

Proactively Addressing the Shortage of African Americans in School Psychology
Daphne R. Chandler, B.A.
University of Wisconsin-Madison
NASP 2007 Convention - Poster Presentation

This study offers strategies for recruiting and retaining Black psychology students and professionals, as well as highlights cultural differences in situations of ethnic incongruence. Data were collected from students attending three Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs) and faculty of one of the respective psychology departments. The grounded theory constant comparative analysis approach was used to analyze and interpret the participants' responses. Benefits of utilizing this information include (a) addressing the underrepresentation of Black school psychologists, (b) gaining skills to enhance ethnic and educational diversity within school psychology in educational and professional settings as shared by psychology faculty and students from HBCUs; (c) improving the mental and behavioral health services provided to minority students; and (d) gaining skills to expand awareness of the field through effective recruitment strategies.

Method

A total of 44 Black students attending one of three HBCUs, and 3 Black faculty of one of the respective HBCUs participated in this study. Females comprised 88% (N=39) of the sample, and all three of the faculty were female. The classification composition of the students was 28% senior (N=12), 32% junior (N=14), 40% sophomore (N=18), and 0 freshman. For the 27 students who reported family income, a review of the Index of Social Position (Hollingshead, 1958) revealed that approximately 24% (N=10) of the students' family household were likely to be upper class or upper-middle class, 25% (N=11) middle class, and 15% (N=6) lower-middle or lower class. The students' home-state region breakdown was 16% (N=7) from the West, 14% (N=6) from the Midwest, 33% (N=15) from the South, and 37% (N=16) from the Northeast. All of the faculty were Ph.D. status, one of them a clinical psychologist. All of the faculty reported being from the southern region.

Instrumentation

Two separate 18-item measures created by the researcher, one designed for educators and one for students, were completed by the participants. Both instruments assessed (a) participants' feelings toward what school psychology training programs can do to successfully recruit and retain Black school psychology graduate students and professionals, (b) their feelings toward diversity in their professional and educational environments, and (c) their awareness of the school psychology field. Additionally, recruitment and retention "mistakes to avoid" were gathered. All but two of the items on both measures were open-ended questions, some requesting an explanation of respondents' answers.

Results

Emerging themes for both students and faculty include a desire and responsibility to uplift the Black community, the need for a community atmosphere, a connection between psychology fields and the Black community, and a need for early exposure and increased awareness.

Explanation of Coding:

Financial Support: A need for financial aid through scholarships, fellowships, and grants because many Black students are unable to afford college (i.e., "Many of us don't think twice about college because we have no way to pay for it.").

Uplift the Black Community: Prioritization of the needs of their ethnic community above their own personal needs and desires (i.e., “I would be uncomfortable being the vast minority, but I would do it to advance the Black community,” and “We want to do things that will serve our community.”).

Community Atmosphere: A need for acceptance and support of their ethnic cultures, a need for faculty-student and student-student connectedness, available support resources from funding to social-emotional support, and a need for a multicultural paradigm within the department culture and curriculum (i.e., “Faculty must accept and support Black students’ research ideas,” and “There should be a feeling of encouragement, we don’t like competitive or oppressive environments.”).

Field to Black Community Connection: There must be a discussion of how the field can uplift the Black community, Black cultures and perspectives should be interwoven throughout curriculum and class discussions, have faculty conducting minority-focused research, have professional networks relevant to the African American community, provide intra-racial mentorship, use Black-specific recruitment strategies, have a history of minority success (i.e., “When recruiting they should tell us how the field can help us and our community,” and “They should have Black faculty, or at the least faculty who are sensitive to Black issues.”)

Early Intervention & Increased Awareness: Early exposure of various fields to students, inform them of income potential and other benefits attached to degree, demonstrate that psychology degrees are viable for them, dispel negative stigmas of psychology and mental illness, inform of disproportionality in schools and professions, and build bridges with predominately Black high schools and colleges to actively recruit by having programs encouraging continued education, assisting with application process, prepping for the ACT/SAT & GRE, and having more psychology courses in high school (i.e., “They should emphasize the need for Blacks in the field because we don’t know about it.”).

Table 1. Recruitment dos and don’ts listed in order of greatest endorsement.

Effective Recruiting Strategies	Ineffective Recruiting Strategies
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offer financial support 2. Increase awareness of psychology fields, career benefits, and viability 2. Use Black-focused recruitment strategies 3. Connect psychology fields and degrees to the Black community 4. Begin recruiting early through collaborations with high schools and colleges (e.g., career days, speaking at special events) 5. Be accessible to students and institutions 6. <u>*Increased preparatory and recruitment strategies for graduate candidates</u> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offering insufficient financial aid 2. Unicultural paradigm and practices unwelcoming to ethnic minority cultures <u>*Particularly important for graduate programs</u> 3. Typecasting and discriminating 4. Non-Black focused recruitment strategies 5. Program diversity misrepresentation

Figure 1. Contributing factors of successful Black recruitment.

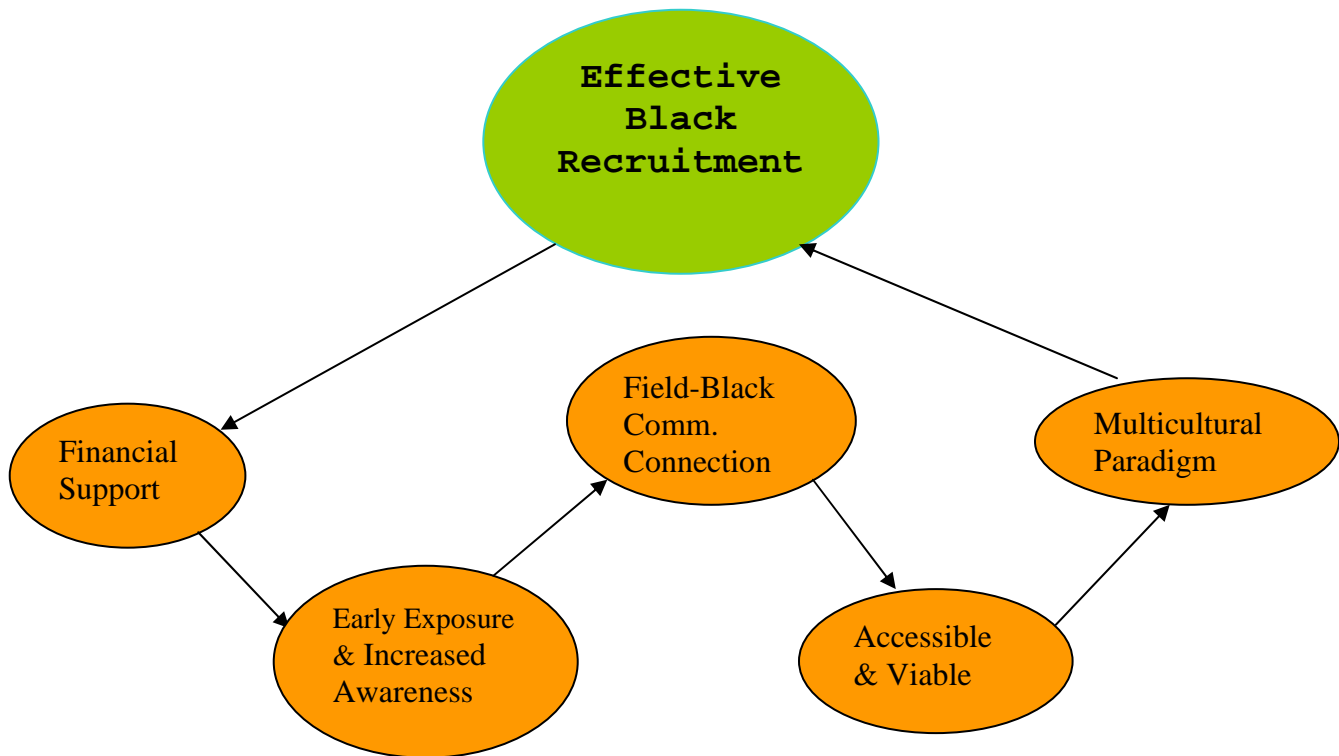


Table 2. Retention strategies listed in order of greatest endorsement.

Effective Retention Strategies
1. Relieve financial distress
2. Increase Blacks' awareness of the multitude of psychology careers and benefits
3. Demonstrate viability of higher education psychology degrees
4. Connect psychology fields to the Black community
5. Implement preparatory programs
6. Establish community atmosphere
7. Provide diverse professional networks and intra racial mentorship
8. Actively recruit from various predominately Black institutions (e.g., orgs. and schools)
9. Build bridges with high schools and colleges
10. <u>*Increased nurturing/intense faculty support, mentoring of career development, increased coping strategies, and more pronounced multicultural paradigm at graduate level</u>

Conclusion

The presented information should be viewed as important contributions to the field and society; however, continued research and intervention beyond the scope of this study is necessary. Further research on the recruitment and retention of African Americans should include (a) more African American male insight, (b) African American participation from predominately White institutions and other non-predominately African American institutions, and (c) further inquiring of African American faculty to advance the literature. Finally, faculty, researchers, practitioners, and students are encouraged to consider the effects of a lack of ethnic diversity on ethnic minority and majority students and clients, and to continue to address the issue. **For further information about this study contact Daphne Chandler at dchandler@wisc.edu.**