



## Capital identity projection: Understanding the psychosocial effects of capitalism on Black male community college students

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined factors impacting the success of Black male students in a Southwestern US community college. Data were collected using multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews ( $n = 29$ ), unstructured concept mapping, non-participant observations, and a focus group. Study findings revealed the harmful effects that glory-seeking, materialism, and excessive consumerism can have on student success, in and out of college. This notion is termed capital identity projection, and is described as a harmful psychosocial disposition that occurs in a capitalistic value system when an image of economic success is extended to the point of one's own detriment. This notion is presented in light of extant research from masculinity studies, economic sociology, and economic psychology.

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### 1. Introduction

Capitalism emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries in Britain following the collapse of the feudal system and as an extension of mercantilism. This economic system quickly spread throughout Western Europe and beyond (Appleby, 2010; Callaghan, 1975; Geiger, 2010; Wallerstein, 1974). Since the system's rapid expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries, capitalism has served as the primary economic system in Western society (and now in the world) (Nee & Swedberg, 2005; Shutt, 1998; Walters & Cooper, 2011). While forms of capitalism have varied (e.g., fragmented, coordinated, industrial, state-organized) (see Jackson & Deeg, 2008), there are four common principles indicative of this system. According to Hunt and Lautzenheiser (2011), these principles are: "market-oriented commodity production; private ownership of the means of production; a large segment of the population that cannot exist unless it sells its labor power in the market; and individualistic, acquisitive, maximizing behavior by most individuals within the economic system" (p. 4). They describe the latter as a social<sup>1</sup> ethic, a consumer-oriented attitude fostered by capitalism where income and possessions are ardously pursued. This pursuit is guided

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<sup>1</sup> The researchers see this as a psychosocial ethic as opposed to a purely social ethic.

by the notion that subjective needs and discontent can be removed by the acquisition of goods. Moreover, given that capital attainment is a marker of personal value, competition is fostered to hold grander assets.

This notion of individualism and procurement is the focus of this manuscript, where we discuss how the values of a capitalist system can foster malfunctioning dispositions and behaviors that negatively affect individuals.<sup>2</sup> We term this notion, capital identity projection, describing this concept as a psychosocial malady which occurs when projection of socio-economic achievement is pursued in lieu of personal well-being. To clarify, the term 'projection' is used to refer to the portrayal or public display of a capital image, not as a psychological projection whereby one's own feelings or actions are attributed to others.

This concept is contextualized around data derived from a study of Black male students attending a community college in the Southwestern United States. The larger study from which this data were drawn focused on factors affecting the academic success of these students. From this research, capital identity projection emerged as a recurrent concept with numerous intricacies. To address this concept and the intricacies associated with it, the researchers: (1) discuss relevant literature which contextualizes the challenges facing Black males in the community college; (2) provide an overview of the qualitative methodology employed in this study; and (3) describe capital identity projection with related premises in light of study findings and extant literature from masculinity studies, economic sociology, and economic psychology.

Capital identity projection is an integral addition to the literature on Black social-psychology and economic psychology, as few psychological studies have examined how economic systems affect the lives of those who live within those systems. Even fewer examine the psychological effect of capitalism on people (Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2007). This is a particularly important notion given the large percentage of the world's population which resides under the influence of capitalism. In particular, this study presents a psychosocial perspective on the effects of capitalism on Black males, a sub-population which has historically fueled the capitalistic economic engine as "slaves, sharecroppers, tenant-farmers, maids, Pullman porters, factory workers and others at the base of bourgeois society" (Ferguson, 2011, p. 69).

A unique component of this research is the investigation of the psychological effects of capitalism on students enrolled in a community college. The community college is a particularly appropriate institutional context for an analysis of the influence of capitalism on Black males, as these institutions have traditionally served as an avenue for postsecondary opportunity for societies most underserved (Nevarez & Wood, 2010) and are a representative microcosm of American society (Cloud, 2010; Dicroce, 1995; Grimes, 1999). Unfortunately, Black male disparate outcomes in wider society are evident within community colleges. After 3 years, more than half (55%) of Black male attendees will have left without obtaining a degree (Wood, 2011a). These data serve as a clarion call to better understand factors that affect the success of this group in college, of which capital identity projection provides added insight. To situate the presentation of this concept, we first discuss extant literature on Black males in the community college.

## 2. Black males in the community college

Overwhelmingly, Black males utilize community colleges (public 2-year institutions) as their primary, and often last, opportunity to achieve a postsecondary degree (Bush, 2004; Bush & Bush, 2005, 2010). In fact, 44.2% of Black males enrolled in tertiary education are enrolled in community colleges, with only 26% in public 4-year institutions (NPSAS, 2008a). While traditional college populations are conceptualized as being between 18 and 24 years of age, the average age of a Black male in the community college is 27.7 years old (NPSAS, 2008b). Further, these males tend to be enrolled part-time (nearly 60%) (NPSAS, 2008c) and work 26 hours per week on average (NPSAS, 2008d). Moreover, nearly one-third of these men (32.4%) have dependents (NPSAS, 2008e). Additionally, large contingents of these men (49.5%) attend community college with the primary interest of gaining job/occupational skills or to pursue a job certification (NPSAS, 2008f).

Given that these men are older, attend part-time and have many external commitments (e.g., work, dependents), they tend to be adversely affected by environmental factors. Environmental factors refer to challenges which are external to the college but which impact their success in college (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Wood, 2011b), this includes variables such as: family responsibilities, employment, and outside encouragement (Mason, 1998). The effects of these external factors on student success are marked. For example, Wood (2012a), in identifying variables most predictive of first-time, first-year, Black male persistence in the community college examined the effect of background, academic, social, and environmental variables on students' continuation in college. Using a hierarchical logistic regression approach, he found that three environmental variables, hours worked per week, supporting others, and stressful life events, were far more predictive than any other variables in his model (e.g., social, academic, background), accounting for 55% of the variable in persistence.

Wood (2011a) also noted the importance of external environments, highlighting the interrelationship between environment and psychological outcomes. He asserted that "the most predominant factors affecting the success of Black males are psychological in nature, resulting directly from barriers, negative messages, and stressors in and out of the college environment" (p. 24). Indeed, Mason's (1998) model of urban African American male community college persistence illustrates a similar relationship, noting a direct effect between environmental variables and psychological outcomes. In essence, what occurs in students' lives outside of college (in wider society) has a direct effect on their performance in college. While scholars have illustrated this connection, little if any research and Black males in the community college has focused on external environmental factors from an economic structural perspective. While some research has investigated the effect of employment

<sup>2</sup> The authors themselves are pro-capitalist, this concept is a critique of the values perpetuated by a capitalistic media as opposed to the system of capitalism itself.

patterns, workplace transition, and the economic downturn on Black male success in this context (Wood, 2012b; Wood, Hilton, & Lewis, 2011), this research does not acknowledge or focus on how economic systems themselves impact Black men.

In a similar vein, numerous scholars have noted the effect of psychological outcomes on community college student success, particularly as it relates to Black males: self-efficacy, students' belief or confidence in their academic abilities (Bates, 2007; Ihekwaba, 2001; Wilkins, 2005); utility, students' perceptions of the worthiness or usefulness of their collegiate endeavors; (Wood, 2010, 2011a); and stereotype threat, the effect of direct and indirect racism and resultant disidentification with education that occurs (Bush, 2004; Bush & Bush, 2010; Foster, 2008; Stevens, 2006). However, here to, there has been no attempt to link (even indirectly), these outcomes to the economic system under which these psychological outcomes are manifested. The next section discusses the methods employed in this study which seeks to fill this void.

### 3. Method

Data from this study are derived from a study of Black American male students attending a community college in the Southwestern United States. Community colleges are traditionally comprised of public 2-year degree granting institutions, which feature open-access enrollment and low-cost educational offerings (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). These institutions serve as primary postsecondary educational pathways for students of color, low-income students, and students who are first-generation college-goers (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). The community college where this study was conducted had approximately 13,000 students of which 1020 self-identified as Black. Of these 1020 Black students, only 148 were Black males, illustrating a significant disparity in male–female representation. During the timeframe in which data were collected, the national and state unemployment rates for Black men were exorbitantly high, hovering between 16% and 17% (Cawthorne, 2009; Corley, 2009).

This study was qualitative in nature, focused on eliciting students' perspectives on factors affecting their success in college. In particular, the research focused on academic success, referring primarily to student's achievement (e.g., grade point averages) and secondarily to their continuation (hereafter referred to as persistence) in college. Participants were asked about factors affecting their personal success as well as their emic (insider) perspectives on what affects the success of other Black males. A qualitative research design was employed which allowed for the researcher's to investigate the lived realities (e.g., psychological, social, cultural) of this student group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). With this in mind, the next section will discuss the data collection strategy employed in this study.

#### 3.1. Data collection

This study employed a comprehensive data collection approach using multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews ( $n = 29$ ), unstructured concept mapping, non-participant observations, and a focus group. Semi-structured interviewing is an interview approach where a pre-determined line of questioning is utilized to guide an interview, while also allowing for emerging lines of questioning to evolve based upon the discourse between the researcher and participant (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In this case, interviews employed pre-planned probes for enhanced comparability of data across interviews (Brenner, 2006; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Each interview lasted an hour in length. Prior to each interview, participants were given blank sheets of paper and asked to depict the factors which affect their success in college. Participants depicted success factors using a variety of approaches, such as: diagrams, narratives, poems, drawings, and listings. This approach is referred to as unstructured concept mapping (Zanting, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2003), and the data derived from each map guided the interview process and was employed for triangulation purposes.

The researchers spent 5 months engaged in non-participant observation at the campus setting, in common areas, study lounges, the library, tutoring centers, counseling offices, eateries, and during organizational meetings, among other locations. Non-participant observation permits researchers to be forthright about their role as outsiders who are engaged in documenting common practices, dispositions, habits, and unconscious practices within a given setting (Fitzpatrick & Boulton, 1994). Finally, the researchers also hosted a focus group (a guided group interview) (see Krueger & Casey, 2010). The focus group was conducted using initial study findings as a framework for discussion. Initial findings were portrayed via a conceptual framework which illustrated psychological, ecological, academic, and social factors affecting student success. All of these forms of data informed the findings presented in this article; however, data derived from the interviews will serve as the primary method of articulating the concept of capital identity projection. These data collection methods were used as they provided the researchers with an advanced understanding of the socio-cultural and economic realities of participants, both from their perspectives and our observations. The next section discusses how these data were analyzed and the validity and reliability procedures employed.

#### 3.2. Analytic approach and trustworthiness

In this study, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All forms of data collected were coded using an ideas grouping approach, a grounded theory approach proffered by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). Grounded theory is an inductive research technique where recurrent narratives are developed into advanced conceptual categories through the restriction of preconceived notions. A primary goal of this approach is the generation of theory (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1992, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1965, 1967). Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) suggest that data are coded by identifying recurrent

statements or 'ideas'. A list of recurrent ideas is then created and through a constant-comparison method, this data is interrogated. Information supporting the remaining recurrent themes are then grouped together and conceptually linked to better understand *process*. This results in the expansion, reduction, and revision of recurrent ideas and the generation of theory.

As noted by Corbin and Strauss (1990), grounded theory is typified by several core elements. Grounded theory relies upon the integration of data collection and analysis by situating the unit of analysis within the conceptualizations of phenomena. Emergent themes are constructed for an analysis of recurrent ideas which are driven by theoretical sampling. This theory requires that researchers employ a constant comparative method that entails identifying patterns and deriving theory from those patterns, then, subjecting recurrent ideas to verification through an iterative analytic process. It is common for grounded theorists to employ a team-based approach to data collection and analysis in order to reduce bias. To enhance the trustworthiness of this approach, the researchers employed intercoder reliability, members checks, and engaged in bracketing. In terms of intercoder reliability, the researchers engaged in an iterative process whereby coding was performed individually and then compared until a high degree of congruency was reached among the codes. Member checks were employed by providing participants opportunities to verify, modify, or question interpretations and results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); this was done through a focus group. Finally, the researchers engaged in bracketing by identifying preconceived assumptions, and then bracketing those notions to reduce their influence on the research process (Ahern, 1999). Guided by the aforementioned analytic process and trustworthiness measures, this study identified recurrent notions which led to a new theory, capital identity projection. The next section details the aspects of this theory.

#### 4. Findings

In this study which explored factors impacting the academic success of Black males in the community college, recurrent themes centered on the impact of environmental (e.g., students finances, work-college balance) and psychological factors (e.g., degree utility, self-efficacy, motivation) on student outcomes. One recurrent notion was situated at the nexus of these factors. As informed by this analysis of study findings and literature in masculinity studies, economic sociology, and economic psychology, capital identity projection is extended as a framework to guide discourse around the negative effects of capitalistic values on students. This framework has applicability for understanding psychosocial dispositions in college and in wider society. To substantiate this new theory, this malady is defined and then participant comments are presented to illustrate the intricacies of capital identity projection.<sup>3</sup> Individuals engaged in behavior indicative of this concept are referred to as 'projectors', because they are concerned with projecting an image of capital success. To be clear, in advance, capital identity projection does not impact all Black males. But for the ones that it does the effect is detrimental. Further, this notion is not restricted to Black males, but rather to all individuals in general who live under the deleterious effects of a capitalistic value system. Thus, the onus of this disposition are not the fault of projectors themselves, but on the economic value system under which they live.

##### 4.1. Defining capital identity projection

Capital identity projection is a harmful psychosocial disposition that occurs when an image of economic success is projected to the point of one's own detriment.<sup>4</sup> This disposition is demonstrated when individuals purchase or acquire goods (e.g., clothing, jewelry, cars), and secure services (e.g., cosmetic, entertainment), to present a false or embellished narrative of success. To reify this narrative, evidence of goods and services are publically displayed as a means of illustrating status. Capital identity projection is endemic to all socio-economic ranks. This projection is a byproduct of a capitalistic value system where mores of individualism, glory-seeking, and economic success are fostered and idealized as a proxy for happiness, self-worth, and life achievement. The conflation of these divergent notions are framed and extended by the media which venerates capital attainment. Given the influence of the media on purchasing patterns, the nuances of these projections are differentiated among subgroups.

Further, women are often 'objectified' in capitalistic, hetero-patriarchal societies. In extreme, women are popularly portrayed in a dehumanized fashion; being perceived as goods and commodities. As such, they are sordidly viewed as 'objects' to be acquired and displayed as a means of illustrating capital attainment. For example, in music videos, women are often depicted in sexually subordinate roles with artists having numerous women surrounding them (Kalof, 1999). While capital identity projection is concerned with how portrayals of a capital image serve to detriment the portrayer, like other maladies (e.g., physical abuse, substance abuse, depression), those within the projector's sphere of influence can also be negatively affected. In the case of heterosexual projectors, women are deleteriously impacted.

As articulated within this description, there are four primary premises of capital identity projection. These interrelated premises infer that: (1) an inflated capital image is pursued irrationally; (2) capital attainment, self-worth, and happiness are conflated; (3) glory-seeking, materialism, and consumerism are interiorized; and (4) projection manifestations are a byproduct of a capitalistic value system and marketing enterprise. Each of these premises is addressed individually.

<sup>3</sup> Often, participants discussing this concept attributed this psychosocial disposition to other Black males. In some cases, this was accurate, while in others, the nature of additional comments illustrated that they were indeed referring to themselves in tandem with other Black men. Either way, whether they were providing personal experiences or emic perspectives on other Black male challenges, discussions about capital identity projection were ubiquitous.

<sup>4</sup> This detriment can also be to others having mutually dependent (e.g., partners) or dependent relationships (e.g., children) with the projector.

#### 4.2. Irrational pursuit of capital image

Capital identity projection is employed as a framework for contextualizing why many study participants noted that an image of capital attainment was often pursued by themselves, or other Black males. The purchasing of goods (e.g., clothing, jewelry, shoes, cars) was pursued for the primary purpose of displaying these objects to others as a means of illustrating status. Key here, is the notion that the pursuit of a capital image is seemingly irrational. Goods and services are acquired and pursued in a manner which does harm to the individual. The ramifications of this nonsensical fixation on capital attainment can be numerous, including (but not limited to): placing 'image' before basic needs (i.e., paying rent or light bills); jeopardizing long-term personal, career, and academic goals; making unsound monetary investments; and engaging in illicit activities.

Further, capitalistic marketing systems often objectify women, encouraging the collection and display of women as synonymous with goods. Thus, capital identity projection *can* also result in sexually promiscuous behavior, which has its own negative psychological, physical, and social ramifications. Respondents noted that pursuit of a 'capital image' *can* lead to negative outcomes. Overwhelmingly, when respondents were asked what affected Black male success in college, they noted concerns around the confluence of image, status, and finances. For instance, one participant noted that excessive focus on a 'capital image' can complicate financial problems:

The status image, um, I think a lot of times when African American males, and I'm not going to make it sound too negative, but, sometimes if status means a lot to me when I come over to the campus, again, college can be costly. Especially, if you come over here. . . and you find yourself having to finance, um, um, your education, if I get into a situation that status means so much to me, I have to find out that status means more to me than education. Because if status means more to me than education and I need to buy the latest clothing, I need to get the latest rims on my car, I need to paint my car a certain way, you know, I need people to accept me because of my exterior things, I can find myself dumping so much money into the status thing, versus where I need to be lining my dollars up into education in order to get myself through. So, in that way status, can, if I focus on the status, I may find out later in life, that maybe my priorities were turned around.

Another student made a similar remark regarding his friend:

you know, he didn't have much for bucks, and he was not trying to fill out any financial aid, you know, he could have got it, but he was still like buying shoes, and buying hats and stuff. I think it's kind of like some of it's really ignorance and, or maybe he just, he just, I don't know maybe that's how his parents are, maybe they didn't really, put priorities for him, they didn't really have their priorities right, and that's how he kind of grew up, like he didn't really, think about, you know, you might have more if I stay in school and probably get a degree and make more money.

Capital identity projection is not solely representative of excessive consumerism, but consumerism with the goal of publicly displaying objects as an indicator of status. As evidenced by this quote, a focus on pursuing a capital image can negatively impact students' educational pursuits. This occurs through spending patterns which direct monies towards temporal markers of success as opposed to financing one's education or other more rational expenditures. Simply put, status is pursued in lieu of rational spending patterns. Given that 25.2% of Black males who depart from community colleges (without attaining their educational goals) assert that finances were a primary factor for leaving (BPS, 2004/2009), this detrimental outcome of capital identity projection is salient.

Another student commented that this perspective led to distractions in college, where time in study labs or in class was spent searching the internet for goods (e.g., clothing, cars, games) as opposed to concentrating on academic matters. Indeed, during observations in the computer lab, the researchers also took attention to this pattern whereby online perusing of websites centered on goods and commodities, at least for some students, as opposed to school-related activities. In this regard, one participant stated in reference to himself and other Black males, that they spent their time:

On MySpace, and then on Facebook, now on Twitter. Just checkin' out girls, talkin' about why they would holla at them. I would say, looking at shoes and clothings for seven hours and like an hour of studying, at most, at the last minute. Products that they wanted to buy, but couldn't afford. The new Jordan pair, the Nikes. Looking at Ferrari's, cars and stuff, stuff that we can get in the future. [Talking about] quitting school to get that fast money to get the Ferrari. You know, video games, what kinda computer games, PlayStation games they would buy. Thinking about what video game you would buy next. What products they were gonna buy. No real intention to stay in school, thinking about the quickest way to get the money. Fast cash, being an entrepreneur. Selling clothes and merchandise.

While pursuit of a 'capital image' led to distractions from studying, there is another important element to the above quote. Capital identity projection may also be correlated with students' perceptions of degree utility. Degree utility refers to students' perceptions of the worthwhileness of their collegiate endeavors in comparison to other opportunities to achieve their desired goals (Mason, 1998; Wood, 2011a). This quote illustrates that pursuit of a 'capital image' may lead to attrition as students are more interested in expedited paths towards capital attainment. This notion is also evident in a quote from another student who stated the following:

A lot of African-American males are just focusing on the present moment. You know, all of this is just a waste of time, you know, whatever. No desire. They just drop out. I feel as well too, going around what they see everyday, you know. Oh man,

you know what, my homeys are making money. My homeys are the people that I see. They ain't going to school, but they climb up the ladder real fast, they getting theirs. I ain't gonna waste my time, you know, with taking these classes, and they may not even help me. Their mindset is just distorted with so much outside influences. You know, the family or friends or what they see around them, what they hear. You know what I'm saying, so I feel financially and no desire to make an effort, you know.

It should be noted that the student who provided this quote dropped out of college. He noted that he withdrew maximum limits on loans, rotating between three colleges in the same district, until he was no longer allowed to withdraw financial aid monies. Subsequently, he departed from college. During his interview, he stated that when he entered college, he wasn't attending with long-term degree aspirations but for loan money, "if I'm going to get this loan money, of course I'm gonna go. You know, to fill my pockets up. It's an easy way of getting money, getting what you want to get. . . just going for money". However, by the time he participated in the interview, he was back in school, and much more conscious about how his previous disposition and resultant actions were detrimental.

Some respondents noted that capital identity projection resulted in inaccurate portrayals of their authentic selves. In particular, we refer to this as identity ambiguity, whereby projectors are so fixated on images of attainment that their own identity is ambiguous. One respondent characterized the effect as follows:

Like there, see, they see Jeezy, or T.I. or Gucci Mane, they rap about, you know, how they souljas, how they got cars sittin' on 20s, and Lamborghini doors, and like, Wayne got a song like he want to do every damn girl in the world, or something like that, so that – I want to do it too. So now they trying to look at that image, they try to be Lil Wayne, they try to be – they don't try to be they selves. You know? I mean that's how I look at it, because this is the truth. I see it every day. When a new song come out, and they rappin' they words, tours, livin' the life, I'm like nah. If everybody would be they self, they'd be better off. 'Cause at the end of the day, if you lookin' at me you don't see T.I., you don't see Jeezy. You see yourself!

The above comment illustrates the interconnectedness between media images of success and capital attainment. As made clear, there is a confluent depiction of the desire to obtain goods (e.g., cars, rims) and women (as objectified goods). However, as noted, individuals pursuing this image may not be portraying their authentic selves, instead focused on hyper-materialized and hyper-sexualized images. Interestingly, this participant used the phrase 'livin' the life', this was a recurrent metaphor employed by other participants to describe similar notions of pursuing capital attainment as depicted by popular media.

As illustrated by the above quotes, indicative of capital identity projection is the pursuit of a capital image to the point of one's own detriment. Four examples of this were shown, poor financial management, distractions from academic matters, identity ambiguity, and lowered degree utility. The American Dream imbues the notion that happiness is achieved through monetary success (Derber, 1979). However, an excessive focus on monetary success that dominates life goals has been found to lead to lower social productivity and enhanced behavioral maladies (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Similarly, Gathergood (2012) found that impaired self-control and minimal financial literacy were associated with greater levels of indebtedness, thereby establishing a connection between consumer traits and spending patterns. The next section discusses how this consumer mentality is perceived as a proxy for contentment.

#### 4.3. Conflation of capital attainment, happiness, and self-worth

Capital identity projection results in the conflation of capital attainment (e.g., goods, commodities), happiness, and one's self-worth. In essence, individuals believe that their worth and happiness are tied to what they own and display ownership of; and, their projections are indicators of life achievement. Integrated within the nexus of these concepts is the notion that gratification should be sought without delay. The eldest participant in this study who was 58 years old when interviewed spoke eloquently about the conflation of these ideals and their relationship to instant gratification. He stated:

Black males today, a lot of the younger ones, they're not seeing the reality of things, and then they don't make the connection between, a process and achieving a goal, but that's only because they never been taught that. They don't understand what a process is because their whole life they been introduced to what's called instant gratification. . . buy \$50 Nikes, but it's all about keeping up with the Joneses. . . I think that they find that that's the only thing that makes them feel like a true person or a better person or a bigger person. You know, it's just like the ones I was telling you that buy these big caddies and park 'em in front of the tenement building. Now the Blacks live, young Blacks live for instant gratification because that's all they know. Maybe their parents weren't there enough. Maybe they didn't have anything. When they do something they try to live large, you know. Because they're seeking instant gratification because they never had anything to make them happy. You understand what I'm saying? And they don't understand the benefit and advantages of having a home. Yeah, they dream of having a home, you know, and stuff like that, but it doesn't make a positive connection with them. You know, all of this they gotta learn.

This respondent noted that this psycho-social malady was pervasive among young males, including Black males. He stated that when he was a young man his actions were similar, whereby projections of attainment were informed by depictions of pimps, players, hustlers and 'Godfather' like gangsters. He also noted that this mentality exists in wider society and

permeates collegiate settings, resulting in a lack of focus on educational pursuits with greater focus on achieving and maintaining an image of economic success.

Another student provided a compelling statement, noting how he engaged in living out a capital image. However, he provided a compelling description of how his father challenged him to think differently about his capital identity projection. In reference to his initial experiences as a community college undergraduate, he stated:

I splurged in how I looked, what I drove, you know, how I presented myself. I was really confused on what was important. I was really worried about money, you know, the cars, the girls, you know, things you shouldn't worry about, a 92 Camaro. But I was worried about cosmetic stuff, and he [his father] told me that you're always worried about what's on the outside and not what's on the inside, and when he said that he was talking about not only cars but about life, like when I'd pick something out, it's about what's on the outside not what's on the inside. I never looked at what's on the inside, and when I started to look at what's on the inside my basis on people changed so much. . . But I find that if you look at people for what's inside, you'll get a better understanding about life because the people that look on the outside usually never the ones that always look on the inside some fake people, and I mean, you just gotta understand that you don't need to be around fake people cause fake people create a fake life, and a fake life is not a happy life. And I'll tell you right now, I am so much happier as a person because I talk to people that are real. You know, people that know where they're going.

As illustrated by this comment, when the respondent's actions were confronted by his father, he came to the realization of the emptiness and inauthenticity associated with capital identity projection. This occurred as a result of him being challenged to a greater level of consciousness about his own actions. Also indicative here, is that individuals most engaged in capital identity projection may establish a social network typified by consumerism, materialism, and image projection.

Prior research has identified the erroneous melding of social and economic success as equivalent to happiness and satisfaction (Boudreau et al., 2001; Malka & Chatman, 2003; O'Reilly and Caldwell, 1980). For example, Harris, Palmer, and Struve (2011) interviewed Black male collegians about their perceptions of masculinity, finding that many associated 'accumulation of wealth and material possessions' as markers of success as providers and professionals. They referred to this as 'balling' (p. 53). According to Albee (1977), success in a capitalistic society requires rational decision-making which delays gratification and pleasure-seeking in exchange for long-term goals of socio-economic improvement. However, an inconsistency in a capitalistic value system is that goods must be consumed, even when they are not necessities, a stark contradiction from rationality and delayed gratification. Thus, to foster a market in which goods are sold, capitalism relies upon extensive customer research and marketing in order to "associate status and self-esteem with wasteful consumption" and hedonism (p. 150). The result of these temperaments requires intervention (as illustrated in the previous example) to disrupt the inner-focused behavior. This inner-focused nature of consumerism is further explored in the subsequent section.

#### 4.4. *Glory-seeking, materialism, and consumerism are interiorized*

In capital identity projection, glory-seeking, materialism, and excessive consumerism become interiorized. By interiorized, these values (or vices) become integrated into one's inner being. In essence, these values become part of the intrapsychological reality and subconscious of the projector (Aidman & Leontiev, 1991; Lantolf, 2003). As previously noted, a negative effect of this malady can be a distraction from a focus on academic matters. This is due to the focus on attainment of an image of status as opposed to academic pursuits. The following quote reifies how this concept serves as a distractor from college while also showing how glory-seeking is manifested:

I think a lot of the Black males at this college, they get distracted easily. They don't seem too focused on, you know, highering their education. But there are a couple, you know, who don't get caught up in all the distractions you know, trying to be you know, the best looking one on campus, with you know, the most females and stuff like that you know, trying to be Mr. Trendy or whatever. There's a couple that I see that's not like that, but the majority of the time it's I don't know, I think one of the biggest problems is like you try to change it into like a fashion show. Instead of like being focused on you know, what's really important, which is like getting an education. And you know, choosing a direction to go in your life. I mean, to – me personally, I think it's either to prove something to themselves, or to prove something to you know, somebody else, or to get somebody's attention. But it just seems like they want attention.

This student went on to clarify, that his reference to being Mr. Trendy was an allusion to dressing 'flashy', as others do on television and in music videos. Key to his comments is his assertion that these males are outward focused, intent on gaining the attention of others due to their display of current clothing trends. For instance, he noted that, in order to bring added attention to their capital projections, these males would "listen to music loudly" in quiet study places, in order to gain attention for their capital projections. Other students also spoke about the glory-seeking behavior of many students in relation to a capital image, for example:

'Cause like one minute, outside school, they put on an image. Of like yeah, I'm the man, or this how I get down. . . I mean, not – I really don't care what nobody think of me, right, because at the end of the day, you ain't gonna put money in my pocket. So. I don't care what you think. And that's just, happen between black people, probably always worrying about what somebody think of them, like. If they ain't got the new Jordans, or if they ain't fresh, they gonna be considered a

bum. They don't want people to think they a bum, or if – it's just crazy. It is. That's why we don't hang with too many dudes, I keep to myself.

Similarly, another respondent stated:

They go to the store, go to the movies, go buy some hundred dollar sneakers, you understand. I don't do that. These cheap sneakers [pointing to his shoes], I bought Steven Barry's because they were \$8 a pair. I bought like 8 pair. I'm talking about the ones with all the different colors and stuff like that. Because people are busy trying to keep up. . . That's why you got people out here living above their means, but, um, my point is that people today, they tend to just want, want, want instant gratification as opposed to learning how to manage their stuff, learning how to live inside their means, you understand. They don't try to pay themselves back. Before they pay \*\*themselves, they pay the guy in the store, the guy in the restaurant, you understand what I'm saying, the rent, the lights.

As evidenced by the above quotes, students exhibiting capital identity projection are engaged in glory-seeking behaviors typified by a centralized focus on their individual success in projecting a capital image. This glory-seeking is fueled by materialism and excessive consumerism which all predominate individuals' inner being, allowing them to make illogical decisions (i.e., buying items as opposed to paying rent or light bill). Extant literature in economic psychology is replete with discussions of how individualistic behaviors designed to advance personal mobility, achievement, and prestige are evident in affluent, western societies (Guerin, 2001, 2003; Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000; Tatzel, 2002). These notions are also evident in other literature bases.

For example, from a (pop)cultural perspective, Wasik (2009a,b) extends the notion of cul-de-sac syndrome. He noted that a core component of the American dream is the opportunity for every individual to own their own 'castle'. As part of a cultural sensation of entitlement, individual home ownership increased exponentially. The continued rise in home costs, coupled with aggressive speculation, and minimal loan restraints led to a perception that a home was a solid financial investment (e.g., college fund, retirement). In pursuit of the dream of ownership, some families built and purchased homes in suburbia which leveraged their assets well beyond their means. This irrationality is referred to as cul-de-sac syndrome. Similarly, capital identity projection acknowledges the ubiquitous values of materialism and consumerism which cause *some* individuals to make decisions which have negative ramifications.

Wasik suggests that this illogical pursuit is a 'cultural obsession', fueled by a lack of fiscal accountability. The strength of Wasik's portrayal is the notion that cul-de-sac syndrome is not limited to one racial/ethnic group, but a wider social phenomenon of materialism and excessive consumption. However, Wasik ties this concept to culture, without acknowledging that the 'culture' that propagated the economic downturn was driven by the interiorizing of values from a capitalist value system. Further, the vices extended by this illogical pursuit may not have been deemed illogical at the time. In fact, home acquisition was viewed as a logical investment; whereby the manifestations of capital identity projection are more widely acknowledged as irrational. Further, the ubiquitous consumerism and pursuit of excess that fostered the economic downturn is only one aspect of how capitalist values systems serve to foster consumption. For example, as shown by respondents' comments in this study, a desire for capital attainment and projection was associated with purchasing of a more expansive range of items, cars, jewelry, and clothing. Such purchases are byproducts of a capitalist value system.

#### 4.5. Capitalistic value system and marketing enterprise

The arduous pursuit of capital attainment and projections are a byproduct of a capitalistic value system perpetuated by a marketing enterprise. In order for goods and services to be consumed, capitalistic marketing enterprises (e.g., television, radio, magazine, videos, print) venerate images of capital attainment and projection as illustrations of status, prestige, self-worth, and life achievement. Therefore, these outcomes of capital attainment are sought out, a process which requires excessive consumption and materialism, encouraging attainment pursuit well beyond the means or needs of consumers. As noted by Harris (2010), social constructionists "view gender as a performed social identity. . . according to prevailing societal norms" (p. 299). If true, the capitalistic marketing enterprise then shapes the psychological functioning of men around gender identity. However, the focus of the enterprise itself is on 'moving goods' as opposed to positive gender identity; thus, the programmed and/or indoctrinated dispositions of these men are based upon the interests of a consumption-driven economic system.

While not specifically identifying capitalism itself, respondents identified the resultant marketing enterprises which imbue the psychosocial disposition of capital identity projection. Already, comments have shown that music videos (featuring rappers such as Young Jeezy, T.I., Gucci Mane, Little Wayne) and social networks (e.g., MySpace, Facebook, Twitter) drive capitalistic consumer values. However, another primary enterprise by which capitalistic values of consumerism and materialism are fostered is television. For example, one participant discussed purchasing patterns around clothing and actions designed to gain attraction from others, when asked why this occurred, he commented:

I think honestly, I think it's just you know, there's many different reasons. Like the main one I think though is probably they, they do what they see on TV, you know what I'm saying, like music videos, or you know, whatever. I mean maybe it's like a stereotype of thing you know, like you know, black males are supposed to act in a certain way, or they're supposed to do this, or do that, and then if they don't, if they don't do that, then maybe you know, they're – I don't know, the term, it's square, basically. You know, maybe they're cornballs, maybe they're not really black, you know? You know, if you, if



you focus on your education, if you're quiet, you know what I'm saying? If you're not you know, doing too much to get everybody's attention, then you're not really Black.

As identified in this quote, capitalistic marketing enterprises shape identities around gender and race. They access and shape archetypes and stereotype around identity in order to foster materialism and facilitate consumerism. Often, this occurs around media images of 'gangsters' and 'hustlers' who have cars, jewelry, clothing, and women indicative of their power and prestige. This notion was recurrent among respondents. For example, one participant noted that while there are many positive hip hop artists, others can encourage criminal patterns as a method of achieving and projecting a capital image. In this vein, this participant stated:

there are other ones [rappers] out there saying, you can, have success, or money, or whatever, and you don't have to go to school, and some people listen, some people are highly influenced. Media is a huge barrier; I think that whatever they see on TV, that's what they become. I see a lot of people out there, like even for Black people, sometimes its fun, and sometimes it's not...So, I think media is huge, so if you're listening to something, or influenced by something that is not positive, you know what I'm saying, on the block is hot, and getting all of the girls, and just money is the only important thing, you're going to be influenced by that, I didn't here them say go to school. So, if you are highly influenced, and you're listening to that, and you're watching TV...after a while you believe it, I think and some people follow that.

For Black males, the targeted marketing around counter-culture taps into existing racial structures which foster inequitable social outcomes for Black males. Thereby, capitalistic marketing enterprises, access existing, and propagate further, Black masculine ideals which decry inimical institutional environments. As such, media images suggest that austere or withdrawn methods for approaching education are 'cool'.

Majors and Billson (1992) extended the notion of 'cool pose' as a framework for explaining Black masculine portrayals of calmness, austerity, pride, and control. While proffered as 'exploratory', 'cool pose' has become canon among Black social psychologists as a method for explaining behavioral patterns among Black men. Majors and Billson suggest that cool pose originates from West African culture and has continued in response to a history of racial oppression and social marginalization. Cool pose can be manifested in positive (pride, self-respect) and negative (dropping out, drugs, street gangs) ways. However, it counters stressors and serves as a coping mechanism against anxiety, depression, and psychological disorder. Cool pose suggests that the exhibitionist behavior of Black men through language, dress, and behavior is employed strategically as a source of pride, illustration of power, and status.

In contrast to Majors and Billson, we believe the origin (or co-opting) of these images is designed to foster ideals which further a capitalist system of consumption. One example of this is product placement in videos which idolize counter-culture as a method for encouraging irrational consumption of goods and services. This is not to say that all images of Black masculine identity in the media are negative; however, negative images tend to have greater salience for marketing to Black and White constituencies which respond to racialized portrayals through purchasing. Such images allow capitalistic enterprises to maximize benefits derived from two key emotions, fear and glory. For Whites, portrayals of Black males as thugs, gangsters, pimps, and hustlers ignites fear, which results in added consumption of network news, newspapers, security systems etc. For Blacks, these same images are glorified by the capitalistic enterprises which use them to fuel consumption of clothing, cars, jewelry, music, videos and other items.

Though Majors and Billson provide great examples of the capital projections discussed in this article, 'cool pose', by itself, it is an insufficient framework for explaining the psychosocial dispositions examined in this research. Firstly, Majors and Billson emphasize that 'cool pose' is a response to racism and other systems of oppression. While we have noted that race and gender certainly intersect with status projections examined herein, a primary precipitator of exhibitionism and excessive materialism is a capitalist value system, not a response to racial indignities. Secondly, 'cool pose' is presented as a coping strategy which can be manifested positively and negatively, capital identity projection is a psychosocial malady, focused primarily on the negative effects of individuals overly focused on capital attainment projections. Thirdly, 'cool pose' is presented as an extension of a west African cultural perception of manhood, while capital identity projection is based upon the medias distillation of racial and gender identity for the purpose of encouraging irrational purchasing of goods and commodities. Perhaps, in *some* cases the media may portray images rooted in a seemingly positive African expression of manhood; however, these depictions filtered through a Eurocentric, individualistic, capitalistic mechanism (as opposed to West African collectivism) are co-opted and inauthentic, at best.

## 5. Conclusion

Capital identity projection is a malfunctioning psychosocial disposition which we believe is a response a capitalistic value system. However, this psychosocial disposition and resultant negative effects are not new. Rather, numerous studies have illustrated the glory-seeking, materialistic, excessive consumerism mentality fostered in a capitalistic system (Boudreau et al., 2001; Malka & Chatman, 2003; O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1980). Further, a large body of literature also discusses the fixation on acquiring goods and projecting an image of success and status among many populations (Harper, 2004; Harris et al., 2011; Majors & Billson, 1992). However, this study benefits these literature bases by explicitly identifying, describing, and discussing the premises of capital identity projection. While not necessarily a syndrome in the clinical sense, articulating terminology and premises regarding this disposition has the same effect. This articulation is beneficial as it provides a

framework for the establishment of an advanced nomenclature for investigating the nuances of its causation, negative effects, and possible interventions (Leiblum & Nathan, 2001).

Further, making an explicit connection between projection and capitalism is essential as it provides space to debunk deficit notions which would lay the blame for this disposition and its effects on individuals, their families, or their communities. In contrast, this research places culpability for this disposition as a byproduct of a capitalistic value system which fosters desires for excess, individualism, and glory-seeking. These vices are necessary to ensure that goods and commodities are consumed, thereby fueling 'the economic engine'. Furthermore, as a byproduct of a capitalistic value system, capital identity projection and its effects are not relegated to Black males in community colleges. This psychosocial disposition affects some individuals from all groups, with differing nuances dependent upon the capitalistic marketing enterprises use of one's identity (e.g., gender, racial, cultural) to encourage consumption. This assumption is a limitation of this study, given that data employed in this study are specific only to Black males in the community college context, thus, future studies are needed to examine evidence of capital identity projection (and its effects) on other sub-populations.

Some student comments seemed to illustrate a divergence from Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, where esteem-needs such as respect, reputation, attention, and prestige are, at times, prioritized above physiological-needs and safety-needs. Some examples of this were acquiring goods in lieu of having money for rent or to pay the lights. Certainly, this study has shown that esteem-needs are sought out to the detriment of the individual. Thus, further work is needed to understand the factors that propel projectors toward seemingly irrational behavior. In addition, future studies should examine whether the proportion of individuals exhibiting this malady is cyclical and if projection behavior is tied to economic conditions. We have suggested that capital identity projection occurs when this disposition negatively affects the projector. Like other maladies (e.g., depression, anxiety) this disposition likely ranges on a continuum with some individuals actualizing more negative outcomes than others. Future studies should examine this continuum, providing a nomenclature for which to understand varying levels of projection.

As previously noted, this study was conducted on a population of Black male students as part of a larger study on academic success. The premises and examples of capital identity projection presented in this manuscript illustrate that this disposition can have negative effects on individuals inside of college and in wider society. With regard to the former, we have shown that projectors engage in poor financial management, have distractions from academic matters, experience identity ambiguity, and exhibit low degree utility. All of these effects can have a detrimental impact to students' success in college.

Using the framework of capital identity projection, more research is needed to understand how this concept negatively affects Black males (and other students) in college and in society at large. Research in this regard will serve to create an enhanced understanding of this disposition which is needed to employ interventions which curb its negative effects. We hypothesize that a primary component of any effort to address this psychosocial malady will be enhanced consciousness and education regarding the structures, processes, marketing, and value inculcation of a capitalistic system. Moreover, projectors need exposure to the intricate ways in which social and cultural notions of success effect individuals psychologically, and how these psychological outcomes serve to negatively impact the lives individuals who are projectors of values derived from this economic system.

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