

“Where are the Brothers?”

Native Hawaiian Males and Higher Education

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It is common knowledge that college education brings economic and social benefits to the individual and the communities where one lives, works, and plays. On average, college graduates also enjoy other benefits at higher rates than non-college graduates, including better health, less incarceration, and steadier employment (Baum, Ma, and Payea, 2013; Ma, Pender, and Welch, 2016). Educational attainment is positively correlated with income and employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Classic social determinants of health are education and income, as well as the physical and social environment and macro structural policies that shape them (Zimmerman, Woolf, and Haley, 2015). This would suggest, then, that the low college participation rates of Native Hawaiian males are impacting local and state economies and the quality of life of these individuals, their families, and their communities.

A positive correlation can be observed when looking through US Census data. According to the US Census Bureau (2016), a little over 9 percent of the adult residents of the Wai‘anae community on the island of O‘ahu was estimated to have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. The average household income for this same community was estimated at \$58,807. The bureau also estimated that just over 25 percent of Wai‘anae residents were living below the poverty level. In another O‘ahu community, Mililani Mauka, where 48% percent of its members hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, the socioeconomic differences are significant. In Mililani Mauka, the median household income was estimated at \$107,163 and only 2 percent are living below the poverty level. There are also significant differences in home ownership, family dynamics, and health statistics between these two Hawai‘i communities. It should be clear from these statistics how a community’s higher educational attainment is correlated with higher income, which in turn has a positive impact on other social metrics like health and well-being.

In 2015, Project Kuleana (2015) released a music video for Ernie Cruz, Jr.’s (2001) song titled “Where are the

Brothers?” The lyrics begin, “A great injustice has been done, from this problem you can’t run...stand up and be proud...a hundred years is much too long, now’s the time to right this wrong” and continues, “too many brothers fill our jails, living their lives in a hopeless hell...brothers, think first and do right, united, we will win this fight.” Reflecting on the lyrics, I began to think about the underrepresentation of Native Hawaiian males in college, the causes of this phenomenon, and how we might change policy and practice to increase college-going rates for this population.

I asked myself “Where are the brothers?” semester after semester working as a student affairs professional at the University of Hawai‘i – West O‘ahu (UHWO). Over the past three years, UHWO and its partners have recruited recent high school graduates to participate in the ‘Onipa‘a Summer Bridge program from service-area schools on the Leeward Coast of O‘ahu. Each new cohort included a fair representation of the traditionally underrepresented ethnicities that make up the Wai‘anae community, but there was a noticeable underrepresentation of males.

This observation of lower male enrollment in college programs is not unique to my work at UHWO. I have seen similar sex distributions while working at Windward Community College on the east side of O‘ahu Island, noticed it as a student studying in the University of Hawai‘i system myself, see it among my colleagues, and read about it in higher education news articles and research.

Native Hawaiian males are not attending college at rates comparable to other males in Hawai‘i. Nearly 30 percent of the total male population in Hawai‘i over the age of twenty-five hold a bachelor’s degree or higher (OHA, 2017). When looking at Native Hawaiian men in this age group, only 15 percent hold a bachelor’s degree or higher (OHA, 2017). This 50 percent gap between Native Hawaiian males and the state average for all males is substantial and worthy of investigation.

I am a Native Hawaiian male, born and raised on the west side of O‘ahu. I was fortunate enough to attend one

of the few independent schools on the coast throughout my elementary school years and continued at an independent school in Honolulu for an additional year. In the eighth grade, I transitioned to the public school system and completed my secondary education at Wai‘anae High School. Wai‘anae is a 20-mile stretch of coastline on the west side of the island of O‘ahu. This coastline is said to have the highest concentration of Native Hawaiians, and this may be attributed to the large and multiple Hawaiian homesteads located within the Nānākuli and Wai‘anae communities. I use the term *Native Hawaiian* to mean “any individual who is a descendant of the aboriginal people who, prior to 1778, occupied and exercised sovereignty in the area that now constitutes the State of Hawai‘i.” (U.S. Public Law 103-150)

In a 2003 report, The Center on the Family at the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources at the University of Hawai‘i noted that Wai‘anae and Nānākuli ranked poorly on child and family well-being measures, including unemployment, income, children in poverty, child abuse, and school safety. Also of concern in these communities are the poor educational performances of the students, high teacher turnover, low levels of school attendance, low levels of college acceptance, and a high percentage of youth ages 16–19 that are neither in school nor working. The Center on the Family also reported the strengths of the community, such as stable neighborhoods, growing homeownership, strong familial ties, and parental desire to ensure school success for their children.

This article comes from my larger dissertation work in which I conducted a qualitative study examining the motivating factors for Native Hawaiian male students pursuing postsecondary education at the University of Hawai‘i – West O‘ahu. My study presented the perspectives of four successfully enrolled Native Hawaiian males and the factors that impacted their college enrollment decision and matriculation at a four-year postsecondary institution.

❧ **THE PROBLEM** ❧ Native Hawaiians have historically been underrepresented in higher education. In 2007, there were 2,674 Native Hawaiian graduates of Hawai‘i Department of Education secondary schools, 24.6 percent of all graduates in the state. Only 34 percent of these Native Hawaiian Hawai‘i Department of Education graduates went directly into college the following fall semester, the third lowest percentage of the 13 ethnic groupings studied (Hawai‘i P–20, 2012).

In the spring of 2009, two years after their high school graduation, Native Hawaiians of the Hawai‘i Department of Education 2007 cohort made up only 17.8 percent of the those enrolled at a postsecondary institution, an enrollment gap of –6.8 percent (Hawai‘i P–20, 2012). These statistics tell us that not only are there access and enrollment challenges for Native Hawaiians, there are also challenges of retention and persistence.

More recently, Native Hawaiian males (and other Pacific Islander males) have had the lowest enrollment rates for post-secondary education of all the demographic groups in the state of Hawai‘i (Hawai‘i P–20 Partnerships for Education, 2015). In the 2017 Office of Hawaiian Affairs report, *Kānehō‘ālanī: Transforming the Health of Native Hawaiian Men*, it is stated that “in 2014, 15% of Native Hawaiian men 25 and older had a bachelor’s degree or higher, half as many as the total male population in the state” (p. 25). The report (OHA, 2017) also revealed that since 2005 the state of Hawai‘i saw a 1.7 percent increase for all males 25 years of age or older with a bachelor’s degree, while a much smaller increase (0.4 percent) was achieved for Native Hawaiian males in the same age group.

These statistics reveal that Native Hawaiian males do not enjoy the benefits of higher education—higher individual earnings, lower incarceration rates, higher rates of civic engagement, improved personal health, intergenerational benefits (Baum et al., 2013)—at the levels commensurate with Asian, White, and other ethnic groups in Hawai‘i.

The body of scholarship on males, minority males, higher education, and masculinity continues to grow. However, there are few studies, if any, explicitly conducted with Native Hawaiian men in relationship to college aspirations.

The purpose of my larger study was to deepen understanding of the factors that influence Native Hawaiian males’ decisions to pursue higher education in order to develop strategies to increase Hawaiian male entry and persistence in obtaining a higher education degree. Specifically, I was and remain interested in the factors that influence low-income, first-generation, Native Hawaiian males from the Wai‘anae coast of O‘ahu educated through the public school system.

❧ **RESEARCH QUESTIONS** ❧ Three research questions were used to guide my larger dissertation:

1. What are the factors that influence low income, first-generation Native Hawaiian male from the

Wai'anae coast of O'ahu in their decision to pursue higher education?

2. What role does gender play in a Wai'anae coast Native Hawaiian male's educational pathway?
3. What role does ethnicity play in a Wai'anae coast Native Hawaiian male's educational pathway?

For this article, I would like to focus on research question number two by providing a conceptual framework for rethinking the relationship between Native Hawaiian males, masculinity, and college aspiration.

:: MASCULINITIES AND NATIVE HAWAIIAN MALES ::

There have been many studies on masculinity over the last three decades (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). These studies looked at masculinity in relation to many things including education, health, careers, relationships, etc. Some of the heavily-cited scholars of men's studies and masculinity studies include Raewyn Connell (1989; 1995; 1996; 2000; 2002; 2005), Michael Kimmel (1994; 2006; 2012; 2013), Michael Messner (1993; 1997), Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (1994), Jim O'Neil (2008).

In her book *Masculinities*, Connell (1995) explains her theory on gender order and introduces the idea of hegemonic masculinity. Connell does not consider masculinities as equivalent to men, stating that masculinities concern the position of men in a gender order. On her website, Connell (n.d.) suggests that masculinities "can be defined as the patterns of practice by which people (both men and women, though predominantly men) engage that position."

Connell (2005) defines hegemonic masculinity as "The configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p.77). Western hegemonic masculinity is often referenced using these terms: Patriarchy, dominance, risk-taking, self-discipline, physical toughness, muscular development, aggression, violence, emotional control, and overt heterosexual desire (Demetriou, 2001; Hinojosa, 2010).

Connell (2005) observed and identified other configurations of masculinities that she categorized as *complicit*, *subordinate*, and *marginalized*, all of which is organized lower in the hierarchy of masculinities. Complicit masculinities refer to the men who support the dominance of the

hegemonic masculinity and reap the benefits of such a patriarchal configuration. This particular configuration includes the majority of men. Subordinate masculinities include those that undermine the goals of hegemonic masculinity. This configuration usually includes gay and academically inclined men due to their association with femininity. The final configuration, marginalized masculinities, is complex due to the intersectionality of gender and other factors including socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity (Lusher and Robbins, 2010; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

Minority men as a group also face more barriers than other groups when it comes to college enrollment, persistence, and completion. Some studies suggest that certain types of masculinities (i.e., hyper-masculinity, compensatory masculinity, protest masculinity) may affect boys, and men, negatively with regards to education (O'Neil, 2008; Yavorsky, Buchmann, and Miles, 2015; Lloyd, 2014; Frank, Kehler, Lovell, and Davidson, 2003). These types of masculinities—hyper-, compensatory, and protest—are often used interchangeably to describe the masculinity performed by some marginalized (usually economically and or ethnically) men. These men create alternative forms of masculinity that defy hegemonic masculinity and are achievable even with their subordinated status usually associated with their socioeconomic status and or ethnicity/race. These alternative forms usually include risk-taking activities or aggressive behaviors and are often destructive, chaotic, and alienating. Connell (2000) notes that even transsexualism and homosexual desire are examples of protest masculinity.

Similarly, Kimmel believes that masculinity is continually changing, constructed and manipulated depending on the context and our relationships with ourselves, others, and the world around us. Kimmel (1994) writes,

All masculinities are not *created* equal; or rather, we are all *created* equal, but any hypothetical equality evaporates quickly because our definitions of masculinity are not equally valued in our society. One definition of manhood continues to remain the standard against which other forms of manhood are measured and evaluated. Within the dominant culture, the masculinity that defines white, middle class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men is the masculinity that sets the standards for other men, against which other men are measured and, more often than not, found wanting (p.124–125).

Kimmel’s quote supports the idea that hegemonic social hierarchies shape the thoughts, actions, and aspirations of young Native Hawaiian males who have multiple “disadvantaged” identities. This study supports the need to explore how social hierarchies created by hegemony influence masculine males to pursue “masculine” careers (trades/vocations) and less masculine males to pursue careers where their success is less influenced by hegemonic masculinity.

There has also been important scholarship on Native Hawaiian masculinity, identity, and colonization (Anderson and Innes, 2015; Goodyear-Ka’ōpua, 2013; Tengan, 2008; Vasconcellos, 2014; Walker and Project Muse, 2011). Tengan (2008) writes about the disempowerment Native men feel as a result of colonization, the feminization of Native Hawaiians by the tourism industry, and how a group of Native men has reasserted their masculinity through traditional practices.

In a section titled *Hawaiian Education and Masculinity*, Tengan (2008) writes about educational experiences of some of the men of the Hale Mua O Maui. This hale mua, organized organically in 1995 by Kyle Nākānelua and Kamana’opono Crabbe, was the first modern version of the traditional men’s house. It provided a group of Native Hawaiian men the setting to reconnect with their Hawaiian ancestry and once again partake in traditional knowledge, practices, and protocols.

Tengan found commonly held sentiments about the Western educational model among members and saw how the supportive structures of the Hale Mua promoted education and learning for Native Hawaiian men. One of the men interviewed talked about his preferred hands-on, tactile learning style, not often engaged through the common pedagogical approaches of academia. Tengan (2008) writes, “Many of the men felt that the classroom was an elitist, haole, and alien space and often a feminine one as well” (p.140), referencing the colonial discourses of Hawaiians as “stupid” and “lazy.” Contrasting the Western classroom, Tengan (2008) explains that the hale mua provided an environment for the Native Hawaiian men that was conducive to learning. These structures and dispositions included the equalization of status between the leadership and the participants, the egalitarian ethos, the focus on men, and a safe and comfortable space away from women.

Another scholar that analyzed Native Hawaiian male masculinity, colonization, and politics is Isaiah

Helekunihi Walker. Walker (2011) writes about how Native Hawaiians have successfully resisted colonization and marginalization in the surf zone of the surrounding Hawaiian waters and focuses in on the surfing group called “Da Hui” and their efforts of resistance.

In *The Seeds We Planted*, Goodyear-Ka’ōpua (2013) writes about ideas of gender at Hālau Kū Mana, a public charter school located in Kalihi. She tells a story about the naming of lo’i (taro fields) by the male-dominant senior class and the female-dominant junior class. They named their respective lo’i in what appears to be an inversion of typical western gender characteristics. The senior class named their lo’i after a behavior that is typically associated with the feminine in Western society, and the junior class named their lo’i after the male progenitor of the Hawaiian people. Goodyear-Ka’ōpua (2013) also talked about gender and hula in her book. She writes that at Hālau Kū Mana, hula and oli (chant) are offered as an opportunity to challenge the ideas and discourse that hula is feminine, that it is for women and mähū (homosexual, effeminate males, gay men, and transgendered women). For one of the male students, hula and oli allowed him to be a “better Hawaiian” and made him proud of his culture. Participating in hula and oli provided an opportunity for this student to shed previously held assumptions about these cultural practices, to grow, mature, and develop a sense of responsibility to himself, his parents, and his community that contrasted his “delinquent” past. It seems as if these examples support the notion of Indigenous practices challenging hegemony.

There is a limited amount of research that examines the intersectionality of masculine identity and the decision to pursue higher education for minority males. For example, Vasconcellos (2014) studied Native Hawaiian male adolescents’ ideas about masculinity and what it means to “be a man” and how education and media influence their perceptions of masculinity. Vasconcellos (2014) found that the adolescent Native Hawaiian males qualified a Native Hawaiian man as someone who “feeds, fends for his family and is a father” (p. 239). However, scholarship on masculine identity for Native Hawaiian males and its effect on their decision to pursue a college education have not been done. Most comparable is research on masculinity and other minority populations, namely African American and Latino males and their college experience (e.g., Harper, 2004 and 2006; Dancy, 2011 and 2014; Cerezo, Lyda, Bristianos, Enriquez, Connor, and Levant, 2013; Sáenz,

Mayo, Miller, and Rodriguez, 2015). These combined experiences piqued my interest in understanding more about how ideas of masculinity and gender identity affect one's decision to enroll and pursue a higher education degree. Understanding more about the interplay of masculinity and education may help institutions and organizations have more effective messaging, recruitment, retention, and college success initiatives for their male students.

In my study I include a lens of gender/masculinity that is more representative of the Polynesian culture and experience as a way to acknowledge the ethnic identity of my participants. Jolly (2008) emphasizes that Oceanic masculinities are "fluid, moving...across time and place" (p. 1). She argues that Oceanic masculinities are constructed in relation, and in resistance, to the hegemonic forces of colonialism. These hybrid versions, influenced by colonialism, have diverged in places like Hawai'i and New Zealand. In Hawai'i, the effects of colonialism have resulted in an emasculation of Native Hawaiian men through the feminization of the Hawaiian Islands, non-violent petitions and protests that followed the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, and how the Native men and women were portrayed (Tengan, 2008; Jolly, 2008). In contrast, colonialism in Aotearoa/New Zealand resulted in hyper-masculine Māori men through discourse, wars as resistance, and the colder climate. The effects of colonial divergence are summed up by the iconic cultural performances known around the world that these islands are known for—Hawaiian hula and feminine accommodation versus Māori haka and masculine resistance (Tengan, 2008).

Traditional Indigenous masculinities have changed with colonialism and assimilation. The complementarity of Indigenous women's and men's authority and leadership was perceived as a barrier and threat for colonizers and their heteropatriarchal society (Sneider, 2015). Indigenous ideas and practices of sexual agency and non-binary genders were also sites of conflict as colonizers vied for control over Indigenous peoples (Morgensen, 2015). The perpetuation of white supremacist patriarchy is pervasive, impossible to escape, conveyed and reproduced through education, news, and entertainment institutions (Anderson and Innes, 2015). Although traditional Indigenous masculinities are still present and practiced by the participants in this study, also evident and influential on their experience are the post-colonization hybrid masculinities as well as the nature of Connell's hegemonic masculinities.

For some Native men, the latter two may promote behaviors (i.e. hyper-masculinity, protest masculinity) that further marginalize their status within Western society.

Today, "Indigenous men have a high risk of adopting negative lifestyles that lead to violence, addictions, and incarceration, and...these challenges can be linked to race and gender bias" (Anderson and Innes, 2015, p. 9). Indigenous men have not only accepted negative perceptions about them, but also internalized them as a result of the colonization of their lands, minds, and bodies (Anderson and Innes, 2015). As I show in the findings of my larger study, the participants in the study identified these kinds of perceptions about them, using it as motivation to persist, earn a college degree, and contribute to the well-being of their communities.

In summary, Native Hawaiian males are not attending college at rates comparable to other males in Hawai'i. The proportion of Native Hawaiian males over the age of 25 with a bachelor's degree is half that of the state average for all males in Hawai'i (15% vs. 30 percent). In the University of Hawai'i system, the gap between males and females of Native Hawaiian ancestry is also much larger than the gap between all males and females (23 percent vs. 15 percent). What is happening to Native Hawaiian males that results in such dismal statistics? How does ethnic and gender identity influence experience and one's decision to pursue a higher education degree? Some scholars point to gender order and masculinity as contributing to some of the social issues that males face including declining educational achievement. This short essay brings these questions to the fore of my work as a student services provider at the University of Hawai'i – West O'ahu. I hope the larger findings of my study will inspire a more nuanced and culturally sustainable perspective of Native Hawaiian males and college aspiration, persistence, and success.

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