

GETTING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES ACROSS THE STAGE: A STUDY TO  
EXAMINE THE STRATEGIES AND METHODS TO INCREASE COLLEGE DEGREE  
ATTAINMENT FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE  
UNIVERSITIES



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## ABSTRACT

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This seminar paper will highlight ways to increase the retention and graduation rates of African American male students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). In addition, the seminar paper discusses the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. This case is very important, because if it were not for its passage in the Supreme Court, people of color would not have gotten the opportunity to go to PWIs.

The seminar paper also highlights barriers that have a negative impact on the academic success of African American males before they even get to PWIs. The paper discusses grade and secondary schooling issues, how people treat Black males, negative images of Black males, and violence. Finally, the seminar paper analyzes ways to improve the retention and graduation rates for African American males at PWIs by examining inclusion, transition programs, mentoring, and multicultural centers.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Looking at the anticipated population growth of America by 2018, there will be a need for 22 million new college degrees, with about 63% of those to be attained from four year colleges/universities (Nguyen, Bibo, & Engle, 2012). As time goes on, the United States will also continue to see a surge in the minority racial-populations. Presently, White Americans are the majority when examining the racial background of individuals, but this statistic will change in 2050 as the racial-minority will become the majority (Palmer, Moore, Davis, & Hilton, 2010). If the United States wants to continue as a world class competitor, degree attainment will need to be a top priority.

With the Civil Rights Act and the GI Bill, there has been a steady increase of African American students enrolling in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Sinanan, 2012). Although there is a steady enrollment increase, the African American college graduation rate is only at 43%, looking at the statistics from 2006. The percentage gets even more disappointing when comparing African American males to African American females. The graduation rate for African American males is 36%, compared to 47% for females who are African American (Robertson & Mason, 2008). As the United States continues to grow its racial-minority populations, the country will need to depend heavily on those particular groups to keep the country competing on a global scale, especially within the African American male group.

With African American males lagging behind every other group in college graduation percentages, strategies to increase the retention and graduation rates in this particular population need to be examined further to find the best practices to utilize. Also important to look at are factors that influence the African American males' high school graduation rate, as it is important

to know what issues Black males are faced with even before they come into higher education. Within HBCUs, African American males are failing in their pursuit of a degree, but when they attend PWIs, they are faced with many more adversities, such as racial hostility, unwelcoming environments based on race, and hate crimes (Strayhorn, 2013). The issues African American males face at PWIs have an impact on their retention and graduation rates. If the United States is serious about being a competitive and better country, improving African American males' experiences in a college setting, and increasing their graduation rate, will need to be a top priority going into the future.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem to be addressed is how America can improve the retention and graduation rates for African American males at predominantly White colleges and universities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the proposed study is to determine what methods and ideas can be used to increase their retention and degree attainment from predominantly White colleges and universities.

### **Delimitations**

The purpose of this seminar paper is to identify the problems of African American male graduation rates at PWIs, and looks at ways to increase the rate specifically at PWIs. There are delimitations because the seminar paper does not look into colleges and universities that are predominantly Black, where the African American males are the minority in a population besides White, or at online programs. Results may not be generalized to institutions other than PWIs.

## **Definitions of Terms**

### **Predominantly White Institutions:**

A college or university where the majority of its population is White (Morrison, 2010).

### **Multicultural:**

Pertaining to, or representing several different cultures or cultural elements (Dictionary.com, 2013).

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

### Brown v. Board of Education Case Impact on African Americans Education

*The Brown v. Board of Education* case was brought by twelve parents of children who wanted to go to predominantly White grade schools in their community (Neal & Moore, 2004). The parents attempted to enroll their children in the White schools, but were denied. A lawsuit took place and Oliver Brown was to take the lead role, thus the case name *Brown v. Board of Education*. Brown's victory was a stepping stone for the racial integration of schools. Before the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Negroes (African Americans were still called Negroes in 1954 when the act passed through the United States Supreme Court) and Whites were separated when it came to schools, busing, restaurants, or any other public facilities (Armor, 2006). The law which forced segregation is called "de jour segregation" (Brittain, 2012). The law *de jour* can be defined as a social system to separate buildings, resources, and restrooms between ethnic minority and majority groups (Zirkel, & Cantor, 2004).

The outcome of *Brown v. Board of Education* was, and still is, an increasing population of African Americans going to PWIs. Even with integration being a major factor in the filing of the case, integration only gives African American students more college options. When an institution is segregated, it is blocking interactions between people who are different from one another. Without interacting, we base our views from biases, stereotypes, and other people's viewpoints (Zirkle et al., 2004).

As a result of integrating universities, students will have a better worldview and gain communication skills more than students who go to a racially homogeneous institution. *Brown v. Board of Education* helped to give inclusion experiences to African American students, as well as White students. According to Zirkle (2004) students in desegregated schools have

more successful outcomes than students who do not get the opportunity to be in an integrated school. Anxieties about race-related issues decreases, there is more social connection with people of different racial backgrounds, and if students involve themselves with the diverse institution they will potentially improve their academic performance.

There are many positive outcomes from the *Brown v. Board of Education*'s decision, but the case does not solve all the issues faced by African Americans in higher education. Even though the case allows African Americans to enroll in PWIs, the academic achievement gap is not closing when comparing them to White students. The PWIs are only graduating African Americans at a rate of 30% (Love, 2010).

One reason why PWIs fail African Americans is that the students feel they can't be themselves. They feel unwelcomed in the environment, and unsupported by the administration (Beatty, Bush, Erxleben, Feguson, Harrel & Sahachartsiri, 2010). *Brown* only looked at the fact that separation of races is inherently unequal (Armor, 2006). Though the success of *Brown* was very much a stepping stone for fostering the education of African Americans, it does not solve many of the inequalities facing them in higher education. Many variables, such as discrimination in the schools, lack of resources and unwelcoming environments are inequalities.

Many scholars believe *Brown* opened the doors for many important changes, such as the civil rights era, voting rights, and fair housing acts (Fine, 2004). Although *Brown* was instrumental in integrating schools and resulted in inequalities being dismantled, discrimination as promoted by the White power structure, can be found in our school systems (Jenkins, 2006). Laws can get the students into the schools, but they do not guarantee success. The environment in which students learn is important in terms of retention and graduation. For African Americans,

particularly African American males, who have the lowest college success rate, environment is particularly important.

The tragic fact is that students are attending schools that are more segregated and unequal now than they were before the *Brown* decision (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). African Americans, especially African American males going to segregated grade and secondary schools, will experience educational malnutrition. This will affect them negatively if they go on to higher education because they will not be prepared socially or educationally (Palmer et al., 2010). Obviously, *Brown* could not solve all the issues faced in the school systems, so continuing to understand the inequalities that still exist today is important. Society will benefit if we can identify practices that will retain and graduate more African Americans at PWIs.

### **Issues Affecting African American Males in Grade and Secondary Schools**

When African American males go to grade and secondary schools, they learn firsthand about unfair treatment from teachers and administration. African American males will experience more suspension time and expulsions than their White classmates and African American female counterparts for the same incidents (Palmer & Maramba, 2010). From a 2004 statistic, African Americans made up 17% of the elementary and secondary school populations, but accounted for 32% of the suspensions and 30% of the expulsions (Bailey & Paisley, 2004). Black male students have worse punishments imposed than White males. It is therefore not surprising that in 2006, 59% of Black males in high school did not receive a diploma within four years (Milner, 2007). Statistics regarding the frequency of suspensions and expulsions is shocking, in and of itself. Significant racial and gender disparities exist, with Black males being targeted more punitively. As stated before, there are more African American females going to college and graduating, compared with their male counterparts, and those statistics of suspension

and expulsion play a part in the low retention and graduation rates for Black males. Thus, both gender and race play a role in the meting out of penalties at school.

African American males are one of the most stereotyped groups of people in the U.S. Unfortunately, because of these stereotypes many of the Black students experience negativity from school officials (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012). Black males rarely share the cultural frameworks of the teachers they have throughout their whole educational process. Eighty-seven percent of teachers in urban schools consider themselves White (Monroe, 2005). When it comes to teachers understanding Black males, their interpretation of behavior could pose many miscommunication issues. Black males have different ways of expressing themselves that would be, in their personal opinion, valued. Expressions such as movement, animation, and speech can be looked at in opposition to what White teachers see as the norm (Monroe, 2005). Many Black males use anger for meditation purposes, to express their frustration in difficult situations, but this is condemned and punished by teachers and administrators without trying to understand where the frustrations are coming from (Thomas, Coard, Stevenson, Bently, & Zamel, 2009). Instead of the first action being to punish the Black male students, other alternatives need to be considered in the process. When disciplining Black male students, teachers will follow what they deem as negative and abnormal, based on stereotypes or biases (Milner, 2007).

Competent teaching professionals understand the value and importance of their interactions with their Black male students. When looking at the psychological influences, teachers can impact the lives of their students (Corprew et al., 2011). Teachers cannot be blamed entirely for the outcomes of all students because of other issues outside of the school the students face, but they do play a vital role. Teachers should know and understand the cultures of their students, and make an effort to deal effectively with differences.

Teachers who believe in stereotypes of Black males can pose dangers when it comes to encouragement and expectations. Many teachers believe Black males are inferior, which in turn lowers their expectations in the classrooms because they have less faith that the students will go beyond a high school diploma (Corprew et al., 2011). Lowering expectations does not do any good for Black males, especially if they plan on succeeding in college one day. Having a nurturing and encouraging environment is vital to the students. Many teachers fail to have a nurturing relationship with their Black male students, and as a result, the students do not get a superior educational service, which is important for academic success (Jenkins, 2006).

African American males in grade and secondary school are underrepresented in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. In a 2005 statistic, only 11% of African Americans were in AP classes, compared to 78% for White students (Taliaferro, & Decuir-Gunby, 2008). With so many teachers having lower expectations of African American males and not believing the students can be successful, it is not surprising that few Black male students attend AP classes. For students to be in AP classes, they have to be nominated by their teachers (Taliaferro, et al., 2008). Another shocking finding comes out of Frazier and Rhoden's (2011) survey. They questioned 500 teachers to see if they thought African American males would go to college. Six out of ten teachers believed that African American males would not go to college. As stated before, teachers can impact students' lives, and to have a negative outlook can devastate Black male's chances of going to college. Many teachers not only have a negative outlook for the success of Black males, but their actions such as not nominating them for AP classes impacts their chances of going to college and succeeding.

Violence in schools where there is a large majority of Black males also has an impact on the educational process of the students. Patton, Woolley, and Hong (2011) found that 30% of

Black males in schools were involved in some form of violence. They also examined whether violence had an impact on academic achievement. The study showed that violence did in fact disproportionately impair Black male academic achievement. With violence having a correlation with poor academic achievement, it is safe to say violence impacts the high suspension and expulsion rates as well. Many of these young Black males turn to violence because seeing few other routes to success available to them, they affiliate with a gang. For many of the Black males, gangs are the only groups where Black males feel welcomed and loved by the other members, but the unfortunate part is that gangs see violence as a part of their lifestyle (Jenkins, 2006). Street gangs are seen as a social network for many Black youth. At first, these groups came together because the youth are so isolated and rejected from institutions including schools; being members was a way of opposing those institutions (Cureton, 2008). Gangs for these young Black males have pros and cons. The short term reward is that they have comfort, however, the fact that gang membership is associated with felonious acts and premature death does not help these young men in the long term. Gangs can pose a problem for Black males in schools. As stated before, many of the Black youth join gangs because they are not finding acceptance anywhere else, so teachers and administrators who are seen to be in opposition will create conflict with the students. This widens the gap between the Black male and the educational system.

Involvement of parents in a Black male's life is very important. With African American males falling behind every other group academically, everything has to be looked into to fix the problems they face. This includes parent participation. When a parent is involved in an African American male's life, it is linked to positive educational outcomes in the schools (Graves, 2008).

A study done to examine the amount of time parents spent with their African American children showed they were more involved with the Black daughters and had higher expectations

of them academically in comparison to Black sons (Graves, 2008). Parent involvement with Black males has to be improved, whether it is helping in homework, going to school events, or just having conversations with the young man. Even though African American parents do participate in their children's schooling, they place more weight on their children being involved in the household. For instance, because African American parents place more weight on their children being active in the household, they spend less time with the children at school, compared to White parents (Taliaferro, et al., 2008). If White parents are shown to be more active in the school setting with their children, this can come off as Black parents not caring about their children's educational process. Lopez (2011) discussed how there is a positive relation between parent involvement and student academic achievement, but also stated that the lower the parents' socioeconomic level, the less likely they are to be involved. Economic factors need to be researched further as correlates of parent involvement.

### **The Impact Images Have on African American Males in Education**

When trying to understand the disengagement of African American males, images of how they are portrayed by others and how they view themselves has to be taken into consideration. One reason for the poor academic performance of Black males in grade, secondary, and higher education is that many of them perceive a lot of the educational activities as unmanly in their development (Davis, 2003). With this view of education, conflict will arise in school settings. There is not a lot of documentation on the causes of why Black males have this perception about certain educational activities. Further research is needed. Perhaps it relates to these activities not being "Cool."

A term used to describe Black males' image is "Cool Pose." Cool Pose describes rituals Black males act out, such as posture, language, control, and overall demeanor (Harris, Palmer, &

Struve, 2011). In a sense, how Black males act is in opposition to what they consider are the White male masculinity norms. It differentiates the cool Black male from the perhaps less cool White male. Acting in opposition comes with consequences academically. Cool Pose encourages Black males to devalue academic achievement because they see academic progress in the image of White males (Harrison et al., 2011). If Cool Pose is big within the Black male culture, it could lead to very difficult situations in the future for Black males, not just in terms of academics, but also in terms of successful employment.

Going along with Cool Pose opposes “Acting White.” This term is used primarily by Black males against other Black males that excel in academics, or who use proper English (Palmer et al., 2010). As stated before Cool Pose deliberately opposes stereotypically White behaviors. “Acting White,” aligns the Black male with the White majority and disavows Cool Pose. This can create problems for Black males, especially in grade and secondary schooling where children want to be a part of groups within the schools. Perhaps this divide comes about because African American adolescents see school structured for them to forget who they are as African Americans and conform to the White race by “Acting White.” Looking at the history of African Americans and all that they have been through since American slavery, there are still issues of identity crisis that have an impact on how Blacks should act. “African Americans formed an oppositional culture, which stems from oppression, enslavement, and discrimination they have experienced in America (Palmer et al., 2010 p.436).” Thus, “Acting White” could be construed by Black peers as repudiating one’s cultural heritage.

Media types are seen as a very important source of information about who African American males are, but these can also lead to negative public perceptions (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). These sources can include news, television shows, and movies. The many negative

images on television about how Black males are violent, disrespectful, and lacking in respect for authorities can carry over into the schools. This could have an impact on how teachers and administrators treat Black males (Davis, 2003). If a teacher or administrator believes all Black males are violent, how they speak to and take action against Black male students will be different from how they relate to other students. This type of mentality has negative impacts on the Black male students in their pursuit to an education. As stated, African American males have worse punishments for the same offenses than other students have, so it is safe to say that images play a factor in the unfair treatment. As a result, African American males have to deal with people having stereotypes about them, and some Black males even start to believe in and confirm to the negative stereotypes, which could have a negative impact of their academic success (Palmer et al., 2010). Many of our young Black males come to embrace these negative images because they feel it is their only outlet to have a voice and be heard (Jenkins, 2006). The fact that so many of the young Black males in our society are using these media sources to have their voices heard is troubling. When a group of people only sees negativity in their specific group, it is only a matter of time until they become that image.

### **How to Create Inclusion at Predominantly White Institutions**

A Black male who has achieved enrollment to college has accomplished something, especially looking at all the issues he likely faced before getting to college. Research shows that African American males have academic problems early in life, making it hard to even get a high school diploma (Palmer et al., 2010). The Black male who is admitted will still face barriers that could impact his success. It is therefore beneficial to work with that targeted population at PWIs. Many of the barriers discussed earlier do not stop once the student goes to college. So, there needs to be ways in which an institution of higher education can improve the situation for

African American males. When Black males come to college, an inclusive environment is critical. An inclusive environment means everybody feels connected on the campus. When Black males are connected with the culture in PWIs, they are more likely to enjoy the time there and succeed academically (Museus, 2011). Connection is enhanced by hiring of Black males, by carefully focusing on campus events, and by fostering success in the classroom.

The hiring of Black males at PWIs is very important, as they can work with and influence Black male students in a number of ways (Robertson & et al., 2008). When looking at a factor that determines academic success for Black males, healthy social relationships with faculty members who can relate to them, help. Knowing that Black males see many negative images of themselves in the media, having a Black professor or staff member to look up to can ultimately change the Black male's views of what masculinity actually means. As stated before, being successful academically is seen by so many Black males as "Acting White," but if we are to break this stereotype, and show these students that Black people can accomplish just as much as a White person can while still being Black, hiring Black faculty and staff is a must. If the climate of the campus is such that it fails to hire Black males, the chances of failure are greater for Black students (Gomes & Kuruvilla, 1999).

One of the major factors that emerges from data on the reasons why African American males do not feel connected to PWIs is the lack of diversity events (Lewis, Oliver, & Burris, 2011). Events such as speakers, plays, comedians, and displays of the Black experience can improve the comfort of Black males on campus. If all of the events on campus deal with White people only, Black males will not connect as much, especially given their need to differentiate from White people. Many African American males have not been exposed to such events as an African American play, so providing the experience gives those students self-identity and

courage. Developing and implementing diversity programs is very important in the success of the students (Love, 2008).

As the increase in African Americans at PWIs continue, institutions need to focus more attention on how to effectively teach diversity in the classroom, especially when it comes to teaching White students (Smolen, Susan, Colville-Hall, Liang, & Mac Donald, 2006). When Black males come to PWIs, they will have to deal with many White students who believe in images they see in the media. Knowing that there is already opposition to both cultures, educating White students in the classroom about Black males and the success they have outside of what they see on television is important. Teacher educators play a very important role in trying to tackle students' negative perceptions about others, especially with regard to multicultural issues (Smolen et al., 2006). Institutions have to be firm when it comes to the education of their students in relation to diversity. The more we know about each other, the better we can communicate. In four year institutions, it is very important that all students get a well-rounded education. This includes diversity education. Faculty members will need to become well prepared in how to teach in diversity within PWIs, especially as the U.S becomes more diverse (Smilen et al., 2006).

### **Transition Programs for African American Male College Students**

As more African American males go to PWIs, these institutions will need to fully understand the dilemmas many of these students will face during their tenure. Every PWI should have a transition program that targets African American males specifically. Transition programs are very effective because they help the students find best practices for academic and social success (Stolle-McAllister, 2011). Transition programs usually are held the first weeks before classes begin to give the students a head start. These programs need to focus on academics,

social adjustment, and self-identity. Maton, Hrabowski and Schmitt (2000) assessed the effectiveness a program for minority students called Meyerhoff Scholars Program at the University of Maryland. This successful program included a summer Bridge Program that focused on remedial courses, and also giving students the opportunity to go to social and cultural events. The program included study groups to gain peer supportiveness. It focused on helping the students reach high goals. Advising, tutoring, faculty support, administrative involvement, public support, mentoring, community services, and family involvement were all addressed. All of what the Meyerhoff Scholars Program does has been shown to help minority students succeed both in the classroom and in the community.

Academic achievement is very important when trying to be successful in life. African American males enter higher education with high hopes of attaining a college degree. One of the issues that gets in the way of Black males' success is mistrust. If African American males have mistrust, they are likely to have a negative academic outcome (Irving & Hudley, 2008). Before any administration tries to help students, trust has to be built. When students know they can trust a staff member, they are more likely to participate. African American males want to create positive relationships with people, but if that does not occur, negativity can result. This can create a barrier to the success of a transition program (Taliaferro et al., 2008). Once trust is built, the transition program should focus on ways to motivate students to succeed academically, as well as set goals to graduate (Zell, 2011). Setting goals needs to be practical for each student, and each must work out a plan as to how they can accomplish goals. One goal in particular could be a student wanting to earn at least a B in mathematics. The program should examine the student's resources and work ethic, as well as other things that may impact the student's ability to get the B.

Transition programs need to focus a lot of their effort on trying to improve math, science, reading, and critical thinking. They must also teach how to study best, and how to utilize all one's resources (Lee, 1999). If students don't know the basics of academic subjects, survival tips, and resources available for them, they will have a hard time succeeding. As discussed before, African American males are coming into college with the lowest GPA's, so giving them the extra time to work on the basics is very important. Many of the teachers Black males had before coming to college would have failed to encourage them to participate in preparatory opportunities, so when they come to college, the institution will need to take corrective action, while still supporting Black cultural values (Palmer et al., 2010).

To have good social adjustment, Black males must become involved on campus. Engagement is something a person has to learn, and many students learn how to engage before they come to college (Hall, Cabrera, & Milem, 2010). It is important to make sure the student understands the importance of getting involved. Learning about what they like to do, or what they want to get into can be beneficial when encouraging them to participate in the institution. Hall et al. (2010) suggest that precollege and transitional programs increase the student's engagement later on in their college experience. Daniyal, Nawaz, Hassan, & Mubeen (2012) found that if students participate in co-curricular activities they will improve their GPA. For a transition program to be successful there needs to be a focus on getting Black males to participate in activities on campus.

African American males face many stressors that have an impact on their identity (Bridges, 2011). Negative images in the media, inferior schooling, and discrimination can impact how Black males see themselves and go about living. Irving et al., (2008) addressed the fact that African American males' identity is somewhat formed by their history of oppression in

American society. As stated before, African American males want to be in opposition to White people, but trying to be in opposition to the dominant culture in a college setting will likely reduce their chances of completing a degree (Perrakis, 2008). Transition programs need to focus their attention on how to get African American males to have a self-identity that impacts their lives in a positive way. Knowing where they are in self-identity development is important as well. Using the Nigrescence model to identify racial identity development could be of importance. Bridges (2011) addressed the five stages in the Nigrescence model: (1) Pre-encounter, in which an individual rejects one's own culture and accepts the norm of White society; (2) Encounter, where events occur that open an individual's eye's to one's own culture and the way it has been oppressed; (3) Immersion-Emersion, where individuals immerse themselves in African American culture and reject the dominant White culture; (4) Internalization, where individuals accept their African heritage, while also accepting the traditions, beliefs, and values of other cultures; and (5) Internalization-Commitment, characterized by positive self-esteem, ideological flexibility and openness to one's blackness just as in stage four (Bridges, 2011, p.151). If students come in being opposed to Whites, they are more likely to be in stage three. It is best for Black males to be in stage four or five, because many scholars agree that when Black males have a strong positive self-image and are open to differences, they will be better off mentally (Pierre, & Mahalik, 2005). Even when it comes to engagement on campus, students who tend to be in either stage four or five have a higher percentage of being involved in PWIs (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

### **Mentoring African American Males in Predominantly White Institutions**

Mentoring Black males in colleges has been one remedy for improving the graduation rate for African American males (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009). As PWIs

increases their Black male population, mentoring should play a vital part in improving Black male graduation and retention rates. Black males will have to deal with the same issues they have already dealt with, such as discrimination, lack of support, and alienation. When African American male faculty and staff become mentors to this group of college students, the mentoring can be used for psychosocial support (Bridges, 2011). Palmer et al. (2010) states that research shows one of the reasons for Black males' academic underachievement is the fact that they do not have many positive role models. As stated before, most of the images Black males see in the media have negative characteristics. When Black professors and staff members get the chance to become mentors to the Black students, it could potentially impact their image of what it actually means to be a Black person.

Mentoring also gives students motivation, which is a predictor of success when examining the outcome of academia (Hall, & Rowan, 2001). Black males will need to be motivated in college, as it will be a difficult time for them. Research shows that if students are not motivated, the chances of succeeding in college declines (Hall, et al., 2001). If students are motivated, they will be more able to stay focused on goals to achieve, keep track of their time, set priorities, and have good study habits (Zell, 2011). Having these characteristics will increase the retention and graduation rates of Black males at PWIs.

### **Strategies for Multicultural Centers to Improve the Retention of African American Males at Predominantly White Institutions**

Multicultural centers at PWIs need to educate the campus about African Americans. As African Americans go to PWIs, racial oppression will still be an issue (Pittman, 2012). Pittman (2012) discussed the impact racial microaggressions have on African Americans.

Microaggressions are often unintentional. They include derogatory statements, being rude to

someone because of their color, or name calling, but can also involve more subtle behaviors and statements. Microaggressions affect students, and the campus as a whole needs to be aware of their impact. If microaggressions occur, many of the African American male students will not feel valued or accepted at the institution (Lewis et al., 2011). Naturally, people want to feel wanted in their environment. If a student feels unsafe, especially in an academic climate, the student will not be able to focus on the number one goal, which is to graduate.

The multicultural centers should always be an advocate for students of color, especially when it comes to course content. African American students do much better in their classes when the course integrates achievements accomplished by people that look like them (Roberson et al., 2008). The multicultural center should push for policies that encourage inclusion in the materials the professors give to students in their classes. Robertson et al., (2008) states that when Black students feel they are part of the educational process, they will be more willing to engage in class activities.

As racial diversity increases, the multicultural center staff should serve on committees that shape policies to improve diversity. Cultural events, workshops, and other ways of bridging the academic gap should be considered (Love, 2008). African Americans, especially African American males, will need to see the support they have from the multicultural centers. Hall et al., (2001) explains that students are ever changing, so they are more prone to be open to diversity while on campus and may be less so later on. It is vital that the multicultural center do its part in educating the campus community about the cultural issues people of color face on campuses.

To summarize, the U.S is becoming more racially diverse. By 2050, the racial minorities will be the majority. For the U.S. to continue as a competitive country, racial minority graduation rates need to be increased, especially within the African American male population. The choices

made in the past, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, increased racial diversity on many campuses, but the academic gap is still increasing. The campus environment needs to come up with ways to deal with the very low retention, especially of African American males.

There are many issues affecting African American males before they even come to college. The grade and secondary schooling for Black males has been unfair in preparing the students for college level work. Black males are being punished far worse than any other group for the same behaviors. If we treat African American males unfairly, their academic achievements will be small. Black students in elementary and secondary schools are constantly being stereotyped, which leads to teachers not having as much faith in their ability to go to college.

There are many other factors as to why African American males are not achieving academically. Violence in schools, negative self-images, lack of parent involvement, lack of motivation, and being underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes attributes to the failure of African American males. The factors listed are strong forces to go against. Many of the African American males confine in these negative activities in pursuit of understanding themselves.

The PWIs have a difficult task to increase Black males' academic achievements. Institutions will have to implement many programs, policies, and trainings to address the issues they are faced with when Black males come to their campuses. The objective is to be a place of true inclusion, with transition programs, mentoring, and multicultural centers. All of these elements are needed of the PWI is to help guide the Black males on a path to success. The ultimate goal is to find ways to get African American males across the graduation stage.

### **Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations**

Based on the literature review related to African American males graduation and retention rates, the following conclusions can be taken into consideration. Looking at factors that keep African American males from going to college, it is safe to say something needs to be done before they get to a PWI. With the unfair treatment of African Americans in elementary and secondary schools, PWIs can develop plans to help the students in those institutions. Precollege, transition programs, and mentoring help increase academic achievement for African American males, so PWIs have to reach out to schools that have a large population of underserved Black males. Black students from the PWIs need to be mentors who can encourage the students to succeed and give them opportunities to join precollege programs. Ultimately once the students are prepared for college, they will more likely join the transition programs the institutions have to offer. The students will increase their academic achievements, be encouraged to want better, and will feel connected to the institution before enrolling there. Black males who are already in college should participate in these outreach activities because that will give the Black male youth potential images of themselves that are not negative.

As Black males continue to increase their population at PWIs, inclusion must be worked on. If a PWI lacks in hiring Black males, there will be a need to have them join the campus. Having Black male faculty and staff not only helps the campus be more inclusive, but also can be of benefit to Black male students. Black faculty and staff can be a positive influence to the students, and ultimately increase their retention and graduation rates. With Black males seeing a lot of negative images of themselves, having events that show positive Black people will broaden their horizons. If a campus is dedicated to inclusion, Black male students will sense that and feel appreciated.

Transition programs are by far one of the most crucial parts of improving the success of African American males. The focus of transitional programs should be academics, social adjustment, and self-identity.

When focusing on academics, all transition programs have to work on trust with the African American male population. A lot of these students come from schools and teachers who did not gain their trust or respect. Just having trust alone can increase the academic success of the students, and that is why it is important. Another factor that plays into the success of academic achievement is motivation. As stated before, many teachers that these students had before did not believe they would go to college, so the students lacked motivation. Lastly, the students need to set goals, and not just set them, but figure out how they can get them accomplished. Working through the process with them will be very important.

When students are involved on campus, they increase their likelihood to succeed academically. Encouraging Black male students to participate on campus is essential. Just being in a transition or pre-college program increases their involvement on campus. The program can increase their involvement, but if a campus is not inclusive, their involvement may decrease. In anything that is done to improve African American males, being inclusive should always be central.

The manner in which a person views himself can make a big difference in life, especially during college. Black males who are in college will already have a perception of themselves. Sometimes this can have a negative impact on their academics, especially if they want to be in opposition to White. An “Acting White” characteristic is excelling in academics. If a Black male does not want to be seen as White, he will oppose succeeding in academics. This self-identity is not helpful for anyone who comes to college. Transition programs must address the issues of

Black identity, and their understanding of their blackness. A model that is very popular is the “Nigrescence Model.” The students should know where they stand on the model, and if they are not where they need to be to succeed in college, the transition program should help to get them there.

Many of the African American male students were not encouraged to succeed academically, had lower Grade Point Averages (GPA’s) in high school compared to their college counterparts, and will be most likely to drop out of college if the institution does not help them in their pursuit of a degree (Zell, 2011). This makes it difficult for an institution to encourage, educate, make the environment inclusive for Black males, and ultimately get them across the graduation stage. Even though the challenge will be hard, if institutions are serious about graduating African American males they will do whatever is necessary.

Multicultural centers will be of great benefit to the Black male students, and the institution as a whole. When it comes to educating the campus regarding African Americans and the issues they face, the goal is understanding and comfort. Multicultural centers serve as advocates for African Americans. By fostering multicultural curriculum and inclusion, creating cultural events and workshops, and trying to bridge the academic gap they can have an impact on all students. Creating an environment that makes African American males excel academically will be a change for any PWI, but taking the right steps will increase the retention and graduation rates for them.

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