The Perceived Effects Of Social Alienation On Black College Students Enrolled At A Caucasian Southern University

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Abstract

Social alienation as experienced by African American students enrolled at a predominantly Caucasian southern university was the focus of this study. Prior studies indicated African

Americans experienced social alienation and depression resulting in feelings of powerlessness and poor academic performance. One hundred students were tested using the PRIDE scale adapted from Burbach's (1972) University Alienation Scale. Parts of the scale measured feelings of perceived social alienation, factors of success and collected demographic data. Data indicated that students who experienced high levels of social alienation and low self-esteem also scored low on the PRIDE Scale. Open-ended questions on PRIDE revealed that the African American males perceived themselves as leaders but as competitors with Caucasian males.

Introduction

Starting about 1661 and lasting through the 1960s, social alienation of African Americans in the United States often manifested itself in very direct and violent ways. Some of these manifestations were defacto in the form of lynching, cross burning, house and property destruction, castration, and church bombings, while others were more dejure forms such as segregated housing, intra and interstate travel, and use of public facilities such as hospitals and cemeteries. And still, in many indirect, nonviolent, and subtle ways, social alienation of African Americans persists not only in the society at large but particularly in some predominantly Caucasian colleges. Despite its indirect, nonviolent and subtle ways, it is no less demeaning or damaging than the direct and violent methods more characteristic of other time periods.

Wilkerson (1988), a reporter writing for the New York Times wrote, "On the campuses of the nation's predominantly Caucasian American universities where racial unrest has risen dramatically in recent years, African American students say they feel increasingly like outsiders, isolated and unwelcome."

The college, it is argued, contains features of the larger society (Burbach & Thompson, 1972; Suen, 1983). Thus, one could argue that the way in which social alienation manifests itself in a college setting is similar to the way it manifests itself in the larger society (Burbach & Thompson, 1972). For example, on college campuses, manifestations of social alienation include: (a) separate eating and dining tables in the integrated schools, (b) separate and different Sunday worship services, and (c) segregated fraternities, sororities and other social organizations and groups on campus. Whereas in the larger society, African American students can still be observed eating at separate tables in many public schools, many African Americans not only attend separate Sunday worship services, but often, they attend a "black church" and many social organizations are still membered by particular races. Although this study is concerned with college students and social alienation, the reflective nature of the college campus regarding the larger American society suggests that the results may be applicable to a larger population.

Statement of the Problem

The Kerner report issued in 1972, stated that this nation was moving toward two unequal societies, one Black, one White. Ten years later a major investigation confirmed the accuracy of the report. Robert Blauner (1972), in his book **Racial Oppression in America**, stated

> Despite the Kerner Report, it is still difficult for most whites to accept the unpleasant fact that America remains a racist society. Such an awareness is further obscured by the fact that more sophisticated, subtle, and indirect forms, which might better be termed social alienation, tend to replace the traditional, open forms that were most highly elaborated in the Old South. The centrality of racism is manifest in two key characteristics of our social structure. First, the division based upon color is the single most important split within the society, the body politic, and the national psyche. Second, various processes and practices of exclusion, rejection, and subjection based on color are built into the major public institutions, especially colleges and universities.

These reports indicated a potentially serious problem for African American college students seeking to matriculate at predominantly Caucasian universities. More information regarding the effects of social alienation is needed. In addition, characteristics of behaviors associated with social alienation need to be examined to investigate potential relationships between GPA, depression, dropout, and self-concept.

Purpose of This Study

The specific purpose of this study was to examine the perceived effects of social alienation on African American college students enrolled at a predominantly Caucasian southern university.

Other studies have suggested that African American students have been studied extensively. However, these studies have not assisted pupil personnel educators and counselors in understanding the African American's social alienation experience on predominantly Caucasian campuses. Many of these studies looked at African American students as merely victims of a system without considering the possibility that their African American heritage could work to their advantage when dealing with the problems they face in higher education. In many instances, African American students were blamed for their plights as though they were deficient individuals.

Support for Current Research

Social alienation plays a significant role in adjustment to college as evidenced in the research of Augustine Pounds (1987). Pounds found that victims of social alienation were less effective socially, had fewer friends, felt lonelier, and participated less in extra-curricular activities. They were less likely to be satisfied with dormitory life, less likely to live on campus, and less likely to pledge fraternities and sororities. They were also less likely to have personal contacts with others on campus or to become integrated into the social systems within the institution.

Further support for the idea that socially alienated minority students do not fare as well came in a project report in 1971 by the Southern Regional Education Board in Atlanta. The report stated: "Steps need to be taken by the university to make minority students feel accepted on campus, for success in academics is highly influenced by the quality of campus life."

Social estrangement has been defined as a feeling of loneliness, and social alienation as the lack of perception of fit within an environment that is in some ways alien. Social alienation experienced by African Americans at predominantly Caucasian institutions of learning is expressed and perceived by the quality of relationships between the African American and Caucasian population of students, teachers, counselors, advisors, and staff. A lack of diversity in the staff, social activities and academic organizations in predominantly Caucasian universities concerns all minority groups and produces special anxieties that can affect a student's ability to learn and succeed.

Another researcher, Charles Taylor (1986), conducting studies of African American college students on predominantly Caucasian university campuses believed that the majority of African American students who wished to be accepted by their white counterparts did not have a clear understanding of themselves. African Americans who supported the status quo of the Caucasian college were less socially alienated because they disallowed African American issues and concerns to surface. It seemed, however, that African American students who experienced alienation to a lesser degree were those who interacted more often and developed more intimate relationships with others within the academic environment. And still another researcher, Steward, Jackson, and Jackson (1990), reiterated this point when stated, "Those who experienced alienation are those who did not interact with other students or did not develop intimate relationships with others in the academic environment."

Steward et al.'s (1990) study found that African American students interacted differently on a predominantly Caucasian campus than on an all African American campus. Successful African American students tended to express and want to be included more so when in an all Caucasian American campus

situation than when in an all African American campus situation. They also tended to express and want affection more so when in an all-Caucasian American situation than in an all African American environment (Steward et al., 1990). The study also showed that "successful African American students" that "fit in" academically, remained "alien" interpersonally (Steward et al., 1990).

This behavior suggested that Reginald Butler's *Implications of African American Consciousness Process Model* (Butler, 1970) can be viewed as accurate. Butler's model suggests that African Americans go through four stages of cultural identities. According to this model, African Americans experienced more social alienation as they moved closer to stage four. Those African Americans who are on stage one, pre-encounter, experience very little social alienation because of attitude and acceptance of Caucasian values. This behavior would be similar to that of house niggers and Uncle Tom's from 1661 to 1960s. Today, however, they would be classified as "pre-encounter."

The four stages of behavior for *Minority Group Cultural Development* are identified below:

1.   Pre-encounter Stage

- o   Attitudes toward the world and self are determined by oppressor's logic.
- o   One has dislike for one's own group, emulates oppressor groups.
- o   One accepts stereotypes of one's own group.
- o   One believes that assimilation is the most effective method for problem solving.

2.   Encounter Stage

- o   Obsessive search for own group history, identity begins.
- o   Reinterprets all events from one's own group perspective.
- o   Experiences deeply the trauma of oppression.

3.   Immersion Stage

- o   Participates in political action, rap-groups, seminars, awareness groups, etc.
- o   Undergoes a liberation from the oppressor's values, stereotypes.
- o   Behaves as though the oppressor is not human.
- o   Confronts the system.
- o   Person feels an overwhelming attachment to her/his own group, gradually both the strengths and weaknesses of oppressor group and own group become visible.

4.   Internalization Stage

- o   The person behaves as if she/he has inner security.
- o   The person has compassion for all oppressed people and can transfer a values orientation to include all "isms," differences.
- o   The person demonstrates commitment, active participation in making social change.

Burbach and Thompson's (1973) research showed African Americans to be more socially alienated than Caucasians in the powerlessness and normlessness sense. Their research suggested that African Americans experienced a greater sense of purposelessness (the loss of socialized values and the absence of values that might give purpose to life) and more of a feeling of being confronted with contradictory normative patterns than their Caucasian counterparts.

Steward et al. (1990) found that the environment on many campuses in the late 1980s made African American students feel like "strangers in a strange land." The results of his study of successful African American students suggested that even those students who fit in academically remained "alien"

interpersonally (Steward et al., 1990). It seemed to him that African American students on predominantly Caucasian campuses acknowledged the value of remaining a "stranger" or socially isolating themselves to protect themselves from events that were perceived to contribute to their academic demise. African American college students who remained a "stranger," or socially and politically disconnected from their African American agenda, often were able to graduate and be academically successful.

In his empirical assessment, Burbach (1973) related alienation to learning, socioeconomic status, and so forth. A review of 24 studies indicated that there are 14 different measures of alienation. Although there is no consensus on the measurement of alienation, there is evidence to strongly support its existence. Burbach (1973) took the relationship further. In his study to determine if alienation was a factor in determining which college students persisted, it was revealed that there were no significant differences between persisters and nonpersisters across racial groups on the *Dean Alienation Scales*. This scale is a measurement of noted feelings of alienation to society as a whole.

Current Research

This was a descriptive-correlation research study designed to identify and describe the relationship between African American students and their levels of social alienation and how those feeling of alienation effected their college performance. It was also designed to describe the nature and strength of those relationships.

Sampling

The researcher contacted 800 African American students by various means: telephone, newsletter, through fraternities, sororities, churches, by conversations, and through football and basketball players. One hundred of the original 800 students contacted agreed to participate. The sample of 100 consisted of male and female college students enrolled in various majors at a mid-size, predominantly Caucasian American university in the southeast.

Instrument Description

The study of social alienation on African American college students enrolled at a predominantly Caucasian American southern university employed four survey instruments. These research instruments included: the University Alienation Scale (UAS); the PRIDE Scale (An adaptation of the University Alienation Scale); the Attitude Towards Standardized Tests Questionnaire; and the Beck Depression Inventory Scale (BDI).

The University Alienation Scale (UAS)

The University Alienation Scale (UAS) was developed by Burbach (1972). The purpose of the scale in this study was to provide an exemplary multiple-item contextual measure of alienation. The scale allowed for conceptual complexity within a reduced context. The goal was the development of a reliable and valid scale to measure those components of social alienation in college students with reference to their university. In all, nine powerlessness, eight meaninglessness, and seven social estrangement items were formulated and randomly assigned a position in the scale. The response categories consisted of five Likert-type scale statements on which subjects were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement. PRIDE Part II is based in part on the University Alienation Scale.

The PRIDE Scale

The PRIDE principles evolved from Dr. Maulana Karenga's book **Kwanzaa: An African American Holiday Celebration of Family, Community, Education and Culture**. The book is a collection of seven values and/or principles defining a higher source of spiritual recognition to benefit mankind.

The PRIDE Scale is a self-report scale designed to measure levels of self-worth and self-esteem, powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation specifically named for African Americans by examining cultural identities, values and practices. It is an adaptation of the University Alienation Scale (UAS). Fifty questions were grouped under the five principles of the PRIDE scale. These principles are Pride, Respect, Integrity, Determination and Enthusiasm.

The acronym PRIDE was chosen because it forms a perfect summary of nguzo sabo without minimizing its meaning (See Table 1). Additionally, 17 open-ended questions pertaining to factors that could influence students' success, pride, respect, integrity, determination, and enthusiasm were formulated. Subjects were instructed to explain their feelings regarding the open-ended questions. The responses from these questions were used to provide

Table 1

The Summary of Nguzo Sabo Formed with the Acronym PRIDE

NGUZO SABA (The Seven Principles)	PRIDE (5 cultural values)
Umoja = Unity–to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race	P = perseverance, purpose, proactive
Kujichagulia = Self-determination to define ourselves and speak for ourselves, instead of being defined, named, created, and being spoken for by others.	R = respect
Ujima = Collective work and responsibility–to build and maintain our community together and make our sisters' and brothers' problems our problems, and solve them together.	I = Integrity
Ujamaa = Cooperative economics.	D = determination, discipline
Nia = Purpose–to make our collective vocation the building and developing to our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.	
Kuumba = Creativity–to do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.	E = Enthusiasm
Imani = Faith–to believe with all our hearts in our people, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.	

qualitative data in an effort to gain a broader perspective on social alienation of African American college students.

The PRIDE Scale consisted of two parts. PRIDE Part I consisted of six sections (I-VI). Section I has five subsets (A-E) that requested demographic information on the subject (classification, major, date of birth, location, gender). Subsection B requested information regarding the level of education completed by the mother or female guardian. Subsection C requested the occupation of the mother or female guardian. Subsection D requested the level of education completed by the father or male guardian, and Subsection E requested the occupation of the father or male guardian.

PRIDE Part I, Section II contained nine items intended to collect high school information, data on past relationships with school counselors, and data on other experiences prior to entering college. Open-ended and yes/no questions were utilized in this section. PRIDE Part I, Section III contained five open-ended questions for the purpose of investigating how the PRIDE factors (Pride, Respect, Integrity, Determination, Enthusiasm) influenced the success of each student. PRIDE Part I, Section IV contained two open-ended questions regarding goals and aspirations. PRIDE Part I, Section V contained three open-ended questions, one seeking comments on ways to improve the success rate of African American students, and two requesting information regarding family influence on educational pride and the desire to succeed. PRIDE Part I, Section VI consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions for the purpose of assessing students' educational experiences at the university. They also questioned whether the student would choose to attend the same university if he or she had an opportunity to make the choice again.

The PRIDE Scale Part II consisted of 50 questions: questions 1-10 refer to "pride," questions 11-20 refer to "respect," questions 21-30 refer to "integrity," questions 31-40 refer to "determination," and questions 41-50 refer to "enthusiasm."

A 5-point Likert-type Scale was used to score Part II of the PRIDE instrument. The following categories were used.

> 1 = Strongly Agree
>
> 2 = Agree
>
> 3 = Undecided
>
> 4 = Disagree
>
> 5 = Strongly Disagree

The scale was divided to measure feelings of perceived alienation as identified by Burbach (1972). These feelings were powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social alienation. A response of 1 or 2 would reflect a high difference to being socially alienated, while a 3, 4, or 5 would suggest low to no degree of perceived social alienation.

The instrumentation for this study was tested prior to administering it to the 100 college students. A pilot test of 30 African American college students was administered by utilizing all five instruments described above. The pilot test included detailed procedures, a full description of each instrument used and general instructions. The objectives of the pilot study were: (a) to resolve any problems, and (b) to answer the following questions:

1. Are there questions which students do not understand?

1. What questions do we need to ask in the real study?

1. What revisions are needed?

1. How long does the procedure take?

1. Are there typographical or spelling errors, misuse of terms, and/or any confusing statements which need to be corrected?

The pilot test allowed the researcher to eliminate questions that were not understood and substitute others that were recommended by students. Revisions were made, and typographical and spelling errors were corrected.

The researcher was interested in finding out of there was a correlation between participants' depression and their social alienation. If the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) did not find a correlation, social alienation could not be considered as a factor contributing to depression. The BDI was utilized to determine whether a relationship existed between the degree of depression experienced by African American students who felt socially alienated. Also, this depression score was compared to those students who did not feel socially alienated.

Data Analysis

All data were reviewed and analyzed with the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) computer program. Descriptive statistics were used initially to summarize and organize the data. Descriptive statistics were also used to describe the distribution and measure of central tendency for each variable in the study. Relationships among the variables were tested by using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r).

Summary of Findings

The survey results revealed that 25% of the population experienced a worsening in self-image and self-concept after attending the predominantly Caucasian university. It should be noted, however, that 39% showed improvement in this area. It is important for recruiters, human resource professionals, personnel counselors, and others working with this population to be aware of these problems for prevention and resolution.

The survey results also revealed that 61% of the population surveyed were not prepared socially or academically for the college experience by their high school teachers. It will be important for academic counselors and the deans of students to recognize this void and to set up special assistance and programs to minimize adjustment problems.

The open-ended questions from PRIDE Part I indicated a general consensus from all subjects: strong feelings of being socially alienated; a sense of social isolation, meaninglessness, powerlessness, and disenfranchisement. However, the African American coping skills and inner strength which produced a strong sense of PRIDE and confidence also proved to be necessary survival skills.

The PRIDE Part II score was significantly related to "Choose This School Again" ($r = -.32$, $p < .004$). Students obtaining higher PRIDE Part II scores were more likely to report that, knowing what they know now, they would still choose to attend the same university. That is, the more pride and confidence exhibited by the African American student, the more likely they were to choose to return. It will be important for African American colleges to recognize that quality service endowments, availability of funds and scholarship, and great facilities, could be necessary to attract and retain African American students with high PRIDE, strong self-concepts and confidence.

Beck Depression

The PRIDE Part II score was significantly related to the total score on the Beck Depression Inventory ($r = .30$, $p < .02$). Students who obtained higher scores on the PRIDE Part II obtained lower scores on the Beck Depression Inventory. A low level of depression was correlated to a low level of social alienation.

Student Gender

The PRIDE Part II score was significantly related to Student Gender ($r[82] = .25$, $p < .03$). Female students tended to obtain higher scores on the PRIDE Part II. Female students experienced a lesser degree of social alienation.

Self-Image

The PRIDE Part II score was significantly related to change in self-image ($r[7859] = .31$, $p < .005$). Students who obtained higher scores on the PRIDE Part II tended to report an improvement in self-image after attending the predominantly Caucasian institution. Self-image apparently improves among students with low levels of social alienation after enrollment.

Summary of Open-ended Questions

The general consensus to the open-ended questions was that pride was the general component that reminded each individual of who he/she is, where he/she came from, and of various significant experiences. All of these factors are important because often at a predominantly Caucasian American institution, individuals tend to forget the importance of his/her personal African American heritage. Therefore, pride appears to be the essential bridge that joins a predominantly Caucasian American institution and African heritage; creating a unique individual capable of succeeding academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.

Levels of GPA

Most of those sampled believed that because of obstacles, such as discrimination, racial competency and racial subordination, and so forth, they have to work harder to earn a "good" GPA. Overall, the grade point averages of African Americans suffer simply because they have to deal with those other burdens in addition to scholastic achievement. Also, upon entrance to the university, the educational levels of many African Americans fall below Caucasian Americans because of different backgrounds such as traditions, educational levels and socioeconomic status.

Levels of SAT

In response to the open-ended question about SAT scores and African American students, the majority believed that they were at an extreme disadvantage simply because standardized tests such as the SAT were geared toward Caucasians. Because of the importance of SAT scores in college placement, Caucasian Americans were better prepared and consequently were placed in higher, more comfortable positions. Some of the responses included:

> 1.   Many SAT questions use words that African Americans have not heard, such as sofa instead of couch.

> 2.   Many African American families do not represent the traditional family and many questions on the SAT are centered around the Caucasian American, traditional family.

> 3.   Caucasian Americans are not taught to be Black, but African Americans are forced into Caucasian American experiences in many questions on the SAT.

What is the Relationship of the PRIDE Score to . . . GPA Scores

In response to the open-ended question of whether the PRIDE score is related to GPA success, the majority tended to disagree that pride is a result of GPA or academic success. Basically, GPA success (in reference to pride) is the result of PRIDE. Because of faith, individual pride, motivation, and family support, African Americans at predominantly Caucasian American institutions have acquired high pride levels. Examples of significant responses include:

1.   Although I am at a predominantly Caucasian institution, my pride and my heritage help me be successful.

2.   Pride helps me to strive hard and do my best.

3.   Pride motivates me not to be outdone by a "white man."

Family Background and Perception of Standardized Tests

The general consensus of the students sampled was that because of rich family backgrounds strong in religion and hard work, pride levels vary. Responses included:

1.   My family pride makes me push harder.

2.   I am the first in my family to go to college and that's pride within itself.

3.   Because my family depends on me, I swallow and continue. Standardized tests were viewed as being geared toward Caucasians.

The majority held this view:

1.   Test used words Blacks have not heard.

2.   Most situations were geared toward Caucasians.

Degree of Depression

Most of the African American students were not depressed. This lack of depression may be attributed to the great level of individualized inner strength and pride these students have acquired over the years. Hence, depression did not appear to be an important factor for the students.

Discussion and Conclusions

This research, along with prior studies, points out that African American students are still experiencing social alienation on predominately Caucasian American college campuses. These stressful academic experiences and strained social relationships can be devastating, resulting in feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, segregation, and exclusion. Poor academic performance and dropout, jail and prison terms, and early death occur as well.

What experiences have contributed to feelings of social alienation?

1.   Not being *racially* prepared for standardized tests.

1.   Falling into a lower socioeconomic status.

1. Large, demanding classes which leave little room for personal needs.

1. The inability of the university to address the needs of African Americans.

1. Lack of the university becoming an integral part of the socializing process.

1. Lack of respect from the faculty for African American students.

1. Lack of respect of peers at the university.

1. Lack of determination of some African American students.

1. Administrative control of African American students.

So what can be done to help with feelings of social-alienation, powerlessness and meaninglessness in the African American population? Dr. James and others believe that the solution lies in training and educating African Americans on the concepts set forth in the PRIDE scale. Recall those concepts were pride, respect-for self and others, integrity, determination, and enthusiasm. To aid in this teaching and training, Dr. James and others established Operation PRIDE. Operation PRIDE's focus is prevention and intervention (teaching and activities), rather than treatment.

Operation PRIDE

Any productive life and people must have a deep appreciation and understanding of their cultural identities, values, and practices. By representing a cultural legacy of African thought, the aim of Operation PRIDE is to provide classes and workshops designed to train and educate African American males about PRIDE. If practiced and nurtured properly, the concepts of PRIDE could restore the strength and power needed to not only survive and thrive, but also to be proactive, overcome, go forward, and to continue to be successful.

Limitations of the Study

The study was descriptive and correlative in nature. The study included African American college students enrolled at a predominantly Caucasian southern educational institution. The results of the study were limited to that population and should not be generalized beyond it. Further, the sample size was small and future research should attempt to survey larger groups of students.

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As the child of two immigrants who fostered learning and saw school as the key to the future, I was positioned for academic success at an early age. However, the work I put in didn't change the fact that I was a black student placed in a northern Virginia public school. So during my academic career, I became the "good statistic": the outlier on the chart that only further isolated me. I have never become more aware of my differences than when I moved in middle school. affects college students. Thirty-five percent of the participants were undergraduates and. 65% were graduate students, studying at Johnson & Wales University. Thirty-one percent. of participants have full-time jobs, 30% have part-time jobs and 39% do not have jobs. Thanks to the invention of social media, young men and women now exchange ideas, feelings, personal information, pictures and videos at a truly astonishing rate. Seventy-three percent of wired American teens now use social media websites (Oberst, 2010). Schill (2011) states that the social media sites encourage negative behaviors for teen students such as procrastination (catching up with friends), and they are more likely to drink and drug. The perceived effects of social alienation on Black college students enrolled at a Caucasian southern university. College Student Journal, 32(2), 228-239. Johnson, G. M. (2005). Student Alienation, Academic Achievement, and Web CT Use. Social alienation, self-efficacy, and career goals as related to the academic performance of college sophomores. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Marywood, USA. Martin, A. J., Marsh, H. W., Williamson, A. & Debus, R. L. (2003). Self-handicapping, defensive pessimism, and goal orientation: A qualitative study of university students. Journal of Educational Psychology, 95(3), 617-628. Mau, R. Y. (1992). The validity and devolution of concept: Student alienation. Adolescence, 27(107), 731-741.