

Males in Enabling: Their lives, their experience, their perspective.

“To those who said I couldn’t do it, thank you for giving me the opportunity to prove you wrong.”

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Abstract

Enabling programs play an important role in the up-skilling and development of students who want a second chance at gaining an undergraduate degree at university. Many Australian universities offer these types of programs, commonly known as Enabling, Preparatory, Transition or Access, as a way of developing and up-skilling students by assisting them in transitioning into undergraduate studies. These programs cater to a diverse cohort of both the male and female populace. An ever increasing number of students are utilising these programs as an alternative pathway to university. Within the *Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies* (STEPS) program at CQUniversity, there has been a notable disproportionate number of males to females enrolling in the program; however, this gap is slowly closing with a higher number of males enrolling in both internal and external mode of study. Recent research by the authors (James, Conradie, & Armstrong, 2014) began exploring the factors that inhibit or enhance the male experience within this program. This paper expands upon this research with a deeper focus into the male experience through more personalised accounts derived from focus groups. Through thematic analysis, three key themes emerged: Overall Benefits to Students (both extrinsic and intrinsic), Support Structures (internal and external) and Obstacles and Barriers. This research will reveal the commitment and dedication of these male students who shared their personal experiences within the STEPS program, but more than this, it has demonstrated that each one faced obstacles and barriers that could derail their dream; yet, they were successful in conquering the obstacles that would have once located them on the perimeter of higher education. The men in this study represent the empowering transformation that enabling programs instigate. These men, although positioned across different and competing formations of identity, aspire towards an idealized identity even when it is at odds with their lived realities.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research paper is to capture the experiences held by male enabling students studying in the *Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies* (STEPS) program at CQUniversity with regards to their experience as a male student re-entering education through an enabling pathway. The information gathered will not only enable the researchers to gain a better understanding of the male student, it will also assist them in identifying any obstacles they may encounter, highlighting aspects of the program they find beneficial as well. This will promote and foster the provision of a quality enabling experience.

Enabling programs play an important role in the up-skilling and development of students who want a second chance at gaining an undergraduate degree at university. Australian universities are there to provide an opportunity for both Australian citizens and international students to gain an education and, in turn, a profession that collectively supports the development of a knowledge society (Anderson, Boven, Fensham, & Powell, 1980). However, in regional areas of Australia, often due to social and economic disadvantages, the opportunity to study at university has been a luxury that many families have not been able to afford (Seary, James & Conradie, 2014). This culture is still prevalent, especially in regards to males deciding whether they should go to university or enter the workforce (Raven, 2012). In 2009, the Australian Commonwealth Government set a target to reform the higher education sector over a ten year period, as part of its commitment to securing national long term economic prosperity, with a commitment to up-skill and educate Australia's workforce (DEEWR, 2009). In addition, the government set targets for increased participation rates of low socioeconomic students (LSES) and groups previously under-represented (DEEWR, 2009, p. x). However, this introduced new issues that needed to be rectified in order for universities to be fully inclusive. Enabling programs, known interchangeably as Enabling, Access, Preparatory, or Transition programs, are specifically designed to offer a fee-free alternative access to tertiary education for students. However, limited research has been conducted specifically on males who enter university via an enabling program. Our research aims to examine the male experience through personal 'lived experiences' – that is, to hear their voice and capture their experiences through their personal narratives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been considerable research into both genders as they progress through enabling programs (Klinger & Wache, 2009; Muldoon, O'Brien, Pendreigh, & Wijeyewardene, 2008; Noble & Henderson, 2009; Ramsay, 2007; Willans & Seary, 2007; 2009). Willans and Seary's research (2007; 2009) reveal that enabling programs have a positive impact on many mature aged students who enter university via this trajectory. Klinger and Wache (2009) assert that enabling programs offer students hope that they can succeed in this new environment by equipping them with the skills and tools to do so. Willans and Seary (2007) believe it vital that Enabling programs combine core skilling and self-skilling in order to set strong foundations for academic discourse. There is the expectation that when students enter

undergraduate study, they will be ready to engage with a vast body of knowledge and use higher-order skills such as analysing, synthesising and evaluating information (James, 2013), and this is the niche that enabling programs fill.

BACKGROUND

The STEPS program commenced in 1986 and is, at present, offered across 10 CQUniversity campuses as well as in distance mode. It is an enabling program specifically designed to act as a pathway; the goal of which is to provide students with the skills needed to successfully transition into undergraduate studies. The underlying philosophy is born from the belief that, within an adult learning program, both the inner and outer lives of students must be taken into consideration (James, Conradie, & Armstrong, 2014). This is achieved through a holistic curriculum that covers core subjects that assist students to develop the skills and academic rigour that is expected to commence into undergraduate studies. Once students start the program, they are supported through each course with support lecturers, whose roles are to facilitate knowledge, share resources, and guide and motivate them in order to help them succeed.

Despite evidence of progress made by means of widening participation programs, male access to higher education is still quite low (Raven, 2012, p. 60). Traditionally, fewer men have enrolled in and successfully completed enabling programs in Australia (Raven, 2012; Weaver-Hightower, 2010). The cohort of male students who enter into this program come from diverse backgrounds and may be the first in their family to attend university (James, 2013). The majority of the male cohort come from a working class culture and the value placed on education in comparison to entering the workforce to provide for their family is a barrier that some struggle to get past. This is supported by Connell's research into social and economic pressures of males in society (2005, p. 1811). She claims that 'where unemployment is high the lack of a paid job can be a damaging pressure on men who have grown up with the expectations of being breadwinners.' Hearn (1992) argues that male students, with low academic achievement and preparation in high school, follow non-traditional pathways, such as enabling programs, because they are not prepared for the rigours of university. Ewert (2010) hypothesise that men are more likely than women to follow disrupted pathways as a result of their poorer high school performance which leaves them less prepared for university. Furthermore, males from lower socio-economic regions are "significantly less likely to enter university than their counterparts from more affluent families" (Raven, 2012). Kahn, Brett, and Holmesch (2011) found that male students who came from underrepresented areas in society tended to be overrepresented in problem areas. These included applying less often than affluent males, underperforming in many academic areas, significantly higher risk to be on academic probation, higher probability to be dismissed from university for academic reasons and an increased lack of persistence to graduate. Raven (2012) states that males from these low socio backgrounds often experience low expectations from family to attend university and, in addition, a lack of parental knowledge to inform and encourage their progression to university. Some of the barriers that were identified with men who had a

limited post school education included significantly lower internet skills alongside an age barrier (McGivney, 1999, as cited in Golding, 2005-2006).

Part of the difficulty in preparing males to follow the trajectory through higher education is the pervasive culture of anti-intellectualism. A recent Australian study investigating aspects that prompted people to participate in education and training at more mature ages, found that the factors underlying the decision to undertake further education differed considerably from those affecting younger students (Coelli, Tabasso, & Zakirova, 2012). The authors found that for males, the decision to enroll in further education was generally related to a weaker labour market. These findings were consistent with research by James, Conradie & Armstrong (2014), which found males more likely to state that the main reason for entering into study was to gain employment. They also identified that in order to satisfy welfare requirements, males were possibly inclined to pursue an education and enter through a non-traditional pathway. McGivney (1999, as cited in Golding, 2005-2006) states that there is still credence in the old saying that 'while men tend to earn, women tend to learn', and this has formed the belief by some men, that learning is seen as an unacceptable form of vulnerability. In addition, he found that men's reluctance to engage in education might be related to a 'lack of interest, fear of failure, or the embracing of traditional masculine values'.

METHODOLOGY

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Throughout the analysis phase, the qualitative approach of thematic analysis was used (Boystzis, 1998). Unlike traditional content analysis, thematic analysis attempts to understand the underlying messages behind social and cultural phenomena, and not just the content, which allows researchers to understand the perceptions of those involved in the focus groups (Guest et al., 2012). Thematic analysis involves the search for and identification of common threads that extend across the entire set of interviews and provides a purely qualitative, detailed and nuanced account of data (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). Using thematic analysis requires a relatively low level of interpretation as it allows the data to speak and guide the findings. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis is a flexible and useful research tool which provides a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of the data. For this paper, the focus is on sharing the preliminary findings from the research taken from small focus groups of males who are currently experiencing the phenomenon of study within an enabling program.

PARTICIPANTS

An initial email was sent to all current internal male STEPS students (115 students) enrolled in the Mackay or Bundaberg campuses inviting them to participate in the focus groups. A total of five focus groups were conducted on the Mackay and Bundaberg campus of CQUniversity. A total of 14 males participated in the focus groups with a demographic

footprint of 18 years to approximately 65 years of age. This sample group gave a broad view from different cultural, experiential and diverse viewpoints. The interviewers asked open ended questions and allowed the participants to share their thoughts amongst the focus groups.

DATA ANALYSIS

The focus groups were recorded on a voice recorder and transcribed verbatim. Utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6 step guide to thematic analysis, the transcripts were initially read and reread to gain an understanding of the individual experiences of each adult male student enrolled in the STEPS enabling program and the transcripts were coded in order to be familiar with the context behind the comments. Initially, the researchers searched for and identified themes consistent throughout the interviews and allocated relevant data to each potential theme. A thematic map was created and the key themes were reviewed and redefined in order to ensure the themes reflected the nature of the responses. Three key themes were identified: 1. Overall Benefits to Students; 2. Support Structures; and 3. Obstacles and Barriers, and within each of these a number of sub-themes were established. The themes identified will be shared and a selection of extracts chosen to effectively share the voice of the lived experiences of the male students journey through STEPS.

FINDINGS

OVERALL BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

The most prominent theme evidenced in the responses was the overall benefit students felt they received by enrolling in and undertaking the enabling program. This was evidenced in two parts: one being the extrinsic nature of skills and academic rigour gained through the completion of the courses, and the second being the intrinsic benefits seen through their enhanced self-efficacy. Almost all transcripts contained a statement that demonstrated the students' appreciation for the STEPS program. An 18 year old student stated, *"It really makes you wake up and realise what you're all about and what you want to do with your life. Here are other people like 40 or something, and they are here to change career. It's never too late to change and I will tell people that can be achieved by doing STEPS"*. A 22 year old student shared, *"It's a very encouraging program especially when someone hasn't studied in a long time. Some of my friends chose to work instead of study, and maybe they were thinking they were not good enough. But I say it is very easy as they (STEPS) will teach you to better yourself"*. A 52 year old student recognised the value of the program due to his years away from study. *"I needed to do something like this since it has been 28 odd years since I left high school. It's good grounding to go into tertiary studies next year."* One student divulged how this experience was very new due to his past career as a labourer. *"All the jobs I've ever done were physical labour jobs basically, so I never really had a job where I needed to use my brain much."*

The structure of the STEPS program was mentioned. *"I feel like everything is nicely laid out and I know what I need to do ahead of time which it makes it a lot easier."* The STEPS program has a number of courses that the students can undertake. The foundational course, Preparation Skills for University (PSU), was mentioned a number of times and students highlighted how beneficial it was to gain and develop key skills required for university. PSU is the core course within this program, and as the title suggests, aims, in part, to equip students with skills such as time management, critical thinking and understanding the type of learner they are. Its primary aim is to support students undertaking studies for the first time and for some it may have been many years since they were at school. One student found PSU helpful with strategies on *"how to organise myself and my time and be proactive as well as to be able to accomplish what I want to do"*. Another student stated, *"The whole course of Prep skills was beneficial. Learning the foundations of everything coming into academic study has helped me a lot just in the first term in general skills and time management"*.

One student shared that PSU helped him to confidently choose a career path and assisted him by visualising himself in different career pathways. *"I found PSU...helped me to define my goals and analyse myself in different trades or career paths."* Another student shared that he was able to view a much broader selection of careers than he had previously considered. *"Some people don't know what they want to do and this course outlines a bigger variety and helps them hone it down to career paths they haven't thought of."* Time management is a concept that is taught early on in PSU in order to equip students with strategies as they begin this new journey and it was mentioned a number of times as students shared how much it benefited them. One of the younger students shared that, *"It helped a lot with organising. You learn to organise yourself whereas at school you just kind of did the assignment whenever you felt like it or last minute"*.

For the older students, computing skills was highlighted with them claiming more confidence with technology. One student came from a trade background and entering STEPS was like entering a foreign environment. *"All my working life I've been manually based and I have done very little computer work. The computer course here was terrific for me and gave me a lot more confidence with technology."* Another mature age student noted how his family has recognised an improvement in his technology skills. *"My children already noticed changes in my technology skills particularly and they say I am much more confident in the way I am dealing with it now."*

At the initial interview, Maths is often mentioned as a subject that is feared by students, but the responses of these participants did not reflect this fear. In actual fact, there was a sense of relief and a newfound appreciation of the maths concepts. One student liked the way the maths course had weekly formative tests. *"In maths, you have a test every week. You work on the concepts during the week and then do the test."* One man noted how his level of

confidence has grown as he mastered the maths concepts. *“My family are quite proud because at high school my maths was terrible and now I tell them that I have got a distinction and they are all over the moon about it.”*

Interestingly, the younger students all mentioned the disparity between what they were taught in high school compared to what they are learning in STEPS. One young man commented that STEPS *“is a good pathway if you were not into school that much and you are looking at going to uni. It’s also a good way to get into a study routine”*. Another student shared that *“it’s a lot easier going through STEPS before going into undergrad then going from high school into undergrad,”* with another claiming that *“if I went from high school to an undergrad course I would not have passed”*. This highlights the realisation that they were not ready to transition into university from high school. A couple of students had disparaging comments which indicates a sense of annoyance as they reflect back to their high school years. One 18 year old shared that he does not believe that high school was setting them up for successful transition into university. The academic standard between high school and STEPS came into question as one young man shared his frustration at the disparity in the teaching of academic skills. *“I have no idea why we didn’t learn this stuff in high school, like the essay writing... I feel like I’ve learnt so much more here. I didn’t even know how to reference ... but we got taught referencing here [STEPS] in a couple of weeks.*

The other sub-theme to emerge was that of the intrinsic value of the program and students shared through a number of scenarios how it has improved their worldview and motivation. For one student, he claimed that *“straight away you’re a better person for going for it. You are gaining an education by putting the work in and you can really go anywhere, so why wouldn’t you do it?”* Another student appreciated learning more about his temperament type and found that through understanding himself, he was able to grasp concepts much better. Students noticed they were using a higher level of critical and analytical thinking now compared to before STEPS. One stated, *“I’ve been analysing things a lot differently than how I used to”* whilst others shared that their confidence levels have improved. *“I have more confidence in myself, and I have become a lot more engaged in my community.”*

SUPPORT STRUCTURE:

The next key theme to emerge through the responses was the variety of support structures available for the students. Within this one theme, there were two avenues of support highlighted: internal support structures at the university and external support structures outside of the university.

Students found that within the university environment, the lecturers were the main anchor of support both academically and emotionally. Support by lecturers can be in many forms ranging from academic advice to pastoral care. Students mention that *“I can speak to them in class rather than be online...that’s the main reason why I chose internal study rather than external and work as well”* and *“they are always more than willing to help”*. One student

found that the tips/study suggestions given by the lecturer assisted them outside of the class environment. Terms like friendly, supportive, compassionate, sympathetic and caring were used to describe lecturers. One student stated, *"They are always more than willing to help"* and the students had the sense that they were *"not on their own"*. The younger students highlighted the notable difference in support and expectations between what they experienced in high school compared to the university environment. One student stated, *"you can tell that a lot of the teachers (high school) didn't really care about whether you passed or failed, it was the test they cared about"*; whereas, another student highlighted that, *"In STEPS, I find that they [lecturers] are very sympathetic to one's cause....they take a little bit more interest in why you maybe didn't attend"*.

Students are encouraged to have their own support networks in the form of study groups and buddies. That said, only one student mentioned their involvement in a study group; nevertheless, there was acknowledgement that interaction with other students was beneficial. For one student, he had a few friends to talk to about different topics and assignments but as for a study group he *"hadn't really felt the need for it at the present time"*. Another student said, *"I haven't really had a study buddy, but do talk to other students to compare notes and stuff"*. When the terms study buddy or study groups were mentioned, it was noted that although they did not dismiss them entirely, the general consensus was that they did not find them to be necessary. They mentioned that they all have support networks in place, but they do not refer to them as study groups or buddies.

External support structures tended to revolve around family, with both positive and negative scenarios shared. Students who had strong family support structures shared how much they valued having support from outside of the university. Most of the older males were in a relationship and each commented about the value of support external to university. *"My wife is very supportive. She works and we don't have children at home, so I have the ability to study in peace and quiet."* One student talked about balance in life and taking the family on this journey of education alongside him. He posed the question, *"what is important; your university study or your children? They both are and you just have to work towards balancing the two"*. One young father shared how, as a family, they fit study into their family life. *"My partner is studying as well. She has one more year to go to finish her degree. We decided to draw up a huge time table. We went through it and itemised everything from study time, travel, play time with kids, eating and sleeping."* Two students shared how they made agreements with their families. One stated, *"I made an agreement with my family about helping around the house and this has worked so far"*, and the other said *"I made an agreement with them saying that I would study for a certain amount of time and during this time I'd like not to be disturbed, and so far so good."* Living at home with parents can bring with it a new set of challenges. Because one student was the second to go to university, his parents were more understanding of what their young adult son was experiencing. While this level of support is beneficial for some, others found that it was emotional support they appreciated. *"My parents taught me from the time I could comprehend that you can be*

anything you want to be, just go out and do it.” On the other hand, another student responded that “it’s all good saying to someone ‘mate you can do this’ but if they don’t believe you, they are not going to do it regardless of how much help you can give them”.

Some students shared some negative stories of how their external support structures were not beneficial, and have placed them in some emotional turmoil as they deal with those situations. Sadly, for one student, doing the STEPS program resulted in him losing friends as a result of prioritizing time for study by reducing time socialising with them. As a result his friends *“took this as an insult and felt that I was stabbing them in the back or turning my back on them. All I was trying to do was better myself, but that was called selfish”*. The ultimate betrayal was that these ‘friends’ were telling him that *“he was not smart enough”*. Another student was in the midst of a marriage breakup and the turmoil of this, plus other factors, have been detrimental. He openly shared his story, *“My marriage broke up the end of last year. My mother died this year and I’ve got my dad who basically came over from where he was living, turned around and told me I would probably never see him again and then left. On top of all this, I basically have to face my ex [at university everyday] which really puts an emotional drain on myself and I struggle to focus”*.

James, Conradie & Armstrong (2014) found that intrinsic motivation was one of the leading factors to have an impact on a male’s STEPS journey and, for the students who were part of these focus groups, the motivational force was often fuelled by emotion. For one student, he *“simply can’t [give up STEPS]. If I just throw all this away, what will happen to me? I will end up becoming a nobody and will probably end up killing myself”*. For another student, looking at his future based on what he saw in the past within his family, was motivational enough to make changes. Working in a labour intensive industry, this student *“saw what happened to my forefathers. It ruined their lives, ruined their bodies both mentally and physically. Struggling for the next 4 years is nothing compared to the struggles I would have to endure for the rest of my life if I didn’t study”*. Inspiration was all that was needed to be a motivational force for another. *“A good friend started her University degree when she was 80 [limited pathways when she was younger] and she wanted to have letters after her name to feel that she had done something. This motivated me to undertake study.”* This same student also noted that *“when I get good grades there is a terrific high”*. Each STEPS student undertakes the program with different expectations. Hope and opportunity was the best way to sum up one student’s feelings. *“Regardless of what’s going on in here or out there, STEPS or hopefully joining the University, is giving us all something to strive towards. Something that’s bigger and better than what we would ordinarily be looking at if we didn’t have this opportunity”*. One student created his own motivational saying that he uses as his driving force: *“To all the people past and present, in my life, who have told me that I cannot do it, thank you for giving me the opportunity to prove you wrong”*.

OBSTACLES AND BARRIERS

The third key theme to emerge revolved around a range of obstacles and barriers that had negative connotations as a male student in the STEPS enabling program. External commitments were the most common thread identified and this ranged from balancing family with study through to work commitments and financial obligations.

As expected, family plays a major role in the life of all students, and balancing this with study can be challenging at times. Travelling to see family is a challenge for a young male who has a daughter who lives away, requiring him to fly and see her every four weeks. During these visits he emphasised that *“when I’m with her she’s in my care all the time so no study gets done”*. Another student shared that *“getting married in 3 months and trying to balance uni and studying with working enough is pretty hard”*. When both partners are studying, finding a balance becomes even more important. As one student states, *“In the start it was very stressful with both of us needing 40 hours study time. However, after a couple of arguments with schedules, we worked it out”*. Balancing time spent with family and partners, as well as interacting socially, coupled with finding the time to study, resulted in one student experiencing a strong sense of guilt. He felt that he needed *“to spend more time on study as it’s more important and that’s where it gets tough”*. Combining family alongside work and study commitments can be a challenge for many of these students.

Financial pressures were identified as being a significant obstacle for most students. The need to work and the time commitment required were key issues facing one student. *“I have debts I have to pay and I’m in the process of restructuring so I can free more time, but at moment I still need to work a fair bit.”* Another student found it challenging going from being *“a primary provider into a secondary role”* where he had to rely on his partner being the main income earner. The STEPS program is supported by Centrelink, though some students shared that it is often not enough to even *“put fuel in my car each week to get here let alone other financial responsibilities like rent, electricity, internet, phone and credit cards”*. For many students, prior to commencing study, they underestimated the time required to balance study and work. One student now realizes that the *“amount time put into uni is crazy and it really affects your income. It’s almost like you want to ride your push bike to work to save some money to have some food on your plate”*. A major drop in income *“from 50-60hours a week to 16 hours a week”* took a certain amount of adjusting for one student. Justifying sitting in class instead of working was something that one student had to deal with especially when questioning *“why am I here studying when I can be earning \$30 an hour right now outside”*. Another student, after commencing study, soon realized how exhausting it could be and he developed a greater appreciation for what his partner, an undergraduate student, was going through. The ability to balance work, with study and some form of social life, was not as easy as students anticipated.

DISCUSSION

Returning to a formal learning environment through an enabling pathway can pose a paradoxical experience for students as they go through a transformational process. For these

mature age learners, they need to develop academic rigour and emotional stability but often lack the tools to instigate these changes by themselves. In order to develop a stronger sense of confidence and efficacy in their new identity as a university student, they need to allow themselves the opportunity to carve a new identity and endure the process that can often times be painful. Stone (2008) found that sheer determination was a significant factor for males in their persistence with their studies, and despite the obstacles previously discussed, is evident within this research. The student experience for many of these males included reconciling the need to work and their struggle to fulfil employment responsibilities while addressing family and academic obligations. Yet the students in these focus groups used adroit manoeuvres to meet academic and employment responsibilities. These students demonstrate sheer determination and a genuine love of and desire to continue learning no matter the obstacles that may impede this journey. The passion evident within the focus groups demonstrate how these students have recognised the transforming power that education has over their lives, not just through new career opportunities, but within their internal locus of control. Priscott and Simpson (2004, as cited in Bakioglu & Hacifazlioglu, 2010) claimed that high levels of motivation had a substantial influence in overcoming the potential barriers faced by the students most at risk of withdrawal (p. 131).

McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) identified that integration, commitment, satisfaction, finances, prospective careers, support and psychology are factors that are important for academic performance in higher education. This research has found similar indicators, but at a more foundational level; it identified that these students realised that they had a gap in their skills and knowledge, and the enabling program was filling that gap. However, it is also acknowledged that these students may require a high level of emotional support as they transition into this new identity as a student. Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite and Godfrey (2004) found that for many of these students, they have had little positive experience of study behind them and a sizable proportion come from lower socio-economic backgrounds with little, if any, family history of education. Therefore, the support required from lecturers is not just to support them academically, but also through pastoral care and psychological persuasion (James, 2013). This is supported by Connell (2005, p. 1805) who purports that males are truly the disadvantaged and “need supported programs in education.”

CONCLUSION

Enabling education offers new horizons, new possibilities and new opportunities for males with aspirations to enhance the quality of their lives and the lives of those around them. As Linger and Murray (2009) state; “it represents a means of social mobility – a vehicle through which to improve and assert one’s place in society.” However, for the males in this research project, it also entails substantial human and financial investment and, for many, it is not undertaken lightly. Those males who chose this pathway are diverse in nature as is seen through their age, cultural heritage, social placement and educational backgrounds. In many cases, they are also the first in the family to attend university, which in itself is instrumental

in societal change, but is often attempted in the face of considerable sociological and socio-economic obstacles. This research has reflected the commitment and dedication of these male students who shared their personal experiences within the STEPS program, but more than this, it has demonstrated that each one faced obstacles and barriers that could derail their dream; yet, they were successful in conquering the obstacles that would have once located them on the perimeter of higher education. Overall, this research touches on the transformative changes that many enabling students experience as they put aside their old identity in order to assimilate into a new and often foreign environment. Through the utilisation of various support structures, both internal being lecturers and other students and external being friends and family, the students found the stability that they need as they go through the metamorphosis of changing identities. However, this journey was not without its challenges. The students shared the barriers that could have the potential to derail them from this pathway. Determined to succeed, these male students have shown great courage in their quest to achieve what was once considered too far beyond their reach. The men in this study represent the empowering transformation that enabling programs instigate. These men, although positioned across different and competing formations of identity, aspire towards an idealized identity even when it is at odds with their lived realities.

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