



Northern Essex Community College

**The Evolution of Manhood:
Redefining Gender Equity in Education**

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Suzanne Van Wert
Professor of English

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Gender equity is not a term we generally associate with manhood. Indeed it is a phrase made familiar by the Title IX initiatives which responded to inequities faced by female students. Those educational reforms in the 60's and 70's gave girls access to opportunities which had given boys an advantage in a broad range of careers – and they have proven to be very successful. In the early 1970's only 20% of college-age women scored positively on questionnaires that measured character traits like assertiveness, independence, and ambition compared to 50% of young men (Twenge 193). Twenty years later men's and women's scores on these traits were "indistinguishable" (193). Thanks to targeted educational reforms, qualities which lead to achievement are no longer gender-defined.

In fact, women have become so successful that today they outperform men in just about every way academic achievement can be measured, and not by just a little:

- Starting as early as elementary school, boys earn lower grades, receiving 70% of the D's and F's while girls earn 60 % of the A's (Gurian 56).
- Up to age 12, they are 60% more likely than girls to repeat a grade (Tyre).
- Over 1 million teens drop out of school every year and 80% of them are male (Herbert)
- Nationwide, only 65% of males graduate from high school, compared with 72 % of females (The Manhattan Institute).
- Of males who do graduate and then enroll in 4 year colleges, nearly half will never finish (Jones 7), and those who do, earn GPA's that, on average, are two-tenths of a point lower (on a scale of 4.0) than their female counterparts (Achieve the Dream Data Notes).

I want to emphasize that women are not taking potential degrees and careers away from men. While women do occupy more seats (and a higher percentage of seats) in colleges than in the past, the number of available spaces for college students has expanded and can keep expanding to accommodate everyone who is interested in getting an education. The Title IX reforms that enhanced girls' education did not displace boys, and I am not suggesting, as some

scholars have, that over-zealous feminism has diverted attention and resources away from males and thus caused their decline.

I am suggesting, however, that we need to pay attention to the very real waning of male interest and persistence in education because it is both symptomatic and predictive of some devastating socio-economic effects. Somewhere between 25 – 30 % of American men actually earn college degrees, and in a world that has become flat, they will be competing for white collar jobs with an expanding international community ("The State of American Manhood"). What kind of future do the less educated 70% have to look forward to?

“For males 25 years and over with less than a bachelor’s degree there have been real declines in income after 1973... High school graduates have seen real income decline 26%. Males who started high school but did not finish have seen a 38% decline in real income” ("The State of American Manhood" 6). This is because male dominated industries, like agriculture and manufacturing, have lost jobs steadily in the 20th century. Goods producing industrial employment has declined from almost 48% of all jobs in 1948 to just under 18% in 2005 ("The State of American Manhood" 8). “At the rate of decline in market share over the last 5 decades manufacturing employment should reach 0 by about 2028” in the United States ("The State of American Manhood" 9).

Jobs in the service industries, on the other hand, have risen from 41 % of all jobs in 1948 to 66% in 2005 ("The State of American Manhood" 8). But males have not adapted well to the changing economy; they are underrepresented in service industries, including education and health services where the number of jobs has risen from 2.1 million to 17.3 million over the past 50 years ("The State of American Manhood" 10). Even if they work service jobs as teenagers, young men are not interested in committing themselves to entry-level service and sales jobs with

low pay and prestige. “The increased instability of their long-term employment prospects, coupled with their sense that jobs must be emotionally and financially fulfilling, leads to a volatile career trajectory. Many experience the ‘two month itch’ and switch jobs as casually as they change romantic partners” (Kimmel 35).

While unemployment rates may ebb and flow according to larger economic conditions, they are always greatest for males with the least education. In 2005, only 2.5% of men with a bachelor’s degree or more were unemployed compared with almost 8% of men with less than a high school degree (“The State of American Manhood” 4). A new twist is that some of the unemployed are not even looking for jobs. “These men aren’t included in the unemployment statistics because they’ve given up looking for a job...Their ranks are growing rapidly. In Michigan, 18% of able-bodied men between the ages of 30 and 54 -- almost one in five -- are not working and not looking for work. In West Virginia, that figure is now up to 24%, almost one man in four. Forty years ago, in the same age group, only about 1 able-bodied man in 20 was unemployed and not looking for work. Today, nationwide, it’s about 1 man in 7” (Sax, Leonard 127).

But the problem is not strictly economic. There are significant social consequences as well. Over half of young men ages 18 -24 are living at home with their parents and are in no rush to move out (U.S. Census Bureau). Their inability – or disinterest – in supporting themselves makes them less than desirable candidates for marriage, and once again those with the least education are at the biggest disadvantage. In 2004, 22.3% of men ages 35- 44 with less than a high school diploma had never been married; that figure shrinks with increasing levels of education so that only 11.9 % of similar men with an advanced degree had never been married (“The State of American Manhood” 15) “This year approximately 200,000 more women will

receive bachelor's degrees than men...That means 200,000 women will not find a college-educated man to marry” (Mortenson qtd. in Jones 8).

So what is going on? Are we losing a generation of men to some sinister cataclysm? In fact, there is no tectonic shift here, no metaphorical tidal wave against which we can build an intellectual levee. Instead, it is a perfect storm of familiar and seemingly minor elements, a confluence of historical, cultural, educational, biological, and chemical factors whose interwoven and cumulative effect may be pushing us to a calamitous tipping point.

The Evolution of Manhood

Before 1800, our cultural definition of manhood was closely aligned with duty and social usefulness. An ideal man was devoted to the good of his community. This is evident in the democratic, participatory government created by the founders of our country. But this new democracy also introduced the idea that power resided in the individual citizen. By the early 19th century, America's social order reflected this same focus, as Horatio Alger novels popularized the notion that a man's success was determined by his own talent, determination, and hard work. The individual, not the community, became the fundamental unit of society.

Although the age of westward expansion is long gone, we continue to derive our American masculine identity from it. We still use words like “pioneer,” “maverick,” and “cowboy” to describe the alpha males of corporate America. We want to believe “it's still true, that we Americans are, against all available evidence, a nation where people grow free and wild and strong and brave and willful, instead of lazy and fat and boring and unmotivated” (Gilbert 125). Even very young boys know that asking for help is not desirable male behavior. To “be a man” is to “stand on your own two feet.” So it is not surprising that boys do not readily admit

their weaknesses in school or anywhere else. Even as a society we cannot admit that our boys need help, though the statistics have been telling us for 30 years, and so we have ignored the academic decline of males.

Cultural Definitions of Masculinity

Today the notion of duty has all but vanished from the various self-reliant masculine ideals which have evolved. Anthony E. Rotundo in his book American Manhood describes 3 familiar images of men: *the pleasure-seeker*, who epitomizes adventure, risky behavior, and blatant consumerism; *the team player*, who competes fiercely within his own organization but also cooperates in contests against other organizations; and *the existential hero*, who is suspicious of authority, women, and civilization in general. These three 'heroes,' often with exaggerated masculine features, populate video games, rap music, and films aimed at the young male demographic, but they are not so common in real life.

There is a fourth prominent image of men in our culture, and although we would hardly call him a hero, this male is far more prevalent and insidious. He provides a realistic role model for young men and is portrayed on television by Ray Romano, George Lopez, and Jim Belushi. Instead of the strong caretakers depicted in mid-century shows like *Father Knows Best*, today's TV dad is a bumbling, barely competent, overgrown teenager who is outsmarted and outranked by his wife and his children. If boys had real role models to emulate, perhaps the culturally iconic ones would be less relevant, but many don't. "One of the most reliable predictors of whether a boy will succeed or fail in high school rests on a single question: does he have a man in his life to look up to? High rates of divorce and single motherhood have created a generation of fatherless boys. In every kind of neighborhood, rich or poor, an increasing number of boys --

now a startling 40% - are being raised without their biological dads” (Tyre). Without the guidance of older males, young men are left with little to imitate but the happy-go-lucky stereotypes reflected on their TVs.

At the same time, American culture has eradicated many of the traditional markers of adulthood. We recognize the symbolism of a confirmation or bar mitzvah, of graduating from high school or even college, but most of us don’t consider our children adults upon completion of these rituals. In most cultures the transition into manhood requires a trial of endurance and an affirmation of strength to prove that one is worthy of being called a man. Previous generations recognized themselves as adults when they completed their education, got a job, moved out of their parents’ home, got married, and had children. For most of them, all of these events happened within the span of a few short years. Michael Kimmel identifies a new stage of development between adolescence and adulthood which he coins “guyland.” The old markers of adulthood have been stretched out over an indeterminate number of years as young people take their time, “waiting for the right job, the right person, the right situation to reveal itself” (Kimmel 35). The traditional male roles of protector and provider are fading in importance and new roles have not yet evolved. The responsibility of being a grown-up just doesn’t seem as appealing as it used to. As a result, “many men have been ‘fired’ as potentially useful fathers by women who expect that as mates they will be a burden, not a help. They will consume resources, not bring them in. They will import problems, not defend against them. They may well be nothing but trouble” (Tiger 20). Without clear rites of passage, perhaps today’s men find it all too easy to be perpetual teenagers.

Changes in Education

It is common knowledge that few 5 and 6 year old boys can sit quietly while a teacher explains a lesson or asks them to read and write. In fact, it is so well known that for decades parents have made conscious decisions to allow male children with late birthdays an extra year before entering first grade. I recently heard a news story which fielded complaints from some parents that others were holding back their boys for more than one year, in an effort to give them an advantage in getting into Ivy League colleges. And yet even with that knowledge, schools are under pressure from politicians and accrediting agencies to start kids earlier and earlier with reading and math. Kindergarten as we knew it, 2 ½ hours of learning to take turns, line up, and raise your hand before speaking, has virtually disappeared. In addition, time spent on “extraneous” things like recess, gym, and many of the fine arts - all of which allow children to move around and use their bodies and different parts of their brains to learn – is the first thing reduced when standardized test scores waver or budgets get cut.

The rush to bookwork and increased seat time that is spurred by narrow definitions of academic success put boys at a disadvantage in complex ways. “In elementary school classrooms - where teachers increasingly put an emphasis on language and a premium on sitting quietly and speaking in turn -- the mismatch between boys and school can become painfully obvious. ‘Girl behavior becomes the gold standard,’ says ‘Raising Cain’ coauthor Michael Thompson. ‘Boys are treated like defective girls.’” (Tyre) Not only does this influence how much boys *like* school from the very beginning, it is particularly detrimental because boys are conscious of their own place within any social hierarchy. High status or low status within a group may influence their level of participation and their willingness to take risks, for instance, by asking or answering questions (Tannen 26). While social order does not seem to affect girls’ levels of academic success, it does correlate with low school performance in boys. “Biologically males on the high

end of the pecking order secrete less cortisol, the stress hormone. Males at the bottom end secrete more. Why is this significant? Because cortisol can invade the learning process; it forces the brain to attend to emotional and survival stress rather than intellectual learning” (Gurian 48).

Furthermore, we take for granted that most teachers, over 90% in elementary schools by some estimates, are women. The most radical reformers of male education claim that schools are “feminized” places which actually discriminate against boys. Closer to the truth is probably the fact that teachers naturally use their own learning experiences to help inform their teaching. The problem is that girls and boys learn differently, so what worked for the teacher may not be effective for her male pupils.

There are simply physical and chemical differences in the ways males and females use their brains. For instance, girls use words to help them think and they enjoy problem-solving in a group where everyone is equal, while boys are better at decoding abstract symbols and tend to work silently (Gurian 45). Thus collaborative learning, which has become a mainstay in classrooms at every level, may not give boys the best opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge. In contrast, boys thrive on challenge and competition (if they have any real chance of being at the top of the hierarchy), but many teachers eschew competition, fearing that some children will suffer a loss of self-esteem. Without it, however, we lose a powerful vehicle for keeping boys engaged in their learning. In addition, the male brain is better at storing lists of information and then making quick deductive decisions (59), as is required by multiple choice tests, but modern teachers are replacing multiple choice tests with essays and projects, which favor the female propensity for language. I am not proposing that we drop writing and critical thinking activities from our curricula, since clearly these are skills which males will need to function in society. However, teachers do need to make careful decisions about evaluation

methods so that we allow both males and females equal opportunity to demonstrate their competence.

Technology and the Brain

Another challenge to educators is the permeation of technology which has occurred in the span of just 2 generations. People in general don't read the way they used to. Young people read even less. Girls are "slightly less likely to read in their spare time today than they were in 1980. But roughly nine out of ten boys have stopped reading altogether" (Sax, Leonard 38). By the time they graduate from college, most students "have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours playing video games (not to mention 20,000 hours watching TV)" (Prensky Part 1)

Marc Prensky calls our current generation of learners Digital Natives. Those of us who did not grow up steeped in technology are Digital Immigrants. The problem, he says, is that "Digital Immigrant teachers assume that learners are the same as they have always been... ***But that assumption is no longer valid***" (Prensky Part 1). "It is now clear that as a result of this ubiquitous [technological] environment and the sheer volume of their interaction with it, today's students *think and process information fundamentally differently* from their predecessors" (Prensky Part 1).

Anyone over 35 is likely to think in the sequential, linear mode which years of reading trained our brains to do. As teachers we continue to teach in ways that seem logical to us, that is, in slow, step-by-step, building block fashion. But as much as this style of teaching seems right to us, it does not resonate with our digital native students. They are accustomed to random access information on demand; they are multi-taskers who are easily bored without constant interaction. And how can we blame them when our society has created computers that respond instantly to

each user's inquiry, and video games that change course according to a player's every move. A teacher in a traditional classroom can hardly compete with that level of interaction, and yet without it, teachers are hard-pressed to keep their students' attention.

While Prensky's assertions apply to both males and females, the female brain has more neural pathways connecting the left and right sides of the brain, and this greater "plasticity" gives girls an edge in adapting to various learning environments, including the holdover chalk and talk classroom. Many schools, of course, have incorporated computers into their curriculum, and a few educators are even heralding the use of video games. James Gee has carefully analyzed the positive learning principles utilized by many popular products, and contends that schools could teach this generation of learners more effectively and efficiently by using certain types of video games as a tool. Other researchers go further and encourage video game-playing, citing experiments that indicate they increase children's response times to certain stimuli. While this may be desirable to certain careers (particularly military careers), one has to wonder how valuable microseconds of response time are when dealing with real world problems, like fixing a lawnmower or buying a house. In any case, it limits learning experiences to just 2 senses -- seeing and hearing -- which may be particularly disadvantageous to boys, whom we know are active, kinesthetic learners.

In fact, video games may pose a special concern, and not just for the usual worries about violence. An overwhelming majority of children and teens play video games as a form of entertainment, but they are exceptionally popular with adolescent boys, who spend an average of 13 hours per week chasing, shooting, crashing and burning in the virtual world (Sax, Leonard 58). One reason video games are so appealing to this group is the ease with which a gamer can achieve power and victory. As mentioned earlier, boys have a need to strive for the top of the

hierarchy; if they aren't making it in their real lives, they may be more successful in their fantasy lives. "That's part of the reason that videogames have such a powerful hold on boys: the action is constant, they can calibrate just how hard the challenges will be and, when they lose, the defeat is private" (Tyre).

Perhaps more important, new evidence suggests a physiological link as well. Researchers at Stanford University found that playing video games stimulates the region of the brain in both genders which is "typically associated with reward and addiction. Male brains, however, showed much greater activation" (Brandt). It is no surprise, then, that males get hooked on video games. "Up to 90 percent of American youngsters play video games and as many as 15 percent of them - more than 5 million kids - may be addicted, according to data cited in the AMA council's report" (Tanner). A similar report from Iowa State University claims, "about 8.5 percent of 8-to-18-year-old gamers can be considered pathologically addicted, and nearly one quarter of young people - more males than females - admit they've felt addicted" (Wagner). With or without a physiological compulsion to play, large amounts of time spent on video games is time *not spent* learning important things for academic or real world success.

Chemical Alterations

Prescription Drugs

As mentioned above, female brains tend to have more neuron connections among various parts of the brain, making their brains more flexible. Male brains, on the other hand, are more compartmentalized. More males are diagnosed with learning disabilities of all kinds, and this may be partly due to compartmentalization. In females, if one part of the brain is not functioning as well as it should be, another part of the brain is more easily able to take over some of those functions (Gurian 60). The explosion of diagnoses in the last 2 decades of Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder has been widely debated in the popular media; whether it is a new problem or simply a new name for an old one, the fact remains that it is more than twice as likely to be diagnosed in boys than in girls (childtrends.org). “In 2004, around one out of every 10 males ages three to 17 were reported to have been diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder by a doctor or other health professional” (childtrends.org). Because children with ADHD are more impulsive and more easily distracted, they often encounter problems in schools which want them to sit still and focus. Some children are helped by prescription drugs like Ritalin and Adderall; the drugs work by stimulating the brain chemicals which are responsible for inhibitory and controlling behavior so that the child is no longer at the mercy of his or her every whim. Pressure from teachers and parents’ own worries that their child will fall behind in school has produced a 30 fold increase over the last 20 years in the number of school age boys taking these medications (Sax, Leonard 85).

Ironically, giving him ADHD medication may be the thing that condemns a boy to failure. “Harvard Medical School recently reported that giving stimulant medications -- such as those used to treat boys with ADHD -- to juvenile laboratory animals results in those animals displaying a loss of drive when they grow up. These animals look normal, but they’re lazy. They don’t want to work hard for anything, not even to escape a bad situation. The Harvard investigators suggested that the stimulant medications might cause similar phenomenon in children...The stimulant medications appear to exert their harmful effects by damaging an area of the developing brain called the nucleus accumbens...the part of the brain that is responsible for translating motivation into action” (Sax, Leonard 90). In fact, “lack of spontaneity” is listed as one of the official side effects in the manufacturer’s own literature. Since the drugs work by

stimulating inhibitory behavior, one has to wonder if the drugs aren't doing their job too well, thus over-inhibiting behavior and dampening motivation to do anything.

Endocrine Disruptors

Chemical changes in our environment are of concern to all of us, but they may have particular ramifications for males. The use of pesticides, plastics, and synthetic hormones has increased dramatically in the last half century. Chemicals in many of these products mimic the hormone estrogen in the human body, and there is no way to prevent ingesting them as they are literally in the water. A U.S. Geological survey done in 1999-2000 found that 80% of the streams sampled contained pharmaceuticals (U.S. Geological Survey). One of the most common is estrogen from oral contraceptives and hormone replacement therapy; indeed, 41 million prescriptions are written each year in the U.S. for these drugs (McAvoy). Scientists have found that male fish exposed to synthetic female hormones have their own hormone systems disrupted. At various points along the Potomac River "...scientists found that at least 80 percent of the male smallmouth bass they examined were feminized: the sex organs in the male fish were making eggs instead of sperm" (Sax, Leonard 100). Similar mutations were found by Canadian Fisheries in northwestern Ontario. "The study found male fish, including larger species like trout and suckers that have longer lifespans and feed on minnows, began producing egg proteins and that early stage eggs were even found in the testes of some of the fish. The hormones also impacted the potency of male sperm, while female fish were found to produce more egg proteins, said researcher Karen Kidd. 'We knew male fish were becoming feminized because of the estrogens that are in sewage effluent,' said Kidd, noting it's a phenomenon that's turned up in earlier studies" (Estrogen Causing...).

Switching from tap water to bottled water won't solve the problem. One of the most common sources of synthetic chemicals that mimic estrogens is plastic -- the same kind used for most bottled water. The chemicals from the plastic leach into the liquid it holds, especially in hot temperatures. Much bottled water comes from Central America where it sits and travels for many hours in trucks with no air-conditioning. Parents, especially those who conscientiously limit soda and other soft drinks, begin sending kids off to soccer practice with plastic water bottles at the age of 4 or 5. There's no question that we and our kids are consuming large amounts of these chemicals. But is it really affecting human males in the same way it impacts fish?

Forty years ago the physical maturation differences between boys and girls in the sixth grade could be measured in months. Now, girls may begin puberty as early as nine or ten, while boys seldom begin before age twelve (and often later) (Sax 104). It's easy enough to observe the different maturation levels in any middle school lunchroom. More startling, however, are the scientific findings. Research published by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences reports that since the mid-1930's sperm counts in American, European, and Australian men declined by an average of 50%; that is, 18 year old males today produce half as much sperm as their grandfathers did at the same age (Swan, Elkin, and Fenster). Although reliable data is harder to find in non-western countries, the same does not appear to be true where lifestyles and economies are less 'developed' (Swan, Elkin, and Fenster). If males are getting enough estrogens from the environment to suppress the normal production of testosterone, then one main source of male competitiveness is eliminated, along with its concomitant drive and achievement for our society.

Addressing the problem

Even if each of the factors described above affects just a small percentage of boys, the total number influenced is considerable. In addition, we need to consider the cumulative affect. Most young men in America today will be exposed to more than one of these factors, so again, even if the impact of each is very small, their sum total could be substantial. While it is important that, as educators, we understand the factors influencing young men today, they are, for the most part, things over which we have no control. Thus it is essential that we research and strengthen those aspects which promote success for males who do make it to college.

In an effort to understand our students and their perceptions of what makes them successful, a survey was conducted in the fall of 2008 on over 500 English Composition 1 students; the survey asked, among other things, which classroom activities were most useful, which factors played an important role in keeping them in college, and which factors they thought contributed most to their success in college. Surprisingly, or not, males and females reported very little difference in their answers to these questions. The entire survey can be viewed on the NECC web site under [Institutional Research](#).

In identifying factors that contributed to their success, “personal interest in the subject matter” was the only factor that stood out as more important to women than to men (see chart below). In small percentages, homework was identified as important to success by more women than men, as was the availability of tutoring; thus women may recognize the importance to these activities and actually do the homework and seek out tutoring, which in turn accounts for some of their academic success. Interestingly, when asked to identify factors which undermined their success, 42 % of men versus 26% of women identified homework as important or very important. It comes as no surprise to most teachers or parents of male children that boys of any

age are less likely than girls to do homework. Though they understand that skipping homework has negative consequences, the knowledge does not seem to impact their behavior.

Which factors undermine your success?

	MALE	FEMALE
Classroom Experience	13%	20%
Instructor Accessibility	21%	24%
Amount of Time and Energy Spent	40%	35%
Relationship with instructor	27%	28%
Difficulty of Course Material	57%	69%
Homework Assignments	42%	26%
Writing Assignments	19%	24%
Connections with other students in class	11%	8%
Availability of Tutoring	11%	13%
Previous Knowledge of Subject Matter	11%	18%
Personal Interest in Subject Matter	30%	32%
Outside Employment	26%	36%
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities	14%	19%
Family	10%	10%

The other difference in answers given to this part of the survey was that males do not consider that the difficulty of the course material will impact their success with it. Other research

has in fact documented that males tend to overestimate their abilities, both in the workplace and in school (Sax, Linda 25). That, coupled with the fact that males will do lot to avoid being at the low end of any social hierarchy, may explain how the cycle of sinking in college repeats what happens to boys in the earliest years of school. This time it starts when they don't do the homework because they think it's unimportant and because they overestimate their own competence. Thus their grade on the next test or assignment is poor, so they begin to dislike the class. This leads to not showing up or not investing oneself in the class because failing is more psychologically tolerable if a young man can at least tell himself that he didn't try – and the spiral downward is perpetuated.

Students were also asked to rank which factors were important in keeping them in college. The percentages here show how many men and women indicated that these factors were Important or Very Important. The differences (in bold) seem to indicate that women are more aware that there are people and services at the college to help them. Surprisingly, the only factor on the list (in red) that is more important to males than females is having friendships with other students.

How important are the following factors in keeping you in college?

	MALE	FEMALE
How much I am learning	66%	67%
How much I enjoy my classes	55%	60%
A wide variety of classes in my major	29%	37%
Instructors accessible outside of class	32%	48%
Instructors who know me as an individual	35%	38%
Friendships with other students	39%	27%
Extracurricular activities which interest me	18%	15%
Having a clear goal for career or transfer	63%	65%
An advisor to help me choose classes	35%	49%
Classes that fit my schedule	60%	67%
Assistance with financial aid	41%	47%
Having extra tutoring help available	25%	29%
Assistance with family issues	10%	9%
Keeping my parents happy	32%	25%

Although men reported friendships as a more important factor keeping them in college than women did, when asked where their friends attended college, males were less likely than females (25% versus 32%) to have friends who attended NECC. It's not clear whether this means their high school friends went elsewhere or whether it means they had not met people at NECC whom they would classify as friends. Either way it reveals a tenuous social connection to the

student body. Males are also more likely to express their plans to transfer somewhere else. Seventy percent of men report that they will or will probably transfer, while the same is true for only 57% of women. Clearly, NECC is seen as no more than a temporary stop for many of our male students, not a place he intends to invest himself.

In their article, *The Other College: Retention and Completion Rates among Two-Year College Students*, Molly F. McIntosh and Cecilia Elena Rouse apply economist Gary Becker's model of human capital to college retention rates. Essentially, the theory of human capital asserts that each person has a set of skills and those skills have a market value. You can change your market value by increasing or improving your skill set. Typically, those at the lower end of the economic ladder are hardest pressed to decide whether or not the cost of attending college will reap a skill set with economic benefits – and how long those benefits will take to be realized. The authors cite research that “suggests that a \$1000 increase in grant aid may increase the probability of attending college by 5 percentage points and increase educational attainment by one-fifth of a year” (11). It does not take a detailed cost-benefit analysis to see the connection here: lower the cost and the benefit becomes more tenable. This is especially important in light of other research which indicates that while concerns about financing an education increases women's drive to achieve, it decreases male motivation (Sax, Linda 195). Increasing the grant to loan ratio of financial aid packages, then, may be a more important consideration for males than for females in choosing or continuing at a college.

But not all costs are financial; there are also psychic costs, which represent stress and the impact on one's quality of life. For many of our students, the payoff for the investment to attend college, both monetary and psychic, is unclear, too costly, or too distant. As we saw in the chart above, more men report that friendships are important, but that they do not have many friends at

NECC. Thus they have a lower psychic investment in the college. The same is true for those who plan, even before they arrive, to transfer. This may also explain why male athletes have a higher retention rate than other male students at the college: they have a sense of identity with a group and a clearly defined place within the college.

We saw earlier that fewer males than females considered that difficulty of course material was likely to be a problem. For women, we might say forewarned is forearmed. The unexpected difficulty of course material may exact a psychic cost on men. In addition, males are more likely to need developmental courses at NECC, and less likely to successfully complete them. From the chart above we see that almost 2/3 of both males and females identified “having a clear goal for career or transfer” as important or very important in keeping them in school. Taking developmental courses pushes back the goal of career or transfer, often for at least a year. For those with less defined goals, the payoffs of staying in school may hardly seem to balance out the costs.

Furthermore, our survey revealed that males are more likely to spend 20 or more hours per week working. We did not ask how many of these workers were full or part time students, but it is likely that many of them were going to school part-time, which pushes the payoff into an even more distant future. In addition, we have to factor in what Becker terms “opportunity cost” for this group; that is, time spent *not* working (and on school instead) is perceived as a financial loss. Thus without a clear understanding of the benefits of an education, the cost becomes higher than the benefit.

All of these factors comprise the various dynamics that increase the psychic costs specifically for males. Whatever we can do to increase psychic investment and offset psychic costs will pay out in dividends of retained students, both male and female:

- students who do not have clear goals should be immediately routed to a career counselor;
- curricular and extra-curricular activities that deliberately foster connections among students should be prioritized;
- high-impact educational practices that facilitate academic engagement, like learning communities and first-year seminars, should be strongly supported.

These are not new ideas, of course, but perhaps understanding how and why they may assist our male students gives them more import. The reforms of Title IX ignited profound changes for women, thus providing immeasurable benefits for society; without taking anything from them, it is time to address the needs of men.

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