WHAT WORKS? A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE FACTORS RELATED TO THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE COLLEGE IN THE SOUTH

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Abstract

Our study examined the factors related to the retention/academic success of African American males at a mid-sized, regional, predominantly white university in the south. The selected university has an African American male graduation rate, of approximately twenty-three percent, which is thirteen percentage points below the national Black male average. Feagin's (1998) theory of cumulative discrimination was used to analyze in-depth interview responses from fifteen African American males who were selected using convenience sampling.

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Introduction

As of 2006, African American college students have a graduation rate of 43% compared to 63% for their white counterparts (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 2007). Even more disappointing is the fact that African American males have a graduation rate of 36% compared to 47% for African American females (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 2007). Over the past two decades, racial differentials in both the enrollment and completion rates between Black and White college students have increased (Campbell and Fleming 2000; Feagin et al. 1996; and Robertson et al. 2005). Further, at the end of the twentieth century the largest proportion of African Americans attending college were women who attended predominantly white colleges and universities (Schwitzer et al. 1999). Between 1990 and 2006, the graduation rate for Black women rose from 34% to 47% while the graduation rate for black males rose from 28% to 36% (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 2007). In 2000, approximately 475,000 Black men between the ages of 18 and 24 were enrolled in college (Maxwell 2004). Moreover, in 2003, 1,266,107 African American women were enrolled in college compared with 686,615 African American men (Garibaldi 2007). According to Anyaso (2007), sixty-seven percent of Black males who begin college never receive their bachelor's degree while only comprising 4.3% of the students attending American colleges and universities. Thus, the pertinent question becomes, "what works in retaining African American male college students?"

Review of Literature

The review of literature centers largely on the variables identified by Simms et al. (1993), Robertson et al. (2005), and Sedlacek (1983) as pertinent to the matriculation of Black males at predominately White colleges. The institutional factors cited as most important to Black male matriculation are faculty involvement, financial assistance, classroom environment, academic and personal support resources, extracurricular activities, and the African American male students' ability to handle racism.

Faculty Involvement

Several researchers (Ancis et al. 2000; Edelin-Freeman 2004; and Robertson et al. 2005) have discussed the importance of African American students in general, and Black male college students in particular, establishing positive relationships with faculty. Robertson (1995) posits that Black male students who have good relationships with White faculty

members are more likely to be satisfied in the White college environment. Moreover, positive relationships with faculty facilitate healthy social and personal development amongst African American college students. This positive social adjustment is one of the best determinants of good academic performance (Cuyet 1997; Robertson et al. 2005; and Edelin-Freeman 2004). Unfortunately, there is a relative dearth of studies that adequately examine the relationship between black male students and white faculty members (Vasquez and Wainstein 1990).

Financial Assistance

The importance of the relationship between finances and black college student success cannot be over emphasized. "Financial assistance availability is a substantial predictor of African American success and performance" (Simms et al. 1993, p. 258). Studies show (e.g., Feagin et al. 1996; Fleming 1984; Furr and Ellin 2002) that African American students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds perform better at predominantly White colleges than those from more modest or working class backgrounds. Correspondingly, the cost of university attendance is a major contributor to the fact that a disproportionate number of low income Black students attend two-year institutions at a higher rate than their white counterparts do (Horn et al. 2002). The financial dilemmas of Black males are more pronounced when one takes into consideration that only 38% of Black college students are male (Cuyet 1997). Further, Patitu (2007) identifies cost of attendance as one of the major barriers faced by of college-bound African American males. To add, Black students who attend White colleges are more likely to come from racially segregated neighborhoods than their white counterparts (Charles et al. 2004). Racially segregated environments, at least for Black Americans, are more intimately connected with economic inequality and stressful/negative social networks that combine to undermine academic performance and increase the probability that the student will need to work to defray the costs of education (Charles et al 2004).

Classroom Environment

African American students perform better in classes where the course content is reflective of their experiences and interests (Robertson 1995; Thompson and Lorque 2005). In other words, when professors integrate information about the accomplishments of African Americans into the content of the class, the interest of Blacks students increase and they are more likely to perform better (Robertson et al. 2005). In addition, Johnson

(2001) posits that course offerings that include African-centered classes, i.e., classes that focuses on the experiences of Blacks across the Diaspora, have been shown to be more receptive to the adjustment needs of Black students at predominantly White institutions. A supportive classroom environment is an even greater necessity when juxtaposed with the fact the more Black males attend White as opposed to Black colleges. Therefore, when White instructors are engaging and make Black students feel as though they are part of the class environment, Black students feel like they belong and adjust better (Booker 2007). Yet, ironically, more African American males graduate from predominantly Black colleges than from predominantly White colleges (Edelin-Freeman 2004; Johnson 2000; Robertson et al. 2005).

Academic and Personal Support Services

According to McClure (2006), Black male students have the highest attrition rates of any collegiate demographic. Therefore, African American male students enter white college settings with special needs (Cuyet 1997). Paramount among those need are: 1) a non-threatening educational environment that encourages the nurturance of academic success; and 2) the deconstruction of stereotypical negative images of Black males (e.g., non-intelligent, thugs), (Fleming 1984). According to Hopkins (1997), Black male students enter the white university environment with a clear understanding that society expects negative outcomes from them. Therefore, it is imperative that campus administrators, if they are truly committed to the success of these students, provide programs (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, social adjustment) for African male to counteract what Kunjufu (1986) calls the "failure syndrome." Failure syndrome is a concept suggesting that Black male students often internalize the negative perceptions/attitudes held of them by school officials and teachers and these negative perceptions ultimately become a self-fulfilling prophecy. This process can begin as early as the fourth grade and persist throughout ones college career. Additionally, Campbell and Fleming's (2000) research suggests that a positive self-concept is a corollary of favorable social adjustment which has been shown to be a major determinant of Black male college student success.

Extracurricular Activities

Athletic participation is an important component of self-esteem, facilitating social adjustment and ensuring college completion among male African American students (Pascarella and Smart 1991). Likewise,

fraternal membership in traditionally Black Greek-lettered organizations has been shown to support positive social and academic integration, which in turn is correlated with better grades and retention (McClure 2006; Robertson, et al. 2005; Tinto 1993). Along with aforementioned, Black Greek-letter organization, membership has been demonstrated to increase political involvement, community involvement, and facilitate the development of positive social networks among Black male college students (Jones 1999; McClure 2006). Moreover, having solid relationships with fraternity members can serve to counteract the alienation that Black males often experience on White college campuses (McClure 2006).

Understanding and Dealing with Racism

Racism has been a persistent impediment to the success of black students in white college environments (Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996). Black students often enter traditionally white universities with expectations of being accepted as equals (Suarez-Balcazar et al. 2003). However, often to their dismay, the predominantly white university can be a hostile environment (Smedley, Myers, and Harrell 1993).

Negotiating racism is of special importance to African American male college students. One of the primary explanations for the relevance of racism is the reality that African American males have higher university attrition rates than their minority male counterparts (Flowers 2006). Racial prejudice leads to feelings of social alienation, which can create a contentious university experience that may result in stress, anxiety and poor academic performance (Fleming 1984). Thus, the combination of racial prejudice, social alienation and the preconceived negative attitudes regarding black males make race a paramount issue for black male student retention at predominantly white colleges (Campbell and Fleming 2000; Johnson 2001; Singer 2005).

Method

This study utilizes in-depth interviews to identify the factors, as delineated in Simms et al. (1993), Robertson et al. (2005), and Sedlacek (1983) that are most relevant to the retention of Black males who attend predominantly white universities. The use of qualitative interviews is necessary to examine our topic thoroughly and to tap into the rich textual meanings of the students' responses.

Qualitative Methodology

Subjects. In this study, fifteen interviews were conducted with African American male students at a mid-sized, regional university in the south from August 2008 through April 2009. Purposive sampling (due to time and monetary constraints) was employed to solicit participants according to the format explicated in Berg (2007). This sampling technique is useful for obtaining subjects in studies of this nature with monetary constraints.

Data. The data were obtained via in-depth interviews. The interview questions addressed the major factors related to Black male student matriculation as identified in Simms et al. (1993), Robertson et al. (2005), and Sedlacek (1983). Thus, the research was guided by the following open ended questions:

- Describe your interactions with faculty members at this institution.
- Are faculty members involved in the development of black male students? If so, how?
- Since you have been attending this institution, has a lack of money ever been a problem?
- Did the university provide information on how to obtain financial aid? If so, what were you told? Was the information helpful?
- Do you feel that your professors, infuse information that is relevant to African Americans in your classes (e.g., information pertaining to race, discrimination, and social class)? Why or why not?
- Does your university offer classes that focus on their experiences (e.g., Black history, Black studies)? Why or why not?
- Are African Americans male students encouraged to participate in intramurals, social organizations, student government?
- Are there pan-Hellenic, i.e., Black Greek-letter organizations on campus?

Analysis Techniques. The data were analyzed using content analysis according to the schemata explicated by Berg (2007) who contends that content analysis is "the most obvious way to analyze interview data" (p. 134). In the present study, the authors employed latent content analysis which allows one to discern the "deep structural meaning conveyed by the message" (Berg 2007: 308).

The ties between data and literature were made using Feagin's (1998) theory of cumulative discrimination. Cumulative discrimination theory

contends that discrimination entails "a college career or lifetime series of blatant and subtle acts of differential treatment by Whites which often accumulates to a severely oppressive impact" (Feagin 1998: 318). Further, cumulative discrimination theory suggests that the discrimination experienced by Black students takes one of four dimensions: (a) aggression, verbal and physical; (b) exclusion, including social ostracism; (c) dismissal of subculture, including values, dress, and groups; and (d) typecasting, including assuming Blacks are all alike (Feagin 1998: 317). Thus, when African American males do not experience discrimination/ racism and adjust well socially, they are more likely to be academically successful, stay in school, and graduate.

Findings

The findings in this study both corresponded to and differ from the existing literature on student academic success. The data are organized around the most frequent themes identified by respondents: racial prejudice, faculty-student relations, social alienation and classroom environment. Participants responded to questions and statements that focused on succinct predictors of Black male academic success as identified in the existing literature (Allen 1998; Cross and Astin 1981; Fleming 1984; Furr and Theodore 2002; Sedlacek 1987; Simms et al. 1993).

Feagin's (1998) theory of cumulative discrimination is used to connect theory with data. Feagin's (1998) collegiate discrimination construct posits that the disparate treatment of Black students in general, and Black males in particular, reduces the possibility of academic success and lowers graduation rates. Feagin (1998) proposes in his theory/concept that the "oppressive impact" of racial discrimination may take one of four forms: (1) aggression; (2) exclusion, including social ostracism; (3) dismissal of subculture; and (4) typecasting, i.e., suggesting that all Blacks are alike.

The most prominent or frequently emerging variables that fit within the framework of Feagin's (1998) construct are presented. Further, each typological dimension is offered with the subsequent interview retort. A brief commentary is offered to elucidate how the modal responses relate to and differ from the existing literature.

Aggression

Aggression is the first component of Feagin's (1998) typology. This variable contends that Black male students will be the recipients of verbal and physical aggression. The most direct subject responses on the idea that

Black male students are victims of verbal and physical aggression come from Mike, a twenty-seven year old sophomore, and John, a twenty-four year old senior, and Anthony, a forty-six year old sophomore:

> I would not describe it as bad in my opinion; however, every now and then when you go to the restroom you will see that some idiot has written racially disparaging remarks on the stall doors. [1]

Mike, the first respondent, was asked to describe the racial climate at the university. As is commonplace at many predominantly white institutions, racially disparaging remarks are often verbalized or etched on the walls of dorms, public spaces, or in restroom stalls. Feagin et al. (1996: 57) posit, "pain-creating racist epithets, like nigger, coon, and boy, are used by whites as a way of defining certain areas as White spaces." Consequently, it can be assumed that this is a way to designate racially the university as the domain of whites and to create an environment that is not conducive to Black male success.

Exclusion, Including Ostracism

The second tenet of Feagin's (1998) discrimination theory is centered on the idea that black males are isolated and made to feel as outsiders at the university. Prominent African American scholar Jacqueline Fleming, in her seminal work *Blacks in College* (1984), expounds on the impact of social ostracism on Black students:

> Feelings of alienation and disconnect from the university appears to devastate both the education and vocational aspirations of males, which decline significantly from freshman to senior years (p. 66).

Fleming (1984) also posits that alienation experienced by Black males contribute to feelings of academic inertia. The relevance of Fleming's (1984) comments is that it corresponds with more contemporary findings in the available literature on the reality of the White college milieu as being alienating and racially hostile for Black students (Lett and Wright 2003). The barriers to matriculation for Black students can range from subtle loathsome glances, physical intimidation, to condescending comments from professors (Feagin 1998; Furr and Elling 2002; Lett and Wright 2003). The selected responses from Black male students reflect

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1   Interview #2 (Mike, twenty-seven year old senior)

general feelings of alienation and segregation heaped upon them by white professors, the result of a dearth of Black professors, and the White college environment. Along these lines, the following responses from Black male students could be surmised as accurate portrayals of exclusion at the predominantly White college:

> The professors tend to lean toward white students. The relationships that they have with White students are different. They, the professors, have stronger relationships with White students. It seems as though the White professors are more comfortable with White students. They can joke with them (White students) more than Black students can. [2]

> I feel we (Black males) have lower graduation rates and fewer jobs after graduation. I feel the feel the professors do not help Black males excel and do well. They do not always want to see Black males succeed because then we will not be competing with them for their jobs. For instance, I had a test due and one of my family members and I missed my morning class, but I came back the same day and tried to take the exam but the professor said it was too late. However, during the final exam, a White girl came an hour late and he still let her take it. [3]

> There is definitely a racial division between Black and White students. You notice that the Black students hang out with Black folks and White folks hang out with White folks. This area (the local community) with its largely White suburban towns, segregation is what Whites are used to. The fraternities and sororities segregate themselves from each other. The fraternities are the ones that set the social climate for the university. [4]

> It is very segregated on this campus. When you go to the restaurant areas, Black students will hangout. On the other hand, White students will get their food and go. It is the same situation in the student center. I think that it is common nature for students to sit with members of their own race. I mean, Black students would probably sit with White students, but I do not believe White

2   Interview #5 (Marcus, twenty-one year old junior)
3   Interview #11 (Kevin, twenty year old junior)
4   Interview #3 (John, twenty-four year old senior)

students feel comfortable around Blacks. I think this is because they (Whites) may think that Blacks are loud and will make fools of them. [5]

The aforementioned responses from Black students tap into many areas of concern regarding black male student matriculation at predominantly White colleges. The existing literature is replete (e.g., Hopkins 1997; Sedlacek 1999; Simms et al. 1993; Tinto 1993) with exhortations of exclusion and ostracism of Black males in White college settings.

The students expressed myriad feelings and attitudes consistent with ostracism from both the larger White society in general and the university environment in particular. For instance, the response provided by Marcus, a twenty-one year old junior, indicates the belief that educated Black men represent a threat to the dominant White power structure in American society and that White professors have more collegial interactions with White students. Thus, it can be surmised that the Black males are excluded from the full benefits of a proper and equitable student-professor relationship as their White counterparts. The assessment of negative evaluations from professors of Black males can have a deleterious impact on their academic performance (Feagin 1998). Black males often enter college with notions that White faculty and administrators view them as the embodiment of negative stereotypes (e.g., intellectually inferior, likely to fail) which can serve as an impediment to good grades (Suarez-Balcazar et al. 2003). Black students are more likely to believe that White faculty members scrutinize their academic assignments more harshly than they do those of White students (Ancis et al 2000). Both of the aforementioned findings validate the existing literature. Robertson (1995) presents information that suggests that White males view Black males as more threatening to the dominant White power structure. Not only can the inference of Black males as a menace to the organization of White power structure result in greater university matriculation difficulties for Black males, the aforesaid inference may also explain why Black females report fewer impediments to their academic success in the White university milieu.

The remaining responses point to issues of racial division and self segregation in the majority college environment. Feagin et al. (1996) posits that the self-segregation by Black males is due to necessity and because the exclusion and ostracism by Whites is nothing more than a microcosm

5   Interview # 10 (Robert, twenty-four year old senior)

of what Black males face in the larger White society. The interview response provided by Robert, reinforces the aforementioned views of both the campus environment and the local collegiate community. For instance, when queried about the local areas surrounding the campus, the Robert points to the fact that White students at local restaurants appear to have no desire to sit and eat with Black students. Hence, it can be perceived that in the Robert's mind, the urban location of the university, and it is predominantly White inhabitants, are not warm and welcoming to African American students.

Dismissal of subculture

The dismissal of the subcultural experiences of African Americans entails a general devaluation of the norms, values, and folkways of African American students in general, and black male students in particular. When it comes to the negotiation of the White college environment, the Black subculture is often disparaged and this can reduce the likelihood of proper social adjustment and academic success (Brown 1997; Fleming 1984; Gallien and Peterson 2005).

The views expressed by several respondents reveal that the dismissal of African American culture and experiences come in the form of not offering classes that were relevant to the black experience, not discussing topics in the existing courses that were perceived to be relevant to Black students, and comments related to the lack of African American faculty at the university:

> I mean they (professors) really do not want to get into controversial issues like affirmative action. They never, or rarely, want to tackle the issue of White privilege. I think I would like school more if there were more courses devoted to an accurate delineation of the African American experience. I guess that the university does not feel that the demand is high enough to create more courses. I once talked with the sociology professor (who is African American) who teaches one of the courses and he said that he has problems obtaining enough students to keep his class open. [6]

> In my classes, I do not see them (professors) trying to relate to the African American student. Maybe I do not have enough African American students in my classes. Maybe there are not

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[6]   Interview #12 (Cedric, twenty year old sophomore)

enough African American faculty members. I have had only three African American professors since I have been here. I think the college experience would have been enhanced with more African American faculty because you ought to see a different view of different things. [7]

The following students expressed concerns centering on the lack of Black faculty, discussion of black experiences in classes, and the reluctance of white faculty to discuss controversial issues. Accordingly, when asked directly if the university offers courses on the dilemmas encountered by blacks in America, one male opined:

No, if they do, I have never seen them. It is sort of like they (courses focusing on the experiences of Blacks) are hidden. I mean American literature and all other types of Classes (e.g., Spanish, French) are blatantly put out there, but Black courses are not. [8]

The subsequent respondents further lamented the lack of course offerings addressing Black concerns, lack of Black professors, and once again, the inability of faculty to connect with Black male students:

There are not enough classes. This is not an historically Black college. I feel there would be more classes offered at a Black college. [9]

African Americans go through a very different way of learning. We have to be given a chance to learn and express ideas in our classes. The classes are not offered because it is a problem finding qualified professors to teach courses relevant to the African American experience. [10]

I believe if there were more Black professors, there would be more Black courses. I do not know why there are not more African American professors. [11]

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7   Interview #6 (Eric, twenty-one year old senior)
8   Interview #3 (John, twenty-four year old senior)
9   Interview #8 (Jaquan, twenty-two year old senior)
10   Interview #9 (Anthony, forty-six year old sophomore)
11   Interview #10 (Robert, twenty-four year old senior)

The viewpoints of the selected respondents touched on the following areas: (1) a lack of African American college professors; (2) the reluctance of existing faculty members to discuss issues, i.e., those that are considered controversial and relevant to Black male students, such as racism, affirmative action, white supremacy, etc.; (3) a lack of classes that focused on the encounters faced by Blacks. The previously mentioned interests reverberate throughout the literature on Black students who attend predominantly White colleges (Ancis et al. 2000; Robertson et al. 2005). Moreover, among the sentiments articulated is the need of Black professors who can serve as viable role models to Black male students. African American faculty members have been shown to facilitate positive social adjustment for African American male students, which is correlated with academic success (Cuyet 1997; Edelin-Freeman 2004).

Typecasting

The fourth and final dimension of Feagin's (1998) typology is typecasting. Typecasting entails an adherence to the stereotypical notion that all Blacks are alike and possess similar disdainful characteristics. Many scholars (Feagin 1998; Fleming 1984; Gallien and Peterson 2005; and Tinto 1993) postulate that stereotypes associated with black students upon entering the white college environment are primarily negative. Along these lines, it is important to note that a knowledge of negative stereotypes, as they pertain to black students' behavior and academic aptitude, can be surmised as contributing to what Steele (1999) refers to as stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is the idea that when African American students are placed in a situation, be it having to take a test or in a social setting, in which their abilities/competence is evaluated by whites, they often will underperform. Therefore, when black male students enter the white college environment where an existing negative view of them abounds, it can contribute to a milieu that is academically inhospitable and not conducive for that student's successful matriculation at that institution. In this regard, the responses below were analyzed and fall under the rubric of typecasting:

> I think that we have hidden racism on campus. It is hidden during the day. At night, you have more African American students and the campus sincerely does not act pleasantly toward students. This is because most of the students that stay on campus are black. In other words, there is more racial profiling. At night, a police officer will stand at the gates to the dorms and card all of the black

students who enter and leave the dorms mainly because there are primarily black students in the dorms at night. [12]

I think that the police (local, non-campus) could be friendlier. However, I am talking about the local police, not the campus police. [13]

The above responses express the sentiment that the typecasting of African American students remains hidden. More specifically, Black male students perceive that campus police officers treat black students in an unfair manner, consistent with negative stereotypes (Gallien, Jr. and Peterson 2006). Person and Christensen (1996) promulgate the idea that Black/African-centered campus organizations can serve as cultural buffer zones to typecasting and other negative portrayals/representations of Black students on predominantly White campuses. To further elucidate the impact of typecasting, Feagin et al. (1996) alludes to the fact that Black students attending predominantly White colleges in the south and southwestern United States are often perceived as "affirmative action students or athletes, with no allowances for other possibilities" (p. 152). Consequently, it can discerned that Black males in general, and Black students in particular with their lower overall rates of academic success vis-à-vis their Black female counterparts, face a special set of circumstances in conjunction with the typecasting they experience at predominantly White colleges.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study, using Feagin's (1998) model as a point of departure, was to identify the factors that can best predict academic success for Black males who attend predominantly White colleges. The motivation for this study is a desire to develop policies to improve the college graduation rates of Black males in general, but more specifically, those who attend predominantly White colleges. The latter is a major concern, since most Black males attend predominantly White colleges (Gallien, Jr. and Peterson 2005). However, despite the fact that more Blacks attend White colleges, historically Black colleges and universities graduate a higher proportion of Black students in general, and Black males in particular (Galien, Jr. and Peterson 2005).. It is hoped that this foray into Black male college student matriculation will encourage subsequent studies

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12   Interview #6 (Eric, twenty-one year old senior)
13   Interview #1 (Steve, twenty year old sophomore)

to seek answers to the perplexing issues of Black males who embark upon their intellectual sojourn at predominantly White collegiate institutions.

The findings in this study affirm those that have been found in earlier studies (e.g., Robertson et al 2005; Schwitzer et al. 1999; Simms et al. 1999). More specifically, this study, which employs Feagin's (1998) theory of cumulative discrimination to tease out the factors correlated with academic success, emphasizes the importance of collegial faculty/student relations, understanding and dealing with racism, and extra-curricular activities and programs. The aforementioned variables, which were identified via Feagin's (1998) tenets of aggression, exclusion, including ostracism, dismissal of subculture, and typecasting, should serve as a starting point for the formation of any programs designed to increase Black male student graduation rates at predominantly White colleges.

There are several limitations that must be considered when scrutinizing the efficacy of this study. First, the selection of a mid-sized, regional university in the South must be examined because the South has historically been known to be less inclusive and more racially hostile than other regions of the United States (Feagin et al. 1996; Karenga 1993). Second, the researchers selected respondents via convenience, i.e., snowball, sampling method. This means that the findings from the Black males' responses cannot be generalized to the larger population of Black male students who attend Black colleges. Finally, a comparison group of Black female students was not part of the study. A Black female control group would have helpful to discern whether or not the factors associated with Black male academic success were peculiar to Black males only.

Linkages between Data and Existing Theory

In the area of black student academic success in general, and Black male academic success in particular while attending predominantly White colleges, relevancy was given to the theme of social adjustment and its related variables. Why? This occurs because the variables that serve as determinants of social adjustment are also most commonly coupled with academic success in the prevailing literature (Robertson et al. 2005; Simms et al. 1993; Tinto 1993). The theme of student social adjustment, as it relates to academic success, has been explored via student integration and student institutional fit models (Murguia et al. 1991; Nora and Cabrera 1996a; Tinto 1993). The adjustment and academic success literature have emphasized the variables of faculty involvement, financial assistance,

classroom environment, academic and support services, extra-curricular activities, and understanding and dealing with racism (Ancis et al. 2000; Robertson et al. 2005; Simms et al. 1993; Tinto 1993). Further, there is a dearth of theoretical formulations that directly address this phenomenon. The lack of theories that have directly addressed this phenomenon, notwithstanding several prominent scholars (Allen 1991; Feagin 1998; Fleming 1984; Tinto 1993), along with countless others, have consistently written on this topic while posing challenging questions to the scholarly community. Two examples of theories that have been applied to examinations of African American student adjustment in general, and Black male academic achievement in particular, that were most applicable to this study are Tinto's (1993) institutional fit approach and Johnson's (2001) Afrocentric development theory.

Tinto's (1993) student-institutional approach or retention theory, asserts that student attributes, i.e., social capital, work to form individual goals and commitments. The previously mentioned goals and commitments interact over time with individual institutional experiences (both formal and informal). Moreover, the student's level of involvement in the formal and informal academic and social systems of the of the institution accounts for his or her decision to leave college. Put more succinctly, the social capital possessed by the Black male influences his goals and commitments, which in turn determines the level and nature of the student's participation in the institution's formal and informal social systems which culminates in the student's decision to stay or leave the White college.

Tinto's (1993) theory supports many of the assertions made in Feagin's (1998) theory of cumulative discrimination. First, Tinto (1993) places primacy on the individual's social capital as the foundation for the formation of the student's goals and commitments, which ultimately play a big part in the decision to stay or continue in college. The aforementioned corresponds with Feagin's (1998) notion of typecasting. Typecasting involves the presumption that all Blacks are alike in a negative way (Feagin 1998). For that reason, when Blacks are viewed stereotypically, the idea is promulgated that they are underprepared for college. Conversely, when African American males display characteristics that debunk negative caricatures, i.e., clearly setting goals and exhibiting a commitment to achieving them, they are more likely to continue and be successful in the White collegiate milieu.

A second connection between the theoretical formulations of Tinto (1993) and Feagin (1998) emerges with an assessment of Tinto's (1993) stress on the student's institutional experiences. This area of Tinto's (1993) theory contends that the student's goals and commitments interact with student's formal (with faculty and administrators) and informal (social activities at the university) institutional experiences to determine if the student will continue at the predominantly White institution. This concept of Tinto's (1993) typology correlates with Feagin's (1998) tenet of exclusion, including ostracism. The principle of exclusion, including ostracism surmises that if the student is made to feel as an outsider in the university environment, be it is social or structural (e.g., relationships with administrators), the student is less likely to be successful academically.

Johnson's (2001) Afrocentric student development model draws its basic precepts from the Nguzo Saba. Credited to African-centered scholar Dr. Mualana Karenga (1993), the Nguzo Saba encompasses the principles of the African American holiday of Kwanzaa. According to Johnson (2001) the Nguzo Saba "allows for the incorporation of authentic African American values into the development of African American college students" (p. 417). Hence, it places prominence on what Black students say about themselves as they attempt to navigate the tumultuous terrain of the White college. Most importantly, Johnson's (2001) Afrocentric student development model places primacy on the student's adjustment as a determinant of black student success. Consequently, Johnson's (2001) model transcends theories of Black student matriculate that are rooted in European-psychology (Robertson et al. 2005).

Johnson's (2001) Afrocentric student development model underscores the importance of the development of an African-centered ideology. An understanding of such can be implemented to cope with racism, discrimination, and social isolation, all of which have been identified as barriers to academic success (Simms et al. 1993; Tinto 1993). This notion finds saliency in two of Feagin's (1998) tenets, dismissal of subculture and aggression. Feagin's (1998) dismissal of subculture posits that the effects of discrimination will be compounded when African American males encounter a devaluation of their norms, values, and folkways. Therefore, if the Black male student is within a white college backdrop that affords him the opportunity to develop an African-centered ideology to serve as a buffer to the dismissal of subculture, academic success will be possible. The second tenet of Feagin's (1998) typology is aggression. Aggression

suggests that if the Black male student encounters verbal or physically aggressive statements or acts (e.g., terroristic threats, insults, slights, etc.), then he is less likely to achieve scholastic success. Although the bind between this theoretical precept and Johnson's (2001) Afrocentric student development theory is more tenuous, it can be definitively discerned. For instance, if the Black male student is able to cultivate an African-centered ideology, according to Johnson's (2001) construct, it is plausible to assume the possible harm caused by "aggression" will not be capricious enough to inhibit academic progress.

In summary, the linkages between Feagin's (1998) cumulative discrimination theory as a paradigm for the examination of Black male academic achievement and existing theoretical formulations mentioned in this section are tenuous. The aforementioned is not intended to suggest that this brief synopsis elucidates every possible connection that can be made with Feagin's (1998) theory and existing data. This extraction represents an attempt to reveal some of the more useful associations that Feagin's (1998) paradigm has with theoretical formulations that were practical in this study.

Recommendations

Overall, according to Gallien Jr. and Peterson (2005), in order to increase the retention rates of African American males who attend predominantly White colleges, the following suggestions should be considered:

(1) Precollege programs that emphasize study skills, resource acquisition, i.e., how to acquire financial aid, counseling services, mentoring, working study jobs, etc.

(2) Make earnest and sincere efforts to recruit African American faculty and staff along with the implementation of social adjustment programs initiated by the university that address the unique needs of African American males in predominantly White college settings.

(3) The addition of courses that are part of the university's core curriculum and that address the needs of Black people throughout the Diaspora. Why? The benefits of the inclusion of such courses are numerous. First, the courses will peak the interest of Black males that show a desire to have the option to take such courses.

An ancillary or related advantage is that the supplement of such course material demonstrates that the university recognizes and acknowledges the plight of Black males who attend a predominantly white institution in a white dominated, patriarchal society. Finally, classes that focus on the experiences of Black people can only increase the self-esteem and educational achievement of black males who greatly need to be informed that they are just as capable of finishing school and being successful in life as their White male counterparts are.

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