The Call for Cultural Adjustments in Educating African American Males

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND LEADERS

Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher and Yvonne Callaway

American society is both “browning” and “graying.” The present U.S. population contains both larger numbers of non-White racially/ethnically diverse persons (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic/Latino(a) Americans, and Native Americans) and greater numbers of “Baby Boomers” who are approaching their retirement years. The bulk of U.S. population expansion over the last 20 years has been due primarily to the increased births and immigration of Hispanics at rates that have consistently outpaced those of other U.S. racial/ethnic groups. Demographers project that in fewer than five decades, people of color will comprise the majority of U.S. citizens, with White non-Hispanic persons projected to account for 47% of the population by 2050 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002). In some parts of the country, the future is already here. For instance, Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans currently account for over half the population of California, making it the first to become a “minority-majority” state.

Although American society is more heterogeneous on the surface, it continually struggles with achieving parity for all of its citizenry—educationally, economically, socially, politically, and so forth. This is particularly true when examining the plight
of African American males within U.S. institutions. Across racial/ethnic groups, African American males are more often considered at-risk, deemed outcasts, and stratified in relationship to educational and occupational mobility (Gibbs, 1988; Parham & McDavis, 1987; Rodriguez, 1997). Attendance and achievement patterns for African American males in k–12 schools, along with Black men's gainful employment in the workplace, receipt of health care, participation in the political arena, and other areas of social life are not reflective of parity with others in the populace.

The charge to develop policies and practices to reverse these patterns for African American males in Michigan is eminent. That charge calls for all educators and citizens who are concerned about and committed to resolving the cultural and gender disparities in educational outcomes plaguing African American males nationwide to take a stand. Concerned with the overall performance of all Michigan youth, in December 2003 Governor Jennifer Granholm announced plans to make the state secondary general curriculum tougher (Burke & Johnstone, 2004). The governor's intent was to encourage Michigan students to attend and graduate from college in an effort to attract new industries and strengthen the states' ability to compete in a knowledge economy. However, more stringent exit requirements will not prevent African Americans from being placed at the intersection of race, poverty, and gender. Michigan's Black males in particular are exposed to many inherent risks and few benefits in the state's k–12 educational system.

This chapter seeks to explore the literature on Black boys and men within k–16 educational and counseling contexts, and to address explicitly the issues plaguing these males as they progress from the elementary to the postsecondary pipeline. It also seeks to integrate as well as articulate processes, policies, and practices that may yield culturally competent praxis that has utility and that is germane to educational practitioners and school counselors in the state of Michigan.

**Enrollment Trends for African American Males in K–12 Schools**

Nearly all of the common educational challenges occurring in Michigan are reflected in the national data. Data reveal that in 1999–2000, African Americans made up 17% of the k–12 student population and 8% of the national teacher workforce (Toppo, 2003). Moreover, 38% of the nation's public schools did not have a teacher of color on staff; indeed, 84% of public school teachers countrywide were White,
and an overwhelming number of those were women. Although, at 37%, Michigan ranks above average in the number of teachers of color it employs, it has not yet achieved a critical mass sufficient to garner better educational outcomes for its Black male students on a consistent basis.

A review of the literature about the current educational status and achievements of Black males in America reveals a systemic national failure. For example, in a study of U.S. school districts with 10,000 or more Black male students, the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2005) reported among 20 representative high schools across the country, graduation rates for Black males ranged from a low of 19% to a high of 34%, with only half of the schools achieving graduation rates above 30%. This pattern is documented throughout the literature (Brown & Davis, 2000; Polite & Davis, 1999; Varlas, 2005) and comes as no surprise given both historical evidence and recent research data that links racial, ethnic, and gender classroom dynamics to student achievement and to the consistent troubles Black boys face in K–12 public schools.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MICHIGAN

Michigan’s demographic landscape is often a contradictory one. The state contains two of the most racially segregated metropolitan areas in the United States per capita: Detroit and Livonia. These cities are polar opposites in terms of Black/White residential ratio. Livonia, on one hand, is 98% White. By contrast, 82% of Detroiter are African American and only 12% are White (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002, 2006). The average age of Detroit residents, 30.9 years, parallels the national average for Blacks across the country (i.e., 30.6 years), yet this is five years younger than the median age of Whites nationwide (Hoffman, Llagas, & Snyder, 2003). By contrast, the overwhelmingly White residential community of Livonia has a mean age that is higher than the national average for Whites at 42.3 years old.

Show Me the Money: Educational Expenditures and High-Stakes Testing in Michigan

During the 2002–3 school year, African American students comprised 20.1% of students enrolled in Michigan public schools (Becker, 2002). Prior to that year,
the number of African American males enrolled had been increasing yearly, from 154,869 in 1999–2000 to 191,708 in 2002–3 (Becker, 2002); by 2003, however, African American male enrollment declined to 176,697. Although the state currently ranks among the top in the nation for per-pupil expenditures, 17.1% of all Michigan students matriculate in Title I, low-income-based schools, and 32.7% are eligible for free/reduced-price lunches (Becker, 2002).

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) is a standards-based test that is designed to measure how well students have mastered particular skills by grade level. Ideally, all Michigan students should meet or exceed the standards for each grade. Based on data collected in 2002, the percentages of students ranked as “low” performers on the MEAP reading and mathematics scales increased between elementary and middle school (Kids Count in Michigan, 2003). Fewer low-income students performed satisfactorily (i.e., >300 on reading test, >520 on math test), and the rates of increase for this group were consistently higher than the aggregate. Table 2 compares fourth- and eighth-grade MEAP scores for all Michigan students and for all Title I and Title I–targeted students in the state.

The Kids Count in Michigan Data Book (2003) provides county profiles of child and family well-being in the state for the 2002 fiscal year and offers a wealth of information about educational outcomes for Michigan’s k–12 students. The Data Book notes an alarming achievement gap between Black and White students in fifth-grade mathematics. Consider, for example, for 2003, the Michigan black/white achievement gap for fourth-grade math is 35 points in contrast to the U.S. black/white gap for fourth-grade math of 27 points. Similarly, eighth-grade math scores on the 2003 MEAP test illustrate a 41-point black/white gap whereas the U.S.

| TABLE 1. MICHIGAN’S BLACK AND WHITE (NON–HISPANIC) POPULATIONS BY GENDER, 1995–2025 (IN THOUSANDS) |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|      | 1995  | 2000  | 2005* | 2015* | 2025* |
| BLACK |       |       |       |       |       |
| Male  | 1,379 | 1,435 | 1,486 | 1,594 | 1,705 |
| Female| 733   | 763   | 790   | 848   | 906   |
| WHITE |       |       |       |       |       |
| Male  | 7,774 | 7,790 | 7,767 | 7,701 | 7,628 |
| Female| 3,803 | 3,818 | 3,813 | 3,795 | 3,777 |
|       | 3,971 | 3,972 | 3,954 | 3,906 | 3,858 |

* Projected.
black/white gap for eighth-grade math is 35 points. There is a 39-point Michigan black/white gap for fourth-grade reading 2003. The fourth-grade reading U.S. black/white gap is 30 points. Among Michigan eighth-graders, 2003 MEAP reading scores reveal a 30-point black/white gap while the U.S. black/white gap for eighth-grade reading is 26 points (Coulson, 2005).

In 2001, $112 million in scholarships were awarded to high school graduates in Michigan based on MEAP scores. Of the 43,650 graduates in the state’s high school class of 2002, 37% qualified for Michigan Merit Scholars (MMS) awards; 97% of them were eligible based on their MEAP scores. A five-year analysis of MEAP data indicates that White Michigan students were twice as likely overall to pass this state test as were Blacks. As a result, financial support for higher education, awarded on the basis of MEAP performance, was awarded to African American students, males in particular, at much lower rates.

The MMS program is four times more likely to benefit students in the highest income districts. Well over half of African American students (59%) fall in the low-income group of students least likely to score satisfactorily on the state achievement test or to benefit from the dollars earmarked for its graduating seniors’ postsecondary expenses. In Michigan, African American students represent the highest number of poor students and are up to four times more likely than White students to live in poverty. Michigan continues to experience an unstable economy, with unemployment woes caused by the shrinking automobile manufacturing base carrying over into education and the home lives of the state’s youngest residents (e.g., one out of every four young children under age five is living in poverty).

It is also important to consider the demography and residential patterns (e.g.,

The table below shows the percentage of students ranked as low in MEAP reading and math scores, 1999–2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENTS</th>
<th>ALL</th>
<th>TITLE I</th>
<th>TITLE I TARGETED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>READING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>MATH</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
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rural, suburban, or urban) of Michigan’s students when examining the state’s Black-White achievement gap. Becker (2002) reports that the per-pupil spending gap between poor and affluent students in Michigan is the highest in the nation. Detroit, for example, features an urban school district primarily comprised of low-income students of color. Ninety-one percent of its students are African American, 6% are Hispanic American, and 72% receive free or reduced-price lunches. Clearly, average MEAP performance for Detroit’s inner-city elementary, middle, and high school youth are below the state average performance (Great Schools, 2006).

Of the 141,406 students enrolled in Detroit’s 261 public P–12 schools, the vast majority are African American (Great Schools, 2006). Over two-thirds of fourth-grade Detroit Public School (DPS) students met or exceeded the state standards for reading (compared to the statewide fourth-grade average of 81%). Forty-five percent of fourth graders across the state met or exceeded the standards for writing, compared to 33% of DPS fourth graders. Fifty-four percent of DPS fourth graders met or exceeded the state’s mathematics standards; the state average was 71%. Similar achievement gaps in reading and writing were found in the MEAP performance of DPS students’ vis-à-vis statewide averages at grade 7, grade 8 for mathematics, and grade 12 across all three subjects (Great Schools, 2006). The proficiencies of

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<th>2005 State Average</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>25</td>
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Source: Great Schools Inc., 2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008 STATE AVERAGE</th>
<th>DETROIT STUDENTS MEETING/EXCEEDING STANDARDS</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>READING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source: Great Schools Inc., 2008.

DPS students have not improved and in some cases are now worse, as 2007–8 data illustrate (see table 4).

A change in state law replaced the MEAP high school test with the Michigan Merit Exam (MME) to better align with the state’s new high school graduation requirements, which are more rigorous. The junior class of 2007 was the first to take the MME. Given that the MME is an entirely new assessment, student results are not comparable to previous high school MEAP tests.

Counseling Considerations

While it is important for students to have a sense of agency, given the policy changes and politicized environment surrounding high-stakes testing, many students, particularly those enrolled in Detroit Public Schools, may feel voiceless. It is the role of the school counselor to act as a change agent and to advocate for students and for social justice. One of the tasks most central to this role is enhancing the quality of life and empowerment of students. This process is meant to be developmental, grounded in theoretical paradigms and best-practice models, and refined through
action research. From this perspective, prevention rather than remediation is the intent of school counseling.

In Michigan, statewide planned school counselor interventions are identified as specific grade-level goals for cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. Also known as the Michigan Comprehensive Guidance Model, this model, which has been used for many years, is meant to ensure that student development is addressed consistently and developed throughout K–12 education. However, an examination of the academic achievement and quality of life measures for African American males reveals that this group has not demonstrated outcome gains as a result of the state’s comprehensive approach to school counseling.

It is critically important for counselors to be culturally competent; hence, teacher education, educational administration, and counseling education programs must purposefully design curricula to promote the cross-cultural knowledge and skills necessary to improve counselors’ effectiveness in resolving the challenges facing African American males. Lee (1991) outlines how incorporating African American culture can facilitate the empowerment process for young Black males. Studies by Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005), Delpit (1996), and others also posit strategies by which educational and counseling personnel can integrate cultural dimensions (i.e., basic aspects of Black life) that typically are ignored in efforts to facilitate positive developmental experiences.

If educators and counselors are not equipped with an understanding of African American culture, if they lack sensitivity or knowledge regarding key tenets of Black male development, then Black males’ academic and psychosocial problems will only worsen. Culturally focused counselors and educators should embrace being student-centered by advocating that the exchange of teaching and learning involve an understanding of the realities of the Black male perspective such that self-actualization for African American males can be fully enacted (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Lee, 1991). As they grapple with cross-cultural issues, counselors and educators must delve even further to grasp the meaning of these students’ multiple group memberships at the nexus of race and gender.

The Confluence of Racial and Gender Identity

Belgrave and Allison (2006) advocate the use of contemporary models that consider the value of the extended or collective self as an agent of change and positive
resistance. They also establish the importance of supporting racial identity development for African American youth through messages about racial status and its meaning concerning behaviors and relationships within and outside of the racial group, cultural stereotypes, social realities, and strategies for overcoming racial barriers. Such messages, they contend, are most likely delivered by parents who are married, older, more educated, and living in more racially mixed neighborhoods. These messages tend to be gender-based in that they stress pride for girls and barriers for boys, and they are more often delivered by mothers than fathers.

As Belgrave and Allison further maintain, socialization messages provide the foundation for healthy racial identity development. Accordingly, a healthy Afrocentric identity includes the following:

1. Positive in-group identification and a sense of common connections and group fate, which result in the saliency of group norms and practices
2. Awareness of out-group perceptions and negative expectations as well as of the potential for such views to negatively affect African Americans’ academic self-efficacy and vulnerability to stereotype threat
3. Viewing academic achievement as consistent with, important to, and embedded in one’s ethnic identity

Belgrave and Allison (2006) articulate several benefits of a positive ethnic identity. They claim, for example, that for adolescents it is positively associated with strong self-concept, positive self-esteem, more and stronger parental connections, better coping skills, and more prosocial and sanctioned activities. They also suggest a positive relationship between developed moral reasoning and developed racial identity. Conversely, they posit a negative relationship between strong ethnic identity and problem behaviors such as drug use and violence. Although their macroanalysis of the research literature yields mixed support for the influence of racial identity on academic achievement, Belgrave and Allison uncover considerable support for the argument that children who are aware of racism perform better academically than those who are not. They conclude, thus, that awareness of racism can be connected to academic motivation and effort, and that more prepared students are less likely to be adversely affected by racist and discriminatory practices.

Belgrave and Allison’s research can be used to inform the translation of counseling theories to practice with African American males. So too can Mary Howard-Hamilton’s (1997) work examining developmental theories relevant
to this population. Howard-Hamilton suggests alleviating Black males’ salient educational and self-esteem concerns through personal development using counseling interventions. She cautions, however, that it is dangerous to apply traditional student development theories to this group without first examining the unique intersection of race and gender.

Howard-Hamilton’s arguments concerning racial identity development are congruent with the aforementioned culturally framed approaches. Her Africentric Resistance Model operationalizes an Afrocentric worldview, the central proposition of which is that knowledge of one’s cultural, historical, and racial roots generates a self-affirmative buoyancy to combat negative stereotypes. Additionally, strong cultural emphases on kinship, interdependence, collective responsibility, generosity, and spirituality are believed to counteract the experiences of racism and oppression through positive resistance. Moreover, the ability to recognize and cope with social inconsistencies, discrimination, and prejudice are critical to perceptions of self-worth and efficacy that influence African American male academic achievement. This is especially so in educational settings in which the dominant group’s social norms and values are operative.

Self-Concept and Efficacy among African American Males

Constructs of the self, including gender and racial identities, worldviews related to interpersonal relationships, and awareness of others’ perceptions of self are all viewed as contributing to the underachievement of African American males (Noguera, 2003). Self-efficacy theory stresses the existence of a reciprocal relationship between personal factors (e.g., self-perceptions, worldview, role and status assignments, age, gender, race, physiognomy), behavior factors (e.g., competencies, skills, and preferences), and the sociopolitical environment (e.g., individual and group power and role constraints, associational patterns and opportunities). These factors interact in a reciprocal fashion to shape behavior.

Bandura (1997) contends that as individuals develop concepts of self and of the environment, they are most likely to attend to and/or select certain experiences and filter out others. Both direct instruction and modeling have been demonstrated as effective technologies for developing self-efficacy, which may implicitly convey that one possesses the necessary capabilities to succeed. Self-efficacy has been
shown to have predictive and interactive effects on goal setting and judgmental heuristics that moderate the nature, extent, and duration of problem solving and coping behaviors.

Osborne (1999) points to the relationship between African American males’ identification with academics and their lack of support in schools as primary obstacles to these males’ success in school. He argues that schools reinforce negative stereotypes of Black male youth, leading them to develop oppositional identities that reflect those stereotypes and make them agents in their own failure. Subsequently, these factors work together to support the Black male academic underachievement that consistently results in lower grades and test scores as well as higher dropout rates and less engagement in postsecondary endeavors.

Osborne references three prominent approaches to addressing educational achievement for African American males: Steele and Aronson’s (1995) stereotype threat model, Ogbu’s (1981) cultural-ecological perspective, and Majors and Billson’s (1992) “cool pose” theory. These concepts focus on the symbolic interaction of African American males’ identification with academics as a necessary condition for changing outcomes.

Stereotype threat theory posits that stress resulting from the perception that one is not able to meet the demands of a given situation can produce debilitating anxiety. This model proposes that minority-group students are at risk of lowered performance in situations where racial stereotypes regarding achievement are salient (Belgrave & Allison, 2006). Osborne (1999) suggests that Black students may be subject to such heightened anxiety in school situations that they often withdraw as a self-protective response. Withdrawal reduces the anxiety and perhaps, concomitantly, concern with evaluation in the school setting. Osborne also notes that African American students’ self-esteem is more affected by home, family, and community than school.

Conversely, Ogbu (1981, 1986) argues from a cultural-ecological framework that African Americans either consciously or unconsciously interpret school learning as incongruent with and unrelated to their social identity, sense of security, and self-worth. He asserts that African American male students are aware that hard work does not necessarily pay off for them, and that those who do succeed are rarely accorded the same benefits as their White counterparts. This awareness, combined with peer and cultural pressure, may act against academic engagement. The cultural pressure to which many Black males react typically occurs within the
context of White racism, which is a social construction based on negative affect for
members of particular racial/ethnic groups. Arguably, racism places hierarchical
values on race and demeans those without the status and power that are socially
determined based on ascribed characteristics.

Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995) point to the social tendency for the poor
to be seen as lazy and even immoral while the affluent are likely to be cast as
esteemed and admired, and maintain that identical marginalization occurs along
racial lines. Hence, racism, sexism, classism, and elitism commingle and are each
important in the context of identity development. Traditional counselor training
demonstrates adherence to and bias in favor of Western value preferences consistent
with middle-class, Protestant ethics, Standard English, and a strong belief in the
notion of meritocracy. Members of oppressed minority groups who endorse this
worldview are predicted to suffer from group powerlessness, depression, and a
negative sense of self-worth.

The hypothesis that African American males may assume a ritual masculine
persona, or “cool pose,” as a defense against threats of oppression and racism in
society and schools has also emerged from the literature (Majors & Billson, 1992).
Osborne (1999) notes that African American males’ academic achievement is often
obstructed by such psychological defenses. The adoption of a reactive masculine
persona may induce anxiety regarding peer acceptance and group affiliations that
are not supportive of a strong identification with academics. These conditions
culminate in Black male students’ lower levels of identification with academics,
which have been shown to increase as they grow older. Behavioral manifestations
of this cool pose—aloofness, fearlessness, and nonconformance—contribute to the
underachievement of this group in two ways; (1) they lead Black males to withdraw
from the academic environment and cause significant others in that environment
to withdraw from or withdraw support for these students; and (2) they reinforce
negative stereotypes of Black males.

Conceptual Underpinnings Related to Research on African American Males

SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Much of the research points to the potential of Bandura’s (1997) social learning
theory as an effective and culturally relevant intervention modality for African
American males in educational settings, and one that provides several specific recommendations for intervening. Social learning theory is specifically offered by Howard-Hamilton (1997) and alluded to by others as a modality for addressing salient concerns related to African American male students. Self-efficacy theory, developed as an extension of social learning theory, proposes that individuals’ experiences and behaviors are largely the result of cognition (Bandura, 1997). Higher dissatisfaction for cognitive failure or substandard performance, combined with higher self-efficacy, is seen as generating greater efforts to succeed and make greater performance improvements. Conversely, being less efficacious and more satisfied (with failure or substandard performance) correlates with less effort and improvement in performance over time.

RESILIENCE

Although research has indicated that the socially learned behavior of racial/ethnic minorities illustrates lower coping self-efficacy with regard to perceived educational and career barriers than their White counterparts (Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001), one cannot discount the capacity Black men have shown, for generations, to overcome unthinkable obstacles. Arguably, African American males have triumphed mightily in the face of adversity. In the face of endangerment many have emerged resilient and strengthened by their experiences. Resilience is considered a critical factor in curbing the damaging effects of institutional and individual forms of racism, sexism, and classism that disenfranchised members of this society often face.

Studies have supported the impact of resilience-promoting behavior among marginalized race and gender groups. Borman and Overman (2004) identified individual characteristics that distinguished academically successful—or as they operationalized them, resilient—minorsity and low-socioeconomic-status elementary school students from their less successful or nonresilient peers. They formulated and tested four risk- and resilience-promoting school models: (1) effective schools, (2) peer group composition, (3) school resources, and (4) supportive school communities. Their findings indicate that racial/ethnic minority students from low-income backgrounds had increased risks and fewer resilience-promoting behaviors than did White students of similar backgrounds. Borman and Overman’s study also supported implementation of uniformity and promotion of individual- and school-level academic resiliency models for all low-income students irrespective
of race/ethnicity. It concludes that a supportive school community model is the most dynamic means of protecting children from harsh conditions and in turn promoting resiliency as required.

Warren (2005) examined resilience as a factor relating to how young African Caribbean men attending schools in London dealt with institutional racism. His study used rich qualitative methods employing the first-person narratives of 15 African Caribbean young men in three London schools. Warren concluded that these students engaged in what he deemed resilience by refusal—that is, they refused to be overregulated, overdisciplined, and treated more severely than their White counterparts. Captured in his study was a portrait of Black male students who embodied a sense of agency. Additional support for these students’ participation in school-based mentoring programs was found to be an effective means of assisting them to cope with and counter the hegemony of the learning environments in which the subjects found themselves.

**Implications for School Counseling and Educational Leadership**

This chapter has presented statistics on the present-day educational participation of African Americans, Black males in the state of Michigan particularly. It has focused on the Black male achievement gaps that have been reported all along the educational pipeline. These findings and discussion have led to several conclusions. One of these is that it is incumbent upon our nation’s schools, colleges, and departments of education to deliver teacher preparation programs that encompass both cultural competency training and professional development that can challenge the social constructions of bias, stereotyping, racism, and sexism that are manifested in schools across this land. Additionally, it is apparent that parent and teacher expectancy can produce self-fulfilling prophecies that counter student persistence; this is especially salient in terms of Black male student performance.

The role of African American parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators in the reform of the ineffective schooling typically provided an African American male is a crucial one. In Michigan, African American male students have lower educational outcomes than their female counterparts, but they fare as well as their gender, racial, and economic peers around the country. The critical nature of cultural factors such as racial identity and the social construction of race in the academic
success of Black boys are often cited as factors behind this state-specific disparity, but very limited research specific to race and gender or poverty relative to identity development and academic success is available. Macro-reviews of research related to the educational achievement of African American males identify common structural and sociopolitical obstacles that are well supported by national and state data.

The policy and legislative landscape of access in Michigan has proven to be the litmus test for the engagement of more African Americans in the educational pipeline. The recent assaults on affirmative action place Michigan squarely in the middle of the national policy debate. The negative impact within Michigan of the proposed Civil Rights Initiative, which seeks to do away with affirmative action, could have detrimental effects on the state’s people of color, most notably its African American males in higher education (Zamani-Gallaher, Green, Brown, & Stovall, 2009). Thus, the outstanding social justice issue for Michigan’s—and the nation’s—educators, administrators, and counselors is to alleviate unequal and discriminatory outcomes for African American males in K–12 and postsecondary education, and to promote access, equity, and the closing of the achievement gap between this group and other racial/gender groups. Educators and counselors alike must act and lead others to action in articulating future steps to remove structural, sociopolitical, and cultural barriers to Black male students’ academic achievement.

The following list, which is by no means exhaustive, contains initiatives we consider critical for improving the educational outcomes and academic achievement of African American males:

1. The immediate establishment of a developmental teaching school to implement staffing, curriculum, and developmental programming that reflects sensitive and effective application of learning and developmental theories uniquely related to Black males.
2. Work with targeted low-income, urban districts, other programs, and national funding sources to implement specific program components as after-school, Saturday school, and rites of passage programs as data is compiled.
3. Collaborate with African American organizations to promote teaching as a career and to emphasize equity in accountability for student educational outcomes.
4. Work with state and national executive, legislative, and judicial branches to establish funding equity and close the per-pupil spending gap; target
low-income schools for interventions that measure educator competency and student achievement specifically related to the documented educational and achievement outcomes of African American males.

We believe that teachers and counselors alike must shoulder the responsibility in removing the systemic barriers that stifle the promise of African American males in our schools. These barriers in turn impede our collective progress. It is imperative that our nation move toward an educational system that not only promises but also operationalizes social justice through education for African Americans. Now more than ever, it is time to challenge the insidious status quo and eradicate the institutionalized racism and systemic discrimination that continues to jeopardize the ability of Black males to survive and thrive in American schools.

**REFERENCES**


