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### THE FORGOTTEN (?) MINORITY

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#### A Commentary

In this day and age, colleges and universities are quite sensitive to trying to provide all of the necessary ancillary / support services that might enhance students' efforts to succeed. These services often are subject to various guidelines, laws, or recommendations that might be state or federally mandated.

Efforts to satisfy the needs of, and assure equality for all races, genders and religious groups, are of obvious concern. In order to fulfill these endeavors, often research is either engaged in at the institution or data is supplied by an outside source (frequently government originated).

Specific academic needs are often identified for those who need help in skills such as test-taking, time management, stress management, note taking and a plethora of other learning enhancements.

Then there are the recognized learning disorders that must be accommodated with adequate services provided by the institution. Along with these above mentioned concerns are the particular roadblocks that confront older (older meaning those older than the statistically typical college age student but not necessarily in the elderly or senior years) students whose academic agility may not be comparable to the younger students.

Frequently we empathize with, and try to offer aid to, the married student or the married student with children, owing to all of the knowledge we have generated via studies of students who are married with or without children.

All of these concerns have evolved from more traditional understandings and profiles of students that educational research has described through the years. However, we have seen some radical societal changes in the past 10-20 years and as a result, a "new minority" has been evolving. With high rates of divorce, along with increased pregnancies, coupled with the increased desire to "have a career," we seem to be seeing more and more "singled" parents entering higher education.

The "singled parent student" being delineated from the "single parent student" because isn't it possible that the needs, the fears, the desires, and indeed the behavior of someone who once shared life along with the responsibility of raising a child is different from the parent who became a parent yet never had the experience of shared decision-making, of shared responsibility, or the prospect of a shared future? The "singled parent student", quite possibly, has lived being more dependant upon someone else for decision-making. For example, the need to completely manage money could be a new challenge, as opposed to being given an allotment in a specific amount for a particular period. There is a certain security and / or dependency that one gets when they have the opportunity to "run this by" someone else, especially when rearing a child, whether or not advice is followed. A soft dependency is usually generated. There is a comfort zone that one senses when one feels that they have consulted with

someone else. On the other hand the person who has not had the co-habitation experience often develops a faster independence when making decisions and thus experiences a deeper sense of self-reliance.

Even from a physical perspective, might the needs of someone who, over a long period of time, has consistently felt a warm body alongside and now doesn't, differ from one who has not had that experience? There are many situations in which becoming a parent occurred as a result of a "momentary" relaxing of inhibitions. Might there be a difference in the quality of loneliness experienced by one who became accustomed to sharing a bed as opposed to one who has not shared a bed? It is known that to many people the sharing of a bed represents a form of security that might have to be identified and thus adequate coping acquired, if lost.

Perhaps, within a university setting, it might prove to be valuable to research and develop a profile of the "singled parent student" with the objective of identifying unique needs for the purpose of organizing some specific support networks for this group of students. The designing of an instrument to develop such a profile and the data gathering methods should be plausible and manageable in the university setting. Sometimes merely having a group of individuals with common concerns getting together with someone who understands the specific problems of the group can be of service and become a source of decision-making potential. Often the experiences of others are quite useful and welcomed. The bottom line is that the "singled parent student" not only must cope with the rigors of being a parent along with the pressures of being a student, but he /she must do so while trying to adjust to the loss of a companion.

Is the "singled parent student" a forgotten minority?