

Building a Sense of Belonging A Critical Key for Retention

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October 21, 2010

Center for Educational Excellence Roundtables

Orienting Questions

- **How do underrepresented students successfully develop a sense of belonging at USD?**
- **How can we best support them in our classrooms, offices, and hallway interactions?**

Janice McCabe, Florida State University

“The Impact of Friendship Structure on the Educational Experiences and Outcomes of Black, White, and Latina/o University Students”

- **Friendship network density**
 - **Black and Latino students have different types of friendship networks than white students**
 - **Connection to GPA and graduation rates**

Janice McCabe, Florida State University

- **Students of color experience difficulties on predominantly-white campuses**
- **Friendships and peer groups help students of color adjust to college**

Janice McCabe, Florida State University

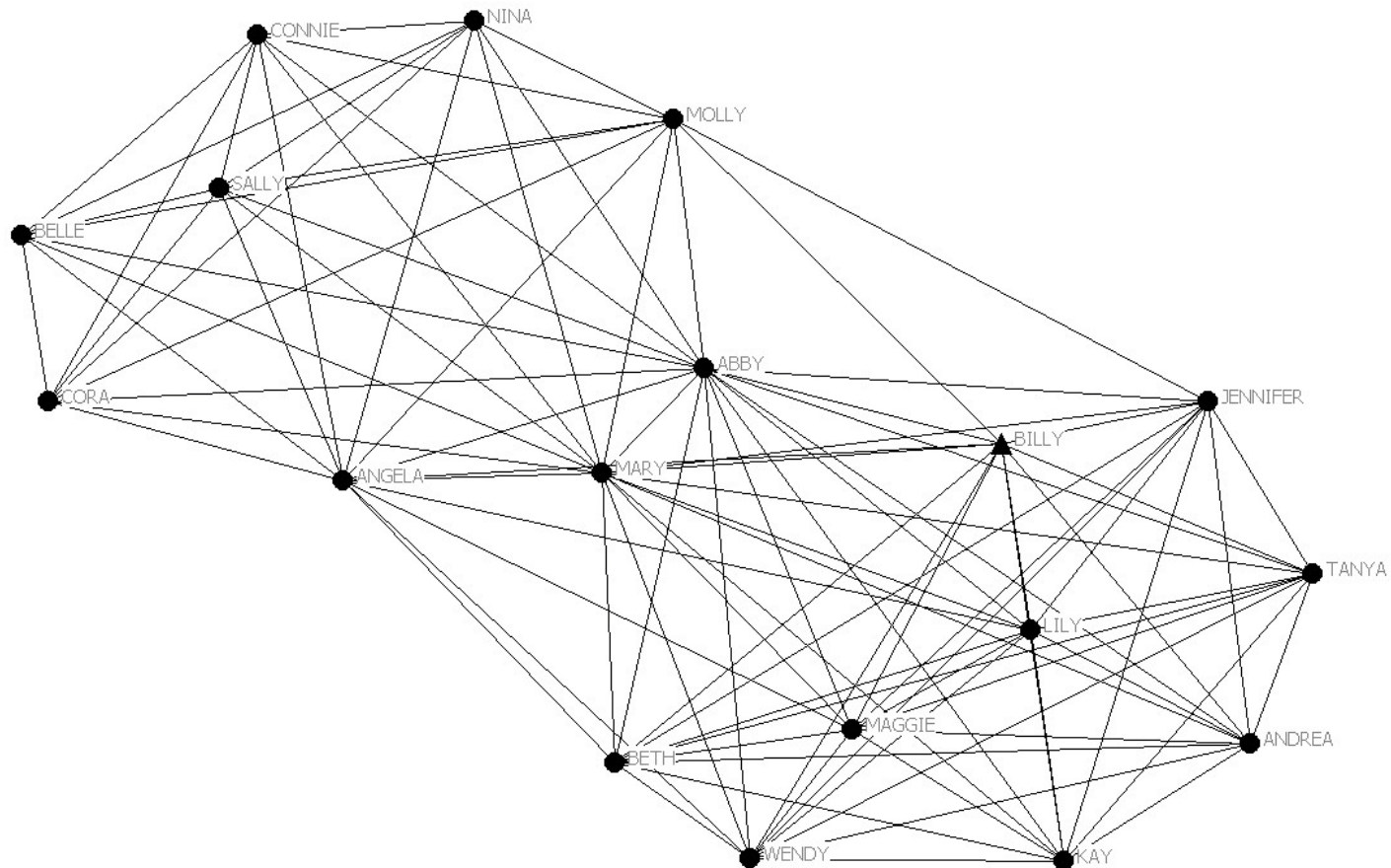
- **Density = # present ties / # possible ties**
- **Why density matters**
 - Provides social support
 - But can be burdensome in demands on members
 - Increases flow of information within a network
 - But inhibits new information from entering the network

Janice McCabe, Florida State University

Research Site: “Midwest University” (MU)

- A large, public, residential, Research University – 30,000 undergraduates
- Set in a small city in a Midwestern state
- Predominantly white: 85% of undergraduates are white, 4% black, 2% Latina/o, 3% Asian, 5% international students and “other”

A Compartmentalizer: Mary's friendship network has .59 density. 88% of white students are Compartmentalizers.



A Tight-Knitter: Carlos' friendship network has 1.0 density. 66% of Black and Latino students are Tight-Knitters.

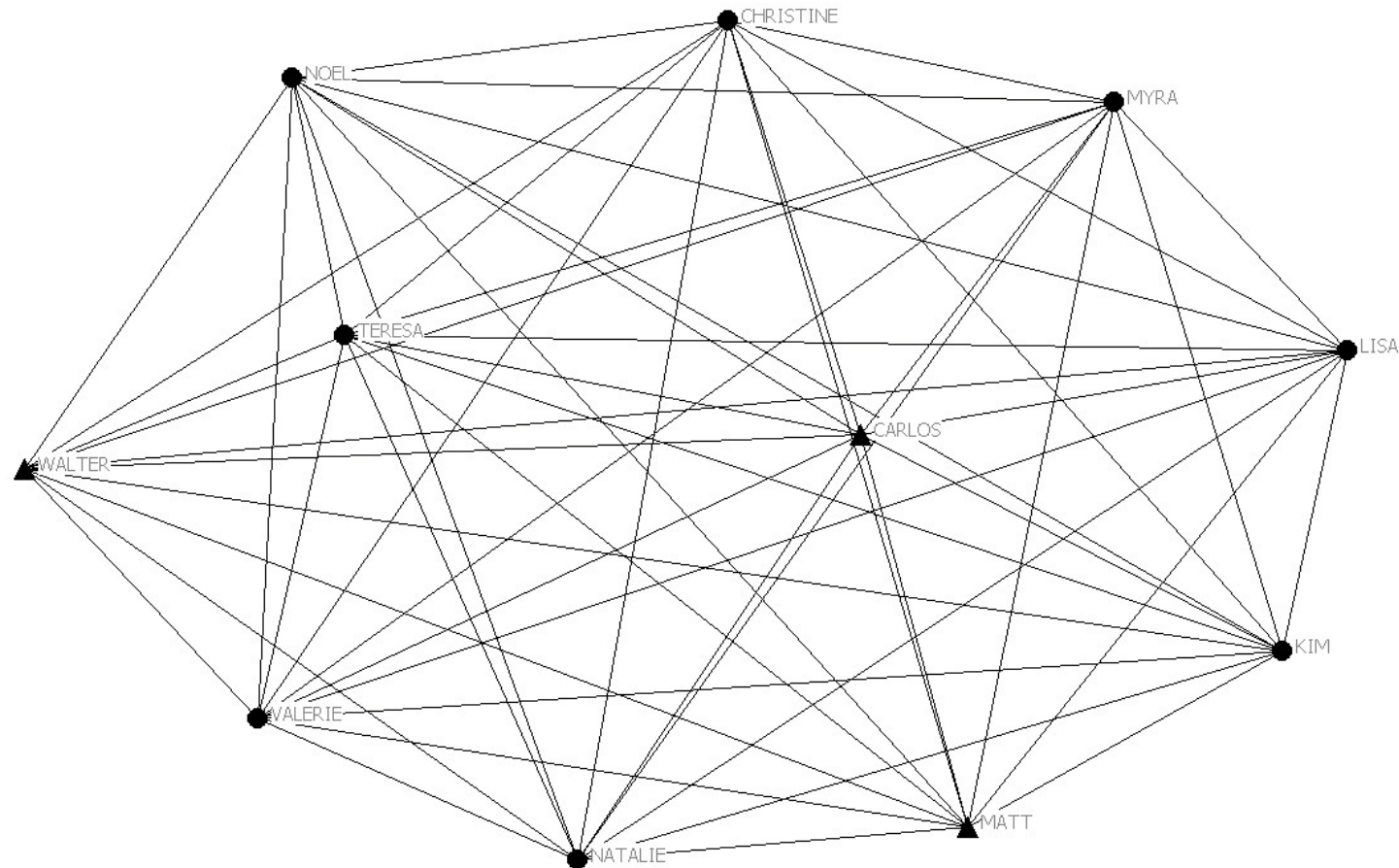
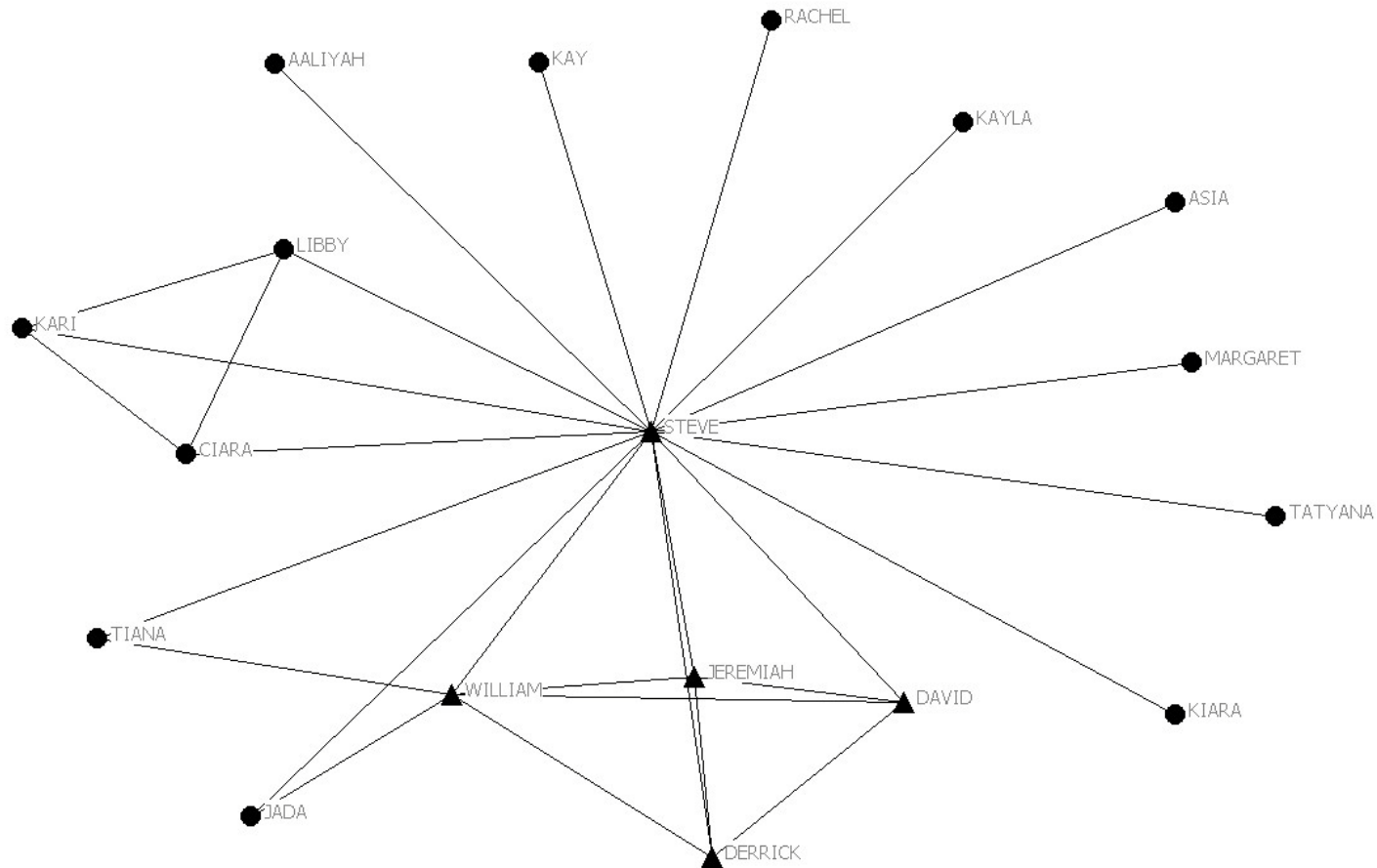


Figure 5. Steve's friendship network: A sampler, a black man with a network density of .08.

A Sampler: Steve's friendship network has .08 density. 21% of Black and Latino students are samplers



Janice McCabe, Florida State University

Table 2: Patterns in Network Density by Racial Identity

	Total	White	Students of Color	Black	Latino
Tight-knitters (.67-1 density)	33% (21)	6% (2)	66% (19)	67% (12)	64% (7)
Compartmentalizers (.34-.64 density)	52% (33)	83% (29)	14% (4)	11% (2)	18% (2)
Samplers (.08-.32 density)	16% (10)	11% (4)	21% (6)	22% (4)	18% (2)

Janice McCabe, Florida State University

	Mean GPA	Graduated from MU
Tight-knitters (.67-1 density)	2.9	76% (N=16)
Compartmentalizers (.34-.64 density)	3.3	88% (N=29)
Samplers (.08-.32 density)	3.2	100% (N=10)
White students	3.4	91% (N=32)
Students of color	2.9	79% (N=23)

Sample is too small to make generalizations about the differences here, but what is most surprising is that Samplers have higher GPA and Graduation Rates compared to racial/ethnic minorities as a whole.

Food for Discussion

- We might misinterpret how much support Samplers get from their friendship networks.
 - They might seem un-integrated in campus social life, but they might be getting exactly the kind of support they need that way.
- To develop a sense of belonging, a student need not be an entrenched member of multiple friendship groups (Compartmentalizers), there are multiple types of network structures that work.

Melanie Jones, *University of California- Davis*

“Gaining Respect’: Negotiating Race & Class in Black Student Relations with School Officials”

Black students interact with institutions (institutional agents) differently according to their class background.

- Consistent Groundwork (middle class students)
- Institutional Distrust (working class students)

Melanie Jones, *University of California- Davis*

Jones looks at Black high school students only. She is interested in how they obtain information about college.

- Her findings are likely applicable more widely to USD students from different class backgrounds obtaining information about their grades, graduation requirements, etc.

Melanie Jones, *University of California- Davis*

Consistent groundwork

involves approaching school officials using consistent signals to facilitate the transfer of college information and support.

- Middle-class black students in her study were better able to meet school official role expectations and gain the “respect” of school officials by engaging in consistent groundwork

Melanie Jones, *University of California- Davis*

Consistent groundwork

- Signaling that student has college desires/plans
- Proactively asking for information
 - Initiating conversations with teachers/counselors
 - Scheduling appointments
 - Requesting that teachers help with application essays and write recommendations

Melanie Jones, *University of California- Davis*

Consistent groundwork

- Counselors/teachers said they gave more time and support to students who:
 - ask questions
 - try hard
 - know what they want
 - come in during lunch
 - show initiative
- In short, these students earned teachers' respect

Melanie Jones, *University of California- Davis*

Consistent groundwork

- Middle class parents encouraged their teenagers to behave this way and actively coached them on how to ask questions respectfully, how to show initiative, etc.
- So these students' success should be seen as a result of their middle-class upbringings, not due to personal character traits.

Melanie Jones, *University of California- Davis*

Institutional Distrust

Involves exhibiting distrust in relations with school officials.

- Working class students in her study were more likely to exhibit distrust in their interactions with school officials.

Melanie Jones, *University of California- Davis*

Institutional Distrust

- Expectation that teachers/counselors would support all students equally.
 - Students expected teachers to initiate conversations about college.
- Skepticism that school officials did not have their best interests at heart.
 - Heightened perceptions of racial discrimination made students doubt whether school officials wanted them to go to college.

Melanie Jones, *University of California- Davis*

Institutional Distrust

Counselors/teachers respond by

- Being too busy for long appointments
- Reminding students how low they stand in class rankings (thus, unqualified for good colleges)
- Reviewing students' course selections quickly and carelessly

Melanie Jones, *University of California- Davis*

High school counselors and teachers have limited time and resources, so they allocate them to students who seem most likely to go to college.

Jones shows us that class-based differences in interaction styles prevent working class students from getting the support they need to prepare and apply for college.

Food for Discussion

Professors (like high school counselors) generally come from middle class backgrounds ourselves, so it is difficult for us to imagine that *everyone doesn't already know how to behave.*

- *If a student wants help, she'll come to office hour.*
 - *If a student cares about her grade, she'll be proactive about keeping tabs on it.*
 - *If a student wants to succeed in my class, she'll earn my respect by doing her work properly.*
- **These are middle class expectations**

Amanda Cox, Stanford University

“Disruption or Reproduction: Discourses of Social Class at a Private School”

How students can resist “borders” between social groups by recognizing them as “boundaries” instead.

Amanda Cox, Stanford University

Borders

- Seeing groups as distinct from one another and valuing them differently
 - “My group” is better than “your group” kind of mentality

Amanda Cox, Stanford University

Boundaries

- Recognizing differences between groups, but being open to ways to bridge those differences.
 - A mentality that looks for ways to find common ground between “my group” and “your group”, while respecting differences.

Amanda Cox, Stanford University

Bathroom stall interaction:

“Who has the fake Ugg boots on?”

Student interaction at an affluent student’s house:

“You’re so rich!”

“Let me show you the holes in the walls”

Food for Discussion

How can we help USD students:

- resist borders?
- cross boundaries?

Suggested Reading

- Lareau, Annette. 2003. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley: UC Press.
- Tinto, Vincent. 1994. *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Carter, Prudence. 2006. “Straddling Boundaries: Identity, Culture, and School” *Sociology of Education* 79(4): 304-328.
- Tyson, Karolyn, William Darity Jr., and Domini Castellino. 2005. “It's Not “a Black Thing”: Understanding the Burden of Acting White and Other Dilemmas of High Achievement” *American Sociological Review* 70(4): 582-605.
- Pascoe, C.J. 2007. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley: UC Press.