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A Few Words from the Editors

Thank you to all who submitted their work this year. We appreciate the dedication and detail evident in each submission and applaud the time, effort, and hard work of each student who submitted their work. The nature of sociology is so vast and allows for an array of topics to be examined and explored, which is clear in the diverse submissions we received.

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A special thank you to the Sociology faculty and Graduate Editors, Sydni Collier and Meghan Lewis, for all of their help and support, and thank you and congratulations to all graduated seniors who submitted their work.

Lauren Ainscow and Sarah Bell

The *Perspectives* Undergraduate Editors

Comparing the Effects of Body Image and BMI on Women's Romantic Relationships

Isabella Luca

ABSTRACT

This literature review explores the relationship of how excess weight affects women's romantic relationships. Romantic relationship success has been assessed through the measures of body image and BMI. These similar measures of excessive weight were compared to determine the best measure/method to represent the relationship between excess weight and women's romantic relationships. The hypothesis stated that excessive weight (in terms of body image, and not BMI) would decrease the overall success of women's romantic relationships. Findings throughout this literature review have concluded that women have higher social pressure to be thin, women feel excess weight stigma more and this can result in worse body image, and that women who have worse body image due to excess weight are less likely to have successful romantic relationships. The main findings illustrated that the excessive weight measures of body image and BMI were related to romantic relationship success for women (whereas when body image decreased romantic relationship success decreased and when BMI increased romantic relationship success decreased overall); however, body image was found to be the better measure of excessive weight in looking at this relationship as the perception of weight was statistically significant in determining relationship success whereas BMI was not. Overall, the hypothesis was supported.

INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships have proven to be an important social identifier not only on an individual level, but also on a societal level. The collective importance can be seen in everyday life through marriage incentives such as tax deductibles and health insurance benefits, the special media attention to celebrity couplings, and the not-so-subtle pressures on young women to get married and start a family. While this concept of an "ideal" romantic relationship may be encouraged widely, romantic relationships and their success can look very different depending on numerous factors. Previous research has agreed that one of the most important factors of romantic relationships is beauty or what are considered attractive traits in a particular culture (Paxton, Norris, Wertheim, Dunkin, and Anderson 2005). In fact, Paxton et al. (2005) claim, the "greater the departure from the current beauty ideal, the greater exposure to negative and teasing" which, in turn, serves to reinforce the importance of a culture's beauty standards being upheld. These findings are further supported by the well-known Selection Hypothesis or Marriage Market Theory, which suggests that healthier people may be more likely to be selected into marriage and other romantic relationships; one such criterion for health includes "physical attractiveness" (Averett, Sikora, and Argys 2008; Goldman 1993; Laus, Almedia and Klos 2018). Overall, it appears that having attractive features can play a key role in determining relationship success; however, like many concepts in sociology, the connection does not stop there.

While it is true that many cultures around the world vary as to which traits are considered attractive, it is important to note that research examined in this literature review is composed primarily of those who could be considered Eurocentric study participants, and thus there is a distinct culture and beauty culture that exists within this group. In Eurocentric culture, it is a

commonplace understanding that the attainment and maintenance of beauty standards is something especially stressed on women (Smith 2012). Pressure to live up to beauty standards is thought to fall mostly on women as specifically physical attractiveness has "traditionally played an important role in attracting a mate" for women, and these traditional role ideologies still exist (Averett et al. 2008). Even beyond those seeking relationships, research has found that there is a far "stronger association between popularity and physical attractiveness for women" than for their male counterparts (Ambwani and Strauss 2007; Feingold 1990). One so-called quality women must attain to achieve this attractiveness is thinness.

According to Paxton et al. (2005), beauty standards for women manifest towards thinness; this result is often attributed to "men's preference for slender physiques" in heterosexual preferences. This standard also exists as the view in general society, as Ambwani and Strauss (2007) stress, this is the cultural environment: one where constant "sexual objectification socializes to women to treat themselves as aesthetic objects" that must adhere to a male-centric beauty standard. Even for those who do not agree with the pressure they placed on them, they too "[internalize] others' responses to their physical appearance," conditioning them to this norm of thinness further (Ambwani and Strauss 2007). Additionally, these standards of thinness are deeply unattainable for many women do not fit into the cultural ideal of a thin body type.

In fact, it is becoming increasingly difficult for women to acquire thinness as average body shapes are continuously leaning towards getting bigger. "Research consistently documents dramatic increases in adult, adolescent, and child obesity over the last 30 years" Gutin (2018) claims according to data collected by Anderson and Butcher (2006). Obesity, normally understood as a category for excessive and unhealthy weight according to the Body Mass Index

scale, is a severe and timely health risk for much of the population (Gutin 2018; Saguy and Almening 2008). In fact, obesity appears to be on the rise so much that some are even wondering if new standards might emerge for what is culturally and socially accepted to be "normal" or "average" in weight as even the "definition of obesity" becomes modernized (Gutin 2018; Reinecke 2012). Considering inclusive terms beyond obesity, this paper will be using the term "excessive weight" or "excess weight" to account for "abstract social views of weight", as Reinecke (2012) calls it. Beyond health concerns, not ascribing to this ideal of thinness where one may have excess weight can lead to a lasting stigma that can be found in many aspects of everyday life for individuals. To the larger society, obesity may carry the meaning of being equivalent to an illness of health and morals where "obese individuals attain their 'sick' or 'diseased' status" (Gutin 2018). With such a negative stigma and pressures placed around beauty ideals for women, it is possible that women deemed obese or of excessive weight by societal standards may have greater difficulty attaining and maintaining successful romantic prospects.

This literature review intends to explore the relationship of how excess weight may affect women's romantic relationships. Previous research has generally used body image and/or BMI to study body weight. However, this literature review questions which of these two measures of excessive weight is more effective in representing excessive weight as an indicator of romantic relationship success. All in all, examining this relationship further will enhance a general sociological understanding of how being of excess weight, particularly for women, can impact romantic relationships. Like Laus et al. (2018) claim, there is more to discover about how romantic relationships relate to body image and BMI.

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

As has been established previously, attractiveness, particularly for women, is key to ensuring one is a desirable dating partner (Eastwick, Eagly, Finkle, and Johnson 2011; Laus et al. 2018; Smith 2012). Not only is this standard of attractiveness important to men, but it is equally important to women. For example, research has found that, unlike men, women's confidence in social interactions, like dating, is linked to self-ratings of attractiveness (Ambwani and Strauss 2007). Thus, if a woman is perceived as having greater attractiveness, they are more likely to have the confidence to initiate romantic relationships as they desire. Alternatively, studies have found that those who "perceive themselves as unattractive" tend to be much more likely to avoid "cross-sex interactions" and to engage less in "intimate social reactions" (Davison and McCabe 2005; Mitchell and Orr 1976; Nezlek 1988). Also, just as attractiveness can enhance relationship success, those who do not "fit the mold of prescribed attractiveness" are equally likely to be deemed as non-desirable partners or as less-desirable partners, and this can hurt their romantic prospects (Harris 1990; Reinecke 2012). Even though attractiveness in partners might spark a relationship, that alone is not necessarily what sustains a successful relationship.

There are important categories and characteristics of relationships that must be considered when trying to understand what a successful romantic relationship might look like. Some romantic relationship categories include non-cohabitation, cohabitation, those never married, those married, and those unmarried (Averett et al. 2008; Laus et al. 2018). It is equally important to look at how the quality of these romantic relationships are measured, as not all relationships are healthy. Some romantic relationship characteristics that can help determine relationship quality include length, satisfaction, commitment, passion, intimacy, support, trust, and partner respect. (Juarez and Pritchard 2012; Laus et al. 2018). Research from Fletcher and

Simpson (2010) and Connolly and Johnson (1996) establish that support from a romantic partner can predict positive relationship quality and has the overall tendency to improve the longer a relationship exists. Relationship trust was also found to predict relationship satisfaction, meaning that the greater trust partners had for each other, the greater the success of their relationship (Wieselquist 2009). These romantic relationship characteristics can help establish what is and is not successful for romantic relationships for most people in a culture. Determining these categories and characteristics of healthy romantic relationships is instrumental in understanding how excessive weight may impact one's romantic relationships.

EXCESSIVE WEIGHT STIGMA

To grasp the sociological importance of the research done on this topic, one must have a contextual understanding of what it can mean to have excess weight in society. As discussed above, stigma against people with excess weight exists. This stigma can additionally take on a physical form as "fat individuals are disliked, rejected, and ridiculed" in many different settings (Crandall 1994; Smith 2012). According to Reinecke (2012), it is not just that this stigma exists in one part of life but that it can seep into all aspects of life, such as personal character, perceived job worth, and perceived desirability as a romantic partner. Some ways in which excessive weight stigma can manifest include being teased by peers and family, being associated with the negative attributes of laziness and less competence by important connections like employers and doctors, and much more (Chen and Brown 2005). In terms of physical health, there are many risks; Averett et al. (2008) and Strum (2002) claim that obesity can be linked to several "chronic illnesses including diabetes, hypertension, asthma, heart disease, and cancer". Furthermore, if an individual with excess weight is at the same time exposed to "smoking, heavy drinking, or poverty" these health conditions can present more negatively (Averett et al.; Strum 2002).

Research has continuously shown that there are "strong relationships" between "low self-esteem, depression, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating" (Paxton, Schutz, Wertheim, and Muir 1999), meaning there are also severe mental health impacts for those who face this stigma directly. There is much to worry about around the health and safety of individuals of excessive weight.

Considering how excessive weight might apply to relationships, Smith (2012) explains that the main reason for negative stereotypes against women with excessive weight is that "[they] were perceived as physically unattractive." Excessive weight stigma especially matters for women because "body esteem plays a less central role in men's romantic and sexual relationship experiences than in women's," which makes the need to feel confident in bodies higher for women (Ambwani and Strauss 2007). Smith (2012) further reiterates that beauty is an important aspect of relationships and that "women are supposed to be attractive", which can insinuate that "fat women" violate the mandate of beauty and in turn are "punished harshly" by failing in their romantic lives. In general, a consensus can be found that heavier women are considered less attractive than their thinner counterparts, and this can put them at jeopardy for attaining and maintaining successful romantic relationships (Smith 2012).

BODY IMAGE AS A MEASURE OF EXCESSIVE WEIGHT

The term "body image" in this context refers to the "perceptions and attitudes individuals hold about their bodies" (Davison and McCabe 2005). Research conceptualizes negative body image or body image dissatisfaction as "the negative subjective evaluation of one's physical body" (Stice and Shaw 2002). The distinction body image offers as a measure of excessive weight is that it allows for consideration of the perception of an individual's weight rather than relying on physical definitions of excessive weight. This measure leaves room for more variance

in social settings, such as how some might have skewed views of themselves because of body image despite actual body and weight, or as Reinecke (2012) suggests, "how much one believes they weigh and how much one actually weighs is not always consistent."

The connection between that of excessive weight and poor body image can be seen through the findings of Lieberman, Gauvin, Bukowski, and White (2001) where weight and shape were found to be "important predictors of body esteem." Therefore, it can be concluded that those with excess weight may tend to have a more negative body image. Additionally, in various studies, women were found to have an overall "lower level of body image satisfaction" and a "higher level of social physique anxiety" than their male counterparts, which solidifies the negative results of the pressures women face around constantly evaluating their bodies (Davison and McCabe 2005). Furthermore, body image is related to romantic relationships. Some researchers claim "negative body image may also be related to problematic sexual functioning" which can lead those with more negative views of their bodies to avoid sexual activities that individuals in romantic relationships may engage in (Davison and McCabe 2005; Faith and Schare 1993); this suggests that women with excessive weight have more negative body image which can result in less successful relationship endeavors.

Beyond logical support for this argument, there is support in much of the research reviewed. One study found that "body esteem and romantic love experiences" were related particularly for women in their quantitative data, and that "women suggested that body image...influences sexual relations in romantic relationships" supporting the idea that positive body image can result in successful romantic relationships (Amhwani and Strauss 2007). Particularly, this study found that trust had an especially significant association with body esteem (Ambwani and Strauss 2007). In another study looking at groups that participated much less in

romantic relationships, single participants were typically "more dissatisfied with their overall appearance" speaking to how those who have less romantic relationship success may have more negative body image (Laus et al. 2018). Furthermore, this study suggested that women were provided a "psychological buffer against societal pressures to attain a slim appearance" in "successful intimate relationships" (Laus et al. 2018). Laus et al.'s findings suggest that there is a relationship between positive body image and successful intimate relationships despite the exact causality being uncertain as it was admitted that they could both influence each other.

Additionally, Juarez and Pritchard (2012) found "a negative correlation between body image dissatisfaction and support" and a "negative correlation...between body image dissatisfaction and trust" in women. This finding speaks to how the relationship characteristics of support and trust were particularly influenced by body image perception and supports the claim of body image being a valid measure of excess weight.

BODY MASS INDEX AS A MEASURE OF EXCESSIVE WEIGHT

While body image is one way that excessive weight has been measured in research, there is also the equally commonly used quantitative measure of BMI. As mentioned before, BMI can be understood as a medical measure of one's height and weight combined to determine their relative health; BMI has been used to measure obesity to such an extent that it eventually was referenced as "*the* measure of obesity" (Gutin 2018). As this measure has a long history of use over 180 years, it has a reputation for demonstrating obesity in a comprehensive and consistent method (Gutin 2018). However, as Gutin (2018) warns, BMI is debated in terms of accuracy, and problems can emerge. One example of this is when BMI is *mis*used to promote specific narratives about weight and health. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that BMI is a measure of healthy weight as a societal ideal and is not without its flaws when used in different situations

(Gutin 2018). In considering all benefits and drawbacks of BMI, Gutin (2018) was able to determine that there were still important "insights gained from its use in aggregate analyses of population health". In this context, it can be assumed that BMI offers a reasonable assessment of the relationship between weight and romantic relationships by representing excessive weight measures in large groups.

As has been shown, BMI can be useful in representing excessive weight alone through its categorization of obesity ranges. Beyond the measure itself, it can be demonstrated that "higher BMI consistently predicts greater body dissatisfaction" (Paxton et al. 2005; Wetheim, Paxton, and Blaney 2004). According to further research, there is also a connection between BMI and romantic relationships as medically "overweight women were less likely to be dating than their [normal-weighted] peers," and that weight was further "negatively correlated with satisfaction in women" (Laus et al. 2018). Through this, it can be reasoned that BMI could predict individuals of excessive weight's romantic relationship success with higher BMI correlating with less romantic relationship success.

While BMI may appear to be a good indicator of relationship success with the research above, there were also conflicting findings for this argument. For example, one study found that there was a "significant difference in the proportion of girls who reported ever having a boyfriend according to BMI category." Looking from a distance, this finding would appear to indicate support for the argument in favor of BMI as a measurement of excess weight as one would expect a higher BMI indicating less dating. However, the study instead found it was the "thinnest girls" who were least likely to "report ever having had a boyfriend." From this, the study gathered that "dating behavior was not significantly associated with body size", which refutes the argument that BMI is a good indicator of excessive weight (Paxton et al. 2005). There

appeared to be some minor support in the finding that "BMI was positively correlated to overweight preoccupation", meaning that as excessive weight went up, so did the individual's conscious focus on their weight (Laus et al. 2018). This may provide support for suggesting that increasing weight may result in less romantic relationship success due to an increase in the individual's negative body image. Again, supporting the original argument, Averett et al. (2008) found that "BMI levels vary with respect to a woman's marital and cohabitation status." Specifically, Averett et al. (2008) found that "women with lower BMIs [were] more likely to be married or cohabitating", leaving the implied understanding that women with higher BMIs were less likely to be married or cohabiting (Averett et al. 2008). Although there tends to be much more varying data conclusions for this measure, findings still suggest that BMI has an influence on romantic relationship success (Laus et al. 2018; Paxton et al. 2005; Wetheim, Paxton, and Blaney 2004).

CONCLUSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper compared two measures of excessive weight -- body image and BMI -- and examined the effect they had on romantic relationships for women. The main goal of the literature review was to consider what might be the best method for representing excessive weight when contextualized in the relationship between weight and romantic relationships to expand upon current sociological understandings. This paper provided context for understanding how gender, weight, and romantic relationships relate. It also analyzed relationship categories and quality characteristics and explored and defined excess weight. Finally, this paper reviewed both measures of body image and BMI with comparative evidence to reach conclusions about the overall findings in the larger literature. Despite varying evidence and interpretations from

research, assessing the current research around this topic and coming to some main findings is important when considering adding new and relevant insights regarding the literature.

One of the main findings suggested that body image may be a better measure of excessive weight than BMI. As Reinecke (2012) compares the two, the study did not find that "one's physical body weight as measured by BMI served as a useful predictor in one's odds of marriage" even though the "variables measuring the perception of one's weight," or perceived body image, "were found to be statistically relevant" to the prediction of marriage. Therefore, despite some support indicating that BMI may influence body image, body image overall best serves as a measure for the excessive weight of women when connected to one's possible success in a romantic relationship. This could possibly be due to a "change in cultural standards of weight", especially as an ever-increasing number of individuals in the culture are identified as having excessive weight or being obese by medical standards (Reinecke 2012). Additionally, in terms of gathering a deeper understanding of the relationship between excessive weight, gender, and romantic relationship success, most of the literature supports the conclusion that women are more highly susceptible to the strain of social beauty standards promoting thinness. Women feel the stigma of being unattractive more when they happen to be of excess weight, and this can create a more negative body image, and ultimately women who are of excess weight in terms of body image are less likely to have successful relationship experiences.

With these findings in mind, it is important to consider some of the outlying or alternative findings in the research on this topic. One study found that while dating behavior was not necessarily associated with body image, the "belief that thinness was important to girls' attractiveness to boys" strongly predicted body dissatisfaction for those girls (Paxton et al. 2005). This finding further means that beauty standards predicted negative body image, but not

necessarily ultimately romantic relationship success. This example in the research finding contradicts what much of the other researchers found, yet it is still valuable to look at and consider how and why this might be. One explanation for this finding could be that since the group studied were all adolescents, there was not much dating experience to base the study off, and therefore, there would not be enough reliable information on dating to gather among this group. This literature review also has limitations. For instance, many of these studies have limited age groups, thus impacting generalizability. Understanding limitations like confined age groups of samples can help interpret the findings more accurately and account for possible variances in these findings.

The main research references discussed in this literature review were open to considering possible limitations to their studies which included not having enough unbiased data that was also collected solely through limited surveying methods. For instance, surveys were the main method of collecting data and there were questions about whether this method would have encouraged less than accurate participant responses. The research also did not have varied demographics and identities included in the research, mostly analyzing participants with similar age, race, location, sexual orientation, and body type, which causes question as to whether certain identities being left out of the studies would have changed the results significantly. On top of leaving out a variety of demographics in research participation, the studies also tended to ignore certain relationship categories and outcomes (casual sexual relationships, successful relationships examples) which would've been helpful for a more holistic look at romantic relationships. Additionally, many studies did not account for mental health states and conditions or additional factors that may have influenced participants with excessive weight or romantic relationship success such as employment, maternal status, income, and media influence

(Ambwani and Strauss 2007; Averett et al. 2008; Chen and Brown 2005; Laus et al. 2018; Paxton et al. 2005; Reinecke 2012). With so many potential limitations, there is space for additional research to be undertaken.

The research studies have provided some suggested future research paths that would be helpful to explore this topic even further. Possible avenues for future research can include: the internalization of the beauty ideal; the sources of the messages promoting thinness to women; gender differences within those who have excessive weight; causality between excessive weight and romantic relationship success; mental health effects of stigmas and pressures; relationship characteristics such as commitment and relationship length, relationship quality, sexual orientation and excessive weight stigma; coping strategies used for excessive weight stigma, and how obesity rates rising may alter the stigma overtime (Ambwani and Strauss 2007; Chen and Brown 2005; Laus et al. 2018; Paxton et al. 2005). Finally, with future research and a better understanding of this topic, policy changes can be enacted where necessary.

Some of the research studies, in addition to considering possible future research, also considered possible policy actions that could come out of the already defined knowledge around this topic. Similarly, policy should focus on helping those struggling with eating disorders and similar mental health conditions, and implement "education and intervention efforts" to encourage a "more positive body image and [decrease] weight concerns" (Ambwani and Brown 2007; Chen and Brown 2005; Smith 2012). This literature review establishes a need for deeper understanding and interpretation, ideas for future research to continue learning about excessive weight in relation to romantic relationship success, and "next steps" that can be implemented now.

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The Effects of Clothing Size on Self-Esteem regarding Gender

Cailin Mahoney

ABSTRACT

Recently there has been a sufficient amount of literature regarding how clothing size affects the self-esteem of each gender in a variety of ways. The purpose of this literature review is to explore how standard clothing sizes affect the self-esteem of each gender, men and women, differently. The findings suggest a Eurocentric ideal that women are held to more of a thin ideal, while men are held to more of a muscular ideal. Additionally, when both women and men did not meet their expected ideals, it caused their self-esteem to become diminished. Overall, women cared more about the clothing size itself than men, but men's self-esteem were still deeply affected by the clothing that they either chose or chose not to wear. The review first begins with an introduction section. Next, there are two broader sections describing the importance of self-esteem and the relationship between clothing size and self-esteem. Then, there are two sections describing the effects of standard clothing sizes on both men and women. Finally, there is one section that compares the effects of both men and women, together. This review concludes with a short overview of the literature, propositions for future research, and implications of the findings that were discovered.

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly known that the ideal body type in our society has always been thin for as long as anyone can remember, especially in the world of fashion. The link between this ideal and the fashion world is obvious. Some specific examples that may come to mind regarding this linkage are Barbie or Marilyn Monroe. Boselli (2012) and Thomsen (2001) have shown the connection between the fashion industry's promotion of the thin ideal and the spread of anorexia nervosa among young women. Groesz (2002) and Shaw (1995) looked at the internalization of the thin ideal and how that affects body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem among consumers. Czerniawski (2015), Peters (2014), and Zangrillo (1990) all evaluated the plus-size fashion world. In more recent years, being obese or overweight has become much more normalized, meaning it is not as expected that everyone must be thin to be beautiful (Czerniawski 2016). This normalization of being "bigger" comes to portray the privileged position of the thin ideal in our fashion industry. The fashion industry is not changing their thin ideal that has been around for centuries. Instead, the fashion industry is continuing to promote clothing on thin models, even in the plus-size sections. Describing this trend, Workman (1991) states: "It has been recommended that size charts need to be checked and revised every 10 years to reflect changes in characteristics of the U.S. population (Workman 1991: 31)." Not only is the fashion industry continuing to show clothes on thinner models, but they are also restricting shoppers to small and medium sizes, which is considered less than a size 12 or a size 14 in the United States. The world needs much more variety in clothing sizes rather than the ones that are commonly available in clothing stores today. Although, the thin ideal is still very apparent in our society, "…Slenderness became a dominant cultural ideal in the 20th century (Bordo, 1993:46) and is

now the reference model to which men and, especially, women usually refer to when caring for their bodies (Hesse-Biber et al. 2007:252)."

This paper intends to explore to what extent standard clothing sizes within the fashion industry affect the self-esteem of each gender, men and women, differently. There is a variety of research on this topic that will be compared throughout this paper. Clothing sizes alone refer to the label sizes placed on articles of clothing either sold off the shelf in a store or a number that is visible online. Standard clothing size refers to the sizes that both men and women are expected to be based off the averages of clothing sizes purchased in our society. According to Smelser (1989), self-esteem is a person's overall sense of personal value and self-worth and it affects one's overall well-being. This literature review falls within the gender binary and discusses only men's and women's fashion. First, there will be a discussion about self-esteem and its importance. Then, there will be a section examining the relationship between clothing size and self-esteem. Finally, there will be two individual subsections, one will talk about the effects of men's self-esteem regarding clothing size and the other will explain women's self-esteem regarding clothing size. This literature review will end with a conclusion that compares the different effects between the two genders regarding clothing size and includes recommendations for research in the future and its implications.

IMPORTANCE OF SELF-ESTEEM

There are many reasons why self-esteem is important. Self-esteem is important because how one feels about themselves can affect their mental or physical health. Based on people's own personal experiences and observing the experiences of others, there are known habits of people who experience high self-esteem and those who experience low self-esteem. Experiencing positive self-esteem can consist of things like knowing and loving oneself,

embracing those qualities, the ability to do what one wants, keeping up with what one may like to do, and keeping up with all of these feelings (Smelser 1989:6). When a person experiences low self-esteem, they can experience the opposite of all of those encouraging aspects, and instead, experience things like self-deprecation, helplessness, powerlessness, and depression (Smelser 1989:6). All of these different effects regarding low self-esteem can lead to the causation of potential social problems based on the way people may act when they are feeling poorly about themselves. Society and clothing stores are perfect examples of settings that diminish self-esteem.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLOTHING SIZE AND SELF ESTEEM

Research has shown that there is a direct link between clothing size and self-esteem. Karazsia (2013) discovered that in order to be considered attractive in society, the world has always focused on being very thin when it comes to being a woman and obtaining a muscular appearance when as a man. In fact, much of these societal expectations have to do with clothing size. The clothes that people wear affect how they feel, their confidence level, and the way that they view themselves. If a person feels good in the size that they wear or feels insecure about the size that they wear, it can lead to either high or low levels of self-esteem. The component that controls all these mixed emotions, and is an important aspect of the fashion industry, is called "vanity sizing" (Karazsia et al. 2013).

The Alexander, Connell, and Presley (2015) study utilized an all-female sample, referring to vanity sizing as the practice of allowing people to fit into smaller clothes by adjusting the measurement specifications. Although, there will be more research including men in the section regarding the effects of clothing size on men's self-esteem. Dahl, Hoegg, Morales, and Scott (2013) emphasize the point that clothing sizes truly do not matter, yet women tend to base their

self-esteem on the number on their clothing labels. This article included five other studies that all concluded with the same results, "larger sizes result in negative evaluations of clothing and show that these effects are driven by consumers' self-esteem (Dahl et al. 2013:70)." Also, although one may assume that a larger clothing size would prevent the consumer from purchasing the clothes, these sizes actually increased the spending of the consumer in order to help restore their low and disappointed self-esteem (Dahl et al. 2013). Therefore, the researchers relayed the complicated relationship between clothing size and self-esteem, "…where shopping can serve to build, strengthen, threaten, and/or repair appearance self-esteem (Dahl et al. 2013:70)." This apparent relationship between clothing size and self-esteem affects both men and women in different ways, although what the researchers in this study found is similar to the findings regarding the effects on women.

THE EFFECTS ON WOMEN

Clothing size is a major factor in whether women have high or low self-esteem. In the event women are not able to fit into the "standard" clothing size, this can lead to a negative mental state with regard to their self-esteem (Bishop et al. 2018). In 2010, Kinley conducted a study in two phases where the women participants were asked to try on pants that either "ran small" or "ran large" (Kinley 2010:317). The findings revealed that the women who could fit into the smaller-sized pants felt more positive about themselves, and this was especially prevalent for younger women (Kinley 2010). Additionally, women who considered themselves larger felt more positive about themselves when they were able to fit into the smaller-sized pants (Kinley 2010). Although, the rather interesting finding here is that the women who did end up having to try on the larger pants because they could not fit into the smaller ones did not have any effect on their self-esteem (Kinley 2010). This was one of the major differences between

Kinley's findings and the next aspect of research. Bishop, Evans, and Gruys's findings in 2018 had much of the same results as Kinley (2010), except when women could not fit into the standard clothing sizes, they tended to demonstrate diminished self-esteem.

In 1997, Brumberg concluded that women relate clothing size to their body weight, and may not purchase clothing that actually fits them because of the number on the clothing label. In 2008, Russ had also discovered that clothing size was a strong factor in how women felt about their bodies. Bishop, Evans, and Gruys's (2018) study combined research from three qualitative studies of women's clothing retailers of bras, plus size clothing, and bridal wear, where they focused on the standard sizes of clothing in our society. With regard to clothing size and women, they investigated how women come across, comprehend, and navigate these standards throughout their everyday lives (Bishop et al. 2018). The researchers of this study "…conceptualize clothing size standards as 'floating signifiers', given their lack of consistency within and across brands and the extent to which women engage in identity work and bodywork in relation to them (Bishop et al. 2018:180)." Clothing size is what women use in regard to accepting their bodies, although it also creates hierarchies among women based on their body size and shape. Women who have smaller bodies and can fit into smaller sizes have a societal advantage over the women who cannot (Bishop et al. 2018). A specific section of this research that was focused on "clothing size, identity, and inequality" stated, "Because body size carries strong moral and aesthetic meanings in American culture, clothing size standards may deeply influence individual's self-perceptions (Bishop et al. 2018:185)." In regard to plus-size clothing, Gruys (2018) found that women who had to shop in these types of stores with plus sizes often hid their bags when leaving due to the embarrassment of being a larger size. The "standard sizes" run from 0-12 and run extra small, small, medium, large, and extra-large. Sizes that are out of

this range are either petite for very small women or plus size for women who are larger, and these are usually sold in their own stores or their own section of a store (Bishop et al. 2018). Both these larger and smaller clothing sizes should be more commonly available in closing stores.

Being big has become a movement, people are bigger and want clothing sizes that fit them available everywhere. Famous models and celebrities have used their platform to "ignite a movement to encourage a fashion industry built around a thin body ideal to include women of every size and eliminate the categorial system that segregates models and consumers based on clothing size" (Czerniawski 2016:70). This is an important finding; people of every clothing size should have always been included and not forced to feel down about themselves. Although, this is still the case for many people. People will shop online in plus-size sections looking for their size clothes, yet the model in those clothes is still very small due to most modeling agencies wanting a curvy body, but they still want that thin face (Czerniawski 2016). Bigger is supposedly becoming more accepted; however, this may not actually be the case. There are still separate sections to shop for plus-size clothing and modeling agencies still want the models of those sections to be somewhat thin because they believe consumers will be more likely to buy the clothing if the model is thinner (Czerniawski 2016). "Plus-size" has recently become more accepted, but the thin ideal is still very apparent. Overall, these three different research studies portray how the size on a clothing label can deeply affects women's self-esteem, and usually in a negative way.

THE EFFECTS ON MEN

Literature regarding men's clothing sizes and self-esteem is far more limited than women's, yet the findings from two specific studies are rather interesting. Women certainly care

more about the actual size of clothes than men, yet the sizes do still affect men in a variety of ways. Usually, people tend to assume that women care more about clothing size and their self-esteem than men do, and that is true, although men do still care about these things and two different studies portray these effects. Women often try and conform to the thin ideal, while men are more likely to conform to a muscular ideal. Frith and Gleeson (2004) relayed four themes within their study: the practicality of clothing choices, lack of concern about appearance, use of clothing to conceal or reveal the body, and use of clothing to fit cultural ideals. The two sections of this research that were relevant to this literature review were the last two sections. In the section about concealing and revealing clothing, one man in the study stated, "If I'm thinking I'm a fat git, I'll have the tendency to wear looser clothes and adhere to various methods employed to make a person look thinner. However, on a day when I'm feeling good, I'll be thinking under that fat is a reasonable-sized pair of pecs and I'll wear something accordingly (Frith and Gleeson 2004:44)." Although this is not distinctly mentioning clothing sizes, it is describing how the clothes that these men wear affect how they feel about themselves. In the section of this study about conforming to cultural ideals with clothing, a man stated, "I have started to bulk out and put on weight and gain more confidence about my body shape and have started buying tight-fitting clothing (Frith and Gleeson 2004:45)." Once again, not distinctly mentioning clothing size, but showing how men use clothes to either feel good about themselves or to hide. Men tend not to have as much concern regarding clothing sizes as women do, but it is shown that men do care a lot about their appearance, which is very apparent in Sung and Yan's (2020) study as well.

Sung and Yan (2020) explored the relationship between self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and clothing-related behaviors regarding Generation Y males. The findings were consistent with

several other studies, including the previous study mentioned. The two main findings that were focused on were the negative relationship between self-esteem and body dissatisfaction and how those with body concerns influenced the types of clothes they purchased (Sung and Yan 2020). When men felt dissatisfied with their bodies, they would choose to strengthen their self-esteem by wearing certain clothes as symbols to reinforce their identity in society (Sung and Yan 2020). The findings also supported that men avoided revealing clothes when they were unhappy with themselves and would choose to wear loose clothes instead (Chattaraman et al. 2013; Walker et al. 2009). Lastly, the findings supported that body dissatisfaction influenced a man's individual concerns positively toward clothing fit and size, which led to more engagement in clothing image avoidance behaviors (Baytar and Shin 2014; Damhorst and Kim 2010). The symbolic completion theory was highly supported throughout this study because that theory "suggests that individuals who desire to enhance their self-identities and to make themselves feel better will do so through their clothing choices (Gollwitzer and Wicklund 1982:11)." Overall, similarly to women, "when men were unhappy with their body, specifically their weight, they avoided certain types of clothes to temporarily feel happier about themselves (Carver et al. 2011:11)." Avoidance coping mechanisms could be the reasoning to this finding, as men could be steering away from certain clothing that could restore their concerns about their bodies as a way to handle the situation (Carver et al. 2011). There is a strong relationship between clothing sizes and self-esteem with regards to men, although both of these studies do not distinctly mention clothing size, both studies mention how men choose or avoid certain clothes based on how they feel about themselves. Research shows that both men and women have much in common when it comes to how clothing size standards effect their self-esteem. However, they are expected to meet

different societal standards which portrays the differences in how they are affected by clothing size.

COMPARISON OF MEN AND WOMEN

The last aspect of research included in this literature review included a comparison study differentiating between men and women. Engeln and Zola (2021) explored how often women, versus men, reported wearing clothing that is painful, distracting, or restricting, which is referred to as "PDR" throughout their study. The difference in body surveillance and appreciation between those who wore PDR and those who did not was also looked at throughout their research. The results showed that "women were substantially more likely to wear PDR clothing than men (Engeln and Zola 2021:467)." The largest difference between men and women was concerned with wearing uncomfortable shoes and wearing distracting clothes (Engeln and Zola 2021). Both women and men that had higher levels of body surveillance were more likely to wear PDR clothing (Engeln and Zola 2021). A difference between genders in this research that related to the previous studies in past sections, was that there was a negative association between body appreciation and wearing PDR clothing. Although, these results were inconsistent between men and women (Engeln and Zola 2021). The fact that these results were inconsistent relates to previous research in past sections of this paper because it was often only women who had this negative association rather than men. Overall, Engeln and Zola's (2021) research was "consistent with the notion that the gendered nature of clothing might reflect and provoke chronic vigilance of the body's appearance (Englen and Zola 2021)."

CONCLUSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, IMPLICATIONS

This literature review explored to what extent standard clothing sizes within the fashion industry affect the self-esteem of each gender, men and women, differently. This literature

discovered that there is an apparent relationship between clothing size and self-esteem for both men and women, but affects each gender in different ways. Women are expected to meet the standards of the thin ideal, and if they did not, they tended to feel more insecure about themselves (Kinley 2010; Bishop et al. 2018). Men are expected to meet the muscular ideal, and if they did not, they also tended to feel more insecure about themselves (Frith and Gleeson 2004; Sung and Yan 2020). Although, overall, women tend to care much more about what their clothing size is than men (Frith and Gleeson 2004). Also, both genders used clothes to either cover up or reveal certain parts of their bodies that they either felt insecure or happy about (Bishop et al. 2018; Frith and Gleeson 2004; Kinley 2010; Sung and Yan 2020). The evidence found clearly portrays the relationship between clothing and self-esteem regarding gender and how it affects each gender in different ways.

Although, future research is necessary in order to get more of an understanding of this topic. Clothing size and self-esteem have always had an apparent relationship, and to this day they still do, but new information is always needed in order to discover the new depths of this relationship that are constantly being changed and updated. It would be helpful to know more about this relationship regarding men. Information was discovered on this relationship regarding men, but it was difficult to find and did not talk about clothing size specifically. It would also be beneficial to find more information regarding plus size clothing and that new movement that is very apparent in our world right now, one article was found on this, but it would be interesting to know more about how plus-size women feel regarding their self-esteem. Another aspect that could be discovered regarding this relationship is age. Most of my research was based on young adults, so it would be interesting to know more about younger children and the elderly regarding this relationship. Lastly, there should be more research regarding every gender, my research was

only talking about the gender binary fashion industry, but there are more fashion industries out there for every gender and every sexuality. Overall, these different scopes regarding this topic were limitations for my research; however, these limitations outline future opportunities for expanding the literature in this field.

Based on these findings, it is obvious that clothing size deeply affects the lives and self-esteem of both men and women. Both men and women have based how they feel about themselves on the number they see on a clothing label. When each gender does not meet the standards that they are expected to, they start to feel diminished about themselves and start to obtain habits that are not beneficial such as anxiety, eating disorders, emotional distress, panic disorders, risky behaviors, substance use, or stress. Since these sizes have such a huge impact on everyone's lives, we need to get rid of them. As previously stated, clothing sizes are supposed to be changed and updated every ten years, but they never stay the same (Workman 1991). Clothing sizes are not consistent, but most of the world bases how they feel about themselves on that one label. If we got rid of these numbers and sizes, much of the population would feel much better about themselves.

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The Relationship Between Race and High School and College Drop Out Rates

Nicole Sarette

INTRODUCTION

Education today is more diverse than ever (Geiger 2020). The United States has made strides towards a more equitable educational experience for students. High School and College students are more diverse than their predecessors, but they are still facing many of the same issues of education inequality. I will be looking at the issue of educational inequality by focusing on high dropout rates and low retention rates for students of color. For high school students, I will be focusing on dropout rates, and for college students, I will be focusing on retention rates. Retention rates are measured by: 1) how students are retained from fall term in year one to spring term in year one, and 2) how students are retained from fall term in year one to fall term in year two.

I focus on retention rates and statistics relating to graduating within 6 years for college students because it is often difficult and imprecise to measure higher education dropout rates as many students don't formally "drop out," they simply do not enroll in the next semester. I found that the number of students who graduate within six years is fewer than 2/3, which is considered low (U.S. Dept of Education 2021). Graduation rates are even lower for some races and not others. Only 42% of Black and 56% of Hispanic students nationally graduate within six years, which is below the national average (63%), and below the rate for white students nationally, at 66% (Musu-Gillette et al. 2018)

This means that students who enter higher education and do not graduate lose out on a million-dollar bonus to their lifetime earnings (on average earning $21k per year less), as well as

most likely have some level of debt without an increased chance of higher earnings (Hanson 2021). The overall lost earnings due to dropouts total up to 3.8 billion dollars a year (Hanson 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

High School Dropout Rates

In recent years, the issue of high school dropouts has attracted increasing attention from policymakers, researchers, and teachers. For most of the 20th century dropping out was normal for students and sometimes even the expected result, especially for students of color. In 1940 more than 60% of people ages 25-29 did not finish high school (Alexander and Rivitch 1996). This issue has become better understood in the past few decades as a serious and complex social and educational issue that will have a lasting impact on the rest of society. By 1980 the dropout rate plummeted to just 16% (Rumberger 1987). Dropping out of high school has caused people to face serious education and social capital problems, severely limiting their social and economic well-being for the rest of their lives.

In 2019, there were 2 million high school dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24, and the overall dropout rate was 5.1%, which was 3.2% lower than in 2010 (U.S. Dept of Education 2021). Dropout rates continue to decrease, but the issue that we're focusing on now is that some groups have significantly higher dropout rates than others. The following outlines dropout rates by race: Asian (1.8%), White (4.1%), two or more races(5.1%), Black (5.6%), Hispanic (7.7%), Pacific Islander (8.0%), Native American (9.6%) (U.S. Department of Education 2021). Now, the question remains why the dropout rate of certain races is several times higher than that of other races.

Although more and more students of color are enrolling in higher education than ever before, there is still a noticeable success gap between races. Many researchers, like the National Center for Educational Statistics, use "Drop out" as a way to refer to students who leave education and don't return, even if they don't formally "drop out". 52% of Black students and 53% of Native American students drop out of 4-year colleges, this is compared to only 42% of white students dropping out (National Center for Educational Statistics 2019).

Possible Explanations for High Drop-Out Rates Among High School Students

In the literature, there appear to be two theoretical perspectives on why high school dropout rates are so different based on race. The first perspective, which uses race-conflict theory, points to racial discrimination, bias, and low expectations as being the cause of student of color dropout rates (Lewis and Diamond 2015). The first perspective can be seen in the book "Despite the Best Intentions" by Amanda E. Lewis and John B. Diamond. The book dives deep into the issue of the educational achievement gap between races, which could be a contributing factor to high dropout rates for students of color. In this book, the researchers control for any resource or poverty explanation for lower performance by students of color by looking at a solidly well-off school that is racially diverse (Lewis and Diamond 2015).

Through their research, Lewis and Diamond (2015) find that teachers and faculty seem to have some form of bias against students of color. This includes teachers having low expectations of students of color, which is noticed by the students. Collective narratives become racial ideologies, which explain away discrepancies in treatment and normalize differences in educational outcomes. This influences student achievement because it affects how students feel they fit in their school community; if they are valued, respected, and cared for by their community. There is also a disparity in who is perceived as needing punishment and who needs

to be understood and empathized with, which is called differential selection (Lewis and Diamond 2015).

The researchers also noticed how white privilege protects white students because there is a recognized trend that white parents will use their social capital to defend their children from punishment (Diamond and Lewis 2015). Social capital, which is the value of someone's social network, plays a large role in the differential treatment of students. The researchers noticed the school had problems with "opportunity hoarding", where white students were being placed into higher-level classes at higher rates than students of color (Lewis and Diamond 2015). There are a few possible reasons for this given by the authors; 1) Teachers see students of color as less proficient than white students and place them in lower-level classes, 2) Students are originally placed in the same class, and then moved because their parent has the social capital to speak to the teacher and have them moved (Lewis and Diamond 2015).

The second perspective, which is framed within conflict theory, points to a lack of resources and high poverty rates in high POC communities as the cause of high dropout rates among students of color. A clear connection between resources and dropout rates has been established (Wood et al. 2017). One of the authors of this piece, Dr. Stephen Truscott, is quoted as stating:

> When you control for the SES of the family, children at the same levels of SES have more or less the same dropout rate for both black and white students. It makes a difference whether you're impoverished or not. Black children are disproportionately impoverished, so their rate is higher, but it's their SES level that makes a difference, not their race or ethnicity. (Wood et al. 2017)

This perspective is heavily supported by the National School Board Association's research (Jinghong 2020). Forty-five percent of Black students attended high-poverty schools, compared

with 8% of white students (Jinghong 2020). Only 7% of Black students attended low-poverty schools compared with 39% of Asian and 31% of white students (Jinghong 2020). Among 90% of Black students without home internet access, 39% said that it was because the internet was too expensive, suggesting that their families could not afford it (Jinghong 2020). Among Black 3 to 18-year-olds, 11% had home internet access only through a smartphone, compared with only 2% among Asians and 3% among white students (Jinghong 2020).

Possible Explanations for Low Retention Rates Among College Students

The issue of low college retention rates among students of color may be an intersectional issue between race and class. A finance article was written by Rachel Bishop and Dr. Alice Anne Bailey in 2019 on the five reasons for low college retention rates. The first reason is, as previously stated, affordability. State spending for higher education is down, cost of higher education is up, so the bills fall to students to pick up. Since the 2008 recession, state spending for higher education has gone down 16%, meaning universities have had to increase the cost of tuition (up 56%). Federal financial aid, like the Pell grant, has not kept up with the increased costs (Bailey and Bishop 2021). Today, the Pell grant only covers 1/3 of costs at a public institution (Bailey and Bishop 2021). Many students will not or cannot take on the loans necessary to continue their education and are forced to drop out (Bailey and Bishop 2021).

The second reason Bailey and Bishop (2021) found for low retention rates of college students was the cost of living. As stated above, large portions of students of color are from high-poverty areas. Students are having trouble paying for textbooks, food, housing, and a multitude of bills. In a survey of 1,008 students nationwide 70% of students recently surveyed say they're worried about being able to pay their bills on time (Bailey and Bishop 2021). Low-income students were hit especially hard during the pandemic as many students didn't have reliable

access to Wi-Fi, making online classes extremely difficult to access. Food and housing insecurity are huge issues on campuses that have drastic impacts on students' abilities to continue their education. Between 14% and 18% of college students surveyed reported they are homeless and 39% are food insecure (Bailey and Bishop 2021). Students facing these challenges are often left without a choice and are forced to leave higher education (Bailey and Bishop 2021).

Another challenge communities of color face in their pursuit of higher education are the need for employment and regular income (HSBC 2018). 85% of students work at least part-time while enrolled in school to help cover expenses (HSBC 2018). Students spend an average of 4 hours a day working, which is two times the amount of time they spend in class and one and a half times the number of hours they spend studying (HSBC 2018). Around 40% of undergraduate students work full time, and around half of the working students are minimum wage workers (HSBC 2018). As a result, their academic performance suffers. Only 22% of low-income students who work while enrolled graduate within 6 years (HSBC 2018).

The fourth factor affecting retention is a lack of academic preparation (Bailey and Bishop 2021). The population consists of students coming from schools that are underfunded, understaffed, and under-resourced. Many students have also been out of academia for many years. Because of this, students often struggle with academics when they enter higher education and have to work much harder to catch up with their peers, a population of historically represented students revered as well prepared and financially equipped to fund their education (well-prepared, domestic high school graduates under age 25 from families able to support the cost of college) (Bailey and Bishop 2021). Because many non-traditional students are so far behind their traditional peers, they are enrolled in non-credit remedial classes for their first year. This turns a 4-year degree into a 5-year degree, increasing the cost of attending an entire year of

tuition, books, housing, and meals, among other aspects of higher education (Bishop and Bailey 2021). Full-time undergrads who take remedial courses are 74% more likely to drop out (Bishop and Bailey 2021).

The fifth factor for low retention rates is a lack of cultural capital, or "college knowledge" (Bailey and Bishop 2021). This lack of knowledge includes struggling with higher education jargon, like FAFSA, and understanding college skills and expectations. Such skills and expectations include navigating office hours, campus guides, campus social norms, college study habits, communicating with professors, how to write an email, asking for letters of recommendation, knowing what to bring to college, asking for extensions/help on assignments, and many others (Bailey and Bishop 2021). Much of this information is either taught to students by their parents or done by their parents almost entirely (as in the case of the FAFSA) (Bailey and Bishop 2021). The article argues that many students of color do not have the cultural capital that is needed to succeed in college (Bailey and Bishop 2021). For example, knowing when dates of course withdrawals dates are, or if it's appropriate to email their professor for help on an assignment.

The last factor discussed in the article by Bailey and Bishop (2021) was a lack of diversity in faculty in higher education. Students of color are notably impacted by a lack of diversity representation in faculty (Bailey and Bishop 2021). A study conducted on community college students in 2014 found that minority students who had faculty that resembled them and that they could see as role models was a huge factor in their collegiate success(Fairlie, Hoffmann, and Oreopoulos 2014). The study found that the performance gap between students of different races closed by 20% to 50% when a faculty member of color was teaching (Fairlie, Hoffmann, and Oreopoulos 2014).

DISCUSSION

The cause of high dropout rates among high school students of color seems to be correlated to poverty, a lack of resources in communities of color, high amounts of racial discrimination, bias, and low expectations of students of color by educators. This issue is not an either/or situation. The literature suggests that racial discrimination, bias, and low expectations are big contributing factors to the achievement gap. The literature also suggests that high dropout rates for students of color across class, along with the high portion of students of color living in high poverty areas, means that many students of color also happen to lack the necessary resources to succeed in academics. This means their achievement may suffer and they may be more likely to drop out. Both of these perspectives, racial and financial explanations, may influence the low retention rates among college students of color.

The next step would be to look into ways to alleviate the factors that influence students to drop out and not be retained in academia. The literature notes many possible ways to help lower the dropout rate for students of color in high school, including offering free internet to families, free breakfast, lunch, and snack programs for students, free laundry, housing options for families, access to free tutors, stipends for good grades, and many more options (Sherman and Mitchell 2017).

As for the issue of racial bias among educators, Lewis and Diamond (2015) suggest that such issues need to be solved internally through sensitivity training and making teachers more aware of their own biases. Educators need to be held accountable for their differential treatment of students by race (Lewis and Diamond 2015).

For the lack of affordability when it comes to tuition, many researchers have suggested increasing the maximum Pell grant award to fit the ever-increasing tuition rates. The Pell grant only covering a third of tuition may help a bit, but it still means low-income students have to pay for the majority of the tuition in either loans or scholarships. The idea of having all graduating high school seniors fill out the FAFSA, regardless of their income level, would also be extremely helpful for students. Many students who are eligible for financial aid never apply and thus never claim it (Helkowki 2018). For example, 2.6 billion dollars of financial aid went unclaimed in 2018 (Helkowki 2018).

Another way to help students against the ever-rising cost of tuition could be a tuition cap for public institutions. Many states are proposing bills that would freeze tuition costs, or at least limit the percent increase it's allowed to go up every year. Another possible option that would benefit both students and institutions would be increased state funding for universities, which would take the burden off of students, and would eliminate fears of institutions having to decrease staff or services (Whitford 2021).

The cost of living has been a policy issue on college campuses for years. Many institutions have already worked to create food pantries and temporary housing for students who are in-between homes or lack housing due to school breaks. But even for students who are not in such dire need cost of living is a large problem. The cost of living is very often an issue for students who are unable to work full time to offset the cost of living, or who do work full time, but are not paid a living wage. Some schools have started looking into policy changes that would make housing on campus more affordable for students, as well as offering well-paying work-study programs that allow students to pay for room and board (Gaffikin, and Morrissey, Wiewel 2019).

Further Research

It is difficult to determine the true variables causing students of color to drop out. The main issue is that many say that when "controlling for other variables" researchers find that high school dropout rates are conclusively caused by either race or class. More research needs to be done on this subject. There has been an almost complete lack of research related to dropout rates among Pacific Islander students and Native American students, despite them having the highest dropout rates of all races. Much of the literature had a very clear black and white dichotomy and does not mention Hispanic, Native American, or Pacific Islanders at all in research. There is a gap in the literature on the connection between the gender, race, and dropout rates despite there being a clear gender/race gap in dropout rates

CONCLUSION

The literature suggests that high school dropout rates are higher for some races than others because of racial bias, or because of high portions of students of color living in high poverty areas. Programs aimed at lowering the achievement gap between students of different classes are offering several programs to help lessen the struggle of low-income students. Schools also need to remain conscious of the role they play in building students' sense of community and their identities as scholars regardless of the teacher's biases.

The U.S. higher education system is now faced with challenges that have been increasingly exacerbated by the problems of the last two decades, including the cost of living and tuition going up, high student employment, social capital disparities between backgrounds, and a lack of role models for students of color in higher education. All of these issues contribute to the low retention rates of students of color. Many state legislators and administrators of higher

education are suggesting policy changes that could drastically improve the retention rates of

students of color: affordable tuition and housing, food pantries on campus, more gainful student

employment, programs to help students gain social capital, and hiring more faculty of color.

With all of these efforts on both the state and local levels, retention rates of students of color are

expected to increase in the coming years.

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