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College in Black and White: Campus Environment and Academic Achievement of African American Males

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Research on African American males in U.S. higher education is generally relegated to explorations of the quantitative indicators of enrollment and attrition. Correspondingly little is known about the qualitative experience of these men on the nation's college campuses. Given the potential impact school experiences have on social and economic consequences throughout the life course, how African American males cope with the stresses of these environments merits important consideration. Higher education settings provide a useful context to examine the influence of such factors on academic outcomes, both within and beyond the bounds of school.

The view that campus environments influence the educational experiences of college students is a consistent thread throughout research on African Americans in higher education. Specifically, campus social environments have been related to differential educational outcomes for African American college students (Allen, 1991). Of particular importance has been the notion of institutional support and how it relates to academic achievement. While institutional support has been shown to have significant consequences for educational outcomes, little attention has been paid to the differential experiences of African American males in college.

Research on the experience of African American students in higher education has concentrated primarily on two areas: (1) the differential experience of these students relative to White students, and (2) the differential effects of attending a predominantly White institution as opposed to an historically Black one. Very little work has focused on the variations in the gender experiences of higher education for African American students. The existing research generally focuses on the declining participation and increased attrition rates of African American males in higher education (Green & Wright, 1992), while paying scant attention to the qualitative aspects of these students' schooling experiences.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

Given the social and economic problems faced by African American males in the United States, their experiences in college have become major sources of concern and challenge for many institutions of higher education. African American males presently account for 3.5% of the total enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities; however, they are disproportionately represented among students who are forced to withdraw, those with relative lower academic performance, and those who have more negative college experiences (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Fleming, 1984). Interestingly, an increase in the college enrollments of African American males occurred at the end of the 1980s. From

fall 1980 through fall 1990, the college enrollment rate of Black males actually increased by 7%; however, more recent data show that the proportion of African American male high school graduates who actually enrolled in college dropped almost 5% from 1990 to 1992 (American Council on Education [ACE], 1994). Specifically, only 29.7% of Black males who graduated from high school in 1992 enrolled in an institution of higher education, compared to 32.2% in 1991 and 34.4% in 1990. While these data are informative, they often mask variations in the quality of the college educational experience for Black males.

Increased educational opportunities for African Americans have occurred since desegregation policies changed the demographics of most higher education institutions. However, only four decades after these corrective reforms began, the nation is witnessing a distressing ebb in the tide of increased educational opportunity for African Americans. Paradoxically, this is occurring at a time when progress toward desegregation has wrought progressively sharper increases in the number of African American students attending predominantly White institutions such that these numbers currently surpass Black enrollment at predominantly Black institutions (American Council on Education, 1994; Anderson, 1984). Notwithstanding, many differences remain between the experiences of African American college students on predominantly Black and White campuses. For instance, Black students at predominantly White colleges have lower grade point averages than their peers at historically Black colleges (Allen, 1986; Thomas, 1981); however, while the latter perform better academically, they are often dissatisfied with the facilities and organizational structures of their colleges (Allen, 1987; Nettles, 1988).

Additionally, a number of studies suggest that two salient factors differentially affect Black college student performance vis-à-vis that of White college students: (1) a perceived lack of positive social support; and (2) perceived discrimination on the part of professors, administrators, and peers (Allen, 1992; Hughes, 1987; Oliver, Smith, & Wilson, 1989; Sedlacek, 1987). Comparative analyses of the experiences of Black students attending predominantly Black and White institutions reveal that students on predominantly White campuses report that racial discrimination occurs with much greater frequency (Allen, 1992). Similarly, academic achievement, social integration, and campus race relations are usually negative for this group of college students. Here again, a positive relationship has been demonstrated between perceived social support, discrimination, and academic achievement (Nettles, 1991). Moreover, academic achievement has been significantly related to student satisfaction with and engagement in college life (Allen, 1992). While several studies note that some African American students are doing well academically on predominantly White campuses, they also report a marked decrease in these students' performance—indeed, a slippage that far exceeds that which is typically expected of students as they adjust to college-level work (Allen, 1988).

Many African American students at predominantly White institutions of higher education report that their relationships with faculty members and peers are negative, and that they avoid interaction with them outside of the classroom. These students also report that they rarely attend campus events sponsored by Black organizations and are generally not socially active on campus (Allen, 1988; Fleming, 1984; Nettles, 1988). Other findings suggest that Black students on predominantly White campuses who were better off academically were also on better terms with faculty members, that they found their institutions to be generally supportive of their educational endeavors, and consequently seemed to make a greater effort to interact with their professors (Nettles, 1988; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). Allen (1987) suggests that a reciprocal relationship exists between African American students and faculty members at predominantly White institutions. That is, Black students who perceive they are being supported by their university will be less reluctant to avoid informal contact with faculty and administrators than will those Black students who do

not perceive this support. Thus, professors will respond more actively to students who have fostered informal contact with them outside of the classroom setting, and this relationship will have a positive effect on academic performance.

The student–faculty relationship has long been noted as a significant indicator of academic achievement as well as a number of other outcome variables such as educational aspirations, attitudes toward college, academic achievement, personal development, and persistence (Chapman, 1986; Tinto, 1987; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). Pascarella's (1980) review of the literature on student–faculty contact and college outcomes suggests that the quality of the contact between student and faculty should be examined in greater detail to determine its impact on the academic outcomes of students. A student, for instance, may have very little contact with the faculty, but the periods of contact may be so positive or negative that the limited interaction may still somehow demonstrate a significant effect on academic performance.

Despite the work on differential effects of the college environment for African American students, surprisingly little is known about how, or even whether, gender circumscribes Black student college outcomes. While Fleming (1984) notes the potential importance of the context of a college's social and academic environments, investigation of the effects of these campus characteristics, particularly for African American males, requires much more focused attention.

INSTITUTIONAL SOCIAL SUPPORT AND BLACK MALE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

A growing body of research in higher education indicates that social support and campus environment affect a variety of outcomes for students. In particular, the connection between institutional support and academic achievement has emerged as an importance area of investigation. Furthermore, a link has been observed between the social and academic experience of African American college students and their attendance at either historically Black or predominantly White institutions (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Gurin & Epps, 1975; Nettles, 1987; Thomas, 1981). Social support has been shown to have significant consequences for educational outcomes (Allen, 1987; Jay & D'Augelli, 1991). Given recent racial incidents and perceived hostile environments on predominantly White campus, many institutions are concerned about the possible negative effects of campus social climate on African American students (Ferrell & Jones, 1988; Green, 1989; Hurtado, 1992).

Whether considered a necessity or not, social support provided by colleges and universities is a critical variable in the educational experience of African Americans (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1992; Hughes, 1987; Oliver et al., 1989; Sedlacek, 1987). Similarly, the movement of African Americans into predominantly White institutions of higher learning has spawned some concern. Some policy analyses and critiques have questioned the contemporary merits of attending traditionally Black colleges and universities (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1992; Sowell, 1993). Others have suggested that Blacks receive greater support at Black institutions, report greater levels of satisfaction, and therefore perform better academically. Though the results of this debate are as yet inconclusive, most research indicates that historically Black colleges provide a more supportive and nurturing environment (Allen et al., 1991; Fleming, 1984; Gurin & Epps, 1975; Nettles, 1987; Thomas, 1984). Fleming (1984) reports that Black students at Black institutions perform better academically and experience a greater degree of satisfaction in their social and academic endeavors. Other findings suggest that Blacks at White institutions report greater satisfaction with peer relations than do White students, even though Black students experience less academic integration and satisfaction. Nettles (1987)

suggests that the social needs of Blacks and Whites are different, and that White institutions simply may not provide the needed social support outlets Black students require in order to succeed academically.

Another perhaps more important finding is that, compared to their White peers, Black students at predominantly White institutions generally see a need for increased numbers of formal programs, informal contacts with faculty members, and social activities that are sponsored by Black student unions and cultural programming boards. They also report that such programs and activities would be useful in helping them to cope with the academic, racial, and social problems they experience on White campuses (Lewis, 1987).

Very little within-race analysis of gender has been done to disentangle the differential experience of African American males and females in diverse college settings. Likewise, differences between African American males attending historically Black and predominantly White colleges are given very little attention. In one study, Fleming (1984) found that African American males reap more benefits, both socially and academically, by attending historically Black colleges; conversely, attendance at predominantly White college appeared to retard the development of African American males. In the latter type of environment, Fleming argues, Black males report that they experience more negative feelings and unhappiness about college life, feel they are often unfairly mistreated, experience academic demoralization, and think less of their academic ability. In a related study, academic interaction while attending a predominantly White college was found to have a negative effect on the academic self-concept of African American males (Pascarella, Smart, Etherington, & Nettles, 1987). Other factors negatively affecting the academic self-concept of college-going Black males included poor secondary school achievement and limited social interaction during college.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study seeks to better understand the relationship between student background, college-level factors, and academic performance in college by examining how these factors differentially affect African American males attending historically Black and predominantly White colleges and universities. Further, it attempts to examine in greater detail perceived social support and its contribution to college student achievement. Although some studies have suggested that perceived social support is a significant predictor of outcomes for Black college student achievement (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1985; Nettles, 1988; Thotis, 1982), the relationship is unclear concerning differences between males and females. Therefore, this research adds to the discussion generally, while it specifically extends the analysis of gender by exclusively investigating differences between African American males attending historically Black and predominantly White institutions. Relative effects of institutional environment, including social support, on achievement in college are also investigated.

METHOD

In this study, comparative analysis of Black males attending predominantly White and historically Black colleges focuses on variations in their college performance. Although other data about the college experience of African American males will be presented, this analysis is confined to academic achievement as measured in terms of college grades. The major statistical method employed is hierarchical regression analysis. The independent or predictor variables used in the multiple-regression analyses can be placed in three groups: academic and personal background factors, racial congruency factors, and college-level environment factors.

The Data

The data for this article are drawn from Nettles's (1988) survey of college students' academic and social experiences. That study employed a sampling technique to examine effects specific to race and college type on student outcomes.¹ It involved a sample of 4,094 students, who attended 30 colleges and universities in the southern and mid-Atlantic states and who completed the Student Opinion Survey (SOS), an 109-item questionnaire addressing issues of college performance, behaviors, and attitudes. While the SOS was developed to elicit a number of different responses about these variables, the present study was only concerned with a subset of them. The subsample used in these analyses consists of all African American males surveyed in the original study. Thus, this study examined the academic achievement of 742 Black males who attended both historically Black (55%) and predominantly White (45%) institutions.

Variables

The conceptual model used in this study is adapted from studies of college impact such as those elucidated by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991). College impact studies usually distinguish between input variables (e.g., students' precollegiate characteristics, characteristics of the college the students attend, etc.) and outcome measures. In the present study, cumulative grade point average was seen as the outcome of students' interest in school and as being predicated upon the input variables. Operational definitions and measurements of all variables used in this study are described in Table I, and include the following:

- (1) *Institutional support*. This variable is derived from items measuring the attitudes and general satisfaction of the students in the sample with the types and amounts of social support they received or perceived as available from their college.
- (2) *Age*
- (3) *Socioeconomic background*. This is a factor score that provides an index of the subject's socioeconomic status (SES) by obtaining a weighted sum of all items loading significantly on the SES factor.

Two academic background variables were included as predictors of student college achievement:

- (4) *SAT* (the student's composite score on the verbal and quantitative sections on the Scholastic Aptitude Test)
- (5) *High school grade point average (HSGPA)*

Several nonacademic attitudinal variables were also investigated to test their significance over and beyond academic variables used to predict college success. These include:

- (6) *Degree Aspirations*. This is a variable that measures the highest degree aspired to by students.
- (7) *High School Racial Congruency* and (8) *Community Racial Congruency*. These variables indicate the racial "fit" of the students' previous school and home environments with that of their college environment.

College-level variables used in the analyses include:

¹The sampling procedures yielded 150 Black students: 50 each from the sophomore, junior, and senior classes at each institution. In cases where an institution did not have 50 African American students, the entire population of these students was selected. Therefore, to control for over- and under-sampling of Black students on some campuses, a weighting procedure was used for individual student responses. The weighting procedure did not affect degrees of freedom. Tests of significance were based on the actual number of cases and thus were not influenced by the weighting formula.

TABLE I
Categories and Descriptions of Variables Used in the Study

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
<i>Personal and Academic Background Variables</i>	
Age	Age of student respondent Response categories: 1–18 years, 18–25 years, 25 years or more
Socioeconomic Background	A composite measure of parents' income, occupation, and level of education (alpha reliability = .85)
High School GPA	Average high school grades (Response categories ranging from 8 = A, 7 = A–, 6 = B +, 5 = B, . . . to 1 = C– or less)
SAT	Respondents' total score on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) (from 400 to 1600 points)
Degree Aspiration	Highest academic degree aspired to by respondent (Response categories ranging from 1 = none, 2 = associate degree, 3 = bachelor's degree, 4 = master's degree, 5 = doctorate, to 6 = professional degree)
<i>Racial Congruency Variables</i>	
Community Racial Congruency	Degree of "fit" between the racial composition of the community in which respondent was reared and his/her college's racial environment (Range: 1 = very similar to 5 = very different)
High School Racial Congruency	Degree of "fit" between the racial composition of the high school respondent attended and his/her college's racial environment (Range: 1 = very similar to 5 = very different)
<i>College-level Variables</i>	
Academic Integration	Composite score reflecting students' involvement in academic life of the campus, based on responses to Student Opinion Survey* (SOS) (Nettles, 1988) items (e.g., "It is easy to develop close relationship with faculty members on this campus") (alpha reliability = .83)
Study Habits	Composite measure of students' academic and study practices and habits, based on responses to SOS items (e.g., "I keep my assignments up to date") (alpha reliability = .84)
Peer Relations	Composite measure of students' relations with their peers in college, based on responses to SOS items (e.g., "How often have you participated in activities with other students'") (alpha reliability = .65)
Institutional Support	Composite score reflecting general perception of institutional support, based on responses to SOS items (e.g., "I am satisfied with the academic advising I have received at my institution") (alpha reliability = .74)
Academic Achievement	Average undergraduate grades (Response categories ranging from 9 = A, 8 = A–, 7 = B +, 6 = B, . . . to 1 = D+ or less)

- (9) *Academic integration*. This is a factor score that indicates students' integration in and satisfaction with their academic environment.
- (10) *Study habits*. This is a factor score representing study habits and academic motivation. It consists of students' responses to several items on the SOS that are related to study skills and academic behaviors.
- (11) *Peer relations*. This is a factor score that reflects the quality of the African American male sample's social and academic relationships with other students on campus. One dependent variable was included in the model:
- (1) *Academic achievement*. This is the student's cumulative college grade point average measured on a 9-point scale.

Data Analyses

The analyses used in this article serve the following purposes: (1) to illustrate the influence of differences in college environment type (predominantly White and historically Black) on Black male achievement; and (2) to illustrate the relative overall effects of students' precollegiate background characteristics, racial congruency variables, and college environmental factors upon the academic achievement of this sample of college-going African American males.

T-tests were used to assess initial differences on all variables by college type. Then a set of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to reveal the incremental effects of each of the three groups of independent variables for predicting college academic performance. Separate group analyses were performed on the data for the students from the two types of institutions to determine the relationship among college performance and student background, racial congruency, and campus environment variables by college type. Variables were entered in multiple stages. The first stage examined the effects of personal and academic background variables. Stage two introduced measures of racial congruency, and stage three introduced college-level environment variables. The result of this procedure is an explanation of the variance in Black males' cumulative grade point averages, accounted for by each set of predictor variables after adjusting for the previous set entered into the model.

Additionally, separate full-model multiple-regression analysis was performed on each of the two college-type data sets. In this procedure, all 11 independent variables were entered into the regression equation concurrently and the independent effect of each variable is illustrated while controlling for all others variables in the equation.

RESULTS

The results of the analyses described in the section above are presented in Table II. With the exception of peer relations, significant differences were found in all of the variables in the study for Black males enrolled at predominantly White versus those enrolled at historically Black schools. For example, the sampled students at historically Black colleges and universities reported significantly higher grade point averages than their peers on predominantly White campuses. Regarding background characteristics, a lower mean age, higher socioeconomic status, better high school grades, higher SAT scores, and lower degree aspirations were reported by Black males attending predominantly White colleges. A difference was also noted in the continuity of Black males' high school racial composition and that of their college campus. Those students attending predominantly White institutions indicated less racial congruency between their high school/community and their college than did their peers attending historically Black colleges. That is, students at Black colleges were more likely to come from predominantly

TABLE II

Differences Between Black Males Attending Predominantly White Colleges and Universities (PWCUs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

	PWCUs		HBCUs		<i>t</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Age	3.962	1.70	4.68	2.02	-5.13***
Socioeconomic Background	-.900	3.08	-1.529	3.30	2.41*
HSGPA	5.503	1.65	4.502	1.56	8.44***
SAT	920	1.50	794	1.40	11.62***
Degree Aspiration	4.044	1.03	4.322	1.04	-3.07**
Community Racial Congruency	3.884	1.29	4.216	1.03	-4.19***
High School Racial Congruency	2.704	1.17	3.352	1.26	-7.22***
Academic Integration	.292	0.88	-.456	0.83	11.70***
Study Habits	.217	0.78	-.142	0.79	6.19***
Peer Relations	-.041	0.88	-.019	0.80	-.35
Institutional Support	17.956	4.19	20.149	4.09	-7.09***
Academic Achievement	3.696	1.50	4.159	1.59	-4.08***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Black high schools and communities than were Black males at White colleges to come from predominantly White high schools and communities. Regarding the college-level variables, the Black males attending Black colleges were more integrated into the academic life of the campus, got better grades, and perceived their colleges as providing more institutional support. However, Black males at predominantly White colleges reportedly had better study habits. Students from the two types of colleges had comparable levels of peer relations.

Results from regression analyses of academic performance on student background, racial congruency, and college-level experience variables for the two subsets of students (those at historically Black and those at predominantly White institutions) are presented in tables III and IV. These tables show the relative effects on academic achievement of the three sets of predictor variables included in the study's conceptual model. The total amount of variance explained by the model for each of the three groupings of the independent variables, including R^2 change, is shown along with the variance explained by all the independent variables.

Table III presents the findings for the African American males who attended predominantly White higher education institutions. As shown, each of the three categories of independent variables produced significant changes in achievement variance when added to the model equation. Racial congruency contributed the least, followed by college environmental factors, while these students' personal and academic backgrounds accounted for a substantial portion of the variance in the dependent variable. The effect of individual variables can be assessed by examining the overall regression model. Contrary to expectations, Black males' perceptions of institutional support were not significantly related to academic performance on predominantly White campus. The same held true for study habits and peer relations. Interestingly, African American male students at predominantly White institutions who had more positive perceptions about institutional support, studied harder, and had stronger peer relations did not necessarily have higher levels of achievement. However, those who had higher levels of academic integration apparently performed better academically. Academic integration was the only college environment variable found to be a significant predictor of these students' grades at predominantly White colleges.

TABLE III
Summary of Regression Analyses: Predictions of Black Male Academic Achievement at Predominantly White Colleges and Universities

VARIABLES	R^2	R^2 CHANGE	F OF R^2 CHANGE	FULL MODEL <i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>Personal and Academic Background</i>					
Age	.115	.115	9.14***	.011	.235
Socioeconomic Background				.009	.357
HSGPA				.127	2.53**
SAT				.000	.387
Degree Aspiration				.403	4.99***
<i>Racial Congruency</i>					
Community	.155	.040	8.25***	.129	2.14*
High School				-.245	.354***
<i>College Environment</i>					
Academic Integration	.203	.048	5.15***	-.531	3.06**
Study Habits				-.110	-1.09
Peer Relations				.068	.788
Institutional Support				-.045	-1.28

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Both racial congruency variables were significantly related to academic achievement among Black male students at predominantly White colleges, but in opposite directions. The closer the match of the racial composition of the students' home community to that of their college environment, the more positive their academic achievement. A negative effect of high school racial congruency was found for those students at predominantly White colleges whose high schools were not correspondingly predominantly White: their grades were lower. Two other student background factors were strongly related to college achievement: (1) students with better high school grades were significantly more likely to have a higher cumulative college grade point average; and (2) Black males with high degree aspirations had higher grades in college.

The results of the regression analyses on the data obtained from the African American males who attended historically Black colleges are presented in Table IV. As seen in this table, the introduction of personal and academic background variables to the model equation provided a significant change in R^2 ; however, the inclusion of racial congruency did not contribute significantly to achievement. By far, college environmental variables explained most of the variations in academic performance for these students. In the overall model, Black males at historically Black colleges who had higher socioeconomic backgrounds, higher GPAs in high school, and higher SAT scores, and who were more academically integrated into campus academic life, had good study habits and formed strong relations with their peers. They were also more likely to get better grades. All of the above variables were significant predictors of achievement for this group of Black male college students. Unlike their peers at predominantly White colleges, none of the racial congruency variables significantly predicted these students' achievement. Likewise, two college environment variables, study habits and peer relations, were found to be related to achievement.

DISCUSSION

The results of the hierarchical regression analyses demonstrate the differential effect of each of the three components of the conceptual model—student background, racial

TABLE IV

Summary of Regression Analyses: Predictions of Black Male Academic Achievement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

VARIABLES	R ²	R ² CHANGE	F OF R ² CHANGE	FULL MODEL	
				b	t
<i>Personal and Academic Background</i>	.140	.140	7.39**		
Age				-.012	.281
Socioeconomic Background				.057	1.92*
HSGPA				.207	3.33**
SAT				.001	2.35*
Degree Aspiration				.032	.310
<i>Racial Congruency</i>	.149	.009	1.19		
Community High School				-.109	1.16
				.079	1.02
<i>College Environment</i>	.313	.163	13.10***		
Academic Integration				-.490	2.12*
Study Habits				-.743	5.52***
Peer Relations				.349	2.93**
Institutional Support				.077	-1.81

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

congruency, and college-level variables (e.g., academic integration and institutional support)—on the academic achievement of college-going Black males. These findings also highlight some of the major differences for African American males between attending historically Black and predominantly White institutions. Overall, the general pattern of influences exerted by the independent variables explained more of the variation in the academic achievement of Black males attending historically Black colleges than it did that of their peers at White colleges. For instance, personal and academic background variables have more of an effect on the academic achievement of Black males at these institutions. For both groups, however, adding college environmental variables to the model equation created a significant change in R^2 . Although this set of variables is less effective for Black males at predominantly White colleges, they were found to have a significant influence on achievement, even after the inclusion of background and racial congruency variables.

The data analyses performed in this study are useful for addressing two major questions: (1) How do Black males who attend historically Black colleges differ from those who attend predominantly White ones? and (2) Are there differences in the predictors of academic success for these two groups? Two general conclusions can be derived from these analyses. The first is that differences in college racial environment and other college environment variables differentially affect academic achievement. The second is that the determinants of academic achievement vary between Black males attending Black and White colleges.

These two groups of Black males have very different profiles. For example, the students who attended predominantly White institutions were academically better prepared for college. However, though they had higher high school grades and their SAT scores were over one hundred points higher than those of their peers at Black colleges, the average score for these students was still about 900 points, which is about 100 points below that of White male college-bound students (Senior, 1992). The initial bivariate analyses indicated a significant difference in academic performance: the Black males at historically Black

colleges got better grades. This finding, while not easily explained, is consistent with the findings in the existing literature (Allen, 1992). Similarly, other studies have noted that this grade difference by campus racial environment is difficult to explain (Cheatham, Slaney, & Coleman, 1990). One common explanation given is that the curriculum and faculty at historically Black colleges are less challenging, and that professors at these institutions subsequently give higher grades to otherwise undeserving students. However, the rates of graduate school admission and performance in graduate programs at predominantly White school for graduates of historically Black institutions undercut this argument (Anderson & Hrabowski, 1977; Blackwell, 1981; Matthews & Jackson, 1991). This study's finding that Black students in general, and Black males in particular, at historically Black colleges have more positive perceptions of institutional support than do Black students at majority institutions may provide some insight into this quagmire. The former group's perceptions of stronger institutional support and higher levels of academic integration, as well as the greater congruency of these students' college and high school/community racial environments, could be important mediating variables in explaining the differential achievement patterns of the two college groups. Concerning degree aspirations, the findings of this study correspond to other studies that document the positive effects for Black students of attending an historically Black college (Allen, 1992).

The model utilized in this study was most effective in predicting college academic achievement—that is, grades—for Black males at historically Black colleges. The only significant variables held in common by the two groups were high school grades and academic integration. Apparently, college-going Black males who are achievers in high school and who become more fully integrated into the academic life of their college campuses are most likely to be the most academically successful in college. These two variables, particularly academic integration, may be at the core of our understandings about the variations in the academic experience and outcomes of Black males in higher education.

The conclusions and implications from these findings must be interpreted within a broader context of Black students' college experiences. The perceptions that an individual has about an institution of higher learning need not be interpreted as a basis for assuming direct connections to a student's academic performance. Indeed, an equally persuasive explanation may be that those Black males who perform better academically may correspondingly interpret campus environmental factors as being more important and intricately connected to their academic achievement than will their less successful peers. Indeed, Allen (1988) suggests that the student-faculty relationship, which is at the core of academic integration, is a mutually reciprocal and dynamic one. However, in the present study, the relationship between academic integration and college academic achievement was not moderated by the racial environment of the institutions the sampled students attended. Nonetheless, it appears that academic integration is required for the success of African American males at historically Black colleges to much the same degree that it is required for those who attend predominantly White colleges.

Previous findings reveal that African American students who hold racial minority status at their institution view that status as more salient and feel an inevitable sense of alienation (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Sedlacek, 1987; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Thomas, 1981). This literature suggests that students at predominantly White institutions experience a number of psychosocial problems and that these problems manifest as significant predictors of academic outcomes. The findings reported herein support Nettles's (1987) claim that Black students in general, regardless of the type of college they attend, may have common needs for support and integration. Consequently, this implies that all universities should provide services that can meet these needs more effectively.

Because the relationship between institutional support and achievement was not clearly explicated by these analyses, the well-documented finding that Black students at predominantly White colleges do not get the psychosocial support deemed characteristic of Black colleges may require clarification or qualification, at least with regard to Black males. However, the failure to find a link between institutional support and college racial environment is consistent with the findings of Cheatham, Slaney, and Coleman (1990), who suggest that Black colleges do not necessarily facilitate the psychosocial development of African American students more so than White colleges. Perhaps the oft-reported differences between Black and White colleges in providing socially supportive and conducive learning environments need further exploration—again, particularly for males. It may be that Black males, given their experience at predominantly White colleges, perceive from the outset that these institutions will not support them, and, in turn, they move through the curriculum and course of college study without those expectations. As previous research indicates, Black males are more likely to perceive institutional support as lacking, and they more often view the racial climate on predominantly White campuses as hostile (Allen & Haniff, 1991; Fleming, 1984). Also, Black students often perceive predominantly White institutions as providing better facilities and services than Black colleges and universities, and they view these benefits as somehow offsetting the perception that the institution does not provide a supportive social environment (Allen, 1987).

CONCLUSION

The present study examined certain noncognitive variables that were believed to bear upon the educational outcomes of African American males. With emphasis on the attitudinal and perceptual variables of campus environment, this research sought to contribute to the body of knowledge suggested by noncognitive studies. It did so acknowledging an important limitation: the explanatory power of this model would be greatly improved by the inclusion of other cognitive variables that relate more directly to academic achievement. As such, this study presents findings that suggest a need for college and universities to consider different approaches to affecting the academic and social lives of their Black male students. Likewise, these analyses attempt to draw conclusions about the mediating nature of student background, racial congruency, and college environment that are important in understanding academic performance among Black males. Given the declining rates of college enrollment for this group, the importance of providing a supportive academic environment for those who get to college is essential.

The higher education of African American males is a task to be shared by all institutions of higher learning, both predominantly White and historically Black. From this study, lessons may be learned about institutional characteristics and environments that are more conducive to increasing the chances for academic success among African American males. If nothing else, these findings suggest a need for colleges and universities, particularly predominantly White institutions, to provide greater integration of African American males into the academic mainstream of college life.

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