeton lyrics.

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SocialEyes Staff

Malia Allen is the managing editor for *SocialEyes*. Originally from Los Altos, California, Malia is currently a senior, pursuing a double major in Sociology and Islamic Civilization & Societies. This past Spring, she studied abroad in Rabat, Morocco on a Human Rights and Multiculturalism program. In addition, Malia studies Arabic and is interested in the negotiation of masculinities, femininities, and sexualities in relation to power structures and social norms. An active member in Bystander Intervention Education, Best Buddies, and College Democrats, Malia has found meaningful ways to participate in the BC community. A member of *SocialEyes* since 2012, she is excited about the publication of this issue and is looking forward to showcasing undergraduate writing and sharing sociological perspectives.

Cara Annunziata is an editor on the *SocialEyes* staff. Cara is a junior majoring in Sociology and minoring in History. This past fall, she studied abroad in Parma, Italy, and completed an independent study on Citizenship, Integration, and Education. With a passion for the Sociology of education, she is interested in how the current institutional structures of our education systems create disadvantages for specific individuals. As an Undergraduate Research Fellow this past summer, she assisted a Boston College Sociology professor in the completion of a research project, sparking her interest in pursuing her own thesis next year as a senior. For this issue, she worked with author Alienna Arnold on her piece entitled "The Psychological Health, Support, and Future of Sexual-Minority Youth," and is excited to share this provoking piece with the readers of *SocialEyes*!

Alienna Arnold is an editor and a design/marketing manager on the *SocialEyes* staff. Alienna wrote "The Psychological Health, Support, and Future of Sexual-Minority Youth" in this year's issue, and was a primary editor for Kevin Suggs' piece "Privileged Cultures: An Autobiography." She is a member of the Class of 2016 in Boston College's Lynch School of Education, pursuing majors in Secondary Education and English, a minor in Special Education, and a certificate in Teaching English Language Learners. Alienna enjoys planning lessons that revolve around sociological issues, particularly those dealing with social justice and gender roles. She is also a member of Creative Kids at the Campus School and of the Boston College Art Club and English Association. She enjoys spending time with her friends and family in her hometown of Cleveland, Ohio.

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Kristin Gordon has been a member of the *SocialEyes* staff since 2012 and is honored to be one of the Senior Editors-in-Chief for this issue. She is an undergraduate senior pursuing a major in Sociology, with an interest in substance use and addiction. During her time at BC, Kristin has also found a passion for human rights and social justice. Her most influential experience has been studying abroad in Cape Town, South Africa, where she expanded her knowledge of the challenges of the search for justice in a global context. She is looking forward to continuing these conversations on campus with this publication of *SocialEyes*.

Liz Handler is an editor on the *SocialEyes* staff. She is a member of the class of 2015 in the College of Arts and Sciences. She is majoring in Sociology and pursuing a minor in History. In addition, she is a writer for BC Reads and an accountant for the BC Dining Services. During her free time, she enjoys reading and baking. This is her first year as an editor (primarily on "'A Ella Le Gusta Agresivo': An Analysis of the Negative Representation of Women in Reggaeton Songs"), and she could not be more excited to help publish the sixth issue of *SocialEyes*.

Annie Layden assisted with marketing and social media initiatives as part of the *SocialEyes* staff. As part of the class of 2018, this is Annie's first year at Boston College, and thus her first year working with the journal. She is a student in the College of Arts and Sciences and is undecided in regards to her major. Annie is from Pacific Palisades, California and loves spending time outdoors when the weather allows it.

Katie Lindahl is an editor on the *SocialEyes* staff. She is a member of the class of 2016 with a major in Sociology and a minor in Women's and Gender Studies. With a passion for combating gender violence and empowering women, she has interned with number of non- profit organizations in the area of development and fundraising. She has thoroughly enjoyed reading the thought- provoking articles in this most recent edition of the journal and is excited to share them with you.

Daniela Mira is an editor on the *SocialEyes* staff. She worked primarily with Monica Maloney on her piece entitled "Role of Parents in Children's Gender Conformity." This is Daniela's second year working as an editor for *SocialEyes*. Daniela is a member of the class of 2015 in the College of Arts & Sciences with a major in Psychology. She is from Long Island, New York, and enjoys spending her summers at home on the beach.

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Isabel Ramos is an editor on the *SocialEyes* staff. She is a member of the class of

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