

Interaction Theories and Behaviors of Black Males that Undermine College Success

Abstract

In the sociology of education, Interactionist theorists investigate the interpersonal dynamics of students and their socially constructed lives. One natural phenomenon that is examined in context is the way in which students use *symbols* to make sense of their social environment. In addition, labeling theory addresses the ways in which labels play a significant role in determining how students formulate their sense of self-worth (Ballantine et al., 2017).

Contemporary literature in the area of interactionist theory applied to Black males has identified a number of behaviors as pathologies that serve to undermine educational achievements such as (a) cool posing, described as ritualized performances composed of scripts, physical posturing, and expressions meant to convey pride, strength, and control (Harris et al., 2011; Hatchett, 1993); (b) self-fulfilling prophecy, described as a nearly inevitable state of mind when a student is repeatedly told or reminded of an inferior status (Wineburg, 1987); and (c) Male Gender Role Conflict (MGRC) and toxic masculinity, described as entry points of harmful effects to men who are unable to meet traditional hegemonic expectations (Harris et, 2011; Neal, 2011). Collectively, when these behaviors and conditions are applied to Black male students, they are often done so using a unidimensional and universal definition of success (Davis & Hunter, 1994). The original intent of symbolic interactionism was to place priority on the meanings that human beings assign to things, *not* behaviors. Consequently, ignoring assigned meanings to focus on a resulting behavior negates the significance of meaning and falsifies the behavior in question (Blumer, 1969/1998). The proposed poster represents a component of a strength-based study that explores the relationship among academic, social, and persistence factors as a function of Black male

ethnic-racial identity. An implication of understanding more about these phenomena is the possibility of leveraging new insights from an interactionist perspective that has the potential to improve Black male retention campaigns and college completions.

Evaluation Criteria:

The proposed poster presentation meets the evaluation criteria in the following ways:

- a) It offers context to the national higher education effort to address the gap in graduation rates among Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and People of Color (BILPOC), particularly Black male students who have the lowest success rates of all major groups.
- b) The objective is to share relevant information with peers and the academic world and to take advantage of this opportunity for rich conversation to enrich my own understanding of these concepts.
- c) Graduation and persistence rates for BILPOC students have relevance in many areas such as local workforce, state, and federal agencies. Therefore, scholarly discussions are very likely.
- d) While the concept of graduation rates and persistence, in and of itself is not new, the poster content will be a part of a dissertation study that is based on Tinto's theory of student departure and Nigrescence theory of ethnic and racial identity. There is a paucity of studies *in general* using this combination of theories.
- e) I will have handouts to disseminate at my poster station and a Quick Reference (QR) code affixed to the top of the poster for those who wish to access the document on their personal device. I look forward to sharing this information in a generative way.

References

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