

African American males graduate from college at lower rates than their African American female and White male classmates. This qualitative study explored the strategies that a subset of that population, African American gay and bisexual men, used to successfully persist at a predominately White educational institution (PWI) in the face of racism, heterosexism and homophobia. The results suggest that the reasons these students initially chose to attend the PWI were important to their decision to remain enrolled until their graduation. The environmental characteristics of the institution were also important since the PWI served as the backdrop for many of these students to develop their identity as gay or bisexual men. The data also suggest that discrimination and other factors made persistence more difficult for the men.

Despite those challenges, these students possessed a number of attitudinal characteristics such as an approach orientation to coping, self-efficacy, being goal orientated, and perceiving few challenges that were key to their persistence. These students were able to obtain social and instrumental support from peers and sources on and off-campus that helped them navigate the PWI and subsequently persist until graduation. Implications for mental health and student affairs professionals are discussed.