GEMS (Gender, Education, Music, & Society)
An Online, Peer-Reviewed Journal Published In Cooperation With Queen’s University
http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/gems/index

Volume 7, Number 9, December 2014
Editor: Dr. Colleen Pinar

TABLE OF CONTENTS
Mission Statement, Writing Style, And Copyright Statement

Editorial
    Dr. Colleen Pinar

ARTICLES
Relationships Among Belongingness: Behavioral And Environmental Factors In Academic Achievement
    Dr. Rick Parker

Social Identity Construction In A Gay Men’s Chorus
    Dr. Don M. Taylor
    Michelle L. Herring, MME

Working Toward Gender Equity: Pathways Toward Institutional Transformation
    Dr. Maike I. Philipsen
GEMS is a peer-reviewed, online journal that explores the myriad intersections between gender, education, music and society. Emphasis is on the ways in which music teaching and learning can be used to re-dress and eliminate inequalities brought about through ideologies of domination by creating an open-ness to the musical experience that promotes access to all (and thus by extension, also the ways in which music teaching and learning have not been transformative in the past). Gender will be approached, not as male or female, but as a continuum of possibilities sustained by socially and historically constructed notions of masculinity and femininity that interact in complex, often competing and contradictory ways. A wide variety of methodological (historical, ethnographic, philosophical, sociological, etc.) and inter-disciplinary orientations will be featured, with contributors encouraged to make use of the variety of creative options presented by the electronic medium.

Materials submitted to GEMS must conform to the current edition of one of the following writing style manuals: *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, The Chicago Manual of Style,* or *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations.* Articles and Book Reviews may not mix styles within a single manuscript. To allow for the identity of the author(s) to be transparent, it is requested that both first and last names be used when citing and when listed in the references.

For Text:
Roberta Lamb and Julia Koza brought feminist critiques of music education.

For References:

Copyright Notice: The policy of GEMS is that authors will retain copyright to their materials. However, authors grant GEMS permission to publish their materials in an online journal format with full-test access. It is the responsibility of the author to obtain all copyright permission prior to submission. Material appearing in GEMS may be shared among individuals for the purposes of scholarly research or discussion. Permission to copy or republish in any context or format must be secured in writing from the author(s), with advance notification given to the editor.

Views and content of each submission included in GEMS are the sole responsibility of the author. GEMS, the editor, and members of GEMS are not liable for any legal or civil actions that may arise involving the content including, but not limited to, copyright infringement.

Questions or comments? gems_editor@yahoo.com

GEMS Board: Dr. Joseph Abramo (University of Connecticut), Dr. Estelle R. Jorgensen (Indiana University), and Dr. Melissa Natale-Abramo (Fine & Practical Arts Department Chairperson, North Salem Central School District).

GEMS Editorial Team: Dr. Vincent C. Bates (Weber State University), Dr. Robin Aaron Bright (Independent Scholar, UK), Dr. Rick Parker (Mississippi College), and Dr. Colleen Sears (The College of New Jersey).
Editorial

I would like to welcome readers to the December 2014 issue of GEMS. The CrossRef service for GEMS will expire at the end of December 2014. CrossRef is the service that links scholarly and professional publications so that they are searchable online. To have the online journal GEMS, the articles, and the book reviews published in GEMS, linked on CrossRef is vital to all involved. Roberta Lamb, Melissa Natale-Abramo, Joe Abramo, and Monique Buzzarté have paid for CrossRef in the past. We are grateful for their financial support of GEMS. I would like to ask if GEMS readers will help pay for the CrossRef renewal fee. This year the CrossRef renewal fee is $275. Please contact me, as soon as possible, if you are able to help pay for this important service.

Queen’s University is continuing to upgrade the Scholar’s Portal. Some of you may have notice that a few of GEMS PDFs were not working correctly. I was told that the Scholarly Communications staff is still looking into the glitches associated with the current upgrade. Please let me know if you notice a PDF not working so that I may contact them as soon as possible. I also would like to remind readers that PDFs may not download properly with Microsoft Internet Explorer. If you experience this, please use Mozilla Firefox or Google Chrome.

The GRIME Chair/Co-chair and the GEMS Editor terms will end in August 2015. Please consider nominating yourself or encouraging one of your colleagues to apply for one of these positions. Service as part of GRIME and GEMS leadership is a great opportunity to help steer the future of these organizations. Further information concerning nominations will be posted in the future.

I encourage all readers to consider submitting an article, book review, book summary, CD review, or a CD summary for the February 2014 issue of GEMS. I was informed some readers could not access the Scholar’s Portal to submit their article or book/CD review; if this happens to you, please email me your document. I would gladly consider it for publication in GEMS.

In the December, 2014 issue of GEMS, Dr. Rick Parker’s article titled “Relationships Among Belongingness: Behavioral and Environmental Factors in Academic Achievement” provides readers with an overview of relationships among student behaviors, teacher behaviors, peer behaviors, and a student’s scholastic environment. Parker also provides readers with several empirical linkages between a student’s sense of belonging and his/her achievement-related outputs in school; several different theories regarding the development of sense of belonging have been proposed and tested. This study found several statistically significant predictors of sense of belonging and found that the variables significantly predicted academic achievement. The results of this study fortify the need for educators to pay more attention to students’ feelings of belonging and connectedness in a scholastic environment.

Dr. Don Taylor and Michelle Herring have studied choir members’ social identity in their article “Social Identity Construction in a Gay Men’s Chorus”. This ethnographic case study sought to answer what ways does social identity construction among first-year members of a predominantly gay men’s chorus align with tenets of Social Identity Theory and what role does comparative and autonomous judgment play in their social identity formation. Taylor and Herring state that Social Identity Theory is based on the idea that people strive to enhance self-esteem by viewing their own group in positive terms and that group comparisons are often a natural outcome of this process.

Dr. Maike Philipsen’s article titled “Working Toward Gender Equity: Pathways Toward Institutional Transformation” was originally written for STEM professionals, but I feel this article will be of interest to many readers of GEMS. Philipsen discusses reasons for the chronic underrepresentation of female faculty members at higher faculty ranks and in leadership positions. This article also proposes strategies to address some of these issues. In addition, this article discusses family-friendly work environments. I personally think Dr. Philipsen makes a powerful point – to increase the diversity and quality of its faculty colleges/universities need to become family-friendly.

Dr. Colleen Pinar, Editor
Abstract: This study presents an overview of relationships among student behaviors, teacher behaviors, peer behaviors, and a student’s scholastic environment. Correlations and multiple regression procedures were utilized to examine the impact of these behaviors on sense of belonging and academic achievement. Using Bandura’s Theory of Triadic Reciprocal Causation, peer behaviors, teacher behaviors, and scholastic environment did impact a student’s sense of belonging. Student behaviors did not predict a student’s sense of belonging, so additional research is needed to explain this outcome. In addition, the three predictor variables did impact a student’s level of academic achievement, except for student behaviors. Finally, sense of belonging did partially mediate the relationship among the three predictor variables and academic achievement.
Introduction

A number of factors influence academic achievement among high school students. One factor is the extent to which students feel a sense of connectedness or relatedness at school (Juvonen, 1996). According to multiple research studies (e.g., Battistich & Horn, 1997; Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Bockern, 1990; Finn, 1989; Goodenow, 1993) students who identify with school and consider it a place where they belong are more motivated to achieve academically. They are also more likely to engage in fewer disruptive behaviors, miss school less often, and perform better academically than students who do not feel a sense of belonging.

Given the empirical linkages between a student’s sense of belonging and his/her achievement-related outputs in school, several different theories regarding the development of sense of belonging have been proposed and tested. One such theory that has received considerable attention over the years was proposed by Juvonen (1996). According to Juvonen (1996), students develop a sense of belonging in school through social relationships with their teachers and peers. Specifically, when students view their relationships with their teachers as supportive, non-conflictual, and fair, they are more likely to feel that they belong in school. Likewise, when students view their relationships with their peers as supportive, nonaggressive, and accepting, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging in their school.

Although empirical studies have found support for several basic tenants of Jana Juvonen’s (1996) theory (e.g., positive relationships between perceptions of teacher supportiveness and sense of belonging, negative relationships between perceptions of peer aggressiveness and sense of belonging), overall research on Jana Juvonen’s (1996) model focuses on the behaviors of students, peers, and teachers; it does not explicitly recognize the potential impact that other environmental factors within and/or outside the classroom may have on sense of belonging (e.g., the degree to which a student’s school values achievement). Although this limitation should not necessarily be viewed as a criticism of Juvonen’s (1996) model, it does highlight the need to investigate other possible motivational determinants of sense of belonging, particularly considering the theoretical role(s) that such environmental factors play in other important theories of motivation (e.g., social cognitive theory).

Research Questions

This study addressed the following key research questions:

1. Do student behaviors, teacher behaviors, peer behaviors, and a student’s scholastic environment predict a student’s sense of belonging in an academic environment? If so, which of these variables is the strongest predictor?
2. Do student behaviors, teacher behaviors, peer behaviors, and a student’s scholastic environment predict a student’s level of academic achievement? If so, which of these variables is the strongest predictor?
3. Finally, does a student’s sense of belonging mediate relationship(s) among his/her behaviors, the behaviors of his/her peers and
teachers, his/her scholastic environment, and his/her level of academic achievement?

**Purpose**

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the influence of student behaviors, teacher behaviors, peer behaviors, and scholastic environment on sense of belonging. However, given the presumed importance of sense of belonging and related constructs as a determinant of motivation to achieve in general, a secondary objective was to determine which, if any, of these determinants impact academic achievement (a logical outcome of motivated students) through their influence on sense of belonging. To this end, this study addressed several key research questions. The conceptual model that was used to investigate these questions is presented in Figure 1. A description of this model, along with examples of hypotheses to be tested, is provided in the discussion that follows.

Figure 1: Proposed Relationships Among Study Variables of Interest

As shown in Figure 1, student behaviors, teacher behaviors, peer behaviors and scholastic environment were hypothesized to predict sense of belonging. Given the hypothesized impact of these variables on a student’s overall motivation to achieve (through their influence on perceptions of academic support), they were also hypothesized to directly predict academic achievement. In addition, student behaviors, teacher behaviors, peer behaviors and scholastic environment were hypothesized to predict academic achievement through their influence on sense of belonging.

Consistent with the largely exploratory nature of this study, the model presented in Figure 1 made no formal predictions regarding the strength of relationships among specific predictor variables, specific predictor-outcome variable pathways, etc. Nonetheless, based on the entire body of research on these variables, it was reasonable to predict that certain study results were more likely than others. Example predictions, framed within the context of this study’s three objectives, are provided in the discussion that follows.

The first objective of this study was to investigate the influence of the behaviors of students, peers, and teachers, and scholastic environment on students’ sense of belonging. According to Jana Juvonen (1996), although the behaviors of students, peers, and students should all have a significant impact on sense of belonging, student behaviors should have the most significant effect, as it is these behaviors and related cognitive processes of students that influence how information (e.g., feedback) from peers and teachers is absorbed and processed. Further, given the impact of peer pressure and the strong desire to ‘fit in’ with one’s peers in most school settings, it was reasonable to think that both student behaviors and peer behaviors would likely have the most positive influence on sense of belonging.

The second objective was to investigate the effects of the aforementioned behaviors and scholastic environment on academic achievement. As noted previously, most of the behaviors and environmental factors to be studied had been shown to have a positive impact on overall motivation to achieve. For this reason, it was reasonable to think that all three behavior ‘types,’ particularly student behaviors (for reasons noted above) would positively correlate with sense of belonging.

The third and final objective was to investigate the mediating effects(s), if any, of sense of belonging on the relationships among student behaviors, teacher behaviors, peer behaviors, scholastic environment, and academic achievement. From Jana Juvonen’s (1996) perspective, sense of belonging is perhaps the most critical determinant of academic achievement. That is, in order for students to achieve academically, they must first feel accepted by and supported by their classmates and scholastic surroundings. From this perspective, sense of belonging – as a mediator of academic achievement - should be predicted by each of the predictor variables noted in Figure 1 (although perhaps less so by scholastic environment, as it is reasonable to believe based on research that behavioral stimuli might exert a stronger impact on achievement through sense of belonging than environmental stimuli).
Methodology

Three-hundred forty-two (342) high school seniors participated in the study. Each participant attended the same large public high school located in the South. Of these participants, 54.2% were female, 64.5% were white, 29.2% were Black, and 53.2% came from families earning less than $100,000 per year.

The school district was located in a city of approximately 16,436 people. The median household income of the district was $63,744. The median age of the city’s residents was 31.9 years. All participating students had to have completed their junior year in order to participate.

Measures

Measures used in this study included: academic achievement; student, peer, and teacher’s behaviors; environmental factors; and sense of belonging.

Data Analyses

Several sets of statistical analyses were conducted on the data. First, means, standard deviations, and ranges for all study variables (e.g., demographic variables) were computed. Correlations among variables were also computed. Second, multiple regression procedures were used to examine the impact of Student Behaviors, Teacher Behaviors, Peer Behaviors, and Scholastic Environment on Sense of Belonging and Academic Achievement (Table 1). Results of these analyses addressed research questions one and two. Lastly, Roan Baron and David Kenny’s (1986) four-step regression procedure for assessing mediation was applied to the data to determine if Sense of Belonging mediated relationships among the study’s four predictor variables and Academic Achievement. For all regression analyses, resulting F-values, adjusted $R^2$, and B-weights obtained for the overall model and respective steps were put in tabular format.

Results

First, Academic Achievement was regressed onto all the study’s demographic variables (i.e., age, sex, race, and socioeconomic status). Academic Achievement was then regressed onto all the study’s independent variables (i.e., Student Behaviors, Peer Behaviors, Teacher Behaviors, and Scholastic Environment).

As seen in Table 2, Step 1 was statistically significant $F(4, 227) = 4.64, p < .01$, meaning that the group of demographic variables as a whole accounted for a significant amount of variance in Academic Achievement (6%). Specifically, female students reported higher levels of Academic Achievement than male students did ($x = 86.2$ and 84.3, respectively). In addition, results indicated a positive linear relationship between students’ self-reported socioeconomic status and Academic Achievement ($r = .20$, $p < .01$).

Step 2 was also statistically significant $F(4, 223) = 3.89, p < .01$, meaning that the group of four IVs as a whole accounted for a significant amount of variance in Academic Achievement (6%) above and beyond that explained by the demographic variables. However, findings indicated that none of the IVs predicted unique variance. In conclusion, results of this analysis indicated that sex and socioeconomic status were the strongest demographic predictors of Academic Achievement. When controlling for these and all other demographic variables, none of the IVs predicted unique variance in Academic Achievement, although the group of IVs as a whole did predict variance in Academic Achievement.

Sense of Belonging was regressed onto all the study’s demographic variables (i.e., age, sex, race, and socioeconomic status). Sense of Belonging was then regressed onto all the study’s independent variables (i.e., Student Behaviors, Peer Behaviors, Teacher Behaviors, and Scholastic Environment). As seen in Table 2 Step 1 was not statistically significant.
of Belonging. When controlling for sex and all other demographic variables, Peer Behaviors, Teacher Behaviors, and Scholastic Environment predicted unique variance in Sense of Belonging. Student Behaviors was the only IV that did not predict unique variance in Sense of Belonging.

The Mediating Influence of Sense of Belonging. According to Roan Baron and David Kenny (1986), four conditions must be met for mediation to be supported. First, the independent variable must predict the dependent variable. Second, the independent variable must predict the mediator. Third, the mediator must predict the dependent variable when controlling for the independent variable. Finally, the mediator must predict the dependent variable when controlling for the independent variable. Not all researchers agree that all four conditions must be met for mediation to be supported (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007). However, most researchers do believe that mediation is not possible, or at least not likely, if Steps two, three, and four are not met. This study followed Baron and Kenny’s (1986) approach for investigating mediation (along with prevailing sentiment regarding conditions of mediation held by most researchers).

Results of the aforementioned two regression analyses addressed Baron and Kenny’s (1986) first two conditions (or steps) of mediation. Specifically, findings indicated that, although none of the study’s IVs independently predicted Academic Achievement (condition one), three of the four IVs (Peer Behaviors, Teacher Behaviors, Scholastic Environment) independently predicted Sense of Belonging (condition two).

In response to these findings, several additional regression analyses were conducted. First, to determine if Sense of Belonging predicted Academic Achievement when not controlling for Peer Behaviors (condition three), Academic Achievement was regressed onto all the study’s demographic variables (i.e., age, sex, race, and socioeconomic status), Student Behaviors, Teacher Behaviors, Scholastic Environment and Sense of Belonging (but not Peer Behaviors). Results indicated that Sense of Belonging did indeed predict Academic Achievement when not controlling for Peer Behaviors ($\beta = .23, t = 2.95$, $p < .01$). To determine if Sense of Belonging predicted Academic Achievement when controlling for Peer Behaviors (condition four), Academic Achievement
was again regressed onto all the study’s demographic variables (i.e., age, sex, race, and socioeconomic status), Student Behaviors, Teacher Behaviors, Scholastic Environment, Sense of Belonging and Peer Behaviors. Results indicated that Sense of Belonging again predicted Academic Achievement when controlling for Peer Behaviors ($\beta = .19, t = 2.41, p < .01$). According to Baron and Kenny (1986), these findings supported partial mediation. Specifically, the perceived supportiveness of students’ peers impacts students’ levels of academic achievement in part through its influence on students’ sense of belonging.

To determine if Sense of Belonging predicted Academic Achievement when not controlling for Teacher Behaviors (condition three), Academic Achievement was regressed onto all the study’s demographic variables (i.e., age, sex, race, and socioeconomic status), Student Behaviors, Peer Behaviors, Scholastic Environment and Sense of Belonging (but not Teachers Behaviors). Results indicated that Sense of Belonging did indeed predict Academic Achievement when not controlling for Teacher Behaviors ($\beta = .18, t = 2.34, p < .01$). To determine if Sense of Belonging predicted Academic Achievement when controlling for Teacher Behaviors (condition four), Academic Achievement was again regressed onto all the study’s demographic variables (i.e., age, sex, race, and socioeconomic status), Student Behaviors, Peer Behaviors, Teacher Behaviors, Sense of Belonging and Scholastic Environment. Results indicated that Sense of Belonging again predicted Academic Achievement when controlling for Scholastic Environment ($\beta = .20, t = 2.67, p < .01$). To determine if Sense of Belonging predicted Academic Achievement when controlling for Scholastic Environment (condition four), Academic Achievement was again regressed onto all the study’s demographic variables (i.e., age, sex, race, and socioeconomic status), Student Behaviors, Peer Behaviors, Teacher Behaviors, Sense of Belonging and Scholastic Environment. Results indicated that Sense of Belonging again predicted Academic Achievement when controlling for Scholastic Environment ($\beta = .19, t = 2.39, p < .01$). According to Roan Baron and David Kenny (1986), these findings supported partial mediation. Specifically, the perceived supportiveness of students’ overall scholastic environment impacts students’ levels of academic achievement in part through its influence on students’ sense of belonging.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to investigate behavioral and non-behavioral predictors of academic achievement and sense of belonging among high school students. This study was one of the first empirical attempts to simultaneously investigate the effects of multiple behaviors (i.e., student, peer, and teacher behaviors) and environmental factors. Overall, findings indicated that sense of belonging is a moderately strong predictor of academic achievement. Findings also indicated that sense of belonging is predicted by some, but not all, of these behaviors. Finally, findings indicated that none of the independent variables predicted academic achievement independently, although the group of variables as a whole (student behaviors, peer behaviors, teacher behaviors, and scholastic environment) did significantly predict academic achievement.

An analysis of the results of this study coupled with theoretical support is provided in the discussion that follows. Findings regarding the relationship between sense of belonging and academic achievement are discussed first, followed by a discussion of the behaviors that were found to predict sense of belonging. The effects of peer behaviors, teacher behaviors, student behaviors, and scholastic environment on academic achievement are then discussed. Finally, findings regarding the mediating effects of sense of belonging are discussed.

Sense Of Belonging And Academic Achievement
Jana Juvonen (1996) reported that student perceptions of sense of belonging impact their level of academic engagement along with their social behaviors such as level of aggression. In this study, sense of belonging was found to be a moderate, but not strong, predictor of academic achievement. According to Jana Juvonen (1996), one possible reason for this finding relates to the relationship between marginal students who do not feel a strong sense of belonging. In short, marginal students who do not feel a sense of belonging often develop friendships with other marginal students. This relationship has the potential to contribute to a cycle of underperforming in the classroom and/or lack of motivation to achieve altogether.

Related, as noted by Jana Juvonen (1996), although student relationships with their peers can influence sense of belonging in the classroom, students who feel a sense of belonging do not automatically become academically engaged. For example, research indicates that middle school students are more likely to stray from the norms of academic achievement since their peer norms are often the opposite of their parental and/or teacher goals/aspirations (Juvonen & Cadigan, 2002). This study sampled seniors who might have been more mature than middle school students and, therefore, might have already established peer friendships (i.e., the behaviors of their peers might not have been that influential at that point in their educational careers).

Behaviors And Scholastic Environment

Although student behaviors did not predict sense of belonging, peer behaviors, teacher behaviors, and scholastic environment did predict. With respect to peer behaviors, peers play a powerful role in influencing a student’s feelings of belonging as well as his/her motivation to achieve (Goble, 2004; Stephens, 2000). Peer behaviors influence a student’s sense of belonging, as evidenced theoretically by Albert Bandura’s theory of Triadic Reciprocal Causation (1986). In addition, peer behaviors, as perceived by students, should logically affect a student’s behavior. When peers react positively towards other students, other students are more likely going to feel a strong sense of belonging (and vice versa). This sense of belonging, in turn, will likely positively influence their academic achievement (Juvonen, 1996; Bandura, 1986).

This study’s findings regarding teacher behaviors likewise supported Jana Juvonen’s (1996) model. Most notably, teacher support, empathy, fairness, and care are all significant factors that impact a student’s sense of belonging and academic achievement (Farmer, Friedrich, Michalowski, Minch, Suldo & White, 2009). Each of these traits (and related behaviors) was measured by this study’s measure of teacher behaviors. It is therefore logical that teacher behaviors would positively predict sense of belonging.

In addition, teacher support is the most influential quality that stimulates academic motivation and classroom interest in the subject matter (Malecki & Demaray, 2003). Since peer behaviors may pull students in different directions, teacher support is regarded as a more consistent predictor of academic engagement. For example, Allison Ryan and Heather Patrick (2001) found that teachers who encouraged their students to display mutual respect for all of their classmates were the best predictor of student’s level of motivation to achieve. Jana Juvonen’s model (1996) likewise portrays social relationships between teachers and students as the defining factors for students to develop a sense of belonging in school. Therefore, social behaviors among students, separate from academic behaviors, do impact student motivation to achieve. Therefore, future research may entail predicting how social behaviors, apart from academic behaviors, influence student’s sense of belonging among high school students.

With respect to scholastic environment, a student’s scholastic environment influences his/her sense of belonging. Albert Bandura (1989) reiterated that students select social environments that complement their perceived self-efficacious beliefs. Stated differently, students will select scholastic environments where they evaluate their perceived sense of belonging as part of their overall decision to attend. From a logical standpoint, this research makes sense as evident by the variety of school environments that exist around the world in many places, especially in America. Parochial, public, and private schools exist partly for this purpose (Goodenow, 1993).

Related, Albert Bandura’s theory of Triadic Reciprocal Causation (1986) supports the influences of the scholastic environment on sense of belonging. The
interaction of student, teacher, and peer behaviors influences each other and the scholastic environment. Students who do not establish rapport with their teachers and peers often act inappropriately as a result. This inappropriate behavior, in turn, creates tension in the environment. The social environment reciprocally becomes disruptive, as the teacher cannot instruct his/her students due to disciplining the student. The student, if teased by other peers, continues to misbehave, and this misbehavior further creates a hostile learning environment. The hostile learning environment stimulates the teacher to implement more disciplinary actions such as detention, calling of parents, and or a writing assignment, in addition to taking away instruction time. Overall, the misbehaving student and the class of students suffer from lack of instruction time as well as disruptions in learning.

Finally, results of this study indicated no relationship between student behaviors and sense of belonging; that is, students who perceived themselves as highly supportive of their peers and teachers did not report higher levels of belonging than those who perceived themselves as less supportive. As noted previously, one possible explanation relates to the way in which student behaviors were measured. A second explanation relates to the specific number of social behaviors that were measured. Jana Juvonen’s (1996) model references only one student behavior (aggressiveness). Although this study’s student behaviors scale tapped multiple behaviors (both social and academic), there are likely many more positive student social behaviors with the potential to impact sense of belonging. Finally, a third more simple and straightforward explanation is that, relative to the behaviors of teachers and peers, the behaviors of students themselves have little effect on a student’s sense of belonging. Theoretical support for this explanation is provided in part by research on egocentrism in adolescents. In short, many adolescents are egocentric, and some of them might not want to perceive that their personal behaviors contributed to their sense of belonging in any form or fashion (Erikson, 1950). From this perspective, these students might not have wanted to take personal responsibility for their own behaviors as contributing to their perceived sense of belonging (Glasser, 1986; Goble, 2004).

In addition to the fact that three of the four independent variables measured independently predicted sense of belonging, the group of variables as a whole explained 37% of the total variance in sense of belonging (above and beyond that explained by the study’s demographic variables). This is an important finding in that it highlights the need for additional research on other variables that predict sense of belonging. Other factors may actually revolve around student behaviors since there is a strong theoretical basis from researchers like Albert Bandura (1986).

**Mediating Effects**

One of the objectives of this study was to determine if sense of belonging mediated the relationships among peer behaviors, teacher behaviors, student behaviors, scholastic environment and academic achievement. According to this study, the answer to this question is “Yes.” Specifically, sense of belonging partially mediated relationships among teacher behaviors, peer behaviors, scholastic environment and academic achievement. Sense of belonging did not, however, mediate the relationship between student behaviors and academic achievement, as student behaviors did not exert a significant influence on sense of belonging. For the most part, these findings are consistent with both research and theory on sense of belonging and related outcomes.

With respect to teacher behaviors, the degree to which a teacher is perceived as fair, empathetic, and so forth has a significant impact on a student’s sense of belonging and subsequent academic achievement (Farmer, Friedrich, Michalowski, Minch, Suldo & White, 2009). Each of these traits was measured by this study’s measure of teacher behaviors. It is therefore logical that sense of belonging would mediate the relationship between this measure and academic achievement.

Regarding peer behaviors, as noted previously, peers also play a very powerful role in influencing a student’s feelings of belonging as well as his/her motivation to achieve (Goble, 2004; Stephens, 2000). Peer behaviors influence a student’s sense of belonging, as evidenced theoretically by Albert Bandura’s theory of Triadic Reciprocal Causation (1986). In addition, peer behaviors, as perceived by students, should logically affect a student’s behavior. If/when peers react positively toward other students,
other students are more likely to feel a stronger sense of belonging (and vice versa). This sense of belonging, in turn, will likely positively influence their motivation to achieve academically (Bandura, 1986; Juvonen, 1996).

Albert Bandura’s theory of Triadic Reciprocal Causation (1986) reinforces this peer-sense of belonging relationship. According to Albert Bandura (1986), a student’s behaviors affect the behaviors of his/her peers. Further, as students and peers interact with one another, these behaviors affect personal feelings of belonging. However, Albert Bandura’s theory (1986) does not specifically target how specific student behaviors will affect a student’s feelings of belonging. Similarly, Jana Juvonen (1996) indicates that student behaviors influence their relationships with teachers and peers, but she notes few specific student behaviors. In turn, although sense of belonging is influenced by students’ relationships with their teachers and peers, sense of belonging, as previously mentioned, is inconclusive as a significant factor that impacts a student’s level of academic engagement. In addition, student behaviors did not significantly predict their sense of belonging in this study, which is puzzling as it refutes research supported by Albert Bandura (1986) and Jana Juvonen (1996).

Finally, with respect to scholastic environment, there are a number of environmental factors that have been shown to positively impact sense of belonging. This study measured several of these factors, both general and specific, at the group level. Examples include quality and quantity of textbooks, availability of computer resources and tutoring resources, and the perceived extent to which a school generally values academic achievement (Hirsch, 1996; Kagan, 1990; Tyson & Woodward, 1989). Given the vast amount of research in support of the positive impact of these variables on academic achievement, it is again not surprising that sense of belonging mediated the relationship between these variables (via scholastic environment) and academic achievement.

Conclusion And Practical Implications

This study found several statistically significant predictors of sense of belonging. It also found that most of these same variables significantly predicted academic achievement. This latter finding should be interpreted with caution, as all of the predictor variables measured explained only 6% of the variance in academic achievement above and beyond that explained by the study’s demographic variables. Further, although the group of demographic variables did not statistically predict sense of belonging, females did report a stronger need for sense of belonging than males. This finding is consistent with past research, which indicates that females tend to operate instinctively based on feelings, whereas males tend to operate instinctively based on their rationale (Glasser, 1984).

Findings from this study can help educators better understand the factors that influence students’ feelings of belongingness as well as their level of academic achievement. They can also help future researchers explore other factors that might have an influence on students’ sense of belonging and/or their level of academic achievement. Perhaps most importantly, this study makes an important contribution to the field, as previous studies have not thoroughly investigated the broad range of variables that have the potential to predict sense of belonging and academic achievement among high school students. Moreover, this study’s variables were chosen carefully based on theoretical relevance. For this reason, future researchers in this area should consider using this study’s variables with other factors to predict twelfth grade students’ sense of belonging and academic achievement.

Results of this study fortify the need for educators to pay more attention to students’ feelings of belonging and connectedness in a scholastic environment. Educators can influence students’ feelings of belonging by ensuring that they are treated fairly, showing empathy and concern for their learning, both academically and socially, preventing bullying and/or harassing among students in the scholastic environment, and incorporating other practical strategies (Farmer, Friedrich, Michalowski, Minch, Suldo & White, 2009; Olweus, 1987).

As noted previously, this study found that teacher behaviors and peer behaviors impact sense of belonging equally. For this reason, moving forward, educators who attempt to positively impact students’ levels of belonging should focus on both teacher and peer behaviors. Given findings regarding the impact of scholastic environment on sense of belonging, they should also continue to focus on the importance of
environmental factors such as possessing up-to-date technology, adequate textbook resources, and an eager attitude to promote scholastic achievement among both students and educators (Tyson & Woodward, 1989).

The impact of student behaviors also needs to be re-evaluated. Although this study did not find significant relationships among student behaviors, sense of belonging, and academic achievement, both Jana Juvonen (1996) and Albert Bandura (1986) have empirically tested and produced models which emphasize how student behaviors impact sense of belonging and/or academic achievement. Further, student behaviors are a significant component in developing friendships, creating clichés, fostering relationships with teachers and other administrators, as well as contributing to the process of learning both individually and with teachers/peers (Dion, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005).

References


Social Identity Construction In A Gay Men’s Chorus

Dr. Don M. Taylor
Michelle L. Herring, MME

Abstract: The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to examine social identity construction among new members of a predominantly gay men’s chorus. Sixteen men (12 White, 2 Hispanic, 2 African-American) whose ages ranged from 23 to 62 years old agreed to participate in the study. Research questions examined were (1) In what ways does social identity construction among first-year members of a predominantly gay men’s chorus align with tenets of Social Identity Theory? (2) What role does comparative and autonomous judgment play in their social identity formation? Findings from the first research question indicated that participants’ experiences were most aligned with social creativity. Findings from the second research question indicated that members’ descriptions of personal experiences were more congruent with autonomous judgment, rather than group comparisons.
First Rehearsal

The air of joy and excitement on this first rehearsal night of the season is palpable. Regardless of age, size, income, or attire, all are welcome. Everyone who enters the building is greeted at the door with a warm smile, a handshake, or a hug. New singers are personally guided to a registration table and then escorted to chairs in the main rehearsal hall where they are strategically placed next to key leaders. These leaders are designated as “Big Buddies” who have volunteered to serve as helpful guides for new members throughout the first season.

After some introductory remarks by the organization’s president, the conductor is introduced to a standing ovation of cheers, hoots, and hollers. “Welcome! I’m thrilled you are here!” he proclaims. An energetic rehearsal filled with ample praise and high artistic demands is interspersed with video clips of past performances that generate a still hush and silent tears of pride among the singers. The bonds between members seem to transcend musical rewards to something deeper. As researchers, we are curious to investigate how new members might find their own sense of identity within the group during their first year of membership. (Field Notes, August 21, 2012)

Review Of Literature

Choral singing is one of the most accessible means of community music making available, with literally millions of Americans regularly participating (Chorus America, 2009). Research examining community choir members’ experiences has focused on issues related to social capital (Langston, 2011; Langston & Barrett, 2008), assimilation (Kramer, 2011), and motivation (e.g., Kennedy, 2002). Additionally, some investigators have been particularly interested in the experiences of singers from unique choral populations, including church choruses (e.g., Faivre-Ransom, 2001; Peterson, 2001; Titcomb, 2000) prison choirs (Cohen, 2009, 2012; Menning, 2010; Silver, 2005), and gay choruses (e.g., Gregory, 2009; Henderson & Hodges, 2007; Hilliard, 2008; Knotts & Gregorio, 2011; Latimer, 2008).

Among these unique populations, gay choruses represent one of the fastest growing groups. Research has shown that these ensembles have provided personal affirmation during politically tumultuous times (Albinder, 2007; Hayes, 2005), social networking (Albinder, 2007; Latimer, 2008; Henderson & Hodges, 2007; Hilliard, 2008; Mail & Safford, 2003), advocacy and support during the height of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and early 1990s (Elliott, 2007; Hilliard, 2008; Putnam & Rattan, 2004), and a positive means to help members disclose their sexual orientation (Latimer, 2008; Hilliard, 2008).

Although musical artistry serves as the core purpose in many gay choruses, the socio-political implications of participation may vary from group to group, depending on particular community dynamics. Some choruses on the east and west coasts have assumed a direct approach, while others in more conservative areas have been cautious, fearing to even include the word “gay” in their name. While political dialogue and group identity within the gay community is often driven by progressive figures in politically liberal communities, the experiences of gay citizens in more conservative areas sometimes receive less attention. The ways in which gay citizens achieve identity, both individually and socially, may vary.

Theories Of Gay Identity

Prior to 1990, a variety of writers described gay identity development in individualistic, linear terms through stage theories (e.g., Cass, 1979; Plummer, 1975; Troiden, 1979). Many of these theories identify a progression of development in which an individual moves from closeted shame through angry defiance to eventual assimilation into the dominant heteronormative paradigm. Stephen Cox and Cynthia Gallois (1996) argued that stage theories fail to capture the complexity of human development and that assimilation into mainstream society does not necessarily signal a higher plane of development. In contrast, they suggested that Social Identity Theory (Tafjel & Turner, 1986) could provide a more elegant means of describing gay identity.

Social Identity Theory (Tafjel & Turner, 1986) is based on the idea that people strive to enhance self-esteem by viewing their own group in positive terms and that group comparisons are often a natural outcome of this process. Categories within the theory include social mobility (seeking acceptance into more favorable social groups), social creativity (defining or redefining one’s own group’s behaviors and attitudes positively), and social competition (challenging dominant norms through activism). Stephen Cox and
Cynthia Gallois (1996) identified specific ways in which these strategies are implemented within the gay community, as discussed below.

Individuals who place higher value on a group other than their own may engage in social mobility strategies by downplaying membership in their own group as they strive to achieve acceptance in another. Gay men who yearn for heterosexual privilege may deemphasize or even deny their orientation in groups of heterosexual men. Four subcategories of social mobility include capitulating, passing, covering, and blending. Those who capitulate completely deny their homosexual orientation, may marry women, and live out their existences as closeted men. Men who pass maintain some semblance of gay life but work diligently to keep gay contacts separate from heterosexual contacts, hoping that members of one group may never encounter the others. If asked about their orientation, those who pass will lie. Gay men who cover are willing to disclose their orientation if asked, but still strive to maintain a heterosexual façade. Those who blend demonstrate heteronormative expressions of gender identity and do not view sexual orientation as a relevant part of their lives. Rather than actively lie or willingly disclose their orientation, they seek to avoid questions.

Individuals who place higher value on their own group membership, regardless of its perceived social status, are more likely to seek self-esteem through social creativity. Those in minority groups often seek to redefine values according to their own norms. For instance, while some may argue that procreation between two gay men is impossible without some form of outside assistance, others may argue that children in gay families are all planned and truly wanted.

People who not only redefine values and make comparisons on new dimensions, but who also challenge dominant groups engage in social competition. Many mark the beginning of the gay rights movement with the 1968 Stonewall Inn riot in which bar patrons defiantly fought back when police initiated a raid on the establishment. Activism takes many forms, from radical expressions of rage in groups like ACT UP that fought for AIDS funding in the 1990s to more conventional activities via political lobbying.

Comparison Versus Autonomy
Group comparisons described by Social Identity Theory (Tafjel & Turner, 1986) have served as a useful model to describe ingroup/outgroup behavior in a variety of settings, but some have suggested that these comparisons can be unhealthy and may foster intergroup conflict (Kohn, 1993, 1999; Tyler & Blader, 2000). Yet comparison is not the only way in which individuals derive self-esteem within their groups. Research has shown that in addition to intergroup comparisons, members rely on autonomous evaluation to foster social identification. Tom Tyler and Steven L. Blader (2002) wrote:

Autonomous influences are those that flow from judgments about what constitutes prototypical group traits (in the case of pride) or attributes of members “in good standing” (in the case of respect). In both cases, individuals refer to their group-related schemas in the construction of their status judgments, rather than specific external references. (p. 815)

The extent to which group comparisons play a role in social identity development within gay choruses has received scant attention. The purpose of this study was to examine social identity processes among first-year members of a predominantly gay men’s chorus. Questions guiding the study included:

1. In what ways does social identity construction among first-year members of a predominantly gay men’s chorus align with tenets of Social Identity Theory?
2. What role does comparative and autonomous judgment play in their social identity formation?

Method
Procedures
In order to examine social identity within a particular socio-cultural context, we utilized ethnographic case study as described by Sharan Merriam (1998). The organization chosen for this study proved to be a viable source due to their regional location, longevity, and success. The chorus resides in a southwestern region of the United States often associated with a politically conservative ideology.
Criterion sampling as described by Michael Q. Patton (2002) was used to narrow our focus to first-year members of a gay men’s chorus. We also bound the study by limiting data collection to the first full season of membership, between August 2012 and May 2013. Data collected included primary sources such as field notes from rehearsals, focus group interviews, individual interviews, and optional journaling. Secondary sources, such as recordings, archived programs, and newspaper articles provided rich context regarding the organization’s history and purpose. To provide both emic and etic perspectives, the lead author served as a participant-observer during rehearsals while the second author served as an observer-participant.

Participants

During the first rehearsal of the season, 16 men (12 White, 2 Hispanic, 2 African-American) whose ages ranged from 23 to 62 years old ($M = 40.31$, $SD = 12.92$) agreed to participate in this study and signed consent forms approved by our university’s Institutional Review Board. Fifteen participants identified as gay, and one identified as bisexual. Fourteen held positions in white collar fields (e.g. physician, manager), and two had jobs that could be described as blue collar (e.g., technician, security guard). Following initial semi-structured focus group interviews, nine men participated in semi-structured individual interviews. These interviews were conducted in individual homes, restaurants, over the telephone, or via videoconferencing, according to participants’ preferences. We recorded all interviews with a Sony digital voice recorder (ICD-P320) and later transcribed them for analysis. Pseudonyms for all participants were provided to ensure ethical standards of privacy. The initial focus group interview was designed to investigate participants’ overall impressions of membership, both musically and personally. Individual interviews focused on themes consistent with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Focus group interviews ranged in length from 35 minutes 21 seconds to 1 hour 26 minutes 51 seconds for a total of 5 hours 2 minutes 8 seconds ($M = 33$ minutes 52 seconds, $SD = 17$ minutes 37 seconds).

Data Analysis

We utilized cross-case data analysis to identify common themes among participants, consistent with John Creswell’s (2007) Data Analysis Spiral. This model provided us with a sequential model of data collection, management, memoing, description, and representation. Trustworthiness achieved through triangulation of data sources (i.e., individual interviews, focus group interviews, field notes, and archival material) was further aided by member checks and follow-up e-mail communications with participants to ensure accuracy. In addition, we submitted our data for peer review to a published researcher skilled in qualitative research with a specialty in social identity theory. Modifications, although minor, were incorporated into the final analysis.

Findings

Findings from the first research question were specifically pre-coded in categories associated with social identity theory: Social Mobility, Social Creativity, and Social Competition. Within these categories, further codes were allowed to emerge. Codes subsumed underneath Social Mobility included Openness and Vulnerability. Codes subsumed underneath Social Creativity were Building Community and Tribes. Codes subsumed underneath Social Competition were Indirect Influence, Assimilation, Political Diversity, Funding Backlash, and Alienation.

Findings from the second research question indicated that members’ descriptions of personal experiences were more aligned with autonomous judgment than group comparisons. Distinctions and subtleties in each category are discussed below.

Social Mobility

Most men in this study were very proud of their membership in the chorus, yet only three of the nine men interviewed individually were completely open about their membership with everyone in their lives. Stephen shared, “If I’m talking to co-workers, I say we are a men’s chorus. (Individual Interview, April 5, 2012) Likewise, Don explained, “I’m in mall security.
I’m not out to everybody at work. And so that’s the dilemma. I think that if I did, it would open up a whole other can of worms that I just really didn’t want to deal with at this time.” (Individual Interview, April 12, 2012)

Willingness to stand on a stage and sing publicly with a predominantly gay men’s chorus involves a certain level of disclosure, whether direct or indirect, that many gay men who strive for social mobility into another group would never consider. Certainly, none of the men in the group would fall into the category of capitulation (those who completely deny their orientation) passing (those who strive to maintain a heterosexual façade), or covering (trying to live distinctly separate lives as gay/straight men). Yet, those who withhold information from certain individuals in their lives (i.e., “don’t ask, don’t tell) could be considered to be aligned with men who blend. They do not lie about who they are, but they seek to avoid questions by omission.

Social Creativity

Social creativity is the means by which individuals redefine values to enhance self-esteem. Singers indicated that the chorus provided a positive means of gay identity that sometimes contrasted with previous experiences in daily life. Yet rather than seeking to place themselves above others through comparative judgment, participants’ statements were much more in line with autonomous evaluation. The chorale provided a positive venue for community building and support that had sometimes been lacking in other venues. Frank valued the opportunity to have his relationship celebrated within social circles:

When discussing the relevance of gay choirs in today’s society of assimilation, participants highlighted the value of gay community within the organization. Bill spoke passionately about the need to maintain a sense of gay community.

Likewise, intragroup comparisons were limited. Participants acknowledged social tribes (e.g., older/younger, bears/twinks, blue collar/white collar), but did not feel that any group was impermeable. Men acknowledged that the large size of the chorus, meeting on a bi-weekly basis, fostered regular social encounters with people from all walks of life. Chorus members celebrated the diversity of tribes and valued the connections made with individuals they may not have encountered in daily life. Wayne related:

I’ve seen a lot more walks of the gay life then I’ve known there to actually be. To sit next to somebody who actually does drag, or next to the guy who’s very butch, it’s like, y’all are so opposite, but work well together. (Focus Group Interview, October 6, 2012)

Members also acknowledged the positive function that subgroups had to help members develop a more personal sense of connectedness with others. Frank shared:

I fall into the group of guys that have kids. I can’t commit to certain things because I’m going to spend time with my kids and that kind of stuff, and I’m cool with that. And I haven’t felt like I’ve gotten any kind of discrimination or anybody judging anybody else. (Individual Interview, March 27, 2013)

When discussing the relevance of gay choirs in today’s society of assimilation, participants highlighted the value of gay community within the organization. Bill spoke passionately about the need to maintain a sense of gay community.

In [this choir], my relationship with Jerry is very recognized. People understand what that means to be in a relationship with somebody. If I’m around some of my family, they don’t get it. Because they just haven’t experienced it. It’s very affirming. (Individual Interview, March 27, 2013)

Likewise, intragroup comparisons were limited. Participants acknowledged social tribes (e.g.,

[We need gay choirs to] maintain and affirm our communities and provide wholesome outlets. In a city like ours, there are [many] gay organizations you can join. And if we don’t have those anymore, then . . . who are we? What are we? We’re just another color in a fabric that loses its identity. (Individual Interview, April 16, 2013)

---

1 “Bear” is a slang term usually referring to stocky or muscular men with facial hair, often middle-aged or older. “Twink” is a slang term usually referring to slender, clean-shaven men, often under 30 years old.
Similarly, Harold (African-American) drew parallels between gospel choirs and gay choirs:

I’m thinking about Black choirs. There’s a certain kind of camaraderie; there’s a certain kind of tone. There’s a certain kind of energy. And so I kind of think of that the same way as a gay choir. In that particular space, you can be yourself; you can be open. So it provides a space so that you can get that creative outlet that we love, which is the love of singing, plus being an openly gay man without the fear of retribution. (Individual Interview, March 27, 2013)

**Social Competition**

Most men did not place high value on direct social activism within the group. They felt that the musical product spoke volumes in indirect ways that more radical action might not. Stephen reflected:

Without really saying a whole lot, we can say it through our music. We can use our credibility and our performance just to relate some of what we believe in, in the chorale. (Individual Interview, April 5, 2013)

Likewise, many spoke about the importance of respecting diversity to encourage inclusivity within the organization and in the community at large. Harold noted:

We very rarely ever talk politics, or strategy, or that sort of thing. And with as politically diverse as the gay community has become, because there are gay Republicans and so on and so forth, that probably is the best thing. (Individual Interview, March 27, 2013)

Similarly, Julio cautioned that overt activism might alienate those outside the gay community:

It’s a gay male chorus, but I appreciate that we want to caution ourselves and not just throw us out there as a gay men’s chorus. Cause for one, I think we want to remain diverse. We’re trying to break down walls. So we have straight men join the chorus. Two, we rely on funding from the community, so we want to be careful, first and foremost, to announce ourselves as an artistic group. We’re competing for funds with others in the arts community. (Individual Interview, March 29, 2013)

**Discussion**

When examined through the lens of Social Identity Theory (Tafjel & Turner, 1986) participants’ experiences were most aligned tenets of social creativity; however, analysis revealed that participant comments were more autonomous than comparative in nature, as described by Tyler and Blader (2000). At no point did chorus members describe their experiences in ways that elevated their status over outside groups. Any comparisons made were more subtle in nature with the recognition that the chorus offered opportunities for personal growth and connection that may not be found as readily in other venues. Likewise, regular rehearsals with a large group afforded opportunities to interact with men outside normal social circles. Unofficial subgroups were somewhat evident, but all were welcoming and friendly to others. Mutual respect and increased understanding of others nurtured the inclusive environment valued by the organization.

No one mentioned seeking upward mobility into another more esteemed group, but they did express feelings of vulnerability that caused them to consider with whom they could share their experiences. Such caution aligns with previous work examining gay job discrimination in the workplace (e.g., Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, & King, 2008; Liddle, Luzzo, Hauenstein, & Schuck, 2004; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Waldo, 1999). Similarly, group members expressed little interest in overt social activism. Alternatively, they believed that excellence in public performance served as a powerful form of subtle activism that might foster understanding and continued support.

**Implications**

Since 2010, strides towards gay equality have skyrocketed. The repeal of anti-gay policies such as Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell and the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) have signaled a changing world. Public awareness of gay issues is mirrored in television media, movies, and the Internet. However, in spite of these strides, employers can cite sexual orientation as
grounds for dismissal without fear of retribution in many states. Disclosing one’s orientation and establishing a positive sense of self-esteem can still be especially challenging for many gay men in politically conservative areas. Organizations like the one in this study can provide a valuable source for individuals who seek support and a sense of community. While some may criticize groups like this for their less overtly social activism, their inclusivity provides a safe vehicle for all and may be seen as a positive bridge between the gay and straight community.

Attitudes toward the gay community are changing most rapidly among younger generations (Jones, Cox, Navarro-Rivera, 2014), which suggests that more students may come out in their school environments. Social change, especially in traditionally conservative environments, may not always be welcomed. Accordingly, teachers may be faced with conflicts within their school settings that could require attention. Music teachers who want to promote tolerance and respect through models of artistic excellence may want to consider incorporating gay men’s choral recordings in their classrooms. From a purely musical standpoint, many organizations have recorded standard choral music such as Franz Biber’s Ave Maria that provide superb examples of vowel placement, dynamic expression, and diction. From a social perspective, these groups also often serve as models of inclusivity, tolerance, and support.

Similarly, the autonomous assessment documented among participants in this study might serve as positive models for performing groups that may be tempted to judge themselves against others. While comparative judgment of others may be a natural part of identity categorization, autonomous assessment seems to be a healthier alternative. Choral directors have the power to set a positive tone for their groups; yet, sometimes group dynamics may make such pursuits challenging. Mentoring that guides singers away from group comparisons and toward autonomous evaluations may provide a dynamic that fosters support and reduces stress. Tom Tyler and Steven Blader (2002) observed, “People are not simply prisoners of a competitive social dynamic. They can be affected by autonomous judgments about the quality of their lives” (p. 832).

Autonomous judgment provides a viable means of self-assessment, based on intrinsically meaningful goals. In contrast, the gains from comparative judgment may seem shallow. Alan Downs (2012) documented the experiences of clients in psychotherapy and discovered that the gains associated with external rewards (e.g., wealth, looks, degrees, awards, etc.) were only temporary. In contrast, he advocated for true acceptance through authentic validation:

You don’t need to be more spiritual, richer, friendlier, better looking, younger, or living on a beach. In this moment, all you need to be is you. Only in that space will you find lasting contentment. (p. 106)

If choral directors can instill a similar sense of personal self-worth in their students, they will have moved beyond musical service to something much deeper that students can carry with them throughout their lives.

References


Abstract: The chronic underrepresentation of female faculty in STEM disciplines, in addition to women’s underrepresentation at higher faculty ranks and in leadership positions in general are well documented. This article discusses possible reasons for this problem at one major research institution, and identifies strategies to address them and proposes initiatives meant to inform the institution’s journey toward institutional change that, ultimately, will affect women in many disciplines.
Background

Despite a growing need for a diverse workforce, women’s participation in science and engineering occupations is only half of what it is in the U.S. workforce as a whole (National Science Foundation, 2013), and women continue to be underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines in institutions of higher education across the nation (National Science Board, 2014). The job satisfaction of academic women in STEM disciplines (and many other academic fields) is lower than men’s, and women tend to leave their academic careers earlier than their male counterparts (Hill, Corbet, & Rose, 2010).

Many reasons account for women’s underrepresentation, including “pipeline” and climate issues, bias, and work-life conflict (Handelsman, Cantor, Carnes, Denton, Fine, Grosz, Hinshaw, Marrett, Rossen, Shalala, & Sheridan, 2005; National Academy of Sciences, 2006). Studies have consistently reported that the number of girls and women interested in science and engineering drops with each transition in their academic career (Hill, Corbet, & Rose, 2010), dramatically affecting the number of women pursuing doctorates in STEM disciplines. Still poignant is what decades ago a senior scholar at the National Association for Women in Education coined the term “chilly climate,” referring to the subtle and sometimes overt discriminatory environment experienced by women in higher education (Sandler, 1996).

Drawing on a large and diverse body of research, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) provides evidence in its 2010 report Why so few? that social/environmental factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in science and engineering. The AAUW argues that while the foundation for a STEM career is laid early in life, scientists and engineers are produced in colleges and universities. According to the research profiled by the organization, small improvements by STEM departments can have a profound impact on female student recruitment and retention. Institutions of higher education can significantly affect the recruitment and retention of female faculty in STEM disciplines if they improve departmental culture to more effectively integrate women. The AAUW recommends that colleges and universities recruit and retain more female faculty by implementing mentoring programs and effective work-life policies for all faculty members (Hill, Corbet & Rose, 2010).

Many of the problems, including the existence of a chilly climate, go beyond women in STEM disciplines and affect women in academe in general. Female faculty find it difficult, for example, to balance professional and personal responsibilities (Colbeck & Drago, 2005; Mason & Goulden, 2002; Philipsen & Bostic, 2010; Philipsen, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2006). At top-tier research institutions, women express great discontent with the clash between tenure requirements and family obligations (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2006).

This paper discusses the problem of chronic underrepresentation of female faculty in STEM disciplines, in addition to women’s underrepresentation at higher faculty ranks and in leadership positions. It also proposes strategies to address these issues. It reports problems areas identified at one major research university and suggests strategies meant to inform the institution’s journey toward institutional change that, ultimately, will affect women in non-STEM disciplines as well.

Conceptually, research indicates that, to be effective, institutional change needs to be initiated in two domains: (1) the institutional-structural domain and (2) the individual-cultural domain (Xu, 2008; Reskin, 2003; Xie & Shaumann, 2003). This paper acknowledges the importance of both domains but focuses primarily on the institutional-structural domain.

Methodology

Trying to understand underrepresentation of women in various disciplines and at higher ranks and in leadership positions, I conducted a case study at a large urban research institution. I examined existing data derived from climate and COACHE (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education) surveys and conducted focus group interviews with female STEM faculty and deans of all major units at the university. The COACHE survey was directed at tenure-eligible faculty while the focus group interviews included tenure-eligible, tenured and term female faculty in STEM disciplines at the university (Chemistry, Biology, Engineering, Statistics & Operations Research, Forensic Science), as well as senior administrators across academic units. The goal
was to find out what, from their perspectives, might account for the low numbers of women in tenured, tenure-eligible, and leadership ranks, and what the university could do to attract and retain more women into those positions. IRB permission to conduct the study was obtained.

Findings

COACHE survey results indicated high rates of faculty dissatisfaction: 40% of tenure-eligible faculty members believe, for instance, that the university does not make tenure and family compatible, and 50% are dissatisfied that it lacks a spousal hiring program. These data indicate a weakened capacity to attract and retain a diverse group of high-quality faculty, especially women who continue to be disproportionately affected by work-life conflict (Mason, 2009). This reflects a national problem, as research has amply illustrated (Philipsen & Bostic, 2010; Philipsen, 2008; Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007; Gornick & Meyers, 2005; Letherby, Marchbank, Ramsay, & Shiel, 2005; Spalter-Roth & Erskine, 2005; Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; Mason & Goulden, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2006; Drago & Colbeck, 2003; Fleig-Palmer, Murin, Palmer, & Rathert, 2003). Such high rates of faculty dissatisfaction undermine many universities’ capacity to attract and retain high quality faculty, a challenge that is also reflective of national trends: because life-work balance is increasingly important to young generations of scholars, colleges face obstacles recruiting and keeping the most promising junior faculty (Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009).

Interview data, furthermore, indicates that the most pressing concerns across departmental units can be categorized as falling into the domains mentioned above: the institutional-structural domain and the individual-cultural domain.

Institutional-Structural Domain

- Inequities of available support structures (work-life policies and programs) between the two campuses
- Absence of supportive policies and programs (e.g. flexible work arrangements, part-time tenure schedules)
- Overrepresentation of STEM women in term (non-tenure) and underrepresentation in tenure-eligible/tenured positions
- Lack of recognition of women in STEM disciplines

Individual-Cultural Domain

- Departmental/disciplinary cultures that can make women feel isolated
- Lack of mentoring and leadership development opportunities to enhance STEM women’s professional role confidence

Consequently, to address the underrepresentation of women in STEM and other disciplines, as well as at higher ranks and in leadership positions, change within the institutional-structural domain must include a) increasing recruitment, retention and promotion of women; b) development of stronger and more innovative work-life policies for flexible work arrangements and spousal/partner hiring; c) strengthening and institutionalizing family leave and child care options; and d) improvement of the leadership and management capabilities of department chairs to create a more supportive environment for women. Change within the individual-cultural domain includes a) strengthening of women’s professional role confidence (meaning confidence in the ability to professionally succeed (Cech, Rubineau, Silbey & Seron, 2011) through effective mentoring and professional development opportunities; and b) building of leadership capabilities through a targeted leadership development program. This multi-tiered approach introduces initiatives while also capitalizing on existing resources. Multiple streams of interventions can be used to accomplish the goals, an approach designed to be robust even during economically unstable times.

Implications For The Institutional-Structural Domain

One way to strengthen the institutional-structural domain is to employ family-friendly initiatives to diversify, attract, and retain faculty, an approach used by a number of colleges and universities (Philipsen & Bostic, 2010; Lester & Sallee, 2009). Included are institutions with limited resources. Examples include:

One example is the University of Washington where faculty can choose from a variety of part-time work options in order to be able to fulfill personal responsibilities and manage challenges such as childbirth/adoption, elder care, personal or family illnesses (Quinn & Shapiro, 2009) or "active-service-modified duties (ASMD)" options for new mothers and fathers at the University of California-Berkeley (University of California-Berkeley, 2014). Institutions have also worked on instituting requirements for effective tenure clock stoppage to avoid stigmatization and the creation of “mommy tracks” (Philipsen & Bostic, 2010). Boise State University, for instance, allows tenure clock stoppage for reasons other than birth/adoption of a child, including elder/dependent care obligations, disability/chronic illness or circumstances beyond the control of the faculty member (Boise State University, 2014).

Effective Spousal/Partner Hiring Programs

An effective strategy is used by U Michigan which created the Higher Education Recruitment Consortium and by the California System which created The Northern California Higher Education Resource Consortium. Both organizations help find positions at nearby schools for spouses or partners who cannot be accommodated at the institution itself. Spouses and partners are given Web-based access not only to openings at a cluster of nearby institutions, but are also enabled to post credentials in a searchable database accessible to prospective employers.

Support with child care: The University of Washington provides assistance along several lines: finding childcare outside of the University of Washington, providing a caregiver directory, locating sick child care and emergency backup care as well as obtaining childcare assistance as a student (University of Washington, 2014). The University of Michigan offers a variety of resources as well, including on-campus childcare, access to a child care home network, sick and backup care, and summer care, to name a few (University of Michigan, 2014).

What Your Department Can Do

Adapt and implement practices that have been demonstrated at other institutions to be effective in increasing family-friendliness and therefore diversify the faculty and attract/retain high-quality faculty in STEM disciplines.

Pilot in several disciplines the following research-based initiatives, modeled after successful existing programs and policies at other universities:

- Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA) for male and female faculty: including part-time tenure track options, differentiated load, and effective tenure clock stoppage.
- Spousal/partner hiring programs, including: improved collaboration among colleges/universities and with major area employers.
- Increase availability of high-quality child care through collaboration with community child care providers, grant writing activities, expansion of services to include after-school, infant care and care for mildly sick children, “nanny-networks,” child care referral services, parent education, child-friendly campus locations, etc.

Financial Implications

Given the limited, often shrinking, budgets of most institutions of higher education, the question of how to finance family-friendly initiatives is a logical one to ask. However, not all policies and programs are costly, and many are even cost-neutral, based primarily on innovative thinking and new approaches. Examples include enhanced career-flexibility through part-time options, spousal/partner hiring support strategies and assistance in securing high quality child care. Regarding the latter, the University of Washington, for example, has a track record of providing an elaborate support system for parents by using various strategies. One of them is the collaboration with community-based child care centers that allow UW parents priority access. Another lies in obtaining grant funding for various projects such as the federal Department of Education’s Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS) grant that secured half a million dollars between 2001...
and 2005 for student financial assistance. It has been suggested to those who wish to replicate the UW success to (a) develop their grant seeking behavior; and (b) enhance collaboration and partnerships, not only with community resources but also within the university by, for instance, tapping into research dollars or accessing intern sites for students in academic programs with a practicum component related to early childhood issues (Quinn & Shapiro, 2009). Lastly, if monies are needed to implement family-friendly initiatives, they are a wise investment. As former provost at U Michigan (and current president of UVA) Teresa Sullivan learned at Michigan, a family-friendly workplace “is a savings in the long run because faculty think well of Michigan and their time here. We want to foster loyalty, and it increases loyalty. It gives you an institutional strength that you can’t get any other way” (personal communication). The time has come for colleges/universities to follow suit, become more family-friendly, and therefore better able to increase the diversity and quality of its faculty in addition to doing what is right.

**Conclusion**

While lasting institutional change geared at addressing such persistent problems as the underrepresentation of women in higher faculty ranks and university leadership positions in colleges and universities in general, and in STEM fields in particular, is not easy to achieve, institutions across the country have made efforts to do so. Learning from existing models, many colleges, universities and major area employers can be poised to initiate changes in the institutional-structural and individual-cultural domains, including the implementation of family-friendly policies and programs. Such initiatives, in the long run, not only address the underrepresentation of women, they also strengthen workplace climate and therefore make colleges and universities more attractive places to work, for everyone.

**References**


