

Nothing new about girls cheating for boys

Contributed by Katie Gilbert and Maya Allen
Friday, 30 October 2009

*This story relies heavily on anonymous sources, and names in quotes have been changed. All sources were independently verified, following Grantonian editorial protocol.

The matter was brought to her attention three years ago. Susan Stautz, a Spanish teacher at Portland Community College (PCC), encountered a particularly serious case of plagiarism involving two of her students. The two, a boy and a girl, were involved in an abusive relationship at the hands of the boy.

Stautz explains that, according to the male student's upbringing and beliefs, "Women are supposed to obey men automatically." He was accustomed to this assumption and because of this wasn't used to being denied a demand. In this case it was a demand for a plagiarized assignment.

The woman in this situation was subjected to verbal abuse, which eventually became physical. Eventually she was forced to file a restraining order and switch schools. "She had to basically escape from the relationship," says Stautz. This particular incident occurred three years ago as a conflict rooted in cultural differences. However, girls are willingly complying with plagiarism demands from male students in a similar way at Grant.

One senior, "Samantha," has been, in her words, "helping" a group of boys since her junior year at Grant. It started with tutoring members of the men's basketball team "until they started getting overwhelmed," she says. "I'm the team mom for them, so when they needed help with homework, I was there," explains Samantha.

Still, she continues to help these boys. Why? Because "they're the only thing I have 'till I get out of here," she says. She explained that until she graduates, sports are "[her] life. That's what I'm known for. That's all I'll ever be known for."

Interestingly, the boys are often willing, even strategizing, to get girls to cheat for them in school. "Michael" describes his three-step method: First, express how hard the particular class is to the girl and imply you need a lot of help. Next, get them to offer help, but make it seem like it's only going to happen once. Finally, repeat the process until it becomes a pattern.

Michael describes the routine without hesitating: "They know, low-key, this is not going to be the last time they do the work for me," he says nonchalantly.

What Michael describes is plagiarism, and according to a US News and World Reports survey taken in 2008, 98% of high school students partake in it. Eighty percent of these students are classified as "high achieving," and 51 % of students, including Michael, "[do] not believe cheating [is] wrong."

"I don't think it's wrong because it's not like I'm forcing them," Michael justifies. "They offer and take the initiative after I persuade them a little bit, so why not?"

Teachers and staff understand where these opinions are coming from, but they don't agree with such practices.

"Plagiarism has been around for a long time," says Stautz, who once taught at Grant herself. She explains that it is because students are thinking in the short term and not the long term. She also explains that this particular issue, girls doing work for boys, is widespread.

Plagiarism certainly is not limited to Grant. A Portland State University football player describes a similar process to the one outlined by Michael. Bribing girls to do homework for him has become common practice.

"When I first joined the football team, all the junior and senior football players told me that even the prettiest girls weren't worth my time. They said playing football means I have to maintain good grades, so the best bet is to find smart girls who will do their part in helping you get your work done."

However, the boys don't seem to realize the risks involved. Says the PSU athlete, "I don't think I'm going to get caught. How will they catch me? It's all in fine print, and typed on the computer." He defiantly concludes that "Yes I'm going to continue to do it, and yes I do know the consequences. But when you have a lot of work... it's kind of hard doing it all by myself."

Grant head football coach and counselor Diallo Lewis expresses disappointment in these boys for two reasons: "One, that they wouldn't show the commitment of doing the work themselves and two, that they would take advantage of someone like that."

Other teachers and staff at Grant struggle over this issue as well. They grasp for solutions in the same way Lewis has tried to grasp the ethics of the conflict. History teacher Donald Gavitt explains that "if the laws aren't respected, people won't follow them," and that "[plagiarism] has to be caught before it even starts." Gavitt believes that rooting out plagiarism is difficult. Although teachers have a lot on their plates, "one has to know the capacity of their students. That's part of being a teacher."

Vice Principal Brian Chatard agrees that this is a difficult matter. Chatard, as well as Stautz, explained that there are measures teachers can take against plagiarism. Involving students in assignments such as speeches and exams that require their personal opinions, or creating assignments that require a lot of in-class work are only some of the ideas they came up with.

"There are multiple ways for [students] to demonstrate they know the material," says Chatard. He explains that it helps "not to just assign a whole bunch of assignments you can copy off someone else." Stautz also indicates that there is need for teachers to promote good behavior in class to help combat plagiarism. She said "when you promote good behavior you get better results than when you just punish bad behavior."

The student planner addresses the consequences of plagiarism by punishing involved parties with zeros on the assignment or failing the class. But how is a perpetrator who isn't enrolled in, or never taken the class, punished? The punishment for the boys here is clear, but what about the girls?

"I remember when we first got the policy," comments Strautz, who co-wrote the GHS plagiarism policy along with teacher

Therese Cooper and others. She said that it's not fair "for the person who didn't write the paper to passively allow for it" and to not carry any responsibility. She, as well as others, also expresses that what these girls are doing is unfair to themselves as well the boys. "It's symptomatic of you not standing up for yourself."

Many believe that the girls involved only do it because of issues of self-esteem, a desire for acceptance, or attention. Regarding participating females, Gavitte states that "not only are they plagiarizing but... they can't feel very highly of themselves if they're doing this. It's like cheating without getting any of the benefits and all the risk. It's crazy."

The self-proclaimed "team mom," Samantha, argues that she does it to help them graduate and participate in sports at the same time. "It might screw them," she admits, and "It's a risk, but it's risk we're willing to take." She just wants the boys to be able to graduate.

"Christopher" (a classmate of Samantha) believes she is forgetting herself in the grand scheme of her actions however. He reported that he tried to talk to her during class about this, saying she could do better in school by focusing on her own work, but to no avail. He explained that "she thinks their being able to play is the most important thing "more important than anything else."

Samantha confesses that her own grades slip as a result of all the work she does for others, but explained that the team "is awesome and [she] really just enjoys watching them play." She knows she is smart but she continues to put these boys in front of her own education nonetheless.

Lewis, maybe most of all, was impassioned by this answer. "She's not helping them; she's only hindering them and getting in the way of their success. I would want to find out what the real reason behind it is. Is it that she wants attention from these guys, acceptance from his peer group, or what?"

"It is an issue of self esteem, said Stautz in response. I think, unfortunately, it is still true today that girls are afraid to be smart." Gavitte agreed, pointing out that this whole issue is "like a form of abuse [and] shows that women have come a long way," yet, "they are still putting themselves into subservient roles."