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The Hidden Weight: Pressure Faced by College Students Today

Nearly all college students today experience emotional and financial challenges that threaten their ability to succeed in higher education. In his story “I Was a Low-Income College Student,” Anthony Abraham Jack shares his personal experience and observations about how financial hardship and social inequality affect low-income students faced at highly rated colleges like Johns Hopkins, Howard, and Princeton. Through understanding and reflecting on his tone, Jack encourages professors, administrators, and students to address the struggles faced by students. Financial hardship, academic adjustment, and social isolation are challenges that create intense pressure on students, preventing them from achieving academic success.

Financial hardship is one of the biggest pressures students face. Many struggle to afford tuition, housing, and meals while trying to balance their academic life. In Jack's story, he said that “I was one of the nearly 40 percent of undergraduates who struggle with food insecurity. Before anything else, colleges should meet students’ basic needs. Jack says, “it is hard to focus and function when you’re hungry” (Jack 24). His situation reflects what students face today; due to their low income, they are left unsupported during school breaks, forcing them to find other ways to survive on their own. This inability to meet basic needs leads to anxiety, poor focus, and exhaustion impacts lower motivation and academic performance.

Another major pressure students face is the challenge of academic adjustment. Many

first-generation students are entering college unfamiliar with the academic environment without guidance or prior exposure to college expectations. Jack further on explaining that “Admission alone, as it turns out, is not the great equalizer. Just walking through the campus gates unavoidably heightens these students’ awareness and experience of the deep inequalities around them” (Jack 6). Without mentors or family experience to guide them, students often struggle to navigate themselves in a new environment. Leading students to burnout, struggling to adapt, and the fear of not living up to the college expectations forced them to work twice as hard to meet standards that others already understand.

Social isolation is the last factor that further amplifies the emotional strain of college life. Low-income students may feel out of place among peers who can afford to socialize, travel, and engage in fun events that they can't afford to do. Jack himself addresses that “College administrations must make a sustained effort to understand the stress and isolation that can define everyday college life for these more vulnerable students” (Jack 23). This daily occurrence of inequality brings out a feeling of isolation and alienation in students. The fear and nervousness of being somewhere new causes students to emotionally retreat, putting themselves into isolation without even realizing it. As a result, many students withdraw socially, missing out on the connections that make college life fulfilling and supportive. Most times, they develop feelings of frustration or self-doubt, wishing they could have done more in their college life.

In conclusion, financial hardship, academic adjustment, and social isolation create deep pressures for many students. Together, these causes create a cycle of stress that can undermine success. Resulting in them being stressed, sleep deprived, and a sense of not belonging in school. To reduce these struggles, colleges should expand meal programs, offer mentorship

opportunities, and create open spaces where students from all backgrounds can succeed. True success in higher education does not only depend on academic ability but also on a supportive environment that values every student's well-being and opportunity to thrive.

Works Cited

Jack, Anthony Abraham. "I Was a Low-Income College Student." Subject and Strategy: A Writer's Reader, edited by Paul Eschholz, Alfred Rosa, and Virginia Clark, 15th ed. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2021, pp 384-391