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African-American Males in Higher Education: Examining the Learning Experiences of African-American Male Graduate Students

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Abstract: The purpose of this proposal is to present and frame a future research project focused on capturing stories from African-American male graduate students, to understand how their graduate school learning experiences are transformative.

Keywords: African-American males, higher education, transformative

Introduction

Within American college and university systems, African-American males are mostly underrepresented as students and faculty (Harper & Harris, 2012; *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* [JBHE], 2013; Wood, 2011). Data sources approximate that there are 15 million students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the United States and roughly 5 to 5.5 % are African-American males (Hauptman, 2008; JBHE, 2013).

(Rosser-Mims, et. al, 2014) posit that African American males, before and during college, tend to experience barriers in their lives that can have negative implications on their ability to succeed in the college classroom. The type of obstacles that typically plague African-American males range from subpar K-12 schooling experiences, financial disparities, and a lack of role model—parents who did not finish high school or attend college. In response to this problem, several studies (Harper, 2015; Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, & Brown, 2015; Strayhorn, 2008) offer implications that policy makers of higher education leaders need to consider for bolstering the enrollment, retention and graduation rates of the African-American male graduate student.

Problem Statement

The preponderance of research on African-American males in higher education tends to focus on narratives of negativity (Harper, 2012). Additionally, the discourse in the literature emphasizes the negative and disparaging aspects of African American male's lack of performance in graduate school—during and after graduation (Scott, J. A., Taylor, K. J., & Palmer, R. T. 2013; Harper, 2015). While the literature concerning the adverse practices and experiences that African-American male college students typically encounter is necessary, this author argues that a need exists to include research studies that encourage and report a promising narrative to highlight the successes and life changes of African-American males in higher education.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand the learning experiences of successful African-American male graduate students. The research questions this study will investigate are:

How do African-American male graduate students describe their learning experiences in graduate programs?

How do African-American male graduate students define success?

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