Chapter 12
Motivational Factors for Academic Success Prospectives of African American Males at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates the motivational factors affecting retention rates of Black males at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In particular, this research is focused on identifying factors that Black male HBCU attendees described as facilitating their continuation in college. Data from this study was derived from a sample of 109 Black male students attending the following institutions: North Carolina Central University, North Carolina A&T University and Winston-Salem State University.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, much attention has been placed on success outcomes of Black male students in post-secondary education (Palmer, Davis & Maramba, 2011). While gains in postsecondary enrollment have occurred, the gap in college completion rates of African American males is the largest among all racial

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0308-8.ch012

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and ethnic groups (Jones, 2001). This is true at the associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degree levels. In attempting to understand the rationale for degree completion, scholars have looked at a myriad of factors, including background characteristics, institutional climate, academic preparation, identity, and academic experiences (Wood, 2013).

Among other salient contributors to success, scholars have identified motivational factors as being critical to enhancing retention and success rates of Black males at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Much of the investigative literature pertaining to this topic not only reveals the validity of this claim, but also evidences the connection between motivational factors and retention rates among Black males (Wood, Hilton, & Hicks, 2014). Bearing this in mind, the purpose of this study is to determine motivational factors influencing the persistence of Black males attending HBCUs, from their perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data (2010), African American men were awarded only 3% of total bachelor's degrees, despite accounting for a significantly larger proportion of college students. At 66%, African American college men have the highest attrition rates across all racial/ethnic groups (Mortenson, 2001). More specifically, every two out of three African American men who attempt a baccalaureate degree do not complete their respective programs. Given the disparities between increasing college enrollment trends, but low completion rates of baccalaureate degrees, the motivational factors affecting retention rates of Black males at HBCUs is a subject that demands further examination.

Numerous studies on HBCUs have focused on comparing the experiences and outcomes of African American undergraduate students attending HBCUs to those attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). An investigation of such research reveals that when compared to PWIs, HBCUs provide better learning environments, are nurturing, supportive, and family-oriented (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). In addition, other studies on HBCUs have focused on the social and educational experiences of African American males (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009; Palmer & Young, 2009), resource disparities with PWIs (Palmer & Griffin, 2009), student engagement (Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004), specifically among African American males (Palmer & Young, 2009). Outside of the important contributions of these studies, research pertaining to motivational factors that affect retention rates of Black male undergraduate students at HBCUs is limited. In fact, many higher education scholars may have inaccurately assumed that the research on undergraduate students at HBCUs (all students combined) defines the experiences of African American male undergraduate students at HBCUs.

Furthermore, the importance of such research is highlighted within articles in local and national newspapers (Abdullah, 2008; Dechter, 2008; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2007), as these sources continue to question the need for HBCUs and frequently discuss the inferiority of the education received at these institutions. An example of this can be seen within an article published by Jason Riley (2010) in the *Wall Street Journal,* which criticized the Obama Administration's decision to invest $850 million in HBCUs over the next decade. Riley suggested that providing such resources to HBCUs might prove to be an unreasonable decision. The reasoning behind this conclusion was based on the fact that HBCUs are viewed as being obsolete, lacking academic quality, grappling with low graduation rates, and gradu-

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