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## RESEARCH STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EDUCATING MULTICULTURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS-Ch 4

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# **Chapter Four**

## **Societal Perceptions of African American Males in Higher Education and the Adverse Impact It has on Their Academic Achievement at Predominantly White Institutions**

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### **Introduction**

For the past decade the attainment gap in college admission and graduation rates between Black males and their White counterparts has continued to grow. A growing body of research has held that there is a negative correlation between educational attainment and the decline of the Black family structure. As the structure of the Black family has deteriorated due to the lack of a male presence, so have participation rates in higher education for African American males. It is established that environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence on human behaviors, including academic performance. What is less understood is how environmental and cultural factors influence the way in which Black males come to perceive education and how those perceptions influence not only their behavior but their performance in school. It is unknown why being African American and male causes this segment of the population to stand out in the most negative and disheartening ways, both in school and in society.

This study measures the perceived influence of three factors (societal dissonance, self efficacy, and institutional support) on the academic success of African American male students at a predominantly White institution of higher education. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the perceived influence of racialized discrimination (societal dissonance), on the academic success of seven academically successful African American male undergraduate students at a predominantly White institution of higher education. This was done by examining students' self-efficacy, support structure, and academic background, guided by three research questions, one of which focused specifically on *Societal Dissonance*.

Through the experiences of the participants, the study provides insight into issues of societal perception, persistence, support, and access through the perspective of African American males. This chapter will provide a contextual understanding of African American males in higher education and provide those who work with the African American male populations in higher education, as well as in K-12 settings, insight to Black males from their perspective. The data and information contained within the body of this chapter may be used to assist institutions of higher education in the recruitment and retention of African American males by providing strategies and recommendations.

## **Societal Dissonance**

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance deals with discrepancy between cognitions. Festinger (1957) defined these cognitions as "any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior" (p. 62). The related concept of *societal dissonance* is based on the foundations of cognitive dissonance theory. Thus, societal cognitions are based on the beliefs and perceptions held by people (society) instead of the beliefs held by the individual concerning displayed behavior. According to cognitive dissonance theory, people have a tendency to seek consistency among their cognitions (i.e., beliefs, opinions); the same holds true for societal dissonance. When society perceives an inconsistency between attitudes or behaviors (dissonance), something must change to eliminate that dissonance. In the case of a discrepancy between attitudes and behavior, society most likely changes its attitude to accommodate the behavior.

Festinger (1957) identified two factors that affect the strength of dissonance: the number of dissonant beliefs and the importance attached to each belief. These factors apply to cognitive and societal dissonance alike. Festinger suggested three ways to eliminate dissonance: (a) reduce the importance of the dissonant beliefs, (b) add consonant beliefs that outweigh the dissonant beliefs, and (c) change the dissonant beliefs so that they are no longer inconsistent.

Based on Festinger's theory (1957), dissonance occurs most often in situations in which society must choose between two incompatible beliefs or actions. In the case of African American males, societal dissonance influences the way in which they are perceived. As with other subgroups, African American males can be praised or vilified; they are often viewed from a deficit perspective. Societal dissonance is the inability to reconcile conflicting beliefs about a group with actions carried out by individuals from that group. Dissonance occurs when society cannot differentiate between stereotypical representations of Black males (which are generally negative), and the characteristics of individual Black males encountered in the real world.

## **Research Question One**

What is the perceived influence of societal dissonance on the African American male's academic success?

The seven young men interviewed for this study had encountered many obstacles, in the form of low expectations, negative stereotypes, and unrealistic pressures to represent the entire Black race; yet, they had been successful in continuing their journey into and through higher education. Society sends out inconsistent and sometimes unjustified messages about perceptions and attitudes toward African American males. These young men, like many others, challenged societal stereotypes to achieve their academic success. A selection of their interview responses summarizes these challenges to the stereotypes and their solutions for societal dissonance.

Andrew recognized the general social stereotypes of the Black community, particularly young Black males. He saw it as his obligation to challenge that stereotype through his personal behavior.

I think the Black community and a lot of the Black males here are perceived as being lazy. And to an extent we are. I think it ties back to the stereotypes of Black males and the Black community in general, that it's so much easier to sell drugs or to rap or to play basketball and be successful than to put your face in a book and work hard for four years in order to achieve that same goal. . . . I have always tried to be a noble person and tried to have some sense of integrity. You can't really *break* a stereotype, but you can be an *exception* to a stereotype.

Andrew recognized that, whether or not by choice, he was a representative of his race in everyday situations.

I don't want the Black community to continue to be perceived as being lazy, which motivates me on a daily basis to make sure that I am noble and do not need to achieve for my personal success but for the success of the Black community. It is easy to stereotype a race, especially the Black race. When you are in the class and you are the only Black student there, when you say something in class, you are a representative of the Black race. For a lot of people, you are the only Black person that they interact with or may see. So if you say something out of turn or you act a certain way, you behave in a certain way, it only reinforces what they see on TV.

Damian pointed out that he was not the only representative of his race on the campus. He was sometimes reluctant to be identified with some peers, and sometimes he was embarrassed or at least uncomfortable about the way some other African American males represented his race.

I think it would have an influence on anyone. Whether negatively or positively, if someone does not believe in you or has a negative perception of you, it can have

an influence on how you perform in school. You hear about that kind of stuff all the time on TV and in the news, about how some guy killed his mother and father because he was abused as a kid. The abuse doesn't always have to be physical for it to affect a person. I think it's the same for Black males in college. The teachers don't think you are smart, the students don't think you are smart, it's hard but you have to get over it.

When you see someone acting out, wearing baggie pants or just clowning, which you see too often on this campus, it's like, "There goes *my* reputation. That's how *I'm* going to be viewed." You hear someone coming down the sidewalk and talking really loud, and you turn around and it's a Black guy. Do you know how that is? It's embarrassing. . . . I'm not the only Black person on a predominantly White campus, it's [already] a lot of pressure to fight those stereotypes. And then it's frustrating when you have peers who don't care.

Jesse framed the social dissonance experienced by African American males on the campus of an institution of higher education in terms of competition with students of other races.

I spend so much time in the library trying to compete with the other cultures because I know that they are doing the same amount of work that I am doing, and that they are trying to compete with me for the same jobs . . . later on in life.

I think it [societal dissonance] plays a major part on how we interact with the other students and then, how it affects us in class. I often find myself taking time out to think about what I want to say in class. Instead of just speaking my mind, or blurting something out, I take time to think about it. So I guess it's good and bad. Good because I don't talk much, but when I do, it is usually of quality. The bad would be, no one should have to be that scared to share their thoughts. I think negative stereotypes and looking down on people plays a huge role in one's college experience, actually in life.

[In one class] instead of being the team leader (which I should have been) and instead of speaking my mind and my opinions, I was actually in the background. I was actually at the bottom of the totem pole, maybe because the people around me were so intelligent. I felt maybe ashamed to speak my mind. We had to present a project to our class, but working with this group, I felt [they were] smarter than I was. A little bit smarter than me. Can you feel sometimes when a person is smarter or has that intelligence level? It's kind of above you, sometimes by the way they present themselves.

Once I was placed in that group among the other smart business majors, I had to keep that image intact; but at the same time, it kind of defeated me. It is kind of hard to look upon that situation. Let's say we are both going in for the interview for the same job; the employer can't look

on both of us and say, "Alright, I'm going to pick him because.. or I can't X you out because you weren't raised in the same environment."

Saviour presented one constructive solution to challenge negative stereotypes about the African American male held by people on the higher education campus in particular and in society in general. He saw his role as an "educator" of society regarding the image of the African American male. Inferred in his description is his assumption of role model as well as educator.

My job is a job, but it's not a job. We put on programs . . . that promote awareness and spread information, because a lot of people come here, especially White people, and they don't know anything about other cultures. They say things like, "What's life's like being Black?" or "I've never seen a Black person before." It's like all they see is what they see on TV, so when they walk across the street, they don't know any other dimension. So we try to let them see another side. In that aspect I'm a leader because, when people see me and they see what I am all about, they see something different, something they've never seen before. So I try to teach them. It's just in small ways, I'm not going to go down my résumé or anything, it's just small things like that.

I don't like to make excuses for anybody or make excuses for why I have not done well on a test or something like that. But truthfully, I think being negatively stereotyped or perceived as bad hurts. I always try to treat everyone with the same amount of respect and teach people whenever I have an opportunity, but when you walk in to class and you have already been judged, it is pretty hard to act normal. When you are constantly looked upon as bad or not able to do the work, sometimes you can't help but start to believe it. That is when you have to be strong and not let that stop you from being successful.

Without saying so directly, Wayne implied that African American males on campus may not be as different in their social roles as some have presumed. He described them as being categorized in much the same way as other males on campus.

I would say Black males in this campus are divided into three categories: athletes, Greeks and regular folks. If you are not an athlete, you are nothing; if you are not a Greek, you are nothing; and then you fall into that category of "just so and so." That's the way we talk about each other here. . . . You [are defined] by a title or a role and you get lumped into one of the three.

## **Analysis for Research Question One**

Although the participants in this study all alluded to the fact that negative stereotypes and perceptions of Black males on campus and in society *could* have a negative influence on their academic performance, the general consensus seemed to be that this particular group of young men used this deficit perception of Black males to their advantage. Jesse, Damian, and Saviour all stated directly that the negative pressures and stereotypes of societal dissonance would affect a Black male's academic matriculation into college in an adverse way. When asked whether he thought that dissonance on a societal level had an influence on a Black male's academic success, Jesse responded, "I think it plays a major part on how we interact with the other students and then, how it affects us in class." This clearly shows that the deficit perspective unjustly given to Black males at times has the potential to affect Black males, not only in life but in the classroom as well. This group of young men addressed the issue of negative stereotypes, feelings of isolation, and low academic expectations by performing well in the classroom. Saviour went a step further, stating that it was his "job to act as an educator," to teach others when confronted with issues of a deficit perception of Black males. He also said, "I don't like to make excuses for anybody or make excuses for why I have not done well on a test, or something like that. But truthfully, I think being negatively stereotyped or perceived as bad hurts." Andrew took it upon himself to address this obstacle by ensuring that his personal behavior did not match that of the stereotypical young Black male.

While the findings related to this question showed evidence of the participants doing exceedingly well academically despite obvious feelings of isolation and low expectations held by others, one participant expressed feelings of societal pressures affecting his academic performance. It was surprising to hear from Saviour that in 2007 students of the African American race were still receiving questions asking "what it is like to be Black." As stated earlier, these young men, like many others before them, have challenged societal stereotypes and social dissonance to achieve academic success. Andrew summarized the ultimate response to this research question best: "I have always tried to be a noble person and tried to have some sense of integrity. You can't really *break* a stereotype, but you can be an *exception* to a stereotype."

From this, one can assume a direct relationship between societal dissonance and African American male's academic performance, and successful matriculation into college. It is not the intention of the researcher to prove that negative stereotyping is exclusive to African American males or to excuse the poor academic performance of Black males in college. In agreement with Damian, it is the opinion of this researcher that negative stereotyping has the *possibility* of adversely affecting anyone. These data are offered for consideration to assist you in forming your own conclusions.

The findings seem to be consistent with research reported by Steele and Aronson (1995), who postulated that, when a person's social identity is attached to a negative stereotype, that person will tend to underperform in a manner consistent with the stereotype. Steele and Aronson attributed the underperformance to a person's anxiety that he or she will conform to the negative stereotype. The anxiety manifests itself in various ways, including distraction and increased body temperature, all of which diminish performance level.

## **Findings for Research Question One**

What is the perceived influence of societal dissonance on the African American male's academic success?

1. There was a direct relationship between societal dissonance and these African American males' academic performance and successful matriculation into college.
2. This group of young men addressed the issue of negative stereotypes, feelings of isolation, and low academic expectations by performing well in the classroom.
3. Although these Black males were aware of the deficit perception of them they combated the negativity by doing well in the classroom, several stated that the negative perceptions affect them and hurts them emotionally.
4. These Black males addressed deficit stereotyping by ensuring that their personal behavior did not match that of the stereotypical young Black male.
5. These findings are consistent with research reported by Steele and Aronson (1995) postulating that, when a person's social identity is attached to a negative stereotype, that person will tend to underperform in a manner consistent with the stereotype.

According to the participants in the present study, perception of African American males is usually discussed from a deficit perspective. Many African American males with varied backgrounds, including doctors, lawyers, social workers, teachers, janitors, and construction workers, are confronted with stereotypes every day. Bill Cosby once stated, "If a White man falls off a chair drunk, it's just a drunk. If a Negro does, it's the whole damn Negro race." While some may find this statement a little farfetched, many African American males would agree wholeheartedly, as validated by the participants in this study.

Myriad issues emerged from this study. The participants all expressed feelings of isolation and negative stereotypes in both the classroom and in life. Faculty members at institutions of higher education can challenge the deficit perspective and stereotypes of Black males in their classrooms, thus helping address the issue of societal dissonance concerning Black males. As stated earlier, Festinger (1957) identified three ways to eliminate dissonance: (a) reduce the importance of the dissonant beliefs, (b) add consonant beliefs that outweigh the dissonant beliefs, and (c) change dissonant beliefs so they are no longer inconsistent. These goals can be



achieved by integrating minority and racism-related content into the curriculum; for example, rather than concentrating on “African American month,” the faculty could integrate into the curriculum an ongoing program that identifies the contributions, feelings, and lifestyles of minorities.

Aronson (1968) offered strategies for reducing dissonance on an individual level. Given the similarities between rectifying individual and societal misconceptions and inconsistencies, these strategies apply to societal dissonance as well: (a) changing behavior to match one’s attitude, (b) changing attitude to match one’s behavior, and (c) cognitively minimizing the degree of inconsistency or its importance. Participants in this study reported that non-Black students saw the Black students as intellectually inferior. Faculty can address this issue by interacting with all students at the same level, by treating all students the same way, and by holding all students to the same standards. Such practices acknowledge Black students as equals while at the same time not spotlighting anyone or openly showing emotion that could be misconstrued as favoritism. The first two strategies mentioned will not only acknowledge the contributions of other cultures but will relieve pressures that many of the participants described related to having to prove how smart they are in order to be accepted.

The faculty member who senses tension or isolation within the classroom can give those on the receiving end an opportunity to express their feelings and views. The opportunity may be in the form of forums, workshops, or general information sessions. Many of the participants in this study stated that, if an opportunity were presented, they would use it to educate those who are not familiar with other cultures. Aronson (1968) suggested that reducing dissonance might occur by acquiring new information that is consistent with attitudes or actions that seem inconsistent at first. Faculty can challenge stereotyped perceptions of the Black male through their interactions in the classroom. Instructors can minimize the importance of a negative attitude or behavior. This can be done by focusing on the positive aspects of African American culture instead of targeting negative aspects. Festinger (1957) stated that minimizing the emphasis on differences or acknowledging the differences from a positive aspect can reduce dissonant beliefs.

Demonstrations of racism are deeply rooted in the societal perceptions of African American males and the generalized stereotype of them being intellectually incompetent. This perception affects Black males not only internally but also externally through today’s policies in higher education. While America has made progress in rectifying the devastating impact of discriminative practices both socially and politically, which were at one time not only common but accepted and viewed as norms, society has a long way before claiming meaningless victories of temporary change. The nation has not moved away from a discriminative mentality. Although laws have been reviewed and changed and some restrictions have been lifted, according to some of the findings about how Black males perceive themselves and their place in society and how they think others perceive them have not changed.

## **Self-efficacy**

According to Bandura (1994), *self-efficacy* can be defined as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (p. 2). These beliefs help to determine how people think, feel, react, and behave. Bandura asserted that self-efficacy can be developed by four primary forces of influence: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and emotional/physical reactions.

Mastery experiences are the most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy in students (Bandura, 1994). Experiencing success adds to one’s sense of value and confidence in one’s abilities; in contrast, experiencing a series of failures undermines efficacy. Therefore, self-efficacy can be related to fear of failure. This fear can be responsible for inhibiting growth and development in students of all races, grades, or ability levels in academic settings. Fear of failure develops early in childhood and leads to anxiety during performance evaluation, a lack of effort and persistence, and overall poorer performance in achievement settings (Bandura, 1978; Steele and Aronson, 1995). Howard and Hammond (1985) asserted that everyone encounters failure but unexpected failure affects students differently from expected failure.

Positive social models are vital to establishing positive self-efficacy. Vicarious experiences provided by social models serve to create and strengthen self-beliefs of efficacy. As suggested by Bandura (1994), “Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers’ beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities to succeed” (p. 71). The reverse holds true as well. Observing others’ failures, in lieu of great effort, lowers one’s perceived efficacy. Moreover, the impact of the social model on efficacy is influenced by perceived similarity to the model. This point is especially important in mentor-mentee relationships: “The greater the assumed similarity, the more persuasive are the models’ successes and failures” (p. 81).

Social persuasion, a deliberate attempt on the part of one party to influence the attitudes or behavior of another party so as to achieve some predetermined end on a societal level, serves as another way to strengthen beliefs of self-efficacy. “People who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given activities are likely to mobilize greater effort and sustain it than if they harbor self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when problems arise” (Bandura, 1994, p. 74). In contrast, social persuasion can harness negative beliefs concerning efficacy. People who perceive that they lack competence in certain areas tend to avoid those areas as a means of avoiding failure. Emotions and reactions serve as the final influence on efficacy. According to Bandura (1988), people rely on their somatic and emotional states when examining their capabilities. Stress reactions, tension, and mood tend to affect one’s judgment of self-efficacy. Therefore, “reducing people’s stress reactions and altering their negative emotional proclivities and misinterpretations of their physical state” (p. 37) can modify self-efficacy.

Bandura (1997) observed that people live with psychic environments that are primarily of their own making. Often, people can gauge their confidence by the emotional state that they experience as they contemplate an action. Moreover, when people experience aversive thoughts and fears about their capabilities, those negative affective reactions can lower perceptions of capability and trigger the stress and agitation that ensure the inadequate performance that they fear. For example, when African American males go into a test-taking situation with expectations of not doing well, anxiety often occurs and can affect their performance. This is not to say that the typical anxiety experienced before an important endeavor is a sure sign of low self-efficacy; however, strong emotional reactions to a task can provide cues about the anticipated success or failure of the outcome.

Self-efficacy beliefs operate in concert with other sociocognitive factors, such as outcome expectations or goals, in the regulation of human behavior. Bandura (1984) argued that people's beliefs of personal competence "touch, at least to some extent, most everything they do" (p. 251). Likewise, self-efficacy beliefs mediate to a great extent the effects of other determinants of behavior. Therefore, when these determinants are controlled, self-efficacy judgments should prove to be excellent predictors of choice and direction of behavior.

Cokley (1998) acknowledged that racial and cultural identity models are important components of the psychosocial development of African American college students. Allen (2000) noted that education is considered to be a very important value within the African American community. For many African Americans, education has been the hope to obtain equality of opportunity and achieve a better standard of living. Yet, for many African American males, pursuing higher education has become increasingly problematic.

Self-efficacy beliefs may correspond to a decision to pursue certain life goals, including higher education. "A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways. People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided" (Bandura, 1994, p. 202). Developing a positive self-image is especially important for African American males. According to Kunjufu (1984), developing positive self-images and self-discipline is a prerequisite for the effective education of African American males.

Certain factors can have particularly negative effects on the development of positive self-efficacy. According to Kunjufu (1984), the following factors have a negative influence on the development of young African American males: (a) chronic unemployment and underemployment, (b) the changing concept of childhood, (c) elitism, (d) low expectations, (e) lack of commitment to educate all children, and (f) misuse of achievement tests to label and place students. Nevertheless, institutions can be instrumental in assisting with the development of self-esteem in African American children. Kunjufu identified the following institutions as influential in the process: (a) the home, (b) the peer group, (c) television, (d) the school, and (e) the church. He asserted that these institutions

should strive to emphasize positive African images to support self-esteem development in African American children.

Howard-Hamilton (1997) described four Africentric models that could be used to enhance African American males' development on college campuses. These models provide possible strategies for increasing self-efficacy and academic performance. The models are (a) Cross's (1991) Nigrescence model, (b) Robinson and Howard-Hamilton's (2000) Africentric resistance model, (c) Erikson's (1980) identity development model, and (d) Bandura's (1977) social learning model.

The is the theory of becoming Black (Cross, 1991). According to Cross, this theory consists of five stages. *Pre-encounter*, the first stage, occurs prior to an African American sensing a need to change his or her identity. Racial identity at this point is based on factors other than race, such as church and family. *Encounter*, the second stage, occurs when the African American experiences an event, usually racial in nature, that makes him or her begin to rethink his or her current identity. *Immersion-emersion*, the third stage, consists of two parts: a commitment to a personal change and a demolition of an old way of thinking. Immersion encompasses the person becoming deeply ingrained in any activity or organization associated with being "Black." This stage may be evidenced by changing one's name or attire to that of Africentricity or becoming involved in organizations of African Americans, regardless of their purposes. The decisions to select certain organizations and to engage in certain activities are classified as being irrational and often erratic. Emersion occurs as radical behavior begins to change. The person begins to realize the irrationality of his or her behavior and begins to focus on the nature and purpose of selected activities. In the fourth stage, *internalization*, the person begins to internalize his or her newly developed activity and is able to appreciate the identity and cultural views of others while feeling fine about his or her own identity and views. *Commitment*, the final stage, is described as the point at which the person becomes committed to others to help them develop their own identity. The final stage allows an opportunity "to translate their personal sense of Blackness into a plan of action or general sense of commitment" (as cited in Howard-Hamilton, 1997, p. 42).

The Africentric resistance paradigm is based on two concepts (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). This model fuses the Nguzo Saba value system, developed by Maulana Karenga, which "enables individuals to establish direction and meaning in their life" (p. 63) with the resistance modality model developed by Robinson and Ward. The resistance modality model is based on the philosophy that "there are healthy forms of psychological and personal resistance to negative and deleterious caricatures of one's race or culture that can promote personal growth and modify one's perception of the self and one's sense of community" (p. 64). This model is meant to promote personal growth through a strong sense of identity, resulting in a healthy resistance to negative messages that attempt to "demean, destroy, or detract from that culture" (p. 64).

By combining theories from the aforementioned models, the Africentric resistance model represents a "self-affirmation, reawakening, and rebirth of

personal beliefs and behaviors. Africentricity represent a strong connection to one's spirituality and kinship via African culture" (Howard-Hamilton, 1997, p. 22). It culminates in a shared belief system whereby the self and others are seen as interconnected and results in a spirit of collective responsibility. According to Howard-Hamilton, the model "interweaves elements of the theoretical Nguzo Saba value systems with certain aspects of resistance that can initiate and promote psychological health and satisfying interpersonal relationships for African American men within and between cultures" (p. 23) The Africentric paradigm could serve as the framework for programs focused on the successful matriculation of African American men in institutions of higher education.

Identity development begins early in life and it is uncertain when, if ever, it ends. It is generally agreed that developing an identity is a life-long process, that a basic identity is solidified during adolescence and young adulthood but, as life progresses, it is continually refined. A positive resolution of the identity and repudiation versus identity diffusion crisis was classified by Erikson (1968) as "a sense of psychosocial well-being. Its most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of 'knowing where one is going,' and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count" (p. 165). Erikson's stage model has been used as a point of orientation for many other developmental theorists, such as Chickering (1969) in the development of his model of college student development and Phinney's (1989) model of cultural identity development incorporating appreciation for Erikson's original formulation of the construct.

Social learning theory is the behavior theory most relevant to criminology. Albert Bandura held that aggression is learned through a process called *behavior modeling*. He maintained that people do not actually inherit violent tendencies but model them after three principles (Bandura, 1976). He argued that people, especially children, learn aggressive responses from observing others, either personally or through the media and environment. He stated that many believe that aggression can produce reinforcements that can formulate into reduction of tension, gaining financial rewards, gaining the praise of others, or building self-esteem (Siegel, 1992). In Bandura's Bobo doll experiment children imitated the aggression of adults in order to gain a reward. Bandura was interested in child development because he maintained that, if aggression was diagnosed early, children could refrain from becoming adult criminals. Bandura (1976) argued that "aggression in children is influenced by the reinforcement of family members, the media, and the environment" (p. 206). Bandura stated that modeling influences do more than provide a social standard against which to judge one's own capabilities. People seek proficient models who possess the competencies to which they aspire. Through their behavior and expressed ways of thinking, competent models transmit knowledge and teach effective skills and strategies for managing environmental demands. Acquisition of better means raises perceived self-efficacy.

According to Loewen (1995), American history textbooks promote the belief that most important developments are traceable to Europeans. For example, most American history textbooks state that Hernando De Soto discovered the Mississippi

River (of course, it had been discovered and named the Mississippi by ancestors of the original American Indians). De Soto's discovery had no larger significance and led to no trade or White settlement. Loewen stated, "His was merely the first White face to gaze on the Mississippi; therefore, he received credit." The Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama is often credited with being the first to sail around Africa, in 1497 to 1499. There is evidence that Afro-Phoenicians actually preceded Da Gama on this route by more than 2,000 years. (White historians insist that a case for the Afro-Phoenicians has not been proven and that history should not be distorted merely to improve Black children's self-image.) In reading history recorded in this manner, Black students learn that Black feats are not considered as important as White ones (Loewen). This ideology does nothing for the psyche of young Black males looking for role models that would improve their self-image.

## **Research Question Two**

What is the perceived influence of self-efficacy on the African American male's academic success?

Self-efficacy is an impression that one is capable of performing in a certain manner or attaining certain goals (Ormrod, 2006). It has been defined as a belief that one has of one's capabilities to execute courses of actions required to manage situations. Not to be mistaken with *efficacy*, which is the power to produce an effect, *self-efficacy* is the belief (whether or not that belief is valid) that one has the power to produce that effect. For example, a person with high self-efficacy may engage in a more health-related activity when an illness occurs, whereas a person with low self-efficacy would experience feelings of hopelessness (Sue, Sue, and Sue, 2005), related in some ways to the principle of locus of control.

One of the key issues in this study is the distinction between *self-esteem* and *self-efficacy*. Self-esteem relates to a person's sense of self-worth, whereas self-efficacy relates to a person's perception of his or her ability to reach a goal. This study focuses on self-efficacy because the lack of self-efficacy is one of the obstacles that Black males encounter in academia, often leading to low academic performance. Feelings of self-efficacy are influenced by home and school environments, both of which affect how a person relates to others in society. Since one's belief in one's abilities is largely formed through social interactions in the dominant home and school environments, low self-efficacy is difficult to overcome. The level of self-efficacy observed in the seven young men interviewed in this study was extremely high. The researcher found the young men to have a strong belief not only in themselves but also in their academic abilities. Generally, the young men's self-efficacy appeared to have been shaped through interactions with their support systems, particularly family, friends, and teachers. Excerpts from some of the interviews illustrate this high level of self-efficacy and some of the sources of that confidence.

Andrew's self-confidence and his strong sense of self-efficacy were expressed throughout his interview. He attributed his success to his "drive" and dedication and related it to his sense of honor.

I am most proud of my drive and my dedication to my studies. My GPA is above 3.0. [Although] I would like it to be higher, I work hard on a daily basis and I have worked hard over the past year to achieve it. I have always tried to be a noble person and tried to have some sense of integrity.

Damian's strong sense of self-efficacy was expressed through his focus on making and achieving goals.

I am extremely goal oriented. I have a very detailed plan for the next 10 or 15 years, at least. Before I came to college I said, of course, "I don't want to have to pay anything." I got that accomplished. I'm pre-med and so I don't want to spend my summers taking summer school and working at a crappy job.

The belief in yourself is very important. If you don't believe in yourself, why should anyone else? No one is going to just hand you anything in life, so you have to believe that you are capable and can do it. When you start doubting yourself is when you fail.

Jesse's goal was very specific, and his clear confidence that he would achieve it reflected a strong sense of self-efficacy.

I want to achieve the best that I can achieve, so that I can possibly one day give back to my mother and my sister, who also raised her and me at the same time. I just like that driving force behind that. That's why I want to do great for my family, just the ability to do great one day for myself.

While I believe in myself, I think the way you feel about yourself can be influenced by others. I think this kind of goes back to the first question. I have always had a great belief in myself and my abilities. I still think that I am very capable in doing whatever I put my mind to, but I still think society influences your self-belief.

Justin expressed his strong sense of self-efficacy through his dedication to high moral standards.

I hold a lot of pride in upholding my principles of daily living . . . and shaping my own values. During the [elementary] school days and middle school [I was] pressured to compromise. But I think I've done a good job. I guess I give credit to my upbringing as far as sticking to those morals and being true to them daily. I would describe myself as personable, agreeable, and definitely dedicated.

While Saviour seemed to be more self-critical than the other interviewees, he still reflected his perception of a high degree of self-efficacy. He described his achievements in terms of competing with himself as well as with others to achieve

his goals. His point about “slowing down” and “taking it as it is” can be interpreted as coming from his sense of overall self-efficacy, in which he can “afford” to ease up on the competitive nature from time to time.

I think I am really hard on myself sometimes. . . . Not only am I hard on myself, I am a competitive person by nature. So I can be competitive with myself, I can be competitive with other people. I think sometimes there comes a point where you are a little bit too competitive and there’s a point where you just need to slow down and take it as it is.

Self-efficacy is the key. You have to believe in yourself if you are going to be successful in life. When you look at successful business people, they all had a great belief in themselves. There have been times when I was unsure if I could pick up on something, but again, I have always been successful in the past, so that is when that belief in myself comes into play and I know I will do well.

## **Analysis for Research Question Two**

As stated earlier, I found these young men to have a strong belief not only in themselves but also in their academic abilities, although at times their belief in their academic abilities did come into question. During the interviews, most of the participants stated that they were most proud of their GPA. It was obvious to the researcher that there was a direct relationship between self-efficacy and GPA, presumably the higher the GPA, the higher the level of self-efficacy. Based on several comments made during the interviews, it also seemed that the participants who had structured goals tended to have a higher level of self-efficacy as well. Some of the participants commented that their self-efficacy was derived from competition with other students. Others described achievements in terms of competing with oneself as well as with others to achieve goals. Saviour made a point about “slowing down” and “taking it as it is,” which could be interpreted as coming from his sense of overall self-efficacy, in which he could “afford” to ease up on the competitive nature from time to time because of that belief.

According to Moore (2001, as cited in Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2003, p. 5), “What separate African American male students from their Caucasian counterparts are the unmeasurable burdens of racism, discrimination, and negative stereotypes.” These oppressive barriers are interpreted as messages of intellectual incompetence, which at times have negative effects on the academic identity and success of African American male students. “Success for African American males has less to do with academic capability and more to do with motivation, self-efficacy, commitment, and follow-through, which ultimately leads to success” (p. 36). For many young African American men, the ability to succeed in the education system depends on the ability to navigate through the barriers and constraints of society.



## **Findings for Research Question Two**

What is the perceived influence of self-efficacy on the African American male's academic success?

1. The level of self-efficacy observed in the seven young men interviewed in this study was extremely high
2. The researcher found the young men to have a strong belief not only in themselves but also in their academic abilities, although at times their belief in their academic abilities came into question.
3. Generally, these young men's self-efficacy appeared to have been shaped through interactions with their support systems, particularly family, friends, and teachers.
4. The findings are consistent with research reported by Lee (2000), who contended that it is possible to educate all children, including Black males, at high levels.
5. Based on comments made during the interviews, it can be concluded that participants who had structured goals tended to have a higher level of self-efficacy.

The researcher found these young men to have a strong belief not only in themselves but also in their academic abilities, although at times the belief in their academic abilities came into question. Also, it seemed that the participants with structured goals tended to have higher levels of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to achieve specified goals. By means of the self-system, individuals exercise control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Self-efficacy beliefs are most influential arbiters of human activity (Bandura, 1997). Institutions play a key role in reinforcing self-efficacy. The participants in this study showed very high levels of self-efficacy, wanting to be challenged, wanting to be successful, and wanting to be treated like everyone else on an equal playing field and to be held to the same standards as everyone else in the class. Faculty, administrators, and staff must hold all students to the same standards and expect all students to succeed.

Wayne revealed that, in selecting teams for projects in some of his classes, Black people were usually the last students selected or were not selected at all. Faculty or administrators could address this issue by selecting the teams, taking away from students the potential power to discriminate.

Saviour commented that being Black is perceived by some in a negative connotation, equating being Black to being unintelligent. Carey and Forsyth (2007) suggested teaching strategies that could assist administration and faculty efforts in reaching out to young Black males in the classroom. They stated that helping students to understand differences among the constructs of related social-cognitive

theories, such as self-efficacy, outcome expectancies, behavioral intentions, self-esteem, and optimism, can provide a better understanding of the students' issues. This problem could also be addressed in the same way as the problem of negative stereotyping was addressed, by integrating minority and racism-related content into the curriculum. Such a strategy will not only acknowledge the contributions of other cultures, but will relieve some of the pressures that many of the participants described about having to prove that they are "smart" in order to be accepted.

## **Institutional Support**

The relationship between the student and university is emblematic; neither can exist without the other. While providing students with personal and academic support for their educational and personal lives, the institution seeks to obtain stability of the student body until graduation. Thus far, predominantly White institutions of higher education have yet to effectively provide that support or find ways to retain African American males.

Negotiating the complexities of college applications, financial aid, payment options, choice of major/study, and scheduling is difficult for the inexperienced student, particularly for those who are neophytes to the college admission process. Combined with housing choices, meal plans, and newly acquired roommates, it is easy to understand why so many students have difficulty in acclimating to college life and the responsibilities that go with being a college student. Thus, it is sometimes necessary to add the very real possibility that the average new student may not be emotionally or academically prepared. Adding variables such as race to the equation can exacerbate the situation many fold.

Cryer-Sumler (1998) stated that an understanding of where undergraduate African American students at predominantly White institutions would refer other undergraduate African American students for assistance with stressful problems (and then trying to ensure that methods and other alternatives are accessible) is probably one of the most important issues faced when struggling to survive at a predominantly White institution. Diop (2004) found that Black students generally saw themselves as being treated fairly, neither being advantaged nor disadvantaged because of their race. This fairness of treatment is generally viewed as a very positive characteristic of an institution. Black students expressed that it would be helpful to design and implement programs to sensitize administrators, faculty, staff, and students to racial issues and concerns.

While integration theorists (e.g., Sedlacek and Brooks, 1976; Zusman, 1999) have argued that a lack of supportive ties on campus jeopardizes student persistence, research among Black students attending predominantly White institutions has revealed a countervailing pattern. According to Bryant (1998), Black students

who were well integrated socially were often most likely to drop out, while those who appeared somewhat disconnected tended to persist. Black students are conflicted to be socially accepted, which often means that they find themselves at odds with student academic responsibility. In terms of network structure, the Black students most likely to be at risk academically were those reporting the largest number of strong ties on campus; this was not the case among their White counterparts. So the question remains: If Black males are generally treated fairly on campus and there seems to be some sort of institutional support for those students on predominantly White campuses, then why do those institutions have difficulty in recruiting and retaining these students?

While the civil strife of the 1950s and 1960s was due to lack of access to equal opportunities both in life and in the nation's institutions of higher learning, students of color are still severely underrepresented in predominantly White institution, both as faculty and staff. Studies also reveal heavy pressure on Black students to be socially connected at levels that conflict with the student role. In terms of network structure, the Black students most likely to be at risk academically were those reporting the largest number of strong ties on campus (Bryant, 1998); this was not the case among their White counterparts.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported an audit conducted at the University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC) that revealed "a miserable climate of race relations on the campus, particularly in the faculty ranks," according to an article in the *Kansas City Star* (Rosenberg, 2006). The audit also showed that Latino students, like Black students, felt no sense of community on campus. As a result, many of those students, especially Black and Latino males, struggled to graduate or left UMKC for another college. The audit, commissioned by the university, revealed that the most racist place on campus was the classroom. Black and Latino students told auditors that they often felt offended by faculty who seemed to hold low expectations regarding their abilities. If it is true that faculty have low expectations of minority students, is that because the students actually do not perform well, or do the students not perform well because of faculty's low expectations?

Minorities have experienced for decades the unequal distribution of education and question the quality, scope, and content of their higher education (Astin, 1985; Castellanos and Gloria, 2002; Gordon, 1999; Harris, 1996; Jackson and Moore, 2006; Kerr, 1991). The proportion of minority students participating in college has been rising but still lags behind attendance rates of the national norm. The changing demographics present a challenge to most college campuses, particularly in creating a climate that is conducive and reflective of the type of students needed to ethnically diversify higher education institutions. More specifically, institutions are confronted with a growing minority population that has a different value system, an intensified awareness of their minority status, and a need for climate inclu-

siveness, and who are the first in their families to attend college (Astone and Nunez-Wormack, 1990; Hurtado and Carter, 1997; Valverde and Castenell, 1998). These students are confronted with a challenge that requires managing and coping with psychological distress as they negotiate the complexities of campus culture at predominantly White institutions.

### **Research Question Three**

What is the perceived influence of institutional support on the African American male's academic success?

Many of the participants discussed programs that targeted diversity issues during orientation activities. Several also mentioned groups on campus that provided an outlet to interact with a variety of people, as well as groups that specifically provided an opportunity to identify with other African American men. While acknowledging the value of these groups, most of the participants commented that most of the resistance that they had encountered on campus came in the form of preconceptions held by others on campus, not the University in particular. For example, Saviour stated:

Higher administration does give us all these opportunities; they give us everything we need. There are basic amenities, tutoring sessions; we have like five mentor programs just in the Black community. We have facilities and we have so much at our disposal, but we choose not to educate ourselves. . . . At some point you have to take it upon yourself as an African American male student to quit putting the blame on everybody else. . . . No one is always going to give you the answer, sometimes you are going to have to go out there looking for the answer. If you are struggling in class, they have tips and ways and just anything at your disposal for you to deal with that. But I think we choose to not do that because the answer is not being fed to us through a spoon.

Several participants mentioned programs on campus that was particularly helpful upon their arrival to campus. One remarked, "I would love to see [organizations such as SAAB] grow more and influence more people." The participants stated that the programs that addressed stereotypes and racial issues openly and candidly were most effective.

Damian recognized the role of the university in providing services geared to minority groups, such as African American male students.

Well, for one, orientation was incredible. There were a lot of things, a lot of little shows we had on stereotypes and stuff like that. I don't necessarily know if they talk to you about actually making better cultural decisions, but there's help there,

but I don't even know if it's problematic. I'm not like a person who says it's our entire fault. We need to get together, you know.

I think the school tries to make all of its students successful, because they have a reputation to uphold. I don't think they specifically target Black males, I think they try to help minorities. I think they still have a long way to go, but it's a start. If the university hired more Black professors, I think that would help with the success of Black males.

However, Damian recognized that the work of university organizations, as well as faculty, staff, and students, is far from finished.

We still have mindsets of people here [on campus] that need to change, White people and other people. The thing I hate most about perceptions on campus is that they tend to report only bad things, and not really report good things that are happening in our community. That happens a lot here.

Others were less than enthusiastic about the institution's motivations for offering specialized services for the African American male student. Wayne stated:

What I have seen here at the university is that the programs are being done just to say that they are providing a program, the programs don't really do anything.

In agreement, Jesse remarked:

The institution has a certain responsibility to each of their students. I think the university tries to meet that responsibility with programs and things like that. Even though they offer programs like tutoring and some mentoring, I still feel as if I don't belong sometimes. I had a friend who graduated a couple of years ago, and he said he felt no loyalties to the university because he didn't feel like he was a part of the university, he didn't get that college experience that everyone else talks about. I never knew what he meant by that, I mean come on, we are at the university. As my time here went on, I started to understand what he meant, it's like we'll [the university] let you in the school, but you still are not a part of us. I don't know, I can't explain it. So I don't know if the school can have an influence, but I think it could definitely do a better job of making us feel wanted, or more accepted.

Saviour did not address the services of the institution directly. Instead, he focused on the perception widely held by students that being Black is equated to being not smart.

When you first go into a class, . . . it is not the pressure from your teacher, [it's mostly] pressure from your peers. You walk in there and you know you have to be on your ground because, when they look at you, they see a Black person. . . . And they think immediately, "Oh! You must not be smart. You are not

intelligent.” . . . So you have to prove to them that you are a very smart person, that you know what you are talking about. So there is that pressure right there.

Saviour then described in interesting twist of perceptions: Being smart seems to translate to being “not Black.” And then there is also that pressure:

“Okay, when I do prove to them that I am smart, that I know what I am doing, that I take my studies seriously, all of a sudden I’m not Black! It’s just like, “Oh! But *you* are not Black.” . . . People . . . are not trying to be actively racist. But these conceptions are stuck in your head, whether you know they are there, and they influence what they should do. . . . They do not analyze you as an individual. . . . It’s really aggravating but I deal with it and I do what I can. Yeah! But not as a Black person because Black person can’t be smart!

If the university addressed the negative stereotypes head-on, I think that would do wonders. As mentioned before, I try to teach whenever I can, but I am only one person. If the institution were to do something I think it would help. As far as learning what to do when you get into college, I think the university does a good job, all of the staff and counselors help as far as classes and stuff.

While most of the participants agreed that the institution provided satisfactory programs and/or facilities targeted toward diversification, there was a consensus that the institution did not adequately address issues of environmental change or campus climate. Many of the participants discussed programs that targeted diversity issues during orientation activities. Several also mentioned groups on campus that provided an outlet for interaction with a variety of people, as well as groups that specifically provided an opportunity to identify with other African American men. Even while acknowledging the value of these groups, most of the participants commented that most of the resistance that they had encountered on campus came in the form of preconceptions held by others on campus.

When an administrator or institution decides to change the campus climate and the deficit perception of African American males, several strategies must be used prior to embarking on that change. Unfortunately, utilizing the model for institutional change proposed by Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) 32 years later is still an appropriate option because the realm of higher education has not changed much in that period and is still not perceived as welcoming to all students. First, the organization must define its specific goals. Failure to do this has been the undoing of more than one cultural change. According to Sedlacek and Brooks, five key points are necessary to consider in defining organizational and institutional goals.

1. Goals must be stated to provide direction for change. Without stated goals, energy and action become misdirected and random and a change does not take place.
2. Goals should be as specific and operational as possible. Following this principle will help to avoid the “umbrella” goal, such as “eliminating racism in an institution,” and substitute a series of subgoals, such as “increase the number of Black teachers” and “incorporate the contributions of minorities in the Chemistry 1 curriculum.”
3. Strategies are separate from goals in that they are ways of accomplishing goals. Institutions must be able to separate means from ends.

4. Goals must be adjusted to the context of the times. For example, if compelling evidence should become available that African American men do better in society by attending all-Black schools, then goals and strategies should be shifted.

5. All goals must be evaluated and the extent of their accomplishment measured.

As the first key point states, goals must be stated not only to provide direction but also to provide consistency. As Sedlacek pointed out, if this goal is not met, energy and action become misdirected and random and change does not take place. A clear-cut direction also helps to avoid the “umbrella effect” to which Sedlacek referred in the second point. If true change is to take place, the university must create policies that will effect change for *all* students.

Examples of goals for institutions include the following (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1976):

1. Change the concept of teacher quotas and develop a fair policy.
2. Integrate minority and racism-related content into the curriculum; for examples, rather than institute African American month, integrate into the curriculum an ongoing program on the contributions, feelings, and lifestyles of minorities.
3. Change the use of standardized test scores for admissions and other alternatives rather than eliminating the tests.
4. Find ways to involve African American students’ parents in school programs.
5. Develop proper techniques for teaching standard English to Black males, while making sure that their current speech style is denigrated in the process.
6. Find appropriate standards for judging and developing programs for African Americans in a positive way. Cultural and racial differences exist, and it is logical to use various techniques and criteria to judge success or failure.
7. Experience and understanding of racism and race relations should be required of all school personnel.
8. Black scholars should be included in the process of developing curricula. Not only does this have an important role in modeling applications for Black male students, it shows White and Black students that African Americans can and do perform many important roles in society and serves as an intermediate goal on the way to acquiring more full-time Black faculty members.

Several of the participants mentioned that they would welcome the opportunity to interact with faculty. Saviour commented that the faculty-student relationship might be stronger if the faculty member and student were of the same race. When Black males have an opportunity to interact with and observe faculty of color create programs and integrate materials into the curriculum, the role of scholar/professor becomes a reality for the students, indicating that the role of a scholar/professor is attainable by them as well.

The earlier the student knows about college and the concept of life-long learning, the better. All of the young men in this study stated that it had not been a question of *whether* they would go to college; rather, it was a question of *where* they would go to college. All of the participants reported that their familiar and extended support systems had played an integral part in ensuring that they received up-to-date college materials and scholarship information.

Early intervention programs have played a significant role in providing services, particularly for minority youth. As participation rates of African American students continue to increase, services that will guide them to successful entrance and transition to college life will be key determinants in student retention and graduation. Although there has been a

significant increase in the higher education rates of minorities, this group is predominantly concentrated at community colleges, with few transferring to four-year institutions (Brewer, 1990). Most minority students (83.7 percent) are still enrolled in lower-cost public institutions (Wilds and Wilson, 1998). Therefore, programs to increase college and university participation by minorities must target public two-year and technical colleges.

If the goal is to increase participation of first-generation, low-income minority students at four-year institutions, early intervention programs should provide college preparation for more African American male students to meet the criteria of the more selective public flagship and private institutions. These initiatives can also decrease the gaps between the participation rates of White males and African American males, while addressing the lack of representation of minorities in certain career fields, including mathematics and science (Martin, 2007).

Early intervention programs such as the I Have A Dream Foundation (IHAD), National Early Intervention Scholarship Program (NEISP), and GEAR-UP provide a solid framework to increase the retention of first-generation, low-income minority students. African American male students are less likely than White male students to graduate from college and complete a four-year degree, especially at predominantly White institutions (Brewer, 1990; Wilds and Wilson, 1998). Therefore, the concern for students of color in higher education does not stop with access into the institution but continues with providing resources to retain these students. By implementing ongoing educational programs and student support services within the community and at post-secondary institutions, minority student concerns and issues in higher education are addressed at an early stage of college student development (Martin, 2007).

## **Faculty of Color**

With the ever-changing demographics of the student population and the stagnant nature of faculty racial composition over the past twenty years, the retention of faculty of color at predominantly White institutions continues to be a significant issue in higher education. Knefelkamp (University of Michigan, 1998, p. 2), “In order for higher education to be more effective, we must have an accurate reflection of society represented within higher education.” Faculty that resembles African American males will serve to increase the number of African American males on campuses of higher education. This requires an environment of equality and inclusion. Several participants mentioned that faculty of color (faculty who “looked like them”) could possibly understand what the students had experienced in life, which would be an excellent addition to the campus experience. Bonner (2003) asserted that acclimating to the higher education environment has proven to be a formidable task for many minority faculty members. Particularly among the ranks of certain subcultures—women, cultural and ethnic minorities, gay and lesbian instructors—experiences with these environments have been described as “chilly.”

To truly tap into the knowledge stores and intellectual reserves maintained by African American scholars, academe must first meet their most basic needs: Establish a safe and inclusive environment to successfully engage in critical discourse, create a forum to bond with peers, develop a means to foster viable connections with students and increase opportunities to interface with the institution. (p.4) Creating opportunities to network with



other students and faculty of color is challenging because there are fewer students of color in graduate programs and fewer faculty of color in tenure track positions. Reaching out to those who are present and creating a welcoming environment for new students and faculty of color will promote the type of diversity that enhances the academic atmosphere (Venegas, 2001).

## **Teaching Strategies for Faculty**

Carey and Forsyth (2007) suggested teaching strategies that could assist administration and faculty efforts in reaching out to young Black males in the classroom. They stated that helping students to understand differences among the constructs of related social-cognitive theories, such as self-efficacy, outcome expectancies, behavioral intentions, self-esteem, and optimism, can provide a better understanding of the students' own issues. This strategy is consistent with the responses given by the participants in this study, citing regular occurrences of feelings of isolation and negative stereotyping in the classroom. Encouraging students to develop a measure of self-efficacy for any academic-related behavior that avoids the confounding of self-efficacy with these other constructs is necessary. If academic behavior is socially stigmatized (e.g., low self-efficacy, low self-esteem) or if social norms suggest that one should engage frequently in a behavior (e.g., exercise), then social desirability response biases might inflate self-efficacy scores. Carey and Forsyth suggest that helping students to design an intervention program will enhance self-efficacy and possibly alter risky behaviors. This researcher contends that allowing the student to take part in self-diagnosis, in a sense assisting in his or her own treatment, will allow the student to have some sense of ownership concerning the issue.

If society is sincere in the attempt to address the issues that confront African American males and their troubled journey into higher education, it is important to enhance and reinforce not only their identities as students but also their identities as competent, intelligent, successful men. Societal perception and social messages are important factors in forming and maintaining high self-efficacy. "Just as Black males perceive themselves as superior in athletics and entertaining, they must also perceive themselves as superior and competent in the academic arena as well" (Whiting, 2006, p. 4). This means developing programs and strategies that improve their self-efficacy, target their self-efficacy, increase their willingness to make sacrifices, enhance their academic self-concept, improve their need for improvement, improve their need for achievement, increase their self-awareness, change their beliefs about the power of effort, enhance their concepts of masculinity, and nurture their racial pride (Whiting).

Many educators speculate that students of color learn best when they are actively involved in the process. Researchers (e.g., Chickering and Gamson, 1991) have reported that, regardless of the subject matter, students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. Students who work in collaborative groups also appear more satisfied with their classes (Beckman, 1990; Chickering and Gamson, 1991; Collier, 1980; Cooper, 1990; Goodsell, Maher, and Tinto, 1992; Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1991). This is consistent with the findings of this study. For example, Colin stated that he appreciated the support that he received from other Black students on campus. Various names have been given to this form of teaching, with some distinctions among them: cooperative learning, collaborative learning, collective learning, learning communities, peer teaching, peer learning, reciprocal learning, team learning, study circles, study groups, and work groups. But all in all, there are three general types of group work: informal learning groups, formal learning groups, and study teams (Johnson et al.). These intimate

styles of learning strategies have shown tremendous results in academic growth among students of color (Lardner, 2003).

The institution in this study has taken great steps related to the recommendations presented above to address multicultural issues on campus. In 2005 the university announced a new position of Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement. The responsibilities of the new position are to work with a broad range of student, faculty, staff, and community constituents to make the university a more inviting and inclusive environment and to develop strategies to connect intellectual resources of the university to various communities across in the state of Texas.

## **Moving Beyond the Deficit Perspective**

With entrance to a new millennium, society is faced with new and challenging problems. Among them are economic constraints, educational restructuring, the ever-present challenge of diversity or lack thereof, and the continuing need for educational and racial equality. In this environment, higher education will not be able to ignore the demands and needs of society and will be called on to address these challenges, which include a major restructuring of society's institutional arrangements (Zusman, 1999). Educational policy makers will be challenged to create innovative approaches that will provide colleges and universities enough autonomy and flexibility to accomplish these challenges and goals, which have been created by a society that has not adjusted well to change or the deficit perspective of the African American male.

Recognizing that Black males are not merely victims but may also be active agents in their own failure means that interventions designed to help them must consider this notion as well. Changing policies, creating new programs, and opening new opportunities will accomplish little if such efforts are not accompanied by strategies to actively engage Black males and their families to take responsibility to improve their circumstances (Fashola, 2005). Institutionally, this may require programmatic interventions aimed at buffering and offsetting the various risks to which Black males are particularly vulnerable. Fashola stated that effective initiatives must also involve efforts to counter and transform cultural and environmental patterns and the attitude that Black males have adopted toward education. One of the best ways to learn how this can be done is to study those schools and programs that have been successful in accomplishing this goal.

Demonstrations of racism are deeply rooted in the societal perceptions of African American males and the generalized stereotype of them being intellectually incompetent. This perception affects Black males not only internally but also externally through today's policies in higher education. Researchers and policymakers rarely include the individuals who are the focus of their studies in the development of solutions to their own problems. Although individuals or groups are often asked their opinions about their plight, they are seldom asked to participate in the development of programs or models that will improve their lives. The very persons who would be most affected and who should be the first to be consulted are not given a voice in the dialogue, as if they had no stake in these important decisions that determine the course of the policies that will affect their lives.

While America has made progress in rectifying the devastating impact of discriminative practices both socially and politically, which were at one time not only common but

accepted and viewed as norms, society has a long way before claiming meaningless victories of temporary change. The nation has not moved away from a discriminative mentality. Although laws have been reviewed and changed and some restrictions have been lifted, according to some of the findings about how Black males perceive themselves and their place in society and how they think others perceive them have not changed.

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