



Meeting Report

Young, Gifted & @ Risk Symposium
The Steve Fund at Stanford University
November 2015

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INTRODUCTION

[On November 20, 2015, the Steve Fund, a non-profit organization founded to raise awareness and efforts to address the mental health and well-being of young people of color, organized a full day symposium at Stanford University, "Young Gifted & @ Risk".]

The Stanford symposium is the second in a series created to honor the legacy of Stephen C. Rose, a beloved son of the Bell Rose family, whose life ended prematurely due to mental illness in January of 2014. The symposium was the second in a series focused on illuminating the challenges of young people of color on college campuses and on increasing awareness of mental and emotional well-being in African-American and diverse young people. A unique aspect of the Steve Fund's work reflects a particular interest in diverse students at competitive academic institutions in the U.S. The meeting focus was aligned with two of the Fund's core pillars namely, "Building Knowledge and Thought Leadership" and "Promoting Awareness and Dialogue" in mental health. Stanford University's School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, Center for the Comparative Studies of Race and Ethnicity, and Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) co-sponsored the meeting. Collectively, they are noted for substantial contributions to racial diversity in education, health and well-being and student achievement. Attendees at the full day meeting heard the latest research regarding mental health needs, mental health treatments and innovative interventions supporting student success designed within rigorous, culturally relevant frameworks. Overall, the intent was to promote dialogue and disseminate best practices to address clinical care, research, and administrative and policy enhancements needed to identify and reduce unmet mental health needs among students of color.

The day began with remarks by Mr. Evan Rose, Co-Founder and President of The Steve Fund. He stressed the importance and timeliness of the mission of the Fund - promoting the mental health and well-being of young people of color. Dr. Linda-Darling-Hammond, Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education, Emerita and Faculty Director of SCOPE provided opening reflections. Their comments were followed by a rousing call to action by the McCormick Memorial Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the Stanford School of Medicine, Dr. Laura Roberts. Dr. Roberts encouraged attendees to recognize our shared humanity and understand the import of the work before us, that of supporting diverse students by listening to their needs, seeking to understand their perspective and working collaboratively to develop programs and interventions to support them during a critical time in their development. Her words echoed the sentiment of recent newsworthy events, like those at the University of Missouri and Yale, where African American and other students of color have initiated high profile protests to call attention to their struggles with being marginalized in the very academic environments they call home. Recurrent themes of the many student protests across the country were reflected in the plenary panels and concurrent discussions focused on the necessity of improvements in campus climate, and the imperative for enhanced access to mental health care and racially diverse, culturally competent clinical staff to meet the unique needs of racially diverse college students. Research tells us that the vast majority of students of color at competitive, predominantly white U.S. academic institutions fail to receive the emotional support and mental health care they need. In fact, recent research conducted by Nielsen (and supported by The Steve Fund in collaboration with the Jed Foundation) indicates that first year white college students report greater feelings of academic and emotional preparedness for college than their African American and Latino peers.

Following, we summarize the highlights from the Young, Gifted & @ Risk symposium at Stanford and emphasize meeting themes that have relevance to a wide range of stakeholders including students, parents, mental health providers, other health professionals and university administrators. The insights from this conference will be invaluable to leaders in institutions of higher learning in making decisions regarding the implementation of best practices to identify and treat the mental health concerns of racially diverse students. Our report focuses on the plenary panels and concurrent sessions with each section ending with a set of "takeaway themes" for consideration.

PLENARY PANELS AND CONCURRENT SESSIONS

The Impact of the Academic Environment on the Mental Health of College Students of Color

The first plenary panel was entitled, ***Marginality, Belonging and Success: The University Experience and the Mental Health of Students and Emerging Adults of Color***, and focused on the academic environment at competitive colleges and universities in the U.S. and how the “feel” of these environments impacts the mental health and well-being of racially diverse college students and emerging adults. Dr. Daphne Watkins of the University of Michigan presented some of her research on the university experience of African American male college students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) or Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). She indicated that while all young African American men face stressors in college, their pressures differ significantly depending upon institution type. For example, men at HBCUs point to financial and familial pressures to succeed as primary stressors while men at PWIs identify micro-aggressions and experiences with racism as key challenges. She closed with a discussion of her innovative social media intervention to identify links between conceptualizations of masculinity and mental health in this population. This program called YBMen, is a Facebook-based study within which African American male college students virtually discuss their experiences managing Black masculinity and their emotional well-being. Early results of the pilot study indicated that the subjects held positive views of their participation in this program. Further testing of the program is slated to begin in 2016.

Dr. Teresa LaFromboise of Stanford presented next on the university experience of Native American students. She began with a moving acknowledgement that the land upon which Stanford was built is of the Native American Muwekma-Ohlone people. She continued with a discussion and illustrations on the idea that Native American students are the most under-represented in U.S. colleges and universities and stressed how that lack of representation contributes to invisibility on campus. To address this crisis, Dr. LaFromboise stressed the importance of identifying cultural ways of being and described how they impact the lived experiences of Native American students. She highlighted the manner in which Stanford utilizes this perspective to address student well-being by illuminating the work of the Stanford Native American Cultural Center (NACC). As an example, she noted the NACC initiative in which Native American faculty and staff welcome new students and their families to campus and introduce them to the NACC via direct personal contact. Dr. LaFromboise indicated that the personal welcome from people who share the culture is critical to the initial impressions that students and families form of Stanford and contributes greatly to reducing feelings of marginalization and increasing a sense of safety and belonging at the University.

Dr. Byron Cliff Breland, President of San Jose City College, followed Dr. LaFromboise as the final speaker of this panel. He addressed the substantial role of community colleges in meeting the educational needs of racially diverse college students. His presentation was data rich and reflected his view of the critical role that community colleges play in helping to build resilience, identify strengths and teach diverse students “how” to engage in the academic endeavor of higher education. Some of Dr. Breland’s key points included the significance of recognizing that diverse students do not seek marginalization and are often “pushed to the margins” by academic settings ill-equipped to receive them. He also stressed the common mental health problems that he, his faculty and staff encounter among students including depression, anxiety and under-preparedness for postsecondary education. Dr. Breland closed by stressing to the audience the critical need for moving beyond access to higher education and focusing on measurable strategies that increase equity in education for racially diverse students.

Overall the takeaway themes from this first plenary panel focused on: 1) recognizing the trauma associated with being marginalized, 2) the need for safe spaces for students of color on college and university campuses and 3) the import of early identification, prevention and treatment of mental illness in diverse students.

The Role of Culture, Socialization and Identity on the Mental Health and Well-Being of College Students and Emerging Adults of Color

The second panel, entitled, ***How Culture, Mindset and Identity Shape and Affect Mental Health Among Young Adults***, featured behavioral scientists who addressed the role of culture, mindset (or perspective taking) and racial/cultural identity development and their intersection with mental health for students and emerging adults of color. Dr. Jeanne Tsai of Stanford began with a discussion of two concepts of affect (i.e. the experience of emotion). Comparing and contrasting White American expressions of affect with Chinese and Asian American expressions, she reviewed her research in the area of ideal vs. actual affect. Dr. Tsai presented her published work in this area, which demonstrates that cultural differences often influence our conceptualizations of what desired affect is and how we achieve optimal affect aligned with positive mental health. She concluded by indicating that research on clinical care must focus on how culture shapes our interpretations of positive

mental health and how her work can help move the field in a direction that allows for the diversity of personal experience to be captured in the development of new approaches to care.

Dr. Alia Crum, a Stanford scholar recognized for her innovative research in “Mindset” (i.e. thoughts, beliefs and expectations) followed Dr. Tsai. Dr. Crum presented her research that seeks to understand how individuals’ beliefs about a situation influence how they are affected by and respond to that situation. Dr. Crum and her team have examined how our socialization to and conceptualizations of stress form our beliefs about and processes for interacting with stress. She supports a reframing of this “mindset” allowing individuals to see stress as a tool to propel one to positive outcomes and she illustrated this approach using examples from sports performance. Notably, Dr. Crum shared data related to an intervention she developed that helps people quickly shift their stress mindsets via multimedia videos. It was suggested that her research might serve as a point of reference for helping academic institutions identify ways to teach students of color how to deal with the racial and environmental stressors they encounter in the university setting.

Dr. Virgil Moorehead, of Stanford Counseling and Psychological Services, closed the second plenary by reflecting on his clinical work with Native American college students. His overall message was in framing mental illness as a community problem. In doing so, Dr. Moorehead highlighted the utility of using a collectivist cultural frame to enhance the psychological well-being of marginalized populations. He illustrated this perspective using multiple examples of photo- and video-voice created by Stanford students to describe their personal experiences and struggles with mental illness and addiction. A recurrent theme of his work was illustrated aptly by one of the student videos in which a student with depression from a family severely impacted by addiction indicated, “I do this to help others”. Dr. Moorehead closed by indicating that he believed media to be a powerful tool for expanding the definition of the “self” among students of color as more than marginalized people and a series of stereotypes.

The takeaway themes from this plenary panel included 1) the importance of understanding how individual differences (like culture and exposure to life stressors) impact perceptions of life experiences which in turn set the stage for the development of adaptive (and maladaptive) coping strategies; 2) the utilization of racial identity and culture as natural pathways to positive coping in students of color and 3) the necessity of expanding our knowledge of U.S. “cultural norms” to include racially and culturally diverse perspectives.

INNOVATIVE METHODS FOR ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING STUDENT OF COLOR AND THEIR MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

The final plenary of the day entitled, ***Promising Strategies for Mental Health on Campus and Beyond for Young People of Color***, focused on the presentation of innovative and tested strategies currently in use by colleges and universities to meet the emotional and educational needs of racially diverse students. The session began with a highly engaging presentation by Dr. Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton, a social psychologist from UC Berkeley who presented his highly innovative research on Rejection Sensitivity (RS). Dr. Mendoza-Denton presented multiple studies to support his theory of RS or the negative outcomes (like anxious expectation and negative perceptions) that members of marginalized groups experience based on their prior encounters with status-based rejection by members of in-groups. His research, which began with a focus on African American college students and has expanded to include students from racially diverse backgrounds, helps to explain how all aspects of the university setting, including the level of demonstrated respect for diversity and availability of genuine cross-racial social interactions, can have an impact on the level of RS experienced by students of color which, in turn, affects their emotional well-being. Dr. Mendoza-Denton closed on a hopeful note by indicating that building positive cross-racial peer relationships into the fabric of the institution is of critical importance for adjustment and coping of racially diverse young people.

Dr. Jeanne Manese of the University of California at Irvine, who discussed the Goals in Action (GIA) program currently being implemented at her university, followed Dr. Mendoza-Denton. She reported that the overall focus of the GIA program embodies the perspective that, “Hope is not just something you feel, it is something you do”. The backbone of the program is the normalizing of the college experience as one with both positive and negative features. Dr. Manese described some of the issues facing first generation students and students of color in university settings including marginalization and personal role adjustment within the campus environment. To illustrate, she described some of the lessons from the web-based version of the GIA program designed to help student overcome challenges like isolation and role adjustment. Specifically, she presented modules from the program that help students build time management skills, develop hopeful thinking and assess their personal values. She indicated that these activities are bolstered by the program’s focus on supporting peer relationships and helping integrate students into the college setting.

Dr. Jan Collins-Eaglin of Pomona College followed with an experiential discussion of ongoing efforts at her home institution to address recent campus events mirroring those at universities like Yale and the University of Missouri. She encouraged participants to value the perspectives of students and administrators alike by highlighting the impact of generational differences (e.g. Millennials vs. Baby Boomers) on personal expectations of academic environments and potential solutions to racial conflict. Dr. Collins-Eaglin offered real world examples from her university to illustrate the multifaceted mechanisms required by administrators to address student demands while maintaining a fruitful dialogue between administrators and students. Ms. Carole Pertofsky, Director of Wellness and Health promotion at the Vaden Health Center at Stanford, closed the panel by describing her efforts at building positive psychology and behavioral health into programming for Stanford students. Ms. Pertofsky described a number of her programs, all of which focus on teaching students practical tips for thriving in the campus environment. Her programs engage students in strategies for self-care, developing compassion and stress reduction. Overall, Ms. Pertofsky and her staff help students find personal meaning in their lives through integrating mindfulness and happiness practices into academic and personal endeavors.

Overall, this plenary highlighted the impact of recent racial events on the mental health, emotional and educational well being of college students of color and generated three key themes. First, the presenters stressed the import of self-evaluation by racially diverse administrators and the necessity of using that self-awareness to guide interactions with students of color in crisis. Next, the presenters highlighted the import of real assessment and awareness of the campus climate and the impact of that climate on student well-being. Finally, presenters reflected on the development and practical application of innovative mechanisms for teaching students how to engage and manage diversity and through personally meaningful self-care and targeted interventions.

Concurrent Sessions:

Three concurrent sessions were held, aligned with the meeting theme of the unique aspects of college student mental health for students of color. The sessions were highly interactive in nature and allowed participants to understand the real world experience of students of color and learn in detail about the development and application of interventions to address student needs. Following, we briefly describe each session and highlight key takeaway messages.

First, ***Thriving in a Multicultural College World*** focused on varied approaches and the sharing of stories related to the lived experiences of racially diverse students at competitive academic institutions. Three presenters; Drs. Annelle Primm, Senior Medical Advisor to The Steve Fund and Professor Hazel Rose Markus of Stanford along with Ms. Vanessa Volpe, doctoral candidate at UNC and Steve Fund Scholar, each spoke to their personal and professional experiences engaging in mental health research, policy-making and clinical care relevant for students of color in a session moderated by Dr. MarYam Hemedani of Stanford. In concurrent session 2, ***Acculturative Family Distancing and Other Challenges Faced by Young Adults from Immigrant Families***, Drs. Wei-Chin Hwang of Claremont College, Alejandro Martinez of Stanford, and Shashank Joshi (also of Stanford) discussed the distancing that can occur between youth and parents as they engage in the development process in moving from adolescence to adulthood and how negative aspects of this transitional process might be exacerbated in immigrant families. The focus of this session was to highlight current research and practice knowledge from the group of experts in both the identification of acculturative family distancing in families in the university setting and innovative strategies for use by providers and administrators to support students and their families in addressing these issues. The third concurrent session was uniquely situated within the Stanford University setting and focused on the issues, challenges and solutions related to diverse student mental health within the Stanford community. In this session entitled, ***Mental Health at Stanford: Current Conversations and Meeting the Needs of Diverse Students***. Rona Hu, M.D., Cindy Ng, and Abhilasha Belani, joined in a discussion moderated by Yasmin Owusu, M.D. These speakers, all members of the Stanford community, presented their ideas on the current needs of students of color and their efforts in supporting the university in increasing outreach and efforts to reduce unmet need in the Stanford student population.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

The Young, Gifted and @Risk symposium generated a wealth of information relevant for mental health providers, parents, college students, campus administrators and other campus leaders. Though the meeting was planned well in advance of recent events on college campuses nationwide, findings from this convening are timely and relevant for the types of concerns expressed by students of color at some of our nation's most competitive academic institutions. Following we highlight the overall import of this convening and stress ways

in which lessons learned can yield practical applications.

Recently, the nation has witnessed college students of color across the country demanding that their emotional and academic needs in the college setting are met. One popular and key demand reported by student organizers is an increase in the numbers of mental health providers and faculty of color to mirror the campus population of students. Research has highlighted mirroring as a key feature of multicultural education and mental health disparities reduction. The convening at Stanford reinforced this message by showcasing racially diverse mental health practitioners, researchers and students and by highlighting both research and practical strategies for addressing mental health need and emotional support in the campus setting. The Steve Fund recognizes that rigorous, culturally relevant care can only exist in academic settings where leadership prioritizes the overall health of its students. Further, when these environments are diverse, administrators and leaders must demonstrate a valuing of and commitment to diversity in word and deed. The Steve Fund recognizes the significant pressures that universities encounter in trying to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student bodies and through this convening, offers a series of critical steps that academic institutions might employ. As an example, we note that various schools, programs and divisions within the Stanford community came together to advance the dialogue on diverse student mental health. In doing so, the university invested financial and human resources into an effort that they viewed as worthwhile. It is this type of structured and actualized commitment that may serve as an exemplar for university administrations seeking ways to support their diverse students.

Parents can benefit from the findings of this event by noting key messages and using them as a template for structuring conversations with their college aged (or soon to be college aged) students on the importance of self-care. Specifically, parents can use the collective wisdom compiled in our Executive Summary and Meeting Report to identify those critical areas of concern expressed by students as impediments to and facilitators of their mental health on campus. Additionally, students must be aware of the warning signs of mental illness, stress and poor emotional health and they must have ready access to campus-based resources to help them address these needs should they arise. The Stanford convening provided many examples of the types of programs available in higher education settings within the state of California to support young people and families in identifying their needs and seeking means to address those needs.

In closing, The Steve Fund was pleased to offer this special symposium and bring together some of the nation's top minds to speak to the mental health needs of racially diverse students. We hope that the findings from our Executive Summary and Report (both located on our website at www.stevelfund.org) will be of benefit to students, parents, mental health providers, campus administrators and other campus leaders.

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