Race, Place, and Poverty
An Urban Ethnographers' Symposium on Low-Income Men

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Education and Employment of Disconnected Low-Income Men

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This brief, part of a series on disconnected low-income men, explores their education and employment outcomes using data from the American Community Survey (ACS, 2008–10) supplemented by other sources. Low-income men are defined as those age 18 to 44 who live in families with incomes below twice the federal poverty level (FPL)[1] and do not have four-year college degrees. Other briefs in the series examine low-income men's demographic profiles, health, and heightened risk of incarceration and disenfranchisement.

Low Educational Attainment Disadvantages Low-Income Men

We present data on the educational attainment of low-income men and compare them with men who live in families with incomes above 200 percent of FPL (or "higher-income men"). While this brief primarily focuses on men without postsecondary degrees, we begin by examining the spectrum of educational disparities for men across the income distribution.

Low-income men have lower levels of education than higher-income men. Nationally, low-income men are almost three times as likely as higher-income men to lack a high school degree or equivalent education (29 percent versus 10 percent; see figure 1).[2] Low-income men are also somewhat more likely than higher-income men to have a high school degree or GED as their highest level of educational attainment (33 percent versus 27 percent). Similar proportions of lower-income and higher-income men have some college education, but not an associate's degree (24 percent versus 25 percent). Low-income men are half as likely as higher-income men, however, to have an associate's degree (4 percent versus 8 percent) and three times less likely to have a four-year college degree or more education (10 percent versus 30 percent).

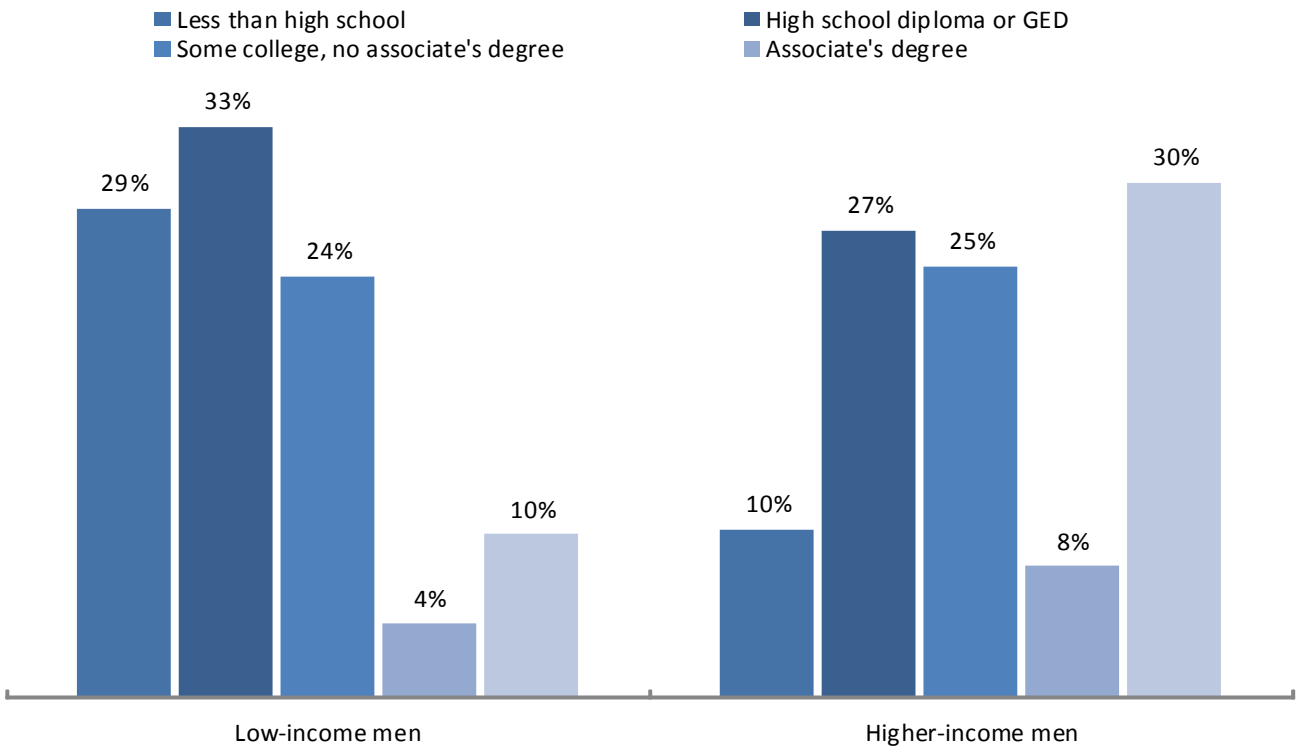
Among low-income men, Hispanics have lower high school completion rates than African Americans and whites.[3] Fifty percent of Hispanics age 18 to 44 lack a high school degree or GED, compared with 26 percent of African Americans and 17 percent of whites in the same age group. Low-income Hispanic men are also half as likely as low-income white men to have any postsecondary education (21 percent versus 48 percent). Low-income African American men fall in the middle (35 percent).

The rest of the brief focuses on the target population—low-income men with less than a four-year college degree—to highlight disparities across race and place. Looking at the target population of low-income men without a college degree, 32 percent do not have a high school degree or GED.

Metropolitan areas with high concentrations of Hispanics have low high school completion rates. In 18 of 52 metropolitan areas examined, more than a third of low-income men (34 percent or more) do not have a high-school degree or GED. Most of these metropolitan areas have a majority low-income Hispanic male population. The Bakersfield metropolitan area in California, where 71 percent of low-income men are Hispanic, has the highest share of low-income men without a high school degree or GED (46 percent).[4]

Similarly, the high school dropout rates are above the national average (32 percent) in several other metropolitan areas where Hispanics are a majority of low-income men: Houston (45 percent), McAllen and Fresno (44 percent each), Los Angeles and Dallas (43 percent each), and Riverside (42 percent) metropolitan areas. In comparison, metropolitan areas with a large percentage (33 percent or higher) of African American low-income men have lower

Figure 1. Educational Distribution of US Men Age 18–44, 2008–10



Source: ASPE tabulations of the American Community Survey (2008–10).
Notes: Low-income men live in families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and lack four-year college degrees. Higher-income men live in families with incomes above 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

high school dropout rates, ranging from 24 percent in the Virginia Beach metropolitan area to 36 percent in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

Another indication of educational disparities is the share of low-income men who are limited English proficient, or LEP. Nationally, 21 percent of low-income men with less than a four-year college degree are LEP, meaning they speak a language other than English at home and speak English less than very well.[5] Fourteen percent of low-income men are bilingual, meaning they speak another language at home and speak English very well. Over four in every ten low-income men in cities with large Hispanic populations cannot speak English very well. The LEP share of low-income men is close to half in the Los Angeles and San Jose metropolitan areas (48 percent each) and 40 percent or higher in six other metropolitan areas with sizable populations of Hispanic low-income men, including Houston (43 percent), San Francisco (41 percent), and Bakersfield (41 percent).

Low-Income Men Are More Likely to Be Unemployed and Underemployed

Employment status can be measured in a number of ways. This brief uses several definitions for a more complete picture of low-income men's connections to work. In addition to the official unemployment rate, we examine men's participation in the labor force and their engagement in part-time work.

Low-income men age 18 to 44 without four-year college degrees report a lower level of labor force

participation (employed or looking for a job at the time of the survey) than all men age 18 to 44: 77 percent versus 87 percent. However, there are differences in labor force participation by race and ethnicity. Among low-income men, Hispanics have the highest labor force participation rate (85 percent) and African American men the lowest (67 percent). The rate for low-income white men is close to the national average for all low-income men (75 percent).

Low-income men have lower levels of employment than higher-income men in the same age group. Nationally, 61 percent of low-income men age 18 to 44 report being employed, compared with 78 percent of all 18- to 44-year-old men. Among low-income men, Hispanics are more likely to be employed than white men (73 percent versus 60 percent). African American men are the least likely to be employed (44 percent).

Looking at unemployment reveals larger differences: low-income men have much higher unemployment rates (ratio of unemployed to labor force participants) than the national average of all men 18 to 44: 21 percent versus 11 percent.[6] Among low-income men, African American men are the most likely to be unemployed (35 percent). Their unemployment rate is one and a half times as high as the rate for white men (21 percent) and more than twice as high as the rate for Hispanic men (14 percent).

The Detroit metropolitan area has the highest unemployment rate for low-income men among the 52 metropolitan areas examined (35 percent). The unemployment rate for low-income men is over 25 percent for several other metropolitan areas: Cleveland (30 percent); Providence (28 percent); Philadelphia, Sacramento, and Memphis (27 percent each); and St. Louis and Milwaukee (26 percent each). All except Providence have relatively high shares of low-income African American men (25 percent or higher).

Metropolitan areas in Texas with large Hispanic shares have the lowest unemployment rates for low-income men: Dallas (14 percent); San Antonio, Houston, and Austin (13 percent each); and El Paso (11 percent). Low-income men in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area also have low unemployment (12 percent).

Low-income men are less likely than working-age men in general to be employed full time. Among US low-income men who have worked in the past year, 30 percent were employed part time or less than 35 hours a week. This is more than one and a half times the rate of part-time work among all men 18 to 44 (18 percent). Low-income men are also less likely than all working-age men (16 to 64) to work year round, or 50 to 52 weeks annually (56 percent versus 73 percent). Low-income men are twice as likely as all men 18 to 44 to be employed for 26 or fewer weeks (22 versus 12 percent).

Looking at both hours and weeks worked, less than half (45 percent) of low-income men are employed full year, full time, compared with 66 percent of all working-age men. Low-income men are more likely than all working-age men to work part year, full time (26 percent versus 16 percent) or full year, part time (11 percent versus 7 percent).

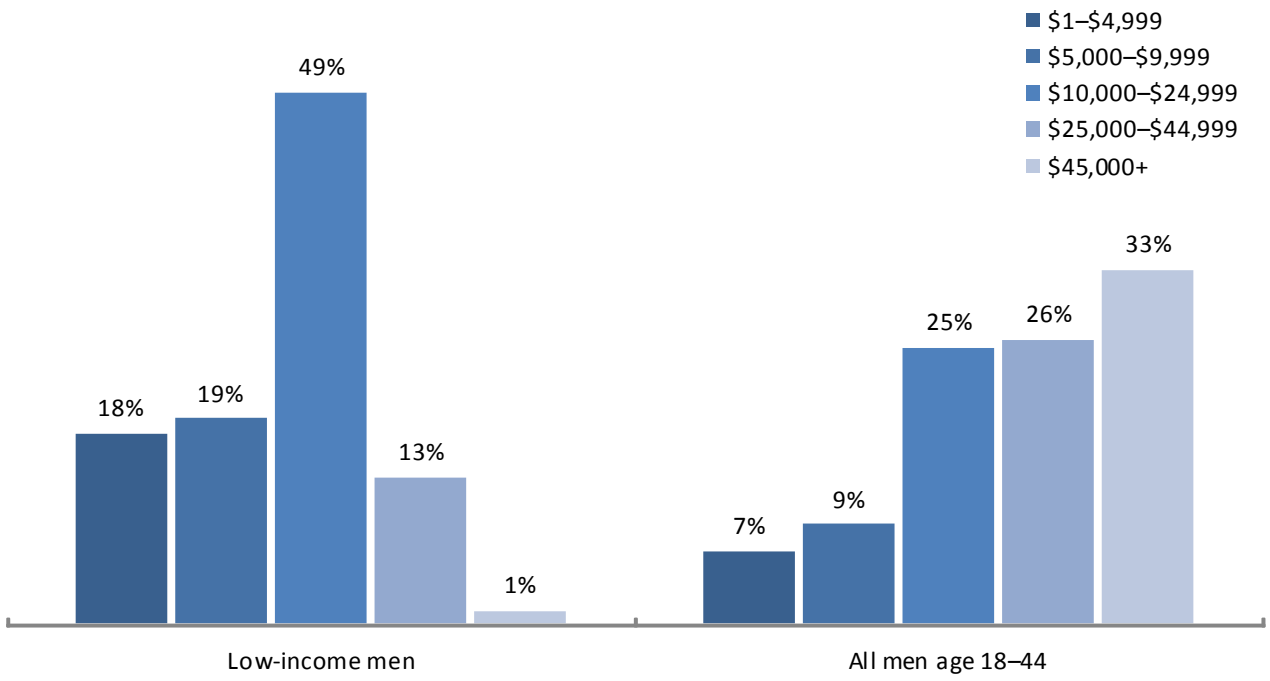
Low-Income Men Have Less Personal Income to Contribute to Their Families

The target population for these briefs is defined by the income of the family in which they live. The exact income that puts these men into the low-income category depends on the size of the family and the income of all of its members. Personal income is the income earned or otherwise received by the individual low-income man.

The vast majority of low-income men have personal income of less than $25,000 a year. Nationally, 83 percent of low-income men report positive personal income (i.e., income greater than $0). Of those reporting positive income, 37 percent report income of less than $10,000, or below the poverty threshold for a single person (figure 2). This is more than double the share of all men age 18 to 44 (16 percent). Low-income men are twice as likely as all men to report personal income between $10,000 and $25,000, or around twice the poverty level for a single person (49 percent versus 25 percent).

Low-income men are half as likely as men overall to report income between $25,000 and $45,000 (13 percent versus 26 percent). Only 1 percent of low-income men report income of $45,000 or more. In contrast, 33 percent of men overall report personal income greater than $45,000.

Figure 2. Personal Income of US Men Age 18–44, 2008–10



Source: ASPE tabulations of the American Community Survey (2008–10).

Note: Low-income men live in families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and do not have four-year college degrees.

Notes

1. In 2010, the year for the data estimates, the federal poverty threshold was $11,344 for a single adult and $17,552 for a family of three with one child. Twice the poverty level was $22,688 for a single adult and $35,104 for a family of three (http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/threshld/).
2. Unless specified otherwise, statistics are based on US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) tabulations of the ACS (2008–10).
3. African American refers to non-Hispanic African American or black and includes those who identified themselves in the decennial census as black or African American only. White refers to non-Hispanic white and includes those who identified themselves in the census as white only. People of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Respondents who identified as other or two or more races in the census are grouped under "other non-Hispanic."
4. The 52 metropolitan areas examined have at least 50,000 low-income men. ACS data are not available for areas with smaller low-income men populations. The detailed name of metropolitan areas and geographic areas they encompass are shown in appendix table 1.
5. "Limited English proficient" people reported in the census survey that they speak a language other than English at home and that they speak English well, not well, or not at all. Those who speak another language at home but also speak English very well are considered English proficient and bilingual.
6. Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, seasonally adjusted unemployment rate, 2008–10 average, accessed in August, at http://data.bls.gov/pdq/querytool.jsp?survey=ln.

Appendix Table 1. Low-Income Men with Less than a High School Education in Metropolitan Areas with 50,000 or More Low-Income Men

Metropolitan area	Low-income men	Low-income men with less than a high school education	Share of metro population with less than a high school education	Share of metro population that is Hispanic
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	760,180	329,520	43%	72%
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA	739,085	268,910	36%	49%
Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL-IN-WI	407,380	139,140	34%	45%
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	348,130	149,510	43%	57%
Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX	342,600	153,090	45%	63%
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	280,965	89,580	32%	56%
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA	263,395	95,090	36%	34%
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	249,125	103,520	42%	69%
Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale, AZ	229,310	83,625	36%	53%
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD	207,665	56,570	27%	20%
Detroit-Warren-Livonia, MI	200,320	54,080	27%	8%
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	161,650	55,025	34%	49%
San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA	150,760	50,065	33%	54%
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	145,130	56,080	39%	40%
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	133,440	39,270	29%	31%
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH	125,775	30,795	24%	26%
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	124,115	33,230	27%	24%
Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL	120,210	27,560	23%	39%
San Antonio-New Braunfels, TX	119,935	38,315	32%	72%
Denver-Aurora-Broomfield, CO	116,140	40,160	35%	48%
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	113,935	27,275	24%	18%
Sacramento–Arden-Arcade–Roseville, CA	108,820	31,705	29%	36%
St. Louis, MO-IL	106,845	26,940	25%	5%
Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA	105,325	30,835	29%	27%
Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX	103,340	34,615	33%	55%
Las Vegas-Paradise, NV	102,615	39,570	39%	51%
Columbus, OH	90,490	21,000	23%	9%
Cincinnati-Middletown, OH-KY-IN	84,855	20,995	25%	7%
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC	84,575	30,750	36%	29%
Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, OH	82,905	23,825	29%	11%
Pittsburgh, PA	81,865	12,275	15%	3%
Indianapolis-Carmel, IN	81,355	27,635	34%	19%
Kansas City, MO-KS	81,120	22,710	28%	22%
Baltimore-Towson, MD	79,050	24,155	31%	13%
Nashville-Davidson–Murfreesboro–Franklin, TN	78,530	23,200	30%	22%
Fresno, CA	78,160	34,475	44%	69%
Memphis, TN-MS-AR	73,650	24,640	33%	14%
McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX	73,460	32,410	44%	98%
Oklahoma City, OK	72,970	21,645	30%	26%
Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, WI	69,265	19,900	29%	24%
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	65,145	25,760	40%	62%
Bakersfield-Delano, CA	63,260	29,245	46%	71%
Providence-New Bedford-Fall River, RI-MA	61,290	19,415	32%	28%
Tucson, AZ	58,570	16,675	28%	51%
Jacksonville, FL	58,180	16,010	28%	14%
Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN	57,335	16,240	28%	12%
El Paso, TX	56,325	17,665	31%	91%
New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner, LA	56,055	18,155	32%	17%
Salt Lake City, UT	54,590	15,620	29%	37%
Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC	53,745	12,875	24%	10%
Birmingham-Hoover, AL	51,650	16,915	33%	15%
Raleigh-Cary, NC	50,360	16,865	33%	35%
Not in Census MSA with ≥ 50,000 low-income men age 18–44	7,302,315	1,955,280	27%	20%
United States	**14,967,260**	**4,715,290**	**32%**	**32%**

Source: ASPE tabulations of the American Community Survey (2008–10).

Note: Low-income men are age 18–44, live in families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and do not have four-year college degrees.

About the Series

A large number of US men of prime working age are neither gainfully employed nor pursuing education or other training, suggesting a potentially significant disconnection from mainstream economic and social life. The Urban Institute, funded by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, US Department of Health and Human Services, convened the Race, Place, and Poverty symposium to better understand the experiences of men who were disengaged or at high risk of disengagement from mainstream economic and social systems. The symposium explored the state of knowledge on disconnected low-income men and discussed effective strategies for improving their well-being.

The five briefs in this series on disconnected low-income men summarize the symposium, provide a geographic and demographic snapshot of low-income men, and examine their education, employment, health, and heightened risk of incarceration and disenfranchisement. A related background paper prepared for the symposium features key themes from ethnographic and other qualitative research.

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