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Psychological Theories of Educational Engagement: A Multi-Method Approach to Studying Individual Engagement and Institutional Change

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INTRODUCTION

As teachers, administrators, scholars, and practitioners, one critical issue we face in the academic world is how to foster the academic success and psychological well-being of future generations of teachers, scholars, and practitioners. In some cases, even the most well-prepared and academically motivated students enter law school with the drive and ability to succeed, but along the way, may encounter difficulties that interfere with their potential success in law school and beyond. What are the barriers to engagement, academic success and psychological well-being that impede some students? How might we understand the process of engagement and investment in legal education, particularly for students who have been historically

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on the margin of inclusion, namely ethnic minority group members and women? What means of institutional change can be implemented to foster engagement, achievement, and well-being for all students? At the heart of these questions is the motivation to understand and explore the academic and psychological well-being of students entering a rigorous and challenging career arena. These questions reflect the challenges of our time as access to higher education has become a reality for students from all walks of life—particularly those who have been historically excluded from such arenas on the basis of factors such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, international status, and sexual orientation. The answers to these questions require researchers and institutional change agents to formulate committed programs of evaluation, experimentation and intervention in the legal education system. In order to effectively study and create such meaningful interventions, the initial work can be informed by theoretical models and experimental methodologies used in the field of social psychology to explore issues of motivation, personality, engagement, and stigmatization. In this paper, we introduce a methodological approach to studying the psychological engagement of law students drawn from research and theory in the field of psychology. We provide some preliminary insights into the types of experiences and factors that may compromise engagement versus those that foster investment and success.

I. DEFINING AND MEASURING "ENGAGEMENT"

Defining "engagement" is a critical first step in the process of identifying those factors that may directly or indirectly affect it. As we define it here, engagement refers not only to the academic investment, motivation, and commitment that students demonstrate within their institution (both in and out of the classroom context), but also to the psychological connection, comfort, and sense of belonging that students feel toward their institution, their peers, professors and administrators. Thus, engagement encompasses the institutional, situational, and individual factors that may impact any given student. These factors may work independently or synergistically to create a global "culture" of law school for each student. Each factor informs and impacts the others, creating a network of potential sources of disengagement, and consequently, windows of opportunities for interventions. For example, the rules and regulations about grading and ranking may create an atmosphere of competition and stress that threatens the comfort and confidence of students. Feeling a psychological disconnect from professors and peers may undermine one's ability to form work groups and engage comfortably in the

classroom environment. Likewise, doubting one's competence and academic preparation for law school can interfere with a student's confidence and comfort in interacting with peers and professors even in non-academic settings. For the purpose of this paper, we treat "engagement" as reflecting both the academic and psychological investment, as well as the comfort of students, and explore the impact of select institutional, situational and individual factors.

A. Institutional Factors

Institutional factors often include the policies, regulations, and structures within the academic system that may create static and inflexible systems, which students must cope with. For example, the availability of limited financial scholarships and fellowships often results in students from economically underprivileged backgrounds being underserved and under-supported. These students often carry the additional burden of economic hardship of which many of their classmates are frequently unaware. In such cases, the institution's lack of financial support may bleed into other areas of students' lives. For example, psychological strain on students worried about money issues may take their attention away from academic work.

Grading and Evaluation Procedures. As described above, another powerful institutional variable that impacts the level of law students' engagement is the system of grading and evaluation instituted by the University. For many students, the institutionally sanctioned grading and ranking procedures create a distinct hierarchy among the students that translates into later potential for success. Thus, the perceived cost of falling short of one of these coveted top spots is high, e.g., less competitive internships and job prospects. A culture of competition for limited resources can make the goal of collaboration or of engaging the course material in a deep and reflective process less likely. This competitive environment may result in students not only disengaging from a learning-focused approach to the material in favor of an approach that maximizes performance, but also may lead to strained relationships among students as they compete against each other for the same limited resources.

Diversity of the academic environment. Finally, another important institutional factor that can interfere with engagement is the level of diversity within the University. All students can benefit from diverse learning environments. For example, all students benefit from exposure to the differing life experiences of a diverse student body and learning to work and interact productively with a diverse

cohort.[1] A recent Harvard University study explored student impressions of law school diversity.[2] The results indicated that many students report that diverse classrooms provide a greater intellectual challenge, more serious discussions, and a greater variety of topics being discussed, compared to more homogenous classes. While the value of diversity within the classroom is known, voluntary "intergroup" interactions between students, e.g., diversity in study groups, is less widely practiced. Only one-third of students reported interacting with "outgroup" members somewhat often in study groups (ratings of 4 and 5 on a 5-point scale).[3] On an institutional level, the importance of diversity often is not reflected in the representation of diverse groups in the administration, faculty, and student body; members of racial and ethnic minority groups continue to be underrepresented compared to their percentages in the general population. For example, while African Americans are 13% of the U.S. population, they comprise only 6.8% of the law school population.[4] The lack of diversity in law schools is not only an issue at the student level, but also at the faculty and administrative level. For one, while women comprise nearly 50% of the law student population, females constitute only approximately 34% of law school faulty members nationally, and the percentage of female tenured faculty and deans is significantly less.[5] For many students, this lack of representation signals a lack of value for their group on the part of the administration. Further, the culture of an institution is often created by the members of the dominant group. The lack of representation of minority group members may result in these students feeling a greater sense of alienation in an environment where their lives, experiences, and perspectives are not represented.

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1. Neil L. Rudenstine, *Student Diversity and Higher Learning, in* DIVERSITY CHALLENGED: EVIDENCE ON THE IMPACT OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION 31, 45 (Gary Orfield & Michal Kurlaender eds., 2001).

2. *See* Gary Orfield & Dean Whitla, *Diversity and Legal Education: Student Experiences in Leading Law Schools, in* DIVERSITY CHALLENGED: EVIDENCE ON THE IMPACT OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, *supra* note 1, at 143, 158-72 (providing data in support of the conclusion that most students "have experienced powerful educational experiences from interaction with students of other races").

3. *Id.* at 158.

4. G. Jeffrey MacDonald, *Law School Verdict's Still Out: Race vs. Ranking*, USA TODAY, Apr. 25, 2006, at 5D, *available at* http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2006-04-24-law-school-race_x.htm.

5. Christine Garton, *Still a Tough Market for Women*, LEGAL TIMES, Sept. 6, 2004, at 32, *available at* http://www.law.com/jsp/printerfriendly.jsp?c=LawArticle&t=PrinterFriendlyArticle&cid=1095207119654.

B. Situational Factors

Two situational factors that may impact engagement include (1) the pedagogical practices of the professor, and (2) the culture of competition versus collaboration in the institution

Pedagogical practices. The pedagogical philosophy of professors has long been identified as an important socialization agent for law students.[6] The philosophy is the driving force behind the classroom dynamics, the relationships between professors and students, and between students in the course. Pedagogical practices are not necessarily institutionalized, but rather reflect the individual teaching philosophies of faculty members. Thus, on a case by case basis, students may be exposed to various teaching styles, which impact their engagement and investment in each of their classes differently. Though unintended, the pedagogical practices of faculty members may sometimes be a significant source of stress and threat for some students. These practices may lead to doubts about one's competence, competition, and a motivation to validate one's intelligence for the benefit of others rather than challenge oneself to grow and learn regardless of outward appearances.[7] While many law schools informally report that the traditional practice of the Socratic Method is less prominent in modern law classrooms, the general culture of the Socratic law class persists. For example, Susan Sturm draws attention to the hierarchical nature of law classes in which the professor is the source of all knowledge and the students' role is devoid of power, authority, and feelings of control over their outcomes.[8] Further, this pedagogical model may promote a motivation to "perform" and validate one's intelligence for the benefit of professors and peers. For students who already doubt their academic competence, abilities, and fit in law school, this classroom culture may add an additional layer of stress and may ultimately lead to feelings of incompetence, alienation, and eventual disengagement from the threatening environment.

Culture of competition versus collaboration. The pedagogical model and social culture of the institution may facilitate competitive rather than collaborative motivations in students. For example, the

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6.   Susan P. Sturm, *From Gladiators to Problem-Solvers: Connecting Conversations about Women, the Academy, and the Legal Profession*, 4 DUKE J. GENDER L. & POL'Y 119, 129 (1997).

7.   *See* LANI GUINIER ET AL., BECOMING GENTLEMEN: WOMEN, LAW SCHOOL, AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE 49-51 (1997) (noting that the Socratic Method as a pedagogical method caused many women to feel intimidated and quieted); Sturm, *supra* note 6, at 128-30 (stating that the law school pedagogy is based on a "gladiatorial" model that undervalues women and minorities).'

8.   *See* Sturm, *supra* note 6, at 128 (noting that students are "taught in large, hierarchial classes").

institutional rules and regulations pertaining to academic ranking and grading may result in students feeling like they are in constant competition with peers for the top spots available. While competition may drive some students to increase their efforts and production, it also produces some negative consequences that interfere with certain key goals of education. Alternatively, collaboration is often found to promote a sense of inclusiveness that fosters investment and engagement. Social psychologists Elliot Aronson and Shelley Patnoe studied intergroup relations and group dynamics and proposed that the formation of collaborative work groups in which each member feels valued and respected and contributes to the overall group success is important in fostering the engagement and investment of all students.[9] Competition highlights differences, places value on validating one's intelligence rather than the process of learning and academic growth, and may alienate many students from the educational process.[10] Thus, the competitive environment of legal education may have the unintended effect of creating ruptures in social inclusiveness and academic self-efficacy. These ruptures may, in turn, compromise the confidence, engagement, and motivation of students.

C. Individual Factors

Individual level factors that may impact the engagement of law students include individual differences in (1) competence beliefs, (2) concerns and expectations of bias around social identities, and (3) perceptions of and coping with the context. Research in social and personality psychology provides valuable insight into how these "person" centered variables impact academic self-efficacy, perceptions of fairness or bias, and coping behavior.

Competence beliefs. Research in the developmental and social psychology traditions has provided evidence that we develop meaning systems around our conceptions of our abilities and personal characteristics.[11] These meaning systems create a framework for how we view and understand our academic and interpersonal experiences. They can lead us to either withdraw and disengage when faced with an academic difficulty, or re-invest and increase effort to cope with

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9. *See* ELLIOT ARONSON & SHELLEY PATNOE, THE JIGSAW CLASSROOM: BUILDING COOPERATION IN THE CLASSROOM 9-15 (2d ed. 1997).

10. *See* CAROL S. DWECK, SELF-THEORIES: THEIR ROLE IN MOTIVATION, PERSONALITY, AND DEVELOPMENT 26 (1999).

11. *See* Carol S. Dweck & Daniel Molden, *Self Theories: Their Impact on Competence, Motivation and Acquisition, in* HANDBOOK OF COMPETENCE AND MOTIVATION 122, 124-34 (Andrew J. Elliot & Carol S. Dweck eds., 2005).

setbacks. The strategy we use depends on our views (theories) about the finality and limitations of our academic abilities versus the potential for success and academic growth. For example, individuals who think of their intelligence as something that is fixed and unchangeable are said to hold an entity theory of intelligence.[12] These individuals may be blocked from engaging in the educational process by the notion that their academic success is limited by their natural abilities rather than capable of being expanded by their efforts and investments. Alternatively, an incremental theory of intelligence holds that one's intelligence is malleable in nature, and therefore increased and honed through effortful work and challenges.[13]

These two lay theories about intellectual ability can create a trajectory of engagement or disengagement for students. For those who view intelligence as fixed, the academic goal is to demonstrate and validate one's intellectual abilities rather than to explore and challenge oneself in domains where failure or difficulty is possible. Thus, for the entity theorist, the competitive academic environment of law school, where one's academic abilities constantly are being tested and challenged, activates the fear of being discovered as having low fixed ability and creates a stress that one is always fighting against. Alternatively, for the incremental theorist, viewing intelligence as malleable creates a meaning system in which effort, challenges, and growth are the central goals and strategies used. Thus, while the competitive nature of the law school environment may promote concerns about one's intellectual competence, incremental theorists may be buffered against such stressors by their adaptive competence beliefs, as these beliefs focus their efforts on growth rather than validation and competition. Other research on academic goal endorsement and achievement motivation provides other models of competence beliefs that similarly impact engagement in law school.[14]

Concerns and expectations of bias. A recent report from the New York Bar Association provided some evidence that female attorneys report observing, and or experiencing, a wide variety of gender-biased behavior against women (e.g., others telling sexist or demeaning jokes, male attorneys treating female attorneys condescendingly, female attorneys being given less respect, verbal advances being made, and even more extreme—female attorneys being the target of unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, questions or

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12. *See* Dweck & Molden, *supra* note 11, at 123.

13. *See* DWECK, *supra* note 10, at 3-4; Dweck & Molden, *supra* note 11, at 123.

14. *See, e.g.,* Andrew J. Elliot & Marcy A. Church, *A Hierarchical Model of Approach and Avoidance Achievement Motivation,* 72 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 218, 220-27 (1997).

gestures).[15] The occurrence of these events was corroborated by male attorneys who witnessed similar treatment of women. This report supports the notion that biased treatment against women is still a very powerful reality in the legal world. Within the academic environment, similar forms of overt and covert experiences may be occurring against female law students, such as condescending language and behavior and devaluing of the academic contributions made by female law students. Further, a similar process may be at work for members of other traditionally stigmatized groups in law school, such as ethnic minority group members and members of sexual minorities. Research has documented the impact of experiencing negative identity-relevant events (e.g., being excluded from groups, events, or opportunities on the basis of identity, verbal harassment, etc.) on students' sense of belonging and academic engagement in college.[16] Such experiences increase feelings of rejection and decrease happiness, comfort, fit, and overall well-being for students. When a student perceives bias against their social group, that bias reinforces their perceptions of being on the margin of inclusion, and can lead to feelings of alienation, discomfort, and eventual disengagement from the institution.

Using an interview protocol that focused on graduate students in the Social Sciences and Humanities, Abigail Stewart and colleagues highlight the difficulties that exist for members of traditionally marginalized groups in negotiating the socialization experience in the Academy.[17] Stewart suggests that the foundation of the Academy is based on the culture, traditions, values, and experiences of the mainstream culture, a culture that is Eurocentric, Caucasian and male. Further, "some identities are compatible with the existing system while others bring identities that often compete or conflict with the institutional identity or culture."[18] Thus, anyone who is outside of the traditional culture on which the Academy was founded may find the academic environment alienating, stressful, and threatening. Stewart and Dottolo further suggest that socialization occurs formally and informally, inside and outside of the classroom, and in relationships with individuals including faculty, staff and

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15. N.Y. STATE BAR ASS'N, COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN THE LAW, GENDER EQUITY IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION: A SURVEY, OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 30-31 (2001), *available at* http://www.nysba.org/Content/ContentGroups/News1/Reports3/womeninlawreport-recs.pdf.

16. Bonita London et al., *A Framework for Studying Social Identity and Coping with Daily Stress During the Transition to College, in* NAVIGATING THE FUTURE: SOCIAL IDENTITY, COPING, AND LIFE TASKS 45, 47 (Geraldine Downey et al. eds., 2005).

17. Abigail Stewart & Andrea L. Dottolo, *Socialization to the Academy: Coping with Competing Identities, in* NAVIGATING THE FUTURE, *supra* note 16, at 168-69.

18. *Id.* at 168.

peers.[19] For those students who are not in the inner circle of inclusion, and who do not feel comfortable within this system, psychological engagement becomes difficult to maintain. The result may be disengagement from the institution, or, in some cases, "disidentification" with one's negatively stigmatized group—i.e., loss of one's identity in favor of assimilating into the institutional culture. Both forms of disengagement have negative implications for the individual. For example, for students from economically challenged backgrounds, entering an elite law school with peers and professors from more privileged backgrounds may conflict with one's working class roots. To that end, researchers have found that law students from economically challenged backgrounds view their backgrounds as a burden in law school, report greater personal stress and anxiety, feel academically inadequate, and are more frequently burdened by an excessive pressure to perform tban are students from higher economic brackets.[20]

    While much of the above-referenced literature provides evidence of group differences in exposure to negative identity-relevant threats and to stress associated with stigmatization, the stress and coping literature also draws attention to individual differences in perceptions of stress.[21] For example, measuring gender differences alone may yield inconsistent results. Some researchers have found that women do not fare any worse than men in their levels of stress and feelings of engagement in law school over time, while other researchers find significant differences in anxiety, participation, and general engagement between genders.[22] These inconsistent findings point to the possibility that there may be critical differences within groups that are masked by simply exploring cross group differences. Lazarus & Folkman suggest that the impact of a stressor depends not only on the situation, but also on the individual's appraisal of the situation.[23] Thus, the same objective stressor is not experienced uniformly by all. Whether law school is perceived as alienating, anxiety provoking, and stressful versus challenging or engaging depends both on the cues present within the educational environment and on the individual's perceptions and appraisals of those cues. Psychological process models attempt to take into account both the

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    19. Stewart & Dottolo, *supra* note 17, at 169.
    20. Robert Granfield, *Making It By Faking It: Working-Class Students in an Elite Academic Environment*, 20 J. CONTEMP. ETHNOGRAPHY 331, 336-37 (1991).
    21. RICHARD S. LAZARUS & SUSAN FOLKMAN, STRESS, APPRAISAL AND COPING 231-33 (1984).
    22. *See* Stewart & Dottolo, *supra* note17, at 169 ("Upper-class white heterosexual men are likely to feel 'at home' in situations that seem strange and unfamiliar to students from different backgrounds, and to see people 'like them' in positions of authority.").
    23. LAZARUS & FOLKMAN, *supra* note 21, at 7-8.

situational relevance of a stressor and individual differences in perceptions and coping with that stressor, and are therefore critical in exploring the individual experiences of law students. One example of such a process approach, as applied to the experiences of women, is the Sensitivity to Gender-Based Rejection ("Gender RS") model.[24]

The Gender RS model posits that past experiences of gender bias (e.g., in the form of overt or covert marginalization or discrimination during interactions with employers, teachers, peers, etc.) lead women to develop concerns and expect future bias in gender-relevant situations.[25] In situations where the potential for gender biased treatment exists, for example, in traditionally male-oriented fields such as law, medicine, the sciences, these expectations promote a readiness to perceive gender-based rejection cues and to respond intensely to perceived rejection. The purpose may be adaptive, e.g., feeling challenged and motivated to prove others wrong, or maladaptive, in the form of withdrawal and disengagement. Importantly, the level of concern and expectation of gender bias that women report varies. For women who have had past experiences of gender bias, the concern that one may be treated in a similarly biased fashion in a domain in which gender marginalization is a reality may add a level of stress and strain to the already stressful experience of law school. Yet, for some women who have had less previous exposure to negative gender treatment, the concern of gender bias may be less salient, masking the more subtle cues of marginalization within the environment, and thus may protect them from the added stress of perceiving and reacting to covert cues of gender marginalization. Therefore, this model can be useful in predicting for whom the subtle cues of gender marginalization within the legal education environment may have the greatest impact. Similar models exist for assessing individual differences in concerns about race-based marginalization.[26]

Coping with bias. Just as the perceptions of the law school environment vary from group to group, and person to person, so do the ways in which students cope with the environment. The central issue and question of this volume is how and why students engage or disengage from law school. The routes to engagement are quite varied. No single coping strategy leads to engagement, but rather it is likely

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24. Bonita London et al., What's a Girl to Do?! Expectations of Gender-Based Rejection and the Psychological Adjustment of Women 4 (Jan.12, 2007) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

25. *See id.* (manuscript at 4).

26. *E.g.*, Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton et al., *Sensitivity to Status-Based Rejection: Implications for African American Students' College Experience*, 83 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 896 (2002).

that coping flexibility in dealing with the variety of stressors reported is critical for remaining invested in law school. While some students may "cope" with perceptions of stress and bias by disengaging and withdrawing from the academic culture, others may cope with the same stress by mobilizing resources, energy, and motivation to maintain their engagement and investment despite the perceived threats. As the work on lay theories of intelligence demonstrates, students may cope with the academic setbacks and pressures by increasing effort and seeking help or by avoiding challenges, reducing effort, and not seeking help when needed. In their studies of African American undergraduates engaged in academic tasks, Jennifer Crocker and colleagues found that when the potential for bias based on ethnicity was present (e.g., when African American students received negative feedback from an outgroup member), some African American students responded by disengaging their self-esteem from task performance.[27] Students devalued the feedback and the importance of the domain in order to protect their self-esteem from internalizing the negative performance.[28] While the consequences of such disengagement may be beneficial for self-esteem, it may have negative implications for academic success.

As described earlier, another form of disengagement involves "disidentifying" from one's stigmatized group. Researchers have found evidence that when negative stereotypes about one's group are present, one response is to pull away from identifying with that stigmatized group. Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson showed that African American undergraduates distance themselves from their Black culture (e.g., deny interest in cultural symbols associated with being Black) following a negative performance in a stereotyped domain.[29] Ethnic identification has been shown to buffer African American students from some of the stressors associated with discrimination, e.g., having pride in one's group despite the negative stereotypes held by others is empowering.[30] Thus, "disidentifying" with one's group can potentially strip those positive benefits and leave students more vulnerable to negative outcomes. This form of "disidentification" can interfere both with academic confidence when

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27. Jennifer Crocker et al., *Social Stigma: The Affective Consequences of Attributional Ambiguity*, 60 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 218, 225 (1991).

28. *See* Claude M. Steele & Joshua Aronson, *Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans*, 69 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 797, 797 (1995).

29. *See id.* at 804-05.

30. *See* Crocker et al., *supra* note 2727, at 219, 225 (finding support for the theory that members of stigmatized groups huffer their self-esteem from negative feedback by others by attributing the feedback to prejudice against the group).

negative group stereotypes are activated and with positive self-views (both critical to psychological well-being).

Using longitudinal data from a college sample, London et al., provided further evidence that the coping strategies individuals use to deal with perceptions of bias on the basis of gender or race predict their sense of belonging and well-being within their academic institution.[31] Their findings suggest that experiencing negative race-related events predicts lower sense of belonging and comfort within the University, greater feelings of rejection, and greater unhappiness among students.[32] However, the coping strategy students used to deal with the event moderated the impact of the stressor on their well-being outcomes. When students used transformative coping strategies, such as changing the subject or using humor, negative race-related events had a less adverse impact on their sense of belonging and well-being than when students used confrontation or self-silencing strategies.[33] In fact, transformative coping increased sense of belonging after negative race-related events, perhaps, because it gave students a sense of control over their situations and confidence in their abilities to handle the stress of the environment.[34] On the contrary, confrontational coping, e.g., speaking out, did not affect students' sense of belonging.[35] Furthermore, self-silencing, e.g., keeping the negative bias experience to themselves, had a negative effect on sense of belonging and happiness, and increased feelings of rejection. Students who self-silenced following negative race-related events experienced significant declines in their level of comfort and feelings of fit at the University, and in their comfort and connection to professors and peers.[36] In another work by Haemmerlie et al., self-silencing was shown to lead students to experience depression and anxiety, and to have a negative adjustment during the transition to college.[37] Importantly, gender differences in the use of self-silencing as a coping strategy in relationships have been found consistently,[38] potentially leaving women particularly vulnerable to the negative outcomes associated with this form of coping. Thus, how one copes with a negative identity relevant event is just as critical for predicting

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31. *See generally* London et al., *supra* note 16.

32. *Id.* at 54.

33. *Id.* at 55.

34. *Id.* at 58.

35. *Id.* at 55.

36. *Id.*

37. F.M. Haemmerlie et al., *Silencing the Self in College Settings and Adjustment,* 88 PSYCHOL. REP. 587, 592 (2001).

38. *See* Dana Crowley Jack & Diana Hill, *The Silencing the Self Scale: Schemas of Intimacy Associated with Depression in Women,* 16 PSYCHOL. WOMEN Q. 97, 97-98 (1992).

engagement and well-being outcomes as other factors such as perceptions and appraisals of threat, and situational influences on engagement.

II. METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES OF LAW STUDENTS

The process of exploring institutional, situational, and individual level influences on perceptions and reactions to legal education is complex. Methodologies that allow for all three factors to be assessed simultaneously will provide the greatest hope in creating a comprehensive view of the legal education experience. Further, research on educational engagement and life stressors provides some reason to believe that studying individuals as they enter a new context is a ripe opportunity for exploring how that novel environment affects all aspects of engagement (e.g., achievement and psychological well-being) both in the present moment and over time.[39]

As students enter a novel environment, they bring with them preexisting frameworks for perceiving, evaluating, and coping with the world around them. Concerns about their sense of belonging, competence, abilities, and future success are all natural issues that arise—though more intensely for some students than others. How one reconciles these concerns, however, predicts whether one engages and maintains healthy engagement throughout law school. For example, as students enter law school, they immediately begin to develop social networks (both formal and informal) that connect them both socially and academically to the institution, its members, and its resources. Although these networks may shift and change over time, during the initial transition they serve the important function of providing students with support groups, collective sources of knowledge and information that help to navigate the new environment. For those students who have difficulty transitioning, the lack of such immediate peer support may have long lasting effects on their sense of belonging, goals and success outcomes. These students may grow to feel isolated and alienated from the social culture of the institution. Social and developmental psychology researchers emphasize the importance of studying educational transitions as a critical period during which students develop feelings of investment, belonging, and engagement.[40]

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39. *See* Diane N. Ruble & Edward Seidman, *Social Transitions: Windows into Social Psychological Processes, in* SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: HANDBOOK OF BASIC PRINCIPLES 830, 830 (E. Tory Higgins & Arie W. Kruglanski eds., 1996).

40. *See* London et al., *supra* note 16, at 47-48.

How can we apply research techniques used in psychology to explore the experiences of law students in legal education settings? To date, many of the studies conducted on law student engagement have utilized survey methodologies, i.e., obtaining a cross-section of law students from the same or varying universities and surveying them about the varied experiences that impact their engagement over their years in law school. In an extension of basic survey research, some researchers have used panel study designs to assess how factors at the beginning of law school might impact engagement at different points throughout law school. While this research methodology gets us closer to understanding the longitudinal process of engagement, it is still affected by the same difficulties of general survey research, i.e., relying on the memory of individuals over a period of time to report events and incidences of importance to their engagement. As students are asked to think globally over a period of time and report on their experiences, they are engaging in a process of reflection that may be biased by memory artifacts, and psychological reappraisal or reconstruction, all of which interfere with the accurate reporting of one's experiences. Thus, the information obtained often may be distorted by memory and "rationalized" in ways that don't reflect the true and immediate impact of the experience. Methodologies that avoid distortions of memory and post hoc rationalizations by students are critical for exploring the actual events and interactions that impact engagement.

One promising methodology that can accommodate this need without the same limitations of cross-sectional survey research is "experience sampling" or the diary methodology. Experience sampling methodologies allow us to explore the specific types of situational and individual influences that can lead to feelings of belonging versus alienation for law students. This methodology can capture both group-based differences in exposure to threat or stress as well as within person variation over time. For example, Mendoza-Denton et al. utilized the diary methodology to study the activation of race identity in undergraduate students making the transition to college.[41] In this work, Mendoza-Denton and colleagues were able to capture individual differences in perceptions and coping with race-related stress over the initial three weeks of college. Strauss and Cross studied the coping strategies enacted by African American women on a daily basis using the diary methodology.[42] Applied to the experiences of college students, Niall Bolger and John Eckenrode studied the strain on

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41.   *See* Mendoza-Denton et al., *supra* note 26, at 906.

42.   Linda Strauss et al., *Transacting Black Identity: A Two-Week Daily Diary Study*, in NAVIGATING THE FUTURE, *supra* note 16, at 67.

interpersonal relationships experienced when a member of an intimate partnership was approaching the Medical College Admissions Test ("MCAT").[43] Thus, this technique has been used successfully in the psychological literature to study individuals in a variety of environments, exposed to a variety of influences and stressors, and during different life stages over time.

Structure of Diary Questionnaires. The type of information researchers are seeking determines both the timing of assessments (e.g., measuring factors of interest once per week for several months or daily for several weeks, etc.) and the type of questions used (e.g., open-ended narratives or close-ended scale questions). For example, in assessing the experiences of individuals approaching the MCAT, Bolger and Eckenrode measured mood, well-being, social interactions, and coping behaviors for several weeks before and after the examination to assess the impact of exam strategies and interpersonal support on exam performance and coping.[44] Researchers may use a combination of close-ended questions based on established empirical questionnaires, and open-ended or qualitative questions that allow the participants to freely write about the experiences they encounter. Established questionnaires and rating scales allow researchers to statistically compare the level of belonging, engagement or distress and alienation reported by students, while the open-ended data allows researchers to chronicle the specific types of events and interactions students have that create or activate concerns of belonging, fit, and engagement. Based on previous research, an efficient structure for diary questionnaires to study law student engagement would incorporate daily assessments with both close-ended and open-ended questions that provide insight into the personal experiences of engagement or alienation that students report.

A. Law School Engagement Pilot Daily Diary Study

In order to address many of the questions outlined in this paper, Bonita London and Geraldine Downey designed a daily diary longitudinal study that focused on law students entering an urban, elite law school. The goals of the study were threefold: (1) to explore the types of experiences law students report as being central to their feelings of belonging versus alienation during the transition to law school, (2) to assess the impact of social identity on these experiences, i.e., whether members of traditionally stigmatized groups experience

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43. Niall Bolger & John Eckenrode, *Social Relationships, Personality, and Anxiety During a Major Stressful Event*, 61 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 440, 441-42 (1991).

44. *Id.* at 442.

negative identity-relevant events that compromise their sense of belonging and engagement in law school, and (3) to explore the impact of these events on engagement over time. To accomplish these goals, London & Downey recruited incoming first year law students several weeks before they began classes, administered a background questionnaire and surveyed them using a daily diary study during the first three weeks of law school.

Students were recruited through orientation announcements, flyer postings, and special interest group email invitations. Approximately one-third of the entering law school class of one year (Cohort 1), and approximately one-quarter of the entering class the subsequent year (Cohort 2) participated in the study (approximately 170 students total). Students first completed a background questionnaire prior to the start of law classes. The background questionnaire assessed students' reported engagement during their undergraduate careers (e.g., office hour attendance, study group participation, sense of comfort with professors and peers), their academic achievement (e.g., undergraduate grade point average, LSAT score), and their expectations of law school. Also included were several personality inventories, academic goal measures, and assessments of future career goals. The goal of the background survey was to provide evidence that prior to entering law school, the students in the pilot study did not differ significantly from each other in any meaningful ways, i.e., they had similar levels of engagement and investment in their undergraduate educations, similar achievement scores and potential. This was, in fact, the case. Further, upon entering law school, if differences emerged in engagement, these differences could be attributed to the experiences students had during the first few weeks of law school rather than to differences in either preparation or investment prior to law school.

After completing the background questionnaire, participants engaged in a web-based daily diary questionnaire study. They logged onto a secure website at the end of each day and answered questions that assessed the following: (1) major stressors that occurred that day, such as any physical illness, financial stressors, academic work overload, conflicts with family members, etc.; (2) sense of belonging, for example, comfort and positive feelings toward peers and professors, fit in the university; and (3) academic engagement, including volunteering in class, academic goals and motivation, assessments of performance. Participants were also asked to write about a significant event that impacted them each day, either positively or negatively; they indicated the personal identity (e.g., their personality, academic competence, physical attractiveness, etc.) or social identity (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) that

became salient as a result of that event. Participants then indicated how they coped with the event, and how they felt afterwards. This combination of close-ended and qualitative questions provides a comprehensive assessment of how students perceive their academic environment and their status in it, as well as the types of events and experiences students report daily that interfere with their ability to engage successfully. Follow-up assessments of students at the end of their first semester and at the end of their first year in law school provide evidence of *how* events during the transition translate into important long-term outcomes, such as academic success and psychological well-being. For purposes of this paper, we focus on the narrative of daily experiences students reported to illustrate the issues we have outlined.

 Background of Pilot Sample. The suhgroup of entering students who participated in the Law School Engagement study had LSAT scores comparable to the larger entering class. Cohort 1 consisted of approximately 102 entering students; 54.5% were female; approximately 13% were African-American or African, 43% were Caucasian, 20% were Asian, 12% were Latino, and approximately 12% were from other ethnic backgrounds. In cohort 1, there were no gender differences in undergraduate grade point average (Men: M=3.60, SD=.22; Women: M=3.66, SD=.22) or in expectations of belonging, comfort, or fit in law school. There was a slight difference in self-reported LSAT scores hy gender (Men: M=170.49, SD=5.29; Women: M=167.95, SD=4.64). What is critical is that there were no significant gender differences in the reported academic engagement prior to law school. Both women and men reported equal levels of investment and engagement in their undergraduate institutions, e.g., approaching professors outside of class to talk about work, contributing to class discussions, attending professor or teaching assistant office hours, or participating in course study groups. However, there were some significant gender differences. Women anticipated lower salaries five years post-graduation than men and afforded greater importance to life and academic goals such as having children and a family, establishing close mentoring relationships with professors, and obtaining a prestigious internship or job position.

 The same findings were replicated in the second Cohort of entering law students. Cohort 2 consisted of approximately ninety entering law students (46% female), with approximately 8% Black, 54% Caucasian, 12% Asian, 6% Latino, and 20% indicating membership in a variety of other ethnic groups. There were no significant gender differences in undergraduate GPA (Men: M=3.61, SD=.24; Women: M=3.67, SD=.22) or in self-reported LSAT scores (Men: M=169.89, SD=6.21; Women: M=169.23, SD=4.69). There were

also no differences in level of engagement in their undergraduate institutions. For both cohorts, students entered law school equally prepared, motivated, and invested as their peers, but for some, exposure to alienating and stressful events upon entering their new environment may have shifted their level of engagement over time.

In Cohort 1, a comparison of levels of academic engagement prior to law school between white and non-white students (i.e., African-American, Latino, Asian, and other ethnic groups combined) showed no significant differences. Non-white students reported attending professor office hours, contributing to class discussions, and participating in study groups as frequently as white students. In fact, ethnic minority students reported attending teaching assistant office hours significantly more often than white students. Further, there were no significant differences in feelings of belonging, comfort, fit, and positive feelings toward professors and peers at the beginning of the semester in law school. Given that no relevant differences in achievement or history of academic engagement existed between female versus male and minority versus non-minority students prior to entering law school, any differences that later emerged may be attributed to the novel experiences students encountered during law school.

What experiences during the transition to law school impact engagement? Through the daily diary questionnaire, participants recorded significant experiences they had each day during the first three weeks of law school. These experiences varied in valence (e.g., positive interactions with peers to negative and alienating interactions with peers or professors) and intensity (e.g., study time with roommates to critical life changing experiences such as the death of a family member). The majority of events reported reflected issues relevant to students' social identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation), competence beliefs, and institutional practices (e.g., pedagogical style of professors). While all the events did not impact engagement, the vast majority dealt with students' growing confidence in (or increasing doubts about) their abilities and belongingness within the law school environment. The attributions (explanations) students made for their experiences were often intertwined and overlapping; for example, an ethnic minority student being excluded from a study group could attribute that exclusion to bias, as well as to their lack of academic skills.

Social Identity experiences. Many students reported events related to their social identities (e.g., ethnicity and gender) as having negative implications for their confidence in law school and feelings of fit and belonging. Often, these events made their status as a numeric minority, and thus on the margin of inclusion, more salient. For

example, one student poignantly reported on her feelings of isolation and alienation as a minority group member within the law school environment:

> I went to [a law school event] and it reminded me of how I am one of few at this school. [The event] was full of people that looked nothing like me and I felt uncomfortable . . . it is an awkward feeling being the only black female amongst all white people.

The simple numeric minority status of some students may contribute to their feelings of isolation and discomfort. For majority group members, the privilege of having others similar to them represented in the student body, on the faculty, and in the administration is often a silent factor that can contribute to their feelings of belonging and comfort. In contrast, for members of ethnic minority groups, the absence of similar levels of representation of their group within the student body, faculty, or administration may contribute to the sense that their experiences, interests and contributions are not valued within the University. Another student commented:

> [H]is comments got me angry; I think he thinks that he is more deserving of being here than I am. I feel like I am going to have to work twice as hard as he will to prove that I belong here, mainly because he's white.

For this student, the perceived entitlement of some of her peers reinforced her need to prove her academic merit as a minority student. While this motivation may drive some students to invest in doing well, the strain on peer interactions, as well as the stress and anxiety of having to prove oneself, is an additional burden with which some students must contend.

Issues of respect and legitimacy are critical for all students trying to engage in the system. For students who may already feel invisible (in terms of their value, contributions and worth), respect and legitimacy become even more important. One law student wrote about an experience of "mistaken identity" in one of her law classes where her professor mistook her for another ethnic minority student in the class:

> The Prof called my name and said he would respond to a question I asked yesterday. . . he continued to answer, and then when he finished, asked me if that clarified the point. I gave him a blank look. . . it occurred to me that the teacher had thought [I was the student who asked the question the day before] because I was the one other black female in the class. We have similar skin tones, but different height, physical attributes, and hair.

These types of experiences can also underscore the feeling that one is not respected, visible, or valued as an individual by peers or professors. Though it is common for professors to have difficulty remembering or identifying students in large classes at the beginning of a new semester, for some students such a mistake highlights the

fact that the professor (or peer) views that student not as an individual but as an interchangeable member of their ethnic group. The result is a feeling of invisibility and alienation.

While many of the experiences reported by students demonstrated more subtle forms of marginalization or disrespect, there were several more direct incidences of race stigmatization reported. For example, another student reported a statement made by a professor in class that was directed toward minority students specifically:

> While speaking of the diversity of the class, my Professor said something to the effect of 'if you aren't successful, don't blame your failure on your minority status'. Although personally I agree with this statement in my own life. . .I felt that this was an incredibly insensitive statement based on the fact that my professor was indeed a white male.

Not only does this statement alienate students individually, when addressed to the class as a whole, it also brings the issue of diversity and minority student success under negative scrutiny by all students. Further, when discussing pertinent diversity issues, the level of tension in a class may be palpable for all students. During a discussion of affirmative action, one non-ethnic minority student commented, "I felt very anxious and uncomfortable discussing affirmative action, which is a sore spot for a lot of people"; another commented, "I think the case contributed to a good deal of tension in class and probably made a lot of the minority students somewhat uncomfortable." Issues of diversity are essential points of discussion in the legal classroom and beyond. However, maintaining a supportive and positive classroom environment where students feel "safe" and respected is an important foundation for alleviating the tension and anxiety both ethnic minority students and non-minority students may feel when confronting these issues. These types of negative events may undermine students' feelings of comfort and engagement.

Similarly, female students also report noticing differences in engagement in their classes on the basis of gender. One student wrote,

> I had my hand raised for a long time to answer a question, but I never got called on. Some guy in the back corner got called on twice (I am female). Some other female students were called on, but it seemed like males were more aggressive.

This student noticed an important difference in the level of participation of men and women in her class. Whether this difference could be attributed to the professor selectively calling on more men, to the male students being more vocal in class, or the female students feeling silenced, the difference in engagement based on gender is noticeable. Another student commented, "[I]t pisses me off to see that women don't volunteer in class nearly half as frequently as men!" For this student, the lack of participation of women may be a signal that

some of the women have disengaged, or that the environment is such that women do not feel comfortable volunteering.

Students also reported negative identity-relevant experiences around their sexual orientation (e.g., being "outed" by another student in public), their socioeconomic status (e.g., having financial worries that seem unique from their relatively privileged peers), their age (e.g., feeling isolated because of age differences from peers), etc. All of these identities can be considered "marginalized" as compared to the mainstream culture of elite law schools. Moreover, during this critical period, these identities may become even more salient as students try to find their place and fit within the traditional walls of elite law schools. The struggle to fit in and be engaged may be costly in a system that feels alienating.

While these negative experiences may contribute to some student groups disengaging, many students also report positive identity-relevant experiences that armor them against the feelings of isolation and alienation that lead to disengagement. Thus, while their social identities may expose them to others' negative expectations and biases, as well as to doubts about their fit and belonging, these same identities may be a source of connection to groups within the institution, creating a space for the otherwise isolated student. Many students reported that joining certain groups or attending special events (e.g., *Journal of Women and Law* or social events) were good opportunities to meet similar students and develop a connection with the University community. For ethnic minority students, attending the Black, Asian, or Latino student organizations was a very important positive experience. Further, many students reported positive experiences unrelated to their identities that increased feelings of belonging and comfort at law school. We discuss those experiences further below.

Academic experiences. The vast majority of experiences students reported were class or work related. The interactions students had with their professors and peers contributed to doubts about their competence and fit in law school and to their motivation to engage and invest themselves in the task of learning. Many students reported feeling anxious and threatened by the pedagogical style of the Socratic Method used in their classes:

> [I was] called on in class without volunteering. The horror. . .1 prepared as much as I could have in the very short time available, but 1 still don't understand the material. The professor's questions are unclear, his methods elude me, I feel generally incompetent and singled out for no apparent reason.

Professors play a critical role in creating the context for student engagement. During the transition period, students are most vulnerable to even the slightest critical response from authority

figures. One student commented, "I said something in class that apparently the professor didn't give much value to, so I ended up feeling very timid and [did] not want to volunteer anymore!" For many students, one incident of disapproval from a professor (or even from peers) or perceived failure in the eyes of a professor undermines their willingness to participate and engage in the future. This is not to say that faculty members should avoid giving critical feedback to students in class. Instead, this indicates that the way professors present that feedback has important ramifications on whether students feel efficacious about their ability to be successful. Another student echoed the general sentiment of much of the sample by expressing concerns about the pedagogical style of the Socratic Method:

> The Socratic method is awful! I feel terrible for everyone who was called on and terrified that I was going to be called on. I could barely understand the questions the professor was asking. They were simple questions but [the professor] used such convoluted language.

In addition to the influence of professors, peer pressure to appear intelligent is also extremely high during the initial transition to law school. Students form impressions of one another based on their performance in class, making the "performance" aspect of the classroom dynamic a source of evaluation and judgment rather than learning and growth. The apprehension and anxiety that students feel in "validating" their intelligence to professors and peers is thus heightened. When a student fails at proving their intellectual worth, they may begin to question their value and place within the institution, e.g., one student commented, "[T]he smart people are beginning to separate themselves out from the rest of us. I feel so much stupider than most of my classmates, which is a million times more disappointing because I had myself convinced yesterday that I was doing alright." The feeling that one does not measure up academically to one's peers is surely one critical precursor to psychological and academic disengagement. Another student commented on the critical importance of demonstrating one's ability to classmates in order to gain access to resources, such as good study groups, e.g., "I was disappointed that I couldn't impress my classmates (I thought that impressing others would secure me a good study group)." Taken together, the overwhelming focus of most of the narratives were students' doubts about their competence and intellectual ability in law school.

The trajectory of these experiences over time is also a critical issue. The diary methodology allows researchers to explore how an event on one day impacts engagement on subsequent days. For example, one student wrote:

After yesterday's depression at not having anyone around with a similar background, late last night I started to learn that I will have to look beyond race, and today 1 began to live my life outside those boundaries.

This narrative demonstrates how concerns about belonging can plague students over time, though this student has resolved to deal with these feelings by expanding his social network. Several students also documented their shifting confidence over time, "Yesterday and this morning I was feeling pretty confident that I understood what was going on in my classes. But studying tonight, I realized that I haven't even begun to understand things as well as I could."

Experiences that foster engagement. While most students (members of traditionally stigmatized groups and others) reported experiences that threatened their academic and psychological engagement, they also reported some experiences that bolstered their sense of comfort and feelings of competence. Whether these positive events sufficiently buffer students against the stressful and threatening experience of the competitive and performance-oriented classroom and academic environment can be answered with the quantitative data from the diary study. However, the narratives of students' experiences provide some evidence that students do find strength in their positive interactions.

For many students, the normalization of their stressful experiences, that is, the knowledge that all students experience similar doubts, fears and threats to their academic competence and self-esteem, provides a context for their own doubts and allows them to depersonalize these fears and concerns. For example, one student wrote, "[A] classmate just came by and gave me the most encouraging words of advice. Prior to his arrival, I was feeling like I didn't belong, overwhelmed, like I wasn't smart enough, disorganized . . . etc. He changed it all for me." Professors, student groups, and the administration may also facilitate this process by sharing the experiences of other students. For example, several students reported that faculty panel discussions and luncheons with faculty members demystified the law school experience, allowing them to realize that they are not alone:

[I] woke up feeling depressed and anxious; felt better after class; talked to some classmates; professor read an excerpt from [first year law student] that encapsulated my negative experience yesterday perfectly—suggested that most of us probably have had or will have that experience.

The realization that one's experiences are common, that is, a part of the normal transition experience, and not a result of one's own incompetence or lack of abilities, allows students to reframe their stressors in a less personally negative way.

While many students referred to the stress of the Socratic Method as the cause of their doubts about their competence, sense of belonging and fit in the university, one student explored how this methodology might be better used to increase engagement and the comfort of students without compromising the rigorous standards of learning:

> I was thinking about the Socratic method in class today as I listen[ed] to my classmates floundering, and I came to the tentative conclusion that the Socratic method would be a great way to learn if it was done in a more intimate, supportive setting. If I wasn't so worried about losing face, I think I'd be able to focus on grappling with the actual issues and concepts.

When students experience a success, they are reinforced and become more engaged in the process of learning. For example, one student took control over her fear of speaking in class and was positively reinforced by that experience: "I voluntarily spoke in class today. I wanted to get it out of the way, so the first question [the professor] asked that I knew the answer to, I raised my hand. It felt good to get 'the first time' out of the way." Another student's narrative demonstrated the power of "engagement" with the material in facilitating engagement in law school more generally, "I really enjoy the material, and I think that is helping me get through the unexpected amount of work. I realized today that my enjoyment of the material makes studying for class somewhat pleasant."

Success experiences do not have to be based strictly on performance outcomes. Professors can provide critical but constructive feedback so that students are aware of both their strengths and their weaknesses. Psychologists Geoffrey Cohen, Claude Steele, and Lee Ross provide some empirically based insight into how professors might convey critical feedback to students while avoiding the unintended outcome of increasing feelings of self-doubt and alienation.[45] Similarly, Carol S. Dweck's work on achievement praise provides a model for encouraging effort and engagement rather than performance and validation.[46]

Peer interactions also positively translated into feelings of belonging and fit. Over the course of the transition, students reported engaging in academic group meetings and study groups, general conversations, and social events that bonded them with their classmates. For example, one student reported, "Talking through concepts in a small group setting increased my confidence and distilled some concerns I had about the Legal Methods exam."

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45. Geoffrey L. Cohen et al., *The Mentor's Dilemma: Providing Critical Feedback Across the Racial Divide*, 25 PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. BULL. 1302, 1303 (1999).

46. *See generally* DWECK, *supra* note 10.

Members of traditionally marginalized groups attended social identity relevant events, e.g., the Black Law Students group, that brought them together with other members of their ethnic group. While these events were often social in nature, they also served a critical academic function. Students gained access to upper level law students who had successfully navigated the system. These upper level students not only legitimized the stressful experiences of first year law students, but also often provided them with strategies and advice on how to remain engaged despite the threats they perceived. This form of socialization may be critical for students as they search for ways to engage in a system where feelings of alienation are salient.

III. CHANGES IN ENGAGEMENT OVER TIME

At the end of their first semester of law school, a subsample of law students in Cohort 1 completed a survey to determine their level of engagement, sense of belonging, and psychological well-being in law school (N=64). While there were no differences in academic preparation, achievement, and comfort and belonging in law school found prior to the beginning of classes, minority law students reported significantly higher levels of alienation and discomfort in law school by the end of their first semester compared to their non-minority peers. Similarly, at the end of the first semester, minority students reported significantly lower levels of perceived competence and satisfaction with their performance in law school, and greater feelings of invisibility, isolation, and alienation, particularly in their large lecture courses. Minority students also reported contributing less frequently to class discussions. These emerging differences after the first semester of law school are critical cues that minority students may be feeling greater alienation, most likely as a result of the experiences that make marginalization and exclusion more salient for them. Given their equal levels of preparation and previous academic engagement, these emerging differences may result from experiences during the transition to law school.

These findings also provide some evidence that minority students perceive that their classmates view them more negatively than non-minority students. Minority students report believing that their classmates view them as having lower competence, public speaking abilities, leadership skills, academic preparation, and potential for future success. Perceived academic worthiness or respect from peers is often just as critical for feelings of belonging and inclusion as true academic performance. Acceptance by one's peer group may determine broader access to resources, such as study groups, committees, and future job opportunities. Thus, the perception

that one is not viewed as an intellectual equal by one's peers may be a significant blow to one's confidence, investment in peer relationships, and engagement in the overall system. Further, these negative views may be internalized by minority law students and undermine their actual confidence and performance; minority students reported feeling less academically prepared and intellectually capable than their peers.

Finally, a larger proportion of minority students reported experiencing problems such as physical illness, social exclusion, and anxiety than non-minority students. For example, while only 8% of non-minority students reported feeling socially excluded in law school, 26% of minority students reported social exclusion. Further, minority students also reported a significantly greater frequency of psychosomatic symptoms of stress, such as, trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, heart pounding, lump in your throat, or weakness, than non-minority students. This may be due to the minority students' increased exposure to negative incidences reported throughout the diary period and in the follow-up survey. One student wrote:

> I think I had my first panic attack today. I've never felt like that before - I felt dizzy and crazy and I was hyperventilating. It was really intense. . .afterwards I was able to continue my work, though at the time I never thought I would be able to work again.

Thus, the psychological toll of being on the margin of inclusion appears to have an important impact on the confidence and engagement of minority law students. For the purposes of this paper we did not explore the direct relationship between negative experiences of marginalization reported by minority students and feelings of exclusion and disengagement over time. We did, however, provide some insight into the variety of processes that may result in feelings of alienation and exclusion for minority students and students in general, and some evidence of the emerging differences in confidence, sense of belonging, and academic and psychological engagement of law students over time.

How can we foster engagement? The solutions for fostering engagement are just as varied as the factors that lead to it. First, increasing diversity in the student body and on the faculty and administration increases the visibility of diverse groups and brings students closer to feeling included, visible, and valued in the institution. Second, pedagogical practices that create true opportunities for collaboration rather than competition increase the likelihood of positive and supportive peer interactions. Further, collaborative work environments tend to foster learning rather than performance motivations. In addition, pedagogical practices that value multiple forms of academic excellence, beyond performance on exams alone, allow students to feel empowered to master multiple skills. Third, some students found strength in their own coping strategies.

For example, taking the initiative to speak up in class on one's own terms and timeframe, rather than waiting to be called on, seemed to alleviate some of the stress for some students. Other students focused on their enjoyment of the material rather than their performance in class as a buffer. Taking a learning-oriented approach to engaging the material reduces some of the stress of performing and validating one's intelligence to professors and peers. This learning orientation is self-reinforcing and does not require the approval of others to maintain engagement. Fifth, the majority of students responded positively to information that normalized their experiences. Faculty members sharing their personal law school stories, upper level students reassuring first year law students that their doubts and fears are a normal part of the transition to law school, and students in the same cohort supporting each other appeared to help students depersonalize the negative experiences and learn strategies for coping with the stress.

These strategies are not exhaustive. Interventions that foster engagement must attend to all levels of the issue—changing institutional or structural forces that increase competition, stress, and marginalization; promoting situational cues of inclusion from faculty and peers; and armoring the individual with adaptive coping strategies and beliefs systems that protect them from the threat of disengagement. Further, psychological process models provide new methodologies for studying issues of engagement in comprehensive ways. Though this paper does not discuss the full range of potential analyses, the diary methodology will serve as a valuable tool in exploring the process of engagement and identifying sources of potential intervention. Finally, these efforts to understand and question engagement versus disengagement will be futile without the dedication and support of the administration, staff, and faculty to making the necessary changes and improvements in the system. Without a true motivation to question and test the system, many students, particularly those who are already on the margin of inclusion, will continue to struggle, feel alienated, and disengage from the legal education system. However, through the interest and commitment of administrators, faculty, students and staff (change agents in the service of the University community), the educational context of law school can be an environment of growth, belonging, and well-being for all law students.

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