

Public Abstract

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Black undergraduates have the lowest persistence and lowest college graduation rates compared to other racial and ethnic groups at colleges and universities (Fleming, 2012). Using narrative inquiry methodology, the purpose of this study was to explore the influences of race critical incidents on Black undergraduate student college persistence at Predominantly White Institutions. Persistence can be understood as the combination of three motivating factors - family support (encouragement) plus Black Identity Development (awareness, knowledge, appreciation of racial histories and identity) plus Race Critical Incidents (resistance to racism and call to action). In essence, the very construct (racism and race critical incidents) explored in this study is also one of the major findings as an influence in persistence.

The effect of Racial Battle Fatigue among students who persist cannot be ignored and the construct that elicits it – racism and race critical incidents - must be addressed and eradicated. Green (2016) asks whether it is appropriate for colleges to ask historically marginalized students to exercise more grit and persistence efforts or whether efforts should focus instead on institutional changes that promote greater racial justice so that Black students do not have to compromise their well-being by being resilient. Higher education institutions must step up.