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Recommendations are presented for both university-centered and student-centered interventions for the problems of adjustment due to alienation of Black students on White campuses.

Alienation of Black College Students on White Campuses: University-Centered and Student-Centered Interventions

Donelda A. Cook

Introduction

Sociocultural alienation is a factor in the adjustment of Black students attending predominantly White institutions (Fleming, 1984; Loo and Rolison, 1986; Sedlacek, 1987; Suen, 1983). Sociocultural alienation occurs when the social subsystem of the university, i.e., peer groups, faculty, administrators, policies, procedures, and academic curricula fail to communicate acceptance, support, encouragement, respect, and celebration of the values and cultural characteristics of culturally diverse groups that attend the university (Loo and Rolison, 1986). Black college students have long been denied their cultural heritage, as institutions of higher education have not recognized the contribution of Blacks in shaping the history of the country; nor have they recognized the gain in learning from the values, practices, and outlooks of African cultures. Consequently, Black students have been socialized that in order to be successful in higher education, they must master the language, values, attitudes and behavior of Eurocentric cultures. Furthermore, many Black students are unaware that the characteristics of their cultural heritage, such as spirituality, harmony, emotional expressiveness, communalism, expressive individualism, and oral and aural modes of communication (Boykin & Toms, 1985) were assets to the successful lives of their ancestors in West Africa. In addition, these characteristics have endured the physical and psychological abuse of slavery in America, and can serve as a source of strength for students in succeeding in higher education.

In many instances, Black students are penalized for exhibiting Afrocentric cultural characteristics. This is exemplified by (1) reluctance to integrate spiritual development into student development programming (Styles-Hughes, 1987); (2) interference by campus police at Black parties due to students' emotional expressiveness; (3) intolerance for the expressive individualism of Black fraternities and sororities; and (4) academic biases regarding individual achievement motivation versus affiliative motivation and written communication versus oral and aural modes of communication.

Black students have historically been oppressed by covert racial cues within the university environment such as (1) culturally-biased admissions standards; (2) "institutional constraints" of limited funding for African-American studies and academic retention programs; (3) scarcity of Black faculty to serve as role models; (4) high attrition rates due to financial pressures; (5) social isolation in campus housing; and (6) culturally-insensitive and biased academic curricula and social programming (Farrell, 1988). The overall neglect of racial diversity exhibited on White campuses relays a message that "Black presence" and Afrocentric culture are not valued. Additionally, overt acts and subtle forms of sociocultural alienation inherent in institutional and cultural racism have served to undermine self-esteem and confidence, and to confuse the racial identities of Black students which ultimately influences their successful matriculation (Oliver, Rodriguez, and Mickelson, 1985; Parham and Helms, 1985; Sedlacek, 1987).

Empirical Studies

In a review of twenty years of research on the adjustment of Black students on White campuses, Sedlacek (1987) cited numerous studies which reported evidence that Blacks have continuously struggled with difficulties with self-concept, racism, developing a community, and other "noncognitive variables" in relation to the inhospitable climate found on White campuses. The importance of these studies is that they depart from research which blamed the victims; rather, these studies acknowledge the responsibility of the institutions for alienating Black students.

Comparison Studies of Black and White Students

Comparison studies of Black and White students on white campuses have found that "social estrangement" is a contributing factor to Black student attrition (Suen, 1983) and academic progress (e.g., earned fewer credits, stayed fewer quarters). These were not critical issues for White students (Lunnenborg and Lunnenborg, 1985). More specifically, Black students have reported that the university did not adequately reflect their values and that they felt pressured to conform to dominant White middle class values on the campus and to reject those of their own cultural group (Loo and Rolison, 1986).

Studies have consistently shown that Black students appear to be significantly less satisfied with their college experiences than Whites, including relative dissatisfaction with their own grades, social lives, level of interaction with

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faculty (Nettles and Johnson, 1987; Wesley and Abston, 1983) and dissatisfaction with the institution due to ignorance of African-American culture, attitudes of Whites, and lack of positive role models (Oliver, et al., 1985 Styles-Hughes, 1987). Communication with faculty is particularly pertinent in that faculty contact outside of the classroom has been found to be significantly predictive of GPA for Black students (Nettles, Thoeny, and Gosman, 1984; Braddock, 1981; Styles-Hughes, 1987). Styles-Hughes (1987) relates the importance of informal interactions with faculty to the African values of kinship and extended family.

Investigations of Psychological Adjustment of Black Students

More specific evidence of the psychological impact of sociocultural alienation on Black students has also been revealed. For instance, it has been shown that Black students perceived that they faced more academic difficulties than their White counterparts, in part because of the energy required to adapt to a different cultural situation which takes time and mental concentration from academic pursuits (Loo & Rolison, 1986). One study reported that Black students responded to racist attitudes or actions by isolating themselves socially and feeling discouraged from seeking help from faculty and teaching assistants or working cooperatively with White students (Lewis, 1987). Often, Black students find themselves conceding that social, personal, emotional, and cultural development will be delayed or postponed while they are attending White institutions due to the unpreparedness of the university environment in planning for and responding to their social and developmental needs (Styles Hughes, 1987). In addition to the generally stressful circumstances of college life, stressful stimuli for Blacks include prejudice, discrimination, and hostility encountered from the social environment as a result of racism (Smith, 1985). Fleming (1984) pointed out that predominantly White institutions have not succeeded in combating Black students' social isolation, perceptions of classroom biases, and perceptions of hostile interpersonal climates.

Studies of Coping Style, Racial Identity, and Gender Differences

Some researchers have examined differences within groups of black students, rather than comparing them to Whites as a standard. Fleming (1984) found that within the group of Black students attending White colleges, some students responded to the inhospitable climate by becoming rebellious, some acquiesced, and others coped with the conflict through increased involvement in cultural and political activities. In examining racial identity, Parham and Helms (1985) found that Black students who displayed extreme pro-White-anti-Black or pro-Black-anti-White attitudes exhibited lower levels of self-esteem. Other studies suggest: (1) an increased level of affirmation in one's cultural identity influences effective coping patterns (Gibbs, 1974); (2) interpersonally accomplished students are more involved with the general (and Black student-specific) campus life and create and maintain favorable social relationships with Blacks and Whites (faculty and students) on the campus (Allen, 1985); and (3) increased prior interracial experience (e.g., neighborhood, high school, friends) as an influence on effective adjustment to predominantly White campuses (Graham, Baker, & Wapner, 1984).

Gender differences have also been found in the adjustment of Black students. Nettles and Johnson (1987) examined gender differences in college socialization. Socialization was defined as students' satisfaction with their peer group relations, their institution, and academic integration. For Black women, five variables were found to be significant predictors for good peer relations: (1) frequent contact with faculty; (2) living on campus; (3) high degree aspirations; (4) high socioeconomic status; and (5) high grades in high school. In contrast, contact with faculty was the only significant predictor of Black men's peer relations. However, Black men who were most satisfied with their university attended a relatively selective university, had frequent contact with faculty, and attended a college with a racial composition similar to that of their high school. Black women who were most satisfied had frequent contact with faculty and also attended the more selective universities. Black men who attended small universities and had high grades had a high degree of academic integration, while Black women with high academic integration were likely to have high grades, be single, attend a college with a different racial composition from that of their high schools and, interestingly enough, had relatively low high school grades.

Similarly, Styles-Hughes (1987) found that when compared to Black women, Black men were: (1) less likely to consider a change of major; (2) less expressive of inner strength; (3) less self-confident; (4) less capable of withstanding negative external stimuli; (5) more externally controlled; (6) less clear of their sense of identity; and (7) more resistant of adopting compensatory coping styles. The results of both studies reflect the social trends which suggest that Black men face extreme difficulty in coping with a racist society. The gender differences in coping styles may be a reflection of the more overt and aggressive discriminatory tactics Black men are subject to, coupled with possible differences in socialization practices of Black women and men.

The research shows that it is not enough to allow Black students to attend predominantly White institutions; rather, if higher education is to be responsive to all students, much work still needs to be done to create campuses that achieve multiculturalism in academic, social, and administrative practices. Institutional administrators, faculty, and students must collaborate to develop both university-centered and student-centered solutions to sociocultural alienation (Lunnenborg & Lunnenborg, 1985).

Effective interventions can only be developed and instituted if voice is given to the very students who are being alienated. That is, Black students must be involved in needs assessments, studies of the nature and extent of racism on the campus, university committees and task forces for implementing environmental changes, recruitment of Black faculty and administrative staff, and the development of student-centered service delivery strategies. Student involvement serves to empower Black students as a legitimate campus entity, as well as ensuring that accurate representation of their cultures are reflected in all solutions. It is most important that campus administration demonstrate receptiveness and valuing of the cultural attributes of African-Americans, rather than a stance of compromise or appeasement typically displayed in response to student unrest.

University-Centered Interventions

Higher education administrators must examine the person-environment interaction and become educated as to the sociocultural implications of institutional, individual and cultural racism on the campus. That is, they must understand the social and psychological manifestations of racism from the perspectives of the oppressor and the oppressed. Once university administrators are able to comprehend the socialization process of institutional racism and

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recognize their own fears of being called "racist" and feelings of guilt in acknowledging their racist attitudes, they can then move beyond the affective response and begin to develop effective problem-solving strategies. External consultants can be invited to conduct ongoing racism sensitivity and cultural awareness interventions for administrators, faculty, and students. It is not enough to conduct "one-shot" workshops to increase awareness; consultants can work in a contractual relationship to assess the environment, develop social interventions and curricula reform, and conduct program evaluations.

Many of the sociopolitical and environmental interventions can assist Black students in developing a positive racial identity to grow and succeed within the university, and beyond. To the degree that Black students can see Black professionals in positions of authority on their campuses and can interact with Black faculty; to the degree that coursework reflects a multicultural perspective; to the degree that they have a physical "home" on their campus which reflects their cultural backgrounds; to the degree that they can contribute to the college in some meaningful way; that is the degree to which they can experience self-affirmation and racial pride. Once self-affirmation and positive racial identity are established and the necessity for racial activism or passivity is diminished, Black students will be free to focus on more traditional aspects of student development.

Student-Centered Intervention

Outreach Strategies

Outreach approaches can be effective in broadening the cultural community for Black students. Both formal and informal mentoring experiences fulfill the kinship bond which may be reminiscent of their home communities. Many Black students are motivated by the affiliative motive due to the "collective" orientation of their cultural background. They may be more highly motivated to succeed for their family, or their community, or a significant member of their campus environment, than for their own self-achievement. (Styles-Hughes, 1987). Particularly for first generation college students, their parents may have done all that they are capable of to get their child to college, so it becomes imperative that members of the campus community establish relationships and teach them to survive and to succeed.

The mentoring role is multi-faceted. Mentors can provide students with support, reality testing, and guidance needed to nurture their growth and development. Mentors need to support Black students in their "right" to be active members of the campus and communicate faith in their ability to succeed. Students also need to be confronted with the consequences of their self-defeating behaviors, such as socially isolating themselves, poor study habits, or cutting classes. Mentors must also intervene in using their positions on the campus to negotiate some of the external obstacles for students. The mentors' power within the environment can serve to empower the students.

Additional programs can be developed including support services for academic, adjustment, racial, and social problems (Lewis, 1987); peer counseling programs (Locke & Zimmerman, 1987); community service activities (Sedlacek, 1987); campus ministries programs (Styles-Hughes, 1987); colloquia series; career mentoring programs; student professional organizations; and intramural athletic activities. Collectively, Black students have much to gain from one another, and they are in a position to contribute greatly to the academic, social, and cultural climate of the campus.

Counseling Strategies

When counseling services are developed and delivered from an Afrocentric cultural perspective, Black students are very amenable to seeking help. Both individual and group counseling approaches can be adapted to the needs of Black students. In general, many Black students tend to be more trusting of counselors when they are able to observe them in other capacities on campus (e.g., cultural functions, student organizational meetings) or when the counselors are recommended by some other professional whom the students trust on the campus.

In addition to the counseling concerns students generally present to counselors, Black students sometimes have further complications due to the sociocultural alienation exhibited on the campus. Some Black students are blind to the external circumstances of racism; consequently they internalize the oppression. That is, they may not recognize that they are being treated unjustly due to their race, thus they blame themselves for the circumstances, often leading to depression, withdrawal, avoidance, misdirected anger, or generally self-defeating and maladaptive problem-solving behaviors for surviving in an alienating environment. These students may seek counseling for problems of lack of motivation, test anxiety, stress, physical symptoms, or other academic problems emanating from maladaptive coping strategies. The counselor should explore the circumstances of the presenting problem in specific detail to determine whether the problem stems from a racial incident. If it is so determined, the counselor must help the student to understand the problem from a sociocultural perspective rather than one of self-blame. It may be necessary to teach the student how to recognize and cope with racial issues and how to determine if one should confront the issue, and if so, how to do so.

Counselors can also be helpful in serving as advocates for their clients. In instances of a traumatic racial incident, it may be effective for the counselor to intervene with faculty or academic advisors on behalf of the student. Many students respond to harassment or discrimination through denial. Consequently by the time the student seeks counseling, maladaptive coping behaviors may have affected academic performance. Counselors should view the psychological stress of coping with racism as they would any other forms of victimization. That is, if a counselor would intervene in helping a student to withdraw from a class, taking an "incomplete," or make-up an exam due to the psychological trauma of being a victim of other societal ills (e.g., sexual harassment, psychological abuse), so should be the case with victims of traumatic incidents of racism. Even though racial harassment is a difficult issue to confirm legally, counselors must not let it interfere with their responsiveness to the psychological impact on their client, and they should use their power within the university to support Black students in their efforts to cope with racism.

Group interventions can be helpful in facilitating a sense of unity among Black students and provide a cathartic experience for them, thus combating feelings of social isolation. Open-ended support groups, discussion groups, and theme-oriented groups focusing on aspects of African-American cultures can help students to develop a positive racial identity. Finally, skills-oriented groups can be conducted to teach students survival skills, including how to distinguish between isolated acts of racism and generalizations of the entire campus as racist; thus, enabling Black students to utilize the campus resources that are available to them.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, caution is rendered in generalizing to all Black college students. There is great variability in the experiences of African-Americans; however, alienation on White campuses is a problem common to all culturally diverse students. It is a problem which is created and maintained by numerous facets of the campus system, individually, interpersonally, academically, and politically. While the problem appears overwhelming and sometimes abstract, administrators, educators, and students must examine their own roles in perpetuating sociocultural alienation, both individually and institutionally. The time has come for multicultural education to become an environmental, administrative, pedagogical, and social reality in higher education.

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