

THE RETENTION  
OF FIRST YEAR  
BLACK MALE STUDENTS  
AT PREDOMINATELY  
WHITE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC  
UNIVERSITIES  
AND COLLEGES



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DR. SANDY WOODROW YANCY, SR.

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The Retention of First Year Black Male Students at Predominately White Private and Public Universities and Colleges

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# PREFACE

When I was growing up, my mother, the late Hannah Zeporah Pratt, always told me to finish what I started or ‘don’t start anything you can’t finish.’ Upon graduating from St. Patrick’s High School on Capitol Hill, Monrovia, Liberia, I enrolled at the University of Liberia. After one semester I had to drop out due to financial reasons. I took two years off my college education to work and save some money so I could return. My mother again echoed her words of encouragement by repeating her advice about completing whatever I started. After the two years, I returned to complete my college education, receiving a Bachelor’s Degree in Agriculture. After the graduation ceremony, she said to me, “You have finally finished what you started and I am happy for you.” Her words of advice constantly resonated with me during my adult life. When I started my Master’s Degree in Software Systems at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, her words of perseverance kept echoing in my ears. I completed my Master’s Degree in Software Systems and was gratified to complete what I started. Later, I enrolled in the Doctorate of Educational Leadership program and completed that course of study at Argosy University, Washington, D.C. campus.

During my years at Argosy University and the University of St. Thomas, I concentrated seriously on retention. My dissertation topic was solely focused on the retention of first year Black male students at predominately White private universities or colleges. University of St. Thomas is a predominately White private Catholic university. During many of my classes, there were either two or three Black males. Most of the experiences we encountered are those that the participants are experiencing at this predominately White private university in the Washington, D.C. area. Both universities are offering opportunities to Black male students for completing their college degrees. I must commend these universities for their relentless efforts to render services to help educate Black males in the United States of America.

This book was solely written to provide evidence through my participants to prospective Black high school male graduates that want to attend predominately White private, White public universities or colleges. I wish my participants' experiences to somehow aid them in obtaining their college degrees. The education of Black males is important in the United States of America. The benefits derived from the education of Black males will improve their communities, provide financially for their families, enhance their self-esteem, and enable them to become valuable assets to their employers, and perhaps become business owners.

# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to obtain a better understanding about how to retain first year Black students at predominately White private institutions in light of Critical Race Theory Framework (CRTF). A retention model presented by Dr. Tinto was a focus in this study. Tinto's model is the most commonly referred model for student retention and for dropouts. Research questions were geared toward the pre-collegiate and collegiate experiences of three second semester freshmen and three sophomore Black male students at one predominately White private university in the Washington, D.C. area.

Qualitative, narrative research design was used in this study. The narrative aspect of the study dealt with the participants telling the stories of experiences that led to their success. Dr. Harper's Critical Race theory was used to better comprehend their stories related to race issues. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant. All participants were in good academic standing and had completed at least 30 credits at this university. The stories collected from the participants enforced their willingness to become academically successful to obtain their various degrees. The interview guide questions focused on their pre-collegiate and collegiate experiences.

The eleven findings were drawn from pre-collegiate and collegiate experiences of the participants in achieving academic success. The major pre-collegiate findings were: a) positive interactions with high school teachers or guidance and mentors' assistance for college preparation, and b) parents and family members' encouragement and support to attend college. Major collegiate findings were a) involvement with retention programs on campus, b) social life on campus for Black male students, c) participation in leadership roles on campus, d) participation with mentoring programs on campus, e) student involvement, f) religion and spirituality, g) dealing with and overcoming frustration, h) determination to complete college

and i) the importance of social networking on campus and the benefits for attending this predominately White private institution. From these eleven findings, only eight major themes answered the question: What conditions or factors contribute to the retention of first year Black male students at predominately White private institutions? The eight major themes that emerged from the study were: a) positive interactions with high school teachers or guidance and mentoring assistance for college preparation, b) parents and family members' encouragement and support to attend college, c) involvement with retention programs on campus, d) student involvement, e) religion and spirituality, f) dealing with and overcoming frustration on campus, g) determination to complete college and h) the appreciation of social network on campus and the benefits for attending this predominately White private institution.

The findings provided possible suggestions for high school seniors to utilize, for high school counselors to utilize, for College Student Affairs Administration to utilize, for faculty members to utilize and recommendations for further research for the academic success of first year Black male students at predominately White private universities and colleges.



# DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the loving memory of my mother; the late Hannah Zeporah Pratt, who as my late father, Seborn Nathaniel Yancy, said, showed us the school house doors, enabling us to become educated men and women. She has always been my role model. Although she has gone to her eternal rest, her advice about being educated always echoed in my ears. She instilled the fear of God in our hearts and reminded us that with God all things are possible. I admire her strength and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks go to our Almighty God for giving me the strength and knowledge to complete this journey. I am walking in His plan for my life. He brought me from the Republic of Liberia, West Africa to the United States of America during the civil conflicts for a better and more prosperous life in this country. To God be the glory for all the wonderful things He has done and is continuously doing in my life.

To my wife, Magdalene Dennis Yancy, who has been my supporter on this journey through her constant reminders of God's presence on this journey and her tireless efforts in encouraging me to keep on progressing and not letting any distractions impair its completion. To my children who without any doubt told me that I can accomplish this pilgrimage. Thanks to Dr. Susan Crim for encouraging me to start my doctorate degree.

Thanks to my dissertation committee members: Dr. Joan Jackson, Dr. Farhad Khalatbari and Dr. George Fulda for their advices and support in helping me reach this milestone of my academic journey.

Thanks to all the participants for telling their stories about their academic success at a predominately White private university in the Washington, D.C. area. Their stories will be added to the literature to encourage other Black males graduating from high school that they can achieve academic success at a predominately White private institution if they are determined to put enough effort into achieving academic success. Thanks to this particular university for rendering various forms of assistance for the success of first year Black male students.

Thanks to my siblings for believing in my courage and determination to embark upon and accomplish this journey.

Thanks to all members of Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, Leesburg, Virginia for their prayers.

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CHAPTER 1:  

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INTRODUCTION

This is a phenomenological study that provided relevant information to conditions or factors that contributed to the retention of first year Black male students at predominately White private institutions. Research data looked at a private institution of higher learning located in the Washington, D.C. area. The topic is important because it provides evidence from the data collected to high school Black male senior students who want to attend predominately White private institutions (PWPI) to utilize as well as for high school counselors, college student affairs administration and faculty members to utilize. The problem area in the study was the academic accomplishments of first year Black male students at predominately White private institutions (PWPI), specifically their experiences and the key factors that contributed to their academic success. The study used the private university definition of students being in good academic standing (2.5) grade point average and above in determining academic success. Problems studied were academic performance, unwelcome environments, background of first year Black male students and spirituality.

# THE PROBLEM

Nationwide, the Black student college graduation rate remains low, at 43% (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009). Today, African American enrollment in higher education is at an all-time high. Although African American attendance is at an all-time high, there is still a 20-point gap in graduation as compared to Whites at 63% (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009). This gap has enormous economic and societal implications. Houston best described the importance of educating African Americans as follows, "Without education, there is no hope for our people and without hope, our future is lost," (as cited in the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009, p. 1). There is an astonishingly significant difference between the number of African-American students who tend to start their college classes and those who actually end up graduating or completing their degree. During 2004, Black students acquired around 33 percent of the nation's bachelor's degrees (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006). The literature on college enrollment shows that Black men have the lowest enrollment rates of all college-aged students. By 2006, 37% of African American men of college age were enrolled at U.S. postsecondary institutions compared with 44.1% of White men (American Council on Education, 2006). In bachelor's degrees conferred, the gap between women and men widened. Sixty-one percent of bachelor's degrees awarded to Blacks in the 2000-01 academic years were earned by Black women (Harvey, 2003). The six-year graduation rate of Blacks in the 2000-01 academic years was 41 percent nationally, while White students posted a 61% graduation rate. Black women outpaced Black men by 11% (Harvey, 2003).

It was stated by Cuyjet (2006), that the decreasing number of Black male students on PWIs campus has another significant impact on the overall environment that influences everyone. A number of schools have agreed that they desire to have a diverse body of students, expecting that the members of the student body,

administrators and faculty members within the campus community will, therefore, have an opportunity to learn and interact with each other intellectually, as well as culturally. There is an on-going debate about whether or not students coming from different cultural backgrounds should interact on PWIs campuses; even though, there are adequate numbers of students that have been coming from different ethnic backgrounds, for such types of interactions to take place, there must be sufficient amount of students in each of the demographics to represent their cultural groups (Decock, McCloy, Liu & Hu, 2011). Until we realize that there are significant cultural differences between African American women and men, specifically related to how they have been interacting with whites, we may tend to ignore the harmful effects and influences of the low number of African American men having the desired level of cultural interaction at the PWI campuses. Therefore, these issues must continuously be researched to add to the literature for the encouragement of the education of first year Black Male students at PWIs.



# PROBLEM BACKGROUND

According to Harper and Davis (2012), perceptions about African American male underachievement and hopelessness are cited by a number of publications that highlight and identify their educational background in culturally unresponsive and insufficient K-12 institutions (Noguera, 2008; Toldson, 2008); their unpreparedness with respect to the strict and severe work at college level (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Palmer & Young, 2009; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009); their lower rates of baccalaureate degree attainment (Dancy & Brown, 2008; Harper, 2006a, 2012; Strayhorn, 2010); their patterns of social and academic disengagement, outside and inside of the classroom environment (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006); and their lower rates of completing high school (Schott Foundation, 2010; Lynn et al., 2010). Furthermore, considerable efforts are exerted by African American male students throughout their educational levels in order to be perceived as cool and popular among their friends and peer groups (Stinson, 2006), and they must give as much importance to academic achievement as to athletic aspirations (Benson, 2000; Harper, 2009b). Even though, certainly a number of issues and problems are quantifiable and much has already been written about them, these tend to collectively communicate a message in public and academic discourse related to African American male students, and that is: they do not care much about education.

These explanatory issues and factors related to disinterest of African American male students in education have been mostly associated with educational and psychological outcomes (Milner, 2007; Jackson & Moore, 2008; Howard, 2008; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). These are further used to describe the shortage of African American males who pursue their bachelor's degree in education and then acquire K-12 teaching as a profession (Shaw, 1996). It is noted in a report presented by Schott Foundation for Public Education in 2010 that only 47 percent of the African American

male students have been graduated from high schools during 2008 with their peers becoming their cohorts. Consequently, degree attainment among the African American males at all post-secondary educational levels remains surprisingly and alarmingly low, specifically as compared to the female of the same race (see Table 1). Along with educational attainment contrast within their race, Black male students' representation in professional and graduate schools also remains behind their Asian American and Latino American male peers.

Under all these considerations, very little is understood about the African American male students who successfully manage to graduate from high schools, enroll in colleges, are motivated to earn / acquire degrees beyond the baccalaureate, espouse commitments to different career paths in educational and professional fields (education policy, teaching, education research, school administration, the professorate and so forth). What motivates particular Black male students to care so much about education and attaining a degree, in spite of continuous reports throughout the literature about generally being disengaged in schools and comparatively exhibiting a low rate of educational attainment? This question resulted in this research for gaining information about the experiences and perception of the retention of first-year Black male students at PWIs.

**Table 1**

*Black Students' Postsecondary Degree Attainment by Level and Sex, 2008*

	Men%	Women%
Associate's	31.4	68.6
Bachelor's	34.3	65.7
Master's	28.2	71.8
First Professional <sup>1</sup>	37.3	62.7
Doctoral <sup>2</sup>	33.6	66.4

1 For example, J.D., M.D., and D.D.S. degrees

2 Only Ph.D., Ed.D., and comparable doctoral degrees

Source: U.S. Department of Education (2010)

The African American male student enrollment in college campuses has emerged as a significant issue for PWIs during the previous forty to fifty years (Cross, 2002). This issue has attracted the attention of college administrators for investing more resources in new initiatives for recruiting and retaining Black male students from these minority populations by conducting orientation and mentoring programs, creating tutoring programs and providing funds for scholarships. Even though, a significant amount of progress is being made in this respect, yet African American males have continued to lag behind other minority populations in acquiring or attaining a college degree (The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2007).

Some Black communities once used to view education as a key aspect for living the American Dream. Now, many Black male students consider it as an unnecessary barrier or obstacle that stands in the way of making fast money. Generally, Black male students who manage to go to college, arrive at colleges unprepared for handling the requirements of higher educational institutions. Hamilton (1997) states that the reason behind this is that a significant number of Black male students who are college bound, arrived on campuses affected by consequences of previous interactions, associations and affiliations with adverse and severe socio-situational incidents that have emotionally wounded them.

As stated by Cureton (2009), problems and challenges such as lack of employment and education, discrimination, racial stereotyping, economic deprivation and exploitation have significantly affected the self-esteem, personal confidence and social development of Black male students. This also negatively influences young generations of Black male students who are looking forward to somehow enhance their chances in life in respect to social status, prestige, power and wealth.



# THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As stated by Kanpp, Kelly-Reid and Whitmore (2006) there is a need to understand the issues that shape the academic success of African American students at every level of higher education. There is particular interest in the necessity of obtaining a better insight of Black students' experiences predominantly at White Institutions (PWIs), where most of the Black students are now gaining admissions and receiving their academic education.

Despite depressing achievement data which was measured by the grade point average based on the achievement gap between the Black and White, it was observed that Black students tend to be successful in spite of the obvious odd situations (Corwin & Pruitt, 2000). The purpose of this research was to obtain a better understanding about how to retain the first year Black students at predominantly White private institutions under the light of Critical Race Theory Framework (CRTF). In a study conducted by Harper (2009), a methodological approach was performed which was popularized by theorists of critical race. This approach was used for opposing dominant dialogues and arguments that were concerned with the educational and social status of Black male students in America. Particularly, this counter argument on the achievement of students was derived by having individual, face-to-face interviews with 143 Black male students in around 30 predominantly White universities and colleges all across America.

A retention model presented by Tinto was focused on in this study. Tinto's model is the most commonly referred model for student retention and dropouts. According to Tinto (1975), the basic idea of his model is the integration. The model claims that the attitude of whether a student drops out or remains is significantly predicted by the extent to which these students are socially integrated and academically integrated. These behaviors evolve over the passage of time, as commitment and integration interact with the rate of students dropping out as depending upon the level of

commitment while decision making. These might be measured through: personal development, grade/ marks performance and academic integration.

According to Tinto's model, students tend to enter the college or university with individual as well as family attributes and characteristics, along with the pre-college schooling attributes. They enter into an environment or a system which is characterized by intellectual development and grade performance, and it collectively leads the student toward academic integration, entering a social system where faculty interaction and peer interaction further lead the students toward social integration. Social and academic integration work together to affect the institutional commitments and on-going goals. This consequently leads the students to decide whether they want to leave or stay at the college. Later, this model was revised by adding commitment related to intentions to remain within the college or dropping out of the institution.



# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Qualitative inquiry involves systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of material derived from speech and observation (Creswell, 2009). This study was guided by the central research question: **What conditions or factors contribute to the retention of first year Black male students at predominantly White private institutions?** In order to gain an understanding of academic success, it was important to have sub-questions related to campus involvement, social life, and cultural identity that contribute to retention. The interview protocol questions are located in the Appendix. The sub-research questions for pre-college factors and in-college factors are as follows: For pre-college factor - What are the factors that influence the Black students' pre-college experiences? For in-college factor - How did the experiences of Black male students assist in achieving retention success at Predominantly White Private Institutions (PWPI)? Literature has found that these questions are necessary to understand the retention of Black male students at predominantly White private institutions.

# LIMITATIONS

A limitation of the study was the purposive sampling that was used for first year Black male students. The results of this study provided a mere description of factors that have contributed to the retention of first year Black male students at predominantly White private institutions (PWPI). Merriam (2012) states "results would be limited to describing the phenomenon rather than predicting future behavior" (p.41). Also, the social climate for Black male students varies from campus to campus, as well as the availability and the quality of supportive resources. Depending on the college or university, support programs such as tutoring, progressive multicultural centers, and the opportunity to attend cultural awareness programs vary. Therefore, these factors could impact academic success. Lastly, the findings of this research were limited to a degree as these findings and conclusions were made upon one set of interpretations presented by the researcher about one set of data related to the academic success of Black male students. Also, the study was limited to one predominantly White private institution in the Washington, D.C. area.