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The Same . . . But Different: Examining Background Characteristics among Black Males in Public Two-Year Colleges

J. Luke Wood  
San Diego State University

This study examined background characteristics among Black males in public two-year and four-year institutions. This study sought to uncover whether significant differences existed among this sub-group by institutional type. Data were derived from 533 Black male students participating in the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study. The analysis was conducted using two stages of logit analysis. In the first stage, individual logistic regressions were conducted with eighteen variables. In the second stage, significant variables from the first stage were analyzed using appropriate controls. Findings from this study illustrated that Black males at two year colleges are markedly different from those attending four year institutions. Even when statistical controls were set in place, findings illustrated that while Black males share the same racial/ethnic and gender identity there are numerous distinctions between institutional types on background variables. Implications for future research are delineated.

Keywords: African American males, two-year colleges, four-year colleges, logistic regression

The vast majority of literature on African American males in higher education portrays their experience as monolithic. This homogenous depiction of Black male collegians fails to acknowledge their distinct backgrounds, social interactions, cultural variations, and affiliations. While Black males share commonalities with respect to racial/ethnic and gender affiliation, less is known about how they differ (Harper & Nichols, 2008). Delving into the intricacies of the African American experience in education is part of a growing movement in scholarly literature which rejects their monolithic treatment by scholars and practitioners alike and suggests that understanding their differences is foundational to enhancing their status in postsecondary education (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2004, 2005, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011). Differences between student sub-groups, including Black males, should not be trivialized, as they suggest the need for strategic planning, programming, activities, and policies which address the unique needs of students (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). With this in mind, this article presents a study that explicates differences between Black males by institutional type.

STUDY PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The purpose of this study was to examine background characteristics among Black males in public two-year and four-year institutions. Specifically, this study sought to uncover whether significant differences existed among this sub-group by institutional type. Consequentially, the primary research question guiding this study was: Are there differences in background characteristics between Black males in public two-year colleges and those in four-year colleges? The null hypothesis employed in this study assumed that no significant differences would be detectable between these two groups; while the alternative hypothesis was that significant differences would indeed exist. This study conceptualized background characteristics as defined by Nevarez and Wood (2010) to “include characteristics associated with students’ personal, social, and economic status, previous academic performance, as well as their parental socioeconomic status and level of education among other variables” (p. 87). This definition is
also similar to Bean and Metzner’s (1985) description of background and defining variables, inclusive of pre-collegiate factors that directly and indirectly impact college (e.g., high school performance, collegiate expectations, age).

A study of this nature lends support for information needed to better understand student success. While students’ background factors cannot be viewed in a fatalist fashion as predetermining their success in college, students with certain characteristics are certainly less likely than others to be retained, graduate, or transfer (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). For example, studies have identified factors including, but not limited to, minority status, older students, male collegians, and students with low-high school grade point averages (GPAs) as being at risk of attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Feldman, 1993; Mason, 1998; Voorhees, 1987; Wassmer, Moore & Shulock, 2004). This perception is not new to scholars; the overwhelming majority of foundational attrition models use background variables as logical, and often accurate, predictors of future success (Bean, 1980; Bennett & Bean, 1984; Carroll, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Furthermore, research specific to Black males in community colleges also illustrates the importance of background variables in relationship to student success (Dorsey, 1996; Freeman, 2003; Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001-2002; Hampton 2002; Mason, 1994, 1998; Mosby, 2009; Perrakis, 2008; Rideaux, 2004; Riley, 2007; Stevens, 2006). Therefore, it is the researcher’s intent that the information from this study can be used to better understand and serve Black males in postsecondary education. In particular, this article is concerned with two-year college students. There has been a dearth of studies conducted on this population, especially in relationship to scholarly literature on Black males in four-year colleges and universities (Wood 2010). More research is needed to aid efforts supporting the success of Black male students, and other minority males, in the community college (Dabney-Smith, 2009).

One example of these efforts is minority male initiatives (MMIs). MMIs serve as a point of contact among scholars and practitioners in the development and implementation of preventative and intervening actions (e.g., programs, policies, conferences) designed to enhance the success of minority males, especially Black and Hispanic/Latino males, in postsecondary institutions (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). However, given that relatively limited research has been conducted on Black males in two-year colleges (Wood & Turner, 2011), little scholarship exists in which these initiatives can draw upon. Given the limited literature, the researcher’s experiential knowledge as a former member of a MMI indicates that use of theories, models, and research from Black males, and other minority males, collegians in four-year institutions is used to guide efforts. Additionally, Wood (2010) conducted a meta-synthesis of literature on Black males in the community college. This synthesis illustrates that the overwhelming majority of research on this population employs frameworks specific to four-year collegians. This approach presupposes that the four-year literature is relevant to this population. However, findings from Flowers (2006) suggest that one should be cautious in assuming the uniformity of their experiences. His research is detailed in the next section.

**Black Males in Public Two-Year Colleges**

Very little is known about the similarities and differences among Black males in two- and four-year institutions. To date, Flowers (2006) has conducted the only study that explicitly examined variance among this sub-group. Using *Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study* from 1998 data (BPS: 96/98), Flowers examined the effects of attending public two-year and four-year colleges on Black males’ social and academic integration as well as differences among background demographics. In his initial analysis of background data, his study did not find significant differences among age, income, high school GPA, or college entrance scores. However, his findings did indicate that Black males at four-year institutions had significantly higher educational aspirations than their two-year college counterparts.
Flowers compiled relevant questions posed in the BPS: 96/98 into two constructs in order to examine academic and social integration differences. His findings illustrated that Black males at four-year institutions were more likely to

- participate in study groups;
- communicate out-of-class with faculty members about academic issues;
- discuss academic plans with advisors;
- participate in school clubs;
- participate in musical and fine arts activities;
- intramural sports, sanctioned sports; and
- engage in entertainment activities with friends (e.g., concerts, movies, events).

In all, this research demonstrated that the social and academic integration of Black males in public two- and four-year institutions were significantly different. Flowers’ work lends important information in understanding differences among Black males.

The public two-year college serves as a primary pathway into postsecondary education for African American students (Lewis & Middleton, 2003). Black undergraduate students are dispersed throughout postsecondary education as follows: public 4-year (24.1 percent); private not-for profit 4-year (10.9 percent); public 2-year (41.3 percent); private for-profit (15.9 percent); other institutions or attending more than one type (7.7 percent). The large representation of African American males in public two-year institutions mirrors that of Blacks as a whole. Among this sub-group, 44.2 percent attending public 2-year colleges, with the remainder attending public 4-year institutions (26.0 percent), private not-for-profit colleges (10.9 percent), for-profit universities (12.0 percent), and other institutions (6.9 percent; U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Although public two-year institutions enroll high proportions of Black males, their lack of success within these institutions has and continues to be concerning (Bush, 2004; Offutt, 1971). Black males are overrepresented in remedial education and among drop-outs and are underrepresented among students attaining certificates or degrees and transferring to four-year institutions (Bush, Bush & Wilcoxson, 2009; Freeman & Huggans, 2009; Glenn, 2003-2004; Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001-2002; Mason, 1998; Perrakis, 2008; Pope, 2006; Toldson, Braithwaite & Rentie, 2009; Toldson, Fry Brown & Sutton, 2009; Toldson & Lemmons, 2011; Wood, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011). For example, more than 41.5 percent of Black males in public two-year institutions have GPAs lower than 2.50. This percentage is higher than that of White males (30.5 percent), Hispanic/Latino males (39.0 percent), Asian males (30.2 percent), American Indian/Alaskan Native males (32.8 percent), other males (27.0 percent), and males that indicate more than one race (33.5 percent). The only male group having a higher proportion of male students below a 2.50 GPA is Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders (46.3 percent; U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Some research has been conducted that links background variables to student success among Black males in two-year colleges. While age was not found to have a relationship to student success by Mason (1994, 1998), the work of Hagedorn and colleagues (2001-2002); and Hampton (2002) indicated that younger students were more likely to persist than older students. Parent’s education was identified as a variable that impact students’ success. Freeman (2003) found that ‘some education’ by students’ mothers was a negative factor to student success. Freeman noted that ‘some education’ meant that students’ mothers had not completed college and that this influence seemed to have a negative impact on Black males’ college completion. Family support was identified by both Mosby (2009) and Stevens (2006) as an important factor for student success. Stevens found that Black males who were supported by families, specifically mothers, received support from these families that aided in their success.

Although high school GPA was not found by Mason (1994,1998) to be relevant to student success, it was found to have a positive relationship on retention by Hagedorn and colleagues (2001-2002), Hampton (2002), Perrakis (2008), Rideaux (2004), and Riley (2007). Several
authors have discussed the relationship between prior academic preparation and collegiate success (Bates, 2007; Dabney-Smith, 2009; Leach, 2001; Stevens, 2006). These authors noted that insufficient high school preparation, particularly in mathematics coursework, leads to low success in collegiate-level classes (Bates, 2007; Miller, 2006). Having educational goals was identified by Mason (1994, 1998) as a positive variable to student success. In essence, students who had goals were more likely to achieve academically than students who had no goals or had goals that were transitory in nature. Similar findings were identified by Dorsey (1996), Freeman (2003), Mosby (2009), Perrakis (2008), and Riley (2007). Lack of financial support was also addressed in the literature as affecting student success. Several scholars have noted that Black male students’ low personal and family incomes served as a significant barrier to success in two-year colleges (Hampton, 2002; Mosby, 2009). Given the findings overviewed, it is clear that background factors serve as strong determinants of student success. With this in mind, the following discussion details the methodology employed in this research of background differences among Black males by institutional type.

**METHODS**

**Data Source**

This study draws on data from the *Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, 2004/2006* (referred to as BPS). BPS is a national dataset designed for the examination of issues facing collegians in postsecondary education. In particular, the study was developed to investigate factors relevant to student enrollment, persistence, transfer, and attainment. BPS surveys a cohort of students beginning postsecondary education during the initial survey year (2003-2004). BPS had three collections, one in students first year of college, three years after entering postsecondary education (2006), and six years after beginning college (2009). BPS was collected in three phases. During phase one, participants completed a self-administered interview by Internet or telephone. In phase two, participants were contacted to complete the survey through computer-assisted telephone interviewing. In phase three, referred to as ‘the non-response conversion phase,’ participants complete the survey through computer-assisted software or were interviewed in person. In this phase, participants were provided an additional monetary incentive (Wine, Cominole, & Caves, 2009; Wine, Cominole, Wheeless et al., 2006). As a result of this three-stage process, 18,640 of the initial 23,090 identified for the sample were located and included in the survey (Cominole et al., 2007).

Data from this research are primarily based on the BPS survey conducted during the initial survey phase. This is a result of the nature of this study’s focus which is on pre-collegiate background variables as opposed to the actual collegiate experience of students. This research is based on response data from 533 Black males included in the BPS: 04/06. These respondents were beginning their college careers during the initial collection year in 2004. Given the sampling procedures, weights, and collection region of BPS data, findings from this student population can be generalized (Cominole et al., 2007). In this case, data analyzed and presented will represent background differences among Black males in public two- and four-year institutions.

**Variables**

The dependent variable employed in this study was institutional type. This variable was categorical and dichotomous, coded ‘0’ for public four-year colleges and universities and coded ‘1’ to represent public two-year colleges. As such, this study purposely delimited the population examined to public institutions; therefore data representative of private for-profit and private not-for-profit institutions were not examined in the analyses. Three control variables were employed in this study: (a) age, (b) income percentile for all students, and (c) high school GPA. Age was a continuous variable representing the age of the respondents during the year of their first enrollment in postsecondary education. Respondents’ ages were recorded as of December.
13, 2003. Among the total sample, the age breakdown was less than 18 years (1.8 percent), 18 to 24 years (78.1 percent), 25 to 30 years (9.5 percent), and 31 or older (10.6 percent). Income percentile for all students was also a continuous variable, this variable represented an income percentile rank calculated separately for independents and dependents and then combined into one variable. Since this percentile score was a combination of both scores, exploratory data analysis examined income percentile rank for dependent students and independent students. This analysis showed that 45.4 percent of dependent respondents were in the lowest 25th income percentile, 42.8 percent in the middle 50th percentile, and 11.8 percent in the highest 25th income percentile. Independent students had a differing distribution, with 31.1 percent being the lowest 25th percentile, 47.3 in the middle 50th percentile, and 21.6 in the highest 25th percentile. High school GPA was a categorical variable, reflective of self-reported high school GPAs from standardized test questionnaires. Thirty-one percent of respondents had a GPA of below 2.5, while 23.7 percent earned between a 2.5 to 2.9. The remaining students (44.7 percent) earned a 3.0 or higher GPA during high school. A number of covariates were examined in this study. These covariates are described as

- Family size—a continuous variable, representing the students’ total family size for both dependent (based on parent’s family) and independent students.
- Has dependents—a categorical variable, reflective of whether or not student has dependents. BPS assumes that students do not have dependents.
- Marital status—a categorical variable, indicates whether the student was single, divorced, widowed, married, or separated. Separated was excluded from this analysis.
- Dependency status—a categorical variable, represents whether the student is dependent or independent. Participants of 24 years of age or more are independent.
- First generation—a categorical variable, derived from TRIO program eligibility criteria. First generation is reflective of whether student is from a family where neither parent possesses a bachelor’s degree or above.
- Parent’s highest level of education—a categorical variable, reflective of the highest degree that either parent has obtained.
- Earned credit for courses in college during high school—a categorical variable, indicating whether the student enrolled in and successfully completed a course at a college or university while he was still a high school student.
- Highest level of education ever expected—a categorical variable, indicating the highest degree a student anticipates earning up to the doctoral and professional degree levels.
- Type of high school—a categorical variable, reflecting whether a student attended a public or private high school.
- Delayed enrollment—a continuous variable, indicates the total number of years between students’ high school graduation and their first years as a student enrolled in postsecondary education.
- Years of foreign language—a categorical variable, reflecting the total number of years (in full and half years) that high school students completed or planned on taking foreign language coursework as self-reported on standardized test questionnaires.
- Years of English—a categorical variable, reflecting the total number of years (in full and half years) that high school students completed or planned on taking English courses as self-reported on standardized test questionnaires.
- Years of mathematics—a categorical variable, reflecting the total number of years (in full and half years) that high school students completed or planned on taking mathematics courses as self-reported on standardized test questionnaires.
- Years of science—a categorical variable, reflecting the total number of years (in full and half years) that high school students completed or planned on taking science courses as self-reported on standardized test questionnaires.
- Years of social studies—a categorical variable, reflecting the total number of years (in full and half years) that high school students completed or planned on taking social studies courses as self-reported on standardized test questionnaires.

See Table 1 for coding schema for control and covariate variables.

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Table 1

Coding Schema

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Coding/Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>15–88 (range)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income percentile for all students</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>2–100 (range)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school grade point average</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>0.0-2.9 (coded 0); 3.0-4.0 (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family size</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>1–15 (range)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has dependents</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>No (coded 0); Yes (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Single, divorced, widowed (coded 0); married (coded 1); separated was excluded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency status</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Dependent (coded 0); Independent (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Not first generation (coded 0); First generation (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s highest level of education</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or lower (coded 0); Higher than Bachelor’s degree (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned college credits in high school</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>No (coded 0); Yes (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest degree expected</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Bachelor’s or lower (coded 0); Higher than Bachelor’s (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of high school</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Public (coded 0); Private (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed enrollment in PSE</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>1–55 (range)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of foreign language</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Two and half years or less (coded 0); three years or more (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of English</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Two and half years or less (coded 0); three years or more (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of mathematics</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Two and half years or less (coded 0); three years or more (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of science</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Two and half years or less (coded 0); three years or more (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of social studies</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Two and half years or less (coded 0); three years or more (coded 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. PSE = postsecondary education.

Analytic Procedures

Logit analysis was used for this study given that the dependent variable was categorical and that the independent variables were both continuous and categorical. Data in this study were examined in two stages. First, the dichotomous dependent variable of collegiate level (4- or 2-year) was analyzed individually with each control variable (e.g., age, income, high school GPA) and each covariate using binary logistic regression. This procedure was employed to determine whether differences existed among background characteristics of Black males in public two-year and four-year institutions without taking into account extraneous factors. Second, statistically significant covariates from the first stage were then further examined using relevant statistical controls in subsequent logit analyses. The purpose of these analyses was to determine...
whether background characteristics were still predictive of institutional type when controlling for factors that would seemingly impact this relationship.

Three subsequent analyses were performed that grouped significant covariates by relevant controls. The first of these three analyses employed age and income as control to further examine the effect of domestic characteristics (e.g., has dependents, marital status, dependency status) in predicting institutional type. Age and income were employed as controls since they would be logical factors for determining an individual’s domestic background. For example, whether a student is married, has children, or is a dependent is related to age. As students become older, they are more likely to marry and/or have families. The next analysis examined college-related factors (e.g., highest degree expected, delayed enrollment) with the controls: age, income and high school GPA. The final analysis focused on high school preparation characteristics (e.g., years of science, foreign language and mathematics and high school type) using income and high school GPA as controls. Odds ratios were computed for all analyses.

Limitations

There are limitations to the current work that should be considered. The dataset used is designed primarily to better understand the experiences of students in postsecondary education, in general. Specifically, BPS allows researchers to track trends over the duration of college at three points in time. However, BPS data provide only one collection year (2004) for entry-level characteristics; therefore study findings are time-specific, meaning that they represent background characteristics of Black males in two- and four-year institutions at one given point in time. Possibly, these background characteristics can shift over time due to factors external to the institutions themselves (e.g., economy, state policy). Furthermore, BPS:04/06 is not adjusted for non-responses and they are derived from a complex sampling design. To mitigate the effects of complex sampling, the researcher followed prior protocol in reporting significant results at \( p < .01 \) (Broene & Rust, 2000; Flowers, 2006).

Findings

As previously noted, the first stage of this study examined each covariate independently as regressed on the dependent variable (institutional type). Findings illustrated significant differences between 10 of the 18 control variables and covariates examined. Black male collegians at two-year colleges were found to be older than Black males at four-year institutions (see Table 2). This finding was statistically significant at \( p < .001 \). No statistically significant differences were found between the income percentiles, high school GPA, or family sizes between Black males at two- and four-year institutions. However, non-significant mean differences examining high school GPAs below and above 3.0 illustrated that the odds of having a GPA above 3.0 were 46 percent less for two-year college students. Two-year college students were significantly more likely to have dependents than four-year college students. In fact, the odds of a two-year student having dependents were 555 percent greater than four-year collegians. Findings also illustrated that the odds of a two-year college student being married were 284 percent higher than that of a four-year college student. This finding was significant at \( p < .01 \).
Furthermore, two-year college students were much more likely to be independents as opposed to dependents. This analysis revealed that the odds of being independent for Black male students in the two-year college were 464 percent higher than that of their four-year university counterparts \( (p < .001) \). With respect to parent’s educational status, this study examined differences using two measures. The first measure determined whether or not students were first generation collegians. If students had one parent who had earned, at minimum, a bachelor’s degree, then they were not considered first generation. No statistically significant differences were detected between Black males in two- and four-year colleges on this item. The second measure of parents’ education took into consideration whether parents had earned a post-baccalaureate degree. While the two-year college students’ parents were 31 percent less likely to have earned a post-baccalaureate degree, this finding was not determined statistically significant.

While the analyses illustrated that the odds of a two-year college student earning college credits during high school was 31 percent less than four-year collegians, this finding was not significant. However, this research did find statistically significant differences with the variables highest degree expected and high school type between two- and four-year college students. The odds of Black male students at two-year colleges expecting to earn more than a bachelor’s degree were 73.5 percent less than their four-year university counterparts \( (p < .001) \). Furthermore, the odds of two-year college males attending private schools were 72.1 percent less than four-year college males \( (p < .01) \). This study also found important differences with respect to one measure of enrollment patterns. Data analysis revealed that the odds of Black

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Odds Ratios</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.162**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income percentile for all students</td>
<td>.996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school GPA</td>
<td>.540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family size</td>
<td>.959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has dependents</td>
<td>6.555**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>3.849*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency status</td>
<td>5.644**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td>1.648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s highest level</td>
<td>.691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned any college credits in high school</td>
<td>.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest degree expected</td>
<td>.265**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school type</td>
<td>.279*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed enrollment</td>
<td>1.150**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of foreign language</td>
<td>.451*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of English</td>
<td>.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of mathematics</td>
<td>.047**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of science</td>
<td>.457*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of social studies</td>
<td>.631</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. GPA = grade point average; * \( p < .01 \); ** \( p < .001 \).*
males at two-year colleges delaying enrolling before entering postsecondary education are 15 percent greater than four-year students \( (p < .001) \).

Several analyses were conducted examining the years of subject specific coursework taken by Black male students during high school. Five subject areas were examined, including: foreign language, English, mathematics, science, and social studies. In all areas, Black males at two-year colleges were less likely to have taken advanced years of coursework. No significant differences were found between two- and four-year college students in English or social studies. However, the odds of two-year collegians of completing (or planning to take) three or more years of course in foreign language or science were less than four-year students, 54.9 percent and 54.3 percent respectively \( (p < .01) \). Additionally, the odds of taking (or planning to take) three or more years of coursework in mathematics were 95.3 percent less than four-year collegians \( (p < .001) \).

The second stage of this study examined significant covariates using relevant controls. Statistical controls used throughout the secondary analyses included age, income, and high school GPA. Only age was found to be significant in the initial analyses. Controlling for income, two-year college students were still more likely to be older than four-year college students \( (p < .001) \). Table 3 presents odd ratios and \( p \)-values for analyses using the identified statistical controls.

### Table 3

**Odds Ratios for Background Factors with Controls**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Controls</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Odds Ratios</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has dependents</td>
<td>3.467*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>1.338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dependency status</td>
<td>3.029**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highest degree expected</td>
<td>.349*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delayed enrollment</td>
<td>.462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income and high school GPA</td>
<td>Years of science</td>
<td>.475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Years of foreign language</td>
<td>.396*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Years of mathematics</td>
<td>.058**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school type</td>
<td>.241*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. GPA = grade point average; *\( p < .01 \); **\( p < .001 \).*

To further examine domestic factors identified as significant in the first set of analyses (e.g., has dependents, marital status, dependency status), the researcher controlled for students’ age and income (see Table 3). When controlling for these variables, significant differences were still identified in terms of having dependents and students’ dependency status. Findings illustrated that Black males in the community college are nearly 3.5 times more likely (246 percent) to have dependents than their four-year university counterparts. The finding was significant at \( p < .01 \). Additionally, these men were 3.02 times more likely (202 percent) to be independent as opposed to dependent \( (p < .001) \). The next set of analyses investigated college-related factors, the highest degree expected by students as well as delayed enrollment into postsecondary education. Both of these variables were examined controlling for students’ age, income, and high school GPA. Controlling for these factors, the odds of a student in two-year college expected to earn greater than a bachelor’s degree were .349 (or 65.1 percent) lower than their
four-year college counterparts \( (p < .01) \). No significant differences were found for variable delayed enrollment with the controls.

Several high school performance variables were also subjected to controls. Using income and high school GPA, the researcher examined the number of years specific subjects were taken as well as the high school type. Findings illustrated that there were no significant differences for the variable years of science taken. However, significant differences were detected for the remaining variables. The odds of a Black male at a two-year college completing (or planning to take) three or more years of foreign language are .396 times less than that of four-year college students \( (60.4 \text{ percent less}) \) \( (p < .01) \). Furthermore, the odds of completing or planning to complete Mathematics were markedly less, .058 times that of four-year college students, or 94.2 percent less \( (p < .001) \). In terms of high school type, even when controlling for income and high school GPA, Black males at two-year colleges are less likely to have attended private schools for high school. In fact, the odds are .241 times that of four-year college students, 75.9 percent less \( (p < .01) \).

**Discussion**

While Flower’s (2006) study focused on social and academic integration as opposed to background characteristics, he did examine five background factors, including: age, family income, high school GPA, college entrance examination scores, and educational aspirations. No statistically significant differences were found between the first four characteristics examined; however, educational aspirations were found to be significant. Similar to Flowers, this study found significant differences between the educational aspirations of two- and four-year students. While no significant differences were identified by income or high school GPA, two-year college students were found to be older than four-year college students. This finding suggests that the mean age of respondents has diverged from the 1995-96 BPS sample. Using the Data Analysis System (DAS) through the National Center for Education Statistics, mean ages were computed for students. While Flowers reported mean ages for Black males at 21.7 (2-year colleges) and 19.4 (4-year college), mean ages from the 2003-2004 data show mean ages at 22.6 (2-year) and 19.4 (4-year). Therefore, two-year college students are older and four-year students younger in relation to the 1995-1996 data (U.S. Department of Education, 2004-2006).

Scholars of Black males in postsecondary education must consider whether the assumptions undergirding their models, research, and theory are relevant to the two-year college student. It is clear from the findings of this study, that two-year collegians are more likely to be older, independent with dependents, married, and to have delayed enrollment into postsecondary education. They are also less likely to have higher degree expectations, attend private high schools, and to have additional years of pre-collegiate preparation in foreign language, mathematics, and science. Furthermore, even when relevant statistical controls were included, students were more likely to be independents with dependents from public high schools, having lower degree expectations and less academic preparation in key fields (e.g., science, foreign language, mathematics).

According to Nevarez and Wood (2010), there are important benefits to community college leaders who understand the demographic characteristics of community college students. They noted that enhanced understanding of student characteristics can bolster strategic planning, assessment and evaluation, and policy development by taking proactive steps to identify and serve current and emerging student needs. A primary point illustrated by this study is that Black males in two-year colleges are different from Black males in four-year colleges on multiple measures (e.g., age, dependents, marital status, dependency status, highest degree expected). Therefore, scholars and practitioners should be cognizant of the unique attributes and differences between Black males by institutional type. As such, this study may present a rationale for a new body of literature which avoids the monolithic treatment of Black males in postsecondary education.
Implications for Practice and Conclusion

Assumptions about the applicability of four-year college research must be reconsidered and renegotiated to address the multiple-layered identities of Black male students in two-year colleges. As the universality of the Black male experience in postsecondary education is re-examined, a space for revised models, frameworks, theory, and research are needed. These revised bodies of knowledge must generate findings that are directly applicable to the academic success, transfer, retention, remediation, and graduation of Black male students in two-year colleges. Practitioners should consider whether programming, activities, and initiatives are being informed by literature that is applicable to the two-year college student.

In particular, MMIs that are engaged in retention-driven activities, which are guided by research and recommendations generated from four-year colleges, should examine the assumptions behind their programming. This would help them to determine whether the prevention and interventions they are engaged in are indeed applicable to two-year collegians. Overall, these initiatives should consider the implications of the differential backgrounds of Black males in two-year colleges and how these backgrounds serve to affect two-year college success (e.g., persistence, achievement, transfer, graduation). For example, what follows are some considerations that can be employed by college practitioners (particularly those involved in male initiatives). These implications for practice are based on the three follow-up analyses conducted (e.g., domestic, college-related, and high school performance).

Domestic Considerations

This study showed that Black males in two-year colleges are more likely to have dependents, be married, and be independent. After controlling for age and income, these students were found to be more likely to have dependents and be independent. Given their domestic responsibilities, these factors may serve to limit their ability to academically (e.g., participation in study groups, meetings with faculty) and socially (e.g., participation in clubs, sports, campus activities) integrate into their respective campus environments. Instead of focusing on integrating the student into the campus setting, college practitioners should re-think this individualistic notion and consider how to integrate the student and their family (as one unit) into the campus setting. This ‘unit-integration’ can be facilitated by MMIs in five ways: (a) schedule activities during K-12 school hours so that those students with children in school will have a greater likelihood of being able to participate; (b) provide childcare that allows students with pre-K children to have fewer barriers to their participation in campus activities; (c) host social activities that are family-friendly, so that students with children can bring them. Use these opportunities to connect students with other collegians who may have families; (d) create a family support groups, so that students with families (e.g., spouse/partner, children) can talk about the challenges associated with the college-life balance and share their knowledge of support resources and strategies that promote this balance; and (e) use peer-mentoring program designs which pair students with familial responsibilities with more advanced students who have successfully navigated college while having similar responsibilities.

College-related Considerations

Findings from the first analyses indicated that Black males in two-year colleges had lower degree expectations and were more likely to delay enrollment. When controlling for age, income, and high school GPA, students were still found to have lower degree expectations. Possibly, this difference is a byproduct of the occupational/vocational programming at two-year colleges. To facilitate student success, college practitioners in MMIs can
create learning communities for students with similar degree goals. This would enable students to share ideas and resources applicable to their respective interests. Furthermore, these learning communities would provide one central place where college officials could provide track specific (e.g., certificate, applied associates, academic associates) to students; identify individuals in industry who can serve as role models to students and are willing to provide internships. Given that these students have lower degree goals, these linkages are important as students will either already be in the workforce or will be seeking employment much sooner than their four-year college peers; and host speakers and panel discussions featuring careers that require post-baccalaureate education. This can serve to expose students to fields that may allow them to reconsider their degree expectations and consider engaging in advanced studies (e.g., master’s, professional, doctorate).

Preparation Considerations

Findings illustrated that Black males in two-year colleges have taken lower levels of high school coursework (e.g., foreign language, mathematics, science) and were less likely to attend private high schools. After controlling for income and high school GPA, students were still found to have lower years of preparation in foreign language and mathematics. These students also remained less likely to have attended private high schools. Given their lower levels of preparation (especially in foreign language and mathematics) than their four-year counterparts, these students may be less prepared to engage in college coursework in these areas. Of particular importance are lower levels of preparation in mathematics; to address differential preparations, college officials involved in MMIs can

- mandate orientation sessions which require students to learn about campus support services, particularly those related to academics;
- mandate student participation in these support services, particularly tutoring in mathematics; and
- conduct pre-assessment refresher courses which can allow students to recall mathematical concepts learned in high school. This may increase their preparation to engage in mathematics coursework and increase their likelihood of placement in higher-level mathematics courses.

With respect to students’ lower levels of attendance in private high schools, colleges can require outreach professionals to target these high schools to illustrate that community colleges are viable postsecondary alternatives. These presentations should focus on transfer articulation agreements, distinct programming not available at four-year institutions, and workforce linkages or partnerships.

In all, this research set out to determine whether background differences existed between Black male students in public two- and four-year colleges. Using two stages of logit analyses, this study has shown that Black males at these institutions are markedly different. Even when statistical controls were set in place, findings illustrated that while they share the same racial/ethnic and gender identity there are numerous distinctions on background variables. Or, more simply stated, these students are ‘the same . . . but different.’

REFERENCES


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