

## Differences Between Black/African American and White College Students Regarding Influences on High School Completion, College Attendance, and Career Choice

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Compared with White persons, Black/African American persons in the United States continue to experience high rates of educational deficits and employment stagnation as well as lower college graduation rates. This study examined the influences on Black/African American and White college students' high school completion, college attendance, and career choice. Results indicate that future income and future status have a greater influence on the career choice of Black/African American college students than on the career choice of White college students. The authors discuss these findings and present implications for career development professionals.

A gap exists in the number of Black/African American and White students completing high school and college (Bauman & Graf, 2003; Stoops, 2004). According to the 2000 U.S. census, an estimated 14.3% of the Black/African American population 25 years and older has a baccalaureate degree, 42.5% has some college education, and 72.3% completed high school. In contrast, 26.1% of the White population 25 years and older has a baccalaureate degree, 54.1% has some college education, and 83.6% completed high school (Bauman & Graf, 2003). Additionally, the percentage of Black/African American persons and White persons in the resident population who have graduated from high school has remained unchanged within the last decade (Stoops, 2004).

Studies suggest that Black/African American students value the importance of earning high incomes and contributing to society (Hwang, Echols, & Vrongistinos, 2002; Hwang, Echols, Wood, & Vrongistinos, 2001; Lewis & Collins, 2001; Walpole, Bauer, Gibson, Kanyi, & Toliver, 2002). A study of Black/African American community college students by Teng, Morgan, and Anderson (2001) suggested that job security, a good starting income, autonomy, and an important position are more important to Black/African American students than to White students. The desire to serve others and the community is also a prominent theme

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in Black/African American culture. However, limited research exists that specifically investigates differences between Black/African American and White college students regarding the influence of future income, future status, and making a difference in society on high school completion, college attendance, and career choice. Additionally, Black/African American persons continue to experience high rates of educational deficits, employment stagnation, and poverty in the United States (Pope-Davis & Hargrove, 2001). We hope that investigating the influence of future income, future status, and making a difference in society will lead to implications beneficial in assisting Black/African American students in completing high school, attending college, and making a career choice.

## Method

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### Participants

A total of 155 Black/African American and White college students at a major metropolitan university in the southeastern United States contributed data to this study. Black/African American college students composed 56.8% ( $n = 88$ ) of the participants, and White college students represented 43.2% ( $n = 67$ ) of the participants. There were 99 women (63.9%) and 56 men (36.1%). Their ages ranged from 18 to 35 years, with a mean age of 20 years.

### Instrument

We designed a demographic questionnaire, a self-report measure that obtains demographic information from participants and information-related study variables. The questionnaire consisted of six demographic items and a table for participants to rate items that influence their decision to complete high school, attend college, and choose a career. Participants were asked to rate, on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *low influence*, 5 = *high influence*), the level of influence that future income, future status, and making a difference in society had on their decision to complete high school, their decision to attend college, and their career choice. However, participants were provided only the prompt and not an operational definition of these variables. This process yielded the nine variables of interest in this study (see Table 1). The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of this instrument was acceptable at .87.

### Procedure

This study used a purposive sampling design in order to provide inclusion of groups usually underrepresented (Barbour, 2001). Participants were recruited from seven 1000- and 2000-level general elective courses and from two organizations that represent Black/African American students. After signing an informed consent form, participants were given the demographic questionnaire to complete. Resulting data were inputted into SPSS 12.0 for Windows, and three analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to investigate differences between Black/African American and White college students in the level of influence that future income, future status, and making a difference in society had on their decision to complete high school, their decision to attend college, and their career choice.

TABLE 1

**Means and Standard Deviations for the Variables for the  
Black/African American and White Participants**

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i> Value
FI-CHS White college students	4.48	0.96	
FI-CHS Black/African American college students	4.50	1.02	0.02
FI-AC White college students	4.61	0.80	
FI-AC Black/African American college students	4.66	0.73	0.15
FI-CC White college students	3.74	1.12	
FI-CC Black/African American college students	4.26	1.10	8.32**
FS-CHS White college students	4.43	1.00	
FS-CHS Black/African American college students	4.41	0.96	0.02
FS-AC White college students	4.58	0.84	
FS-AC Black/African American college students	4.67	0.60	0.61
FS-CC White college students	3.95	1.16	
FS-CC Black/African American college students	4.38	0.92	6.42*
MD-CHS White college students	4.15	1.14	
MD-CHS Black/African American college students	4.30	1.03	0.73
MD-AC White college students	4.38	1.00	
MD-AC Black/African American college students	4.24	0.01	0.67
MD-CC White college students	4.42	0.84	
MD-CC Black/African American college students	4.15	1.17	2.62

Note. FI = future income; CHS = completing high school; AC = attending college; CC = career choice; FS = future status; MD = making a difference in society.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Results

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the variables for the Black/African American and White participants. The first ANOVA, which examined whether a difference exists between Black/African American and White college students in the level of influence that future income had on their decision to complete high school, their decision to attend college, and their career choice, indicated that there was a significant difference between Black/African American and White college students regarding the influence of future income on career choice,  $F(1, 151) = 8.32, p < .01$ . This finding suggests that future income has a greater influence on the career choice of Black/African American college students ( $M = 4.26$ ) than on the career choice of White college students ( $M = 3.74$ ). The second ANOVA, which investigated whether a difference exists between Black/African American and White college students in the level of influence that future status had on their decision to complete high school, their decision to attend college, and their career choice, found a significant difference between Black/African American and White college students regarding the influence of future income on career choice,  $F(1, 151) = 6.42, p < .05$ . This finding suggests that future status has a greater influence on the career choice of Black/African American college students ( $M = 4.38$ ) than on the career choice of White college students ( $M = 3.95$ ). Finally, the third ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference between Black/African American and White college students regarding the influence of making a difference in society on the decision to complete high school.

## Discussion and Implications for Career Development Professionals

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This study sought to investigate what differences exist between Black/African American and White college students regarding future income, future status, and making a difference in society as influences on high school completion, college attendance, and career choice. We identified two significant differences between Black/African American and White college students. Black/African American college students indicated that future income and future status had a greater influence on their career choice than on the career choice of their White counterparts. These findings are consistent with previous literature. Black/African American college students place a high value on income and financial independence (Hwang et al., 2002; Lewis & Collins, 2001; Teng et al., 2001; Walpole et al., 2002).

Although previous research (e.g., Lewis & Collins, 2001; Mack, Smith, & Norasing, 2003; Walpole et al., 2002) identified income and status as having a strong influence on Black/African American students' career goals, these studies only examined Black/African American students. Our study examined differences between Black/African American and White college students regarding influences (i.e., future income, future status, and making a difference in society) on high school completion, college attendance, and career choice. Results indicated that future income and future status have a greater influence on the career choice of Black/African American college students than on the career choice of White college students. However, future income and future status were not found to be more influential for Black/African American college students' decision to complete high school or attend college.

The findings of this study have implications on the theoretical approaches and assessments used with Black/African American students as well as on specific career counseling interventions and approaches to attract, assist, and retain Black/African American students in the career counseling process. Sharf's (2006) human capital theory is a theory that career development professionals could consider when working with Black/African American students. Human capital theory espouses that education and training are an investment toward future income (Sharf, 2006). This theory appears to fit well with individuals who are influenced by income and status in their career choice process. Results of the current study also suggest that the Minnesota Importance Questionnaire (MIQ; Rounds, Henly, Dawis, & Lofquist, 1981) would be of value in working with Black/African American students. The MIQ has a Comfort scale, which has a subscale for compensation, and a Status scale, which has subscales for advancement, recognition, authority, and social status. One intervention adapted from Sorapuru, Theodore, and Young (1972) involves clients considering their income and status 10 and 15 years in the future and then researching career choices to identify congruence. For high school students, this intervention can be modified to examine educational attainments needed to achieve desired occupation, income, and status.

Black/African American students present a special challenge to counselors because they are more likely to terminate counseling after one session

(Carter, Scales, Juby, Collins, & Wan, 2003). If, however, counselors address issues related to income and status, they may generate client "buy in" for career counseling services. Future research can evaluate the effectiveness of interventions that focus on income and status with Black/African American clients.

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