# The Social Adjustment of African American Females at a Predominantly White Midwestern University

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This study examines the social adjustment of African American female students at a predominantly white university in the Midwest. Johnson's (2001) Afrocentric development theory encourages student administrators to examine what African American females say about themselves psychologically and socially. Respondents were chosen via non-probability sampling and answered open-ended questions centering on social adjustment factors. Using content-analysis, the interviews revealed three themes: 1) racial prejudice; 2) social alienation; and 3) faculty-student relations. Hence, our present study reveals promise for Afrocentric development theory in understanding African American student adjustment at predominantly white universities.

During the 1980s and the 1990s, racial differentials in both the enrollment and completion rates between black and white college students increased (Eitzen and Baca-Zinn, 2000; Feagin, Vera, and Imani, 1996). This trend follows a brief reprieve in such inequities during the period between 1969-79 wherein black secondary educational matriculation increased considerably at least partly as a result of civil rights centered legislation (e.g., affirmative action) and the black power/protest movements of the 1960s and early 1970s (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education,* 1999; Marable, 1997; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993).

Additionally, of those African Americans who attend college, the majority are females who attend white colleges and universities (Ginter & Glauser, 1997; Schwitzer et al., 1999). For instance, during the nine years between 1990 and 1999 graduation rates of black women rose from 34% to 43% while the rates for black males decreased from 34% to 33% percent (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 1999). The concern with African American female social adjustment, i.e., the female's normative fit within the total campus environment, at predominantly white colleges can teach us something (Sedlacek, 1996).

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## Review of Literature

Social adjustment of African American female college students is commonly measured by individual factors such as grades, social support, alienation, faculty-student relations, curriculum, performance in bi-racial settings, and retention rates. This study proposes to examine structural factors rather than individual ones to measure the social adjustment of African American females at one Midwestern traditionally white college.

### *African American Student Adjustment*

Several writers (e.g., Murguia et al., 1991; Nora and Cabrera, 1996a; and Schwitzer et al., 1999) argue that social adjustment is best measured by three models: student integration, student adjustment, and student institutional fit. These models are briefly discussed below. Two of the models (student integration and student adjustment) have received the most attention in the adjustment literature. However, we offer the Nguzo Saba, as an alternative in addressing some of the shortcomings of the other predominant models.

The Nguzo Saba, as an ancillary consideration to contemporary student approaches, "allows for the incorporation of authentic African American based values into the development of African American college students" (Johnson, 2001, p. 417). Thus, it implores student affairs professionals and administrators to examine what African American college students say about themselves, psychologically and socially (Johnson, 2001). Hence, it serves as a step in transcending long-established student development theories that are rooted in European psychology (McEwen et al., 1996).

Tinto (1993) emphasizes the student-institutional fit approach. This approach views discrimination on the college campus as interfering with a student's integration into his or her social and academic settings. Additionally, intolerance toward minority students plays a key role in their lack of social adjustment. Not feeling welcome to participate in programs and to interact with white faculty will ultimately affect a student's decision to remain in college (Cabrera et al., 1999). The existing literature on social adjustment emphasizes individual factors, such as the lack of academic preparation, as being the primary determinant as to why African Americans (males or females?) are not successful in college. It overlooks structural factors of the college environment, such as how welcoming it is toward students of color (Tinto, 1993).

The student adjustment model also emphasizes individual factors such as the presumption of parental involvement as facilitating a successful transition to college. Moreover, it asserts that parental influence is an integral component in the student's decision to matriculate through college. This student adjustment approach has received much support within the student adjustment literature (Bean, 1990; Bean and Vesper, 1992; Nora, 1987).

The student adjustment model offers a typology of two domains of experience for the college student: social and academic. The social domain includes

the student's relationships with other students. The academic domain emphasizes interactions with faculty and academic staff. Furthermore, this typology highlights the importance of pre-college preparation on student adjustment, grades, and commitment to college completion. These are all individual factors and are given priority over structural constraints such as racism and discrimination.

We propose an alternative approach, a more Afrocentric one, incorporating the seven principles of Nguzo Saba introduced by Johnson (2001). These seven principles in Swahili and English are: "(1) *Umoja* (Unity); (2) *Kujichaguila* (Self-Determination); (3) *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility); (4) *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics); (5) *Nia* (Purpose); (6) *Kuumba* (Creativity); and (7) *Imani* (Faith)" (Karenga, 1993, p. 173-4). Derived from the tenets of the African American holiday of Kwanzaa (developed out of Kawaida, meaning culture and reason, which celebrates the Nguzo Saba), it represents a grand departure from many college adjustment theories that are bastions of Eurocentrism, assimilation, and conservatism (Johnson, 2001; McEwen et al., 1996; Tinto, 1993). According to Karenga (1993), the Nguzo Saba represents a community-centered approach to building togetherness, social consciousness, and more affable moral precepts.

Johnson (2001), in suggesting how an African-centered approach can be used to fulfill the intrinsic needs of black females at white colleges, endorses the use of the Nguzo Saba (which represents interplay of African American, African, and Kawaida cultural precepts). The initial step in the model stresses the importance of the Afrocircular (the term used for the black student's perceived inherent interest in collective advancement) psyche as opposed to the perceived Eurolinear (or individualist) orientation of European Americans. The student would be introduced to this perspective prior to their immersion (or soon after their arrival) into the Eurocentric college environment. Secondly, the model could be used to familiarize the student with numerous methods (e.g., fewer or no Africana studies courses or campus programs) incorporated by adherents of the Eurocentric paradigm (e.g., few or no Africana studies courses or campus programs) that might divorce them from their own indigenous (Afro-centered) worldview. Third, the student would be encouraged to develop a more thorough comprehension of how an Afrocentric ideology allows them to restructure the experiences (e.g., racism, discrimination, and social isolation) they are likely to encounter on a majority campus and provides a buffer against the social psychological damage that can be incurred from such experiences. Fourthly, an articulation of the Nguzo Saba will enable the female to reconnect to her African heritage in a manner that is conducive to encouraging its use as a source of social support. Finally, it can be surmised that the approach (Nguzo Saba) places an emphasis on the importance of imparting African American females (as well as males) with a degree of pride rooted in historical legacies of truth, resistance, and perseverance throughout the African diaspora. Knowledge of these histories will provide an indigenous support base that has been shown to be a critical component of black female student adjustment (Fleming 1981; 1984).

## Correlates of Black Student Adjustment

### *Racial Prejudice*

Studies indicate that black students come to an integrated college environment expecting to be accepted as equals (Fleming 1981; 1984). Conversely, there has also been research which has indicated that many black students at predominantly white colleges perceive the university as a hostile milieu beset with conflict and confrontation (Gibbs 1974; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003; Smedley, Myers, and Harrell 1993). It has been demonstrated that white students do not realize the existence or severity of racial problems as sensed by black students (Feagin, Vera, and Imani, 1996; Stikes, 1984).

In this study of social adjustment, one of the goals is to be able to more adequately comprehend how racial prejudice plays a role in the adjustment of the African American female student attending a primarily white college. Meeting this goal will be complicated due to the fact that the extensive research that has been done on minorities in higher education has not made it a point to focus on the experiences of black women (Hamilton, 1996; Fleming, 1983). For that reason, in order for researchers to generate more useful projects, there must be more scholarly writing in the area of African American female college adjustment. Moreover, the area of adjustment is crucial regarding black students because in many instances the black student comes from a non-integrated precollege setting and may be more inclined to both experience and perceive prejudices (Wilkerson, 1988). Such may be the case because the black student, who may have never had to interact with people of nonminority status on a frequent basis, may view the white establishment with contempt.

Racial tension for African Americans at predominantly white colleges also results from their conflicts with university officials (Cabrera et al., 1999; Robertson, 1995; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003). The increase in conflicts between black students and university administrators has acted as a precipice in the resurgence of black student separatism. This separatism contributes to maladaptive coping patterns in the areas of academic, social, and personal adjustment (Feagin, Vera, and Imani, 1996; Willie and McCord, 1972).

### *Social Alienation*

The level of alienation or isolation experienced by black students can have a major impact on social adjustment, academic success, and student attrition rates (Fleming, 1984; Willie, 1981). Fleming (1984) points out that a lack of strong supportive social networks results in alienation for black female college students. Hence, black students at white colleges generally develop weaker personal attachments, weaker ties to faculty, less positive intellectual maturity, and fragile social relationships.

Inquiries on the part of both social scientists and educators are important because of the large gap between the ethnic/racial group representation in a particular state and their enrollment in public and state universities (Marable, 1997). An acknowledgement of such disparities could cause bewilderment. Thus, a

deeper exploration into this phenomenon (student alienation and student satisfaction) should become a top priority for education policy makers.

Social isolation experienced by black students may produce any of four modes of adaptation: (1) affirmation, which entails a movement with the dominant culture (e.g., the middle class black student, who had very good high school grades, or who had a high degree of prior interactions with whites); (2) assimilation mode, which involves movement toward the dominant culture; (3) withdrawal mode, calls for movement away from the dominant culture which is characterized by students who have a high intolerance of white culture and cling to black culture as a source of identity; and (4) separation mode, which encompasses a movement against the dominant culture.

*Faculty-Student Relations*

Faculty and their relationships with black students play an integral role in determining how well the student adjusts to college. The significance of building positive relationships between black students and white college faculty cannot be overstated despite the fact few empirical studies exist which directly addresses the phenomenon (Vasquez and Wainstein, 1990). Conversely, Robertson (1995) alludes to the point that black students who do have encouraging interactions with white faculty tend to be more satisfied in the white college environment and are more likely to undergo healthy social, educational, and personal development.

A train of thought that appears to be endemic within the available research offerings is that the teaching strategies of white instructors do not take into consideration the special needs of black students (Gurin and Epps, 1975; Schwitzer et al. 1999). The above-mentioned information should be of special significance to the scholar concerned with white-black student relations. The contacts between black students and white instructors have been described as one lacking trust and interest, culminating in a greater likelihood that the black student would receive a failing grade. Ancis et al. (2000) asserts that black students are likely to feel that white faculty scrutinize their academic performance more harshly than they do their white counterparts. Black students have often found it difficult to develop healthy relationships with white instructors (Feagin, Vera, and Imani, 1996; Gurin and Epps, 1975). Lastly, black students in white college settings have reported differential treatment and being stereotyped by white faculty as less capable (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003).

*Grades*

The number of black students enrolled in higher education has more than doubled since 1960 (Allen, Epps, and Haniff, 1991). For the first time in history blacks are more likely to seek their post-secondary education at colleges that are predominantly white (Allen, Epps, and Haniff, 1991). Although this information may seem encouraging, what is not encouraging is the fact that today only 13.3% of African Americans over the age of 25 have graduated from college (Day and Curry, 1998; p. 2).

Researchers such as Smith (1991), Fleming (1984), and others have differed on precisely which variables influence and predict black-student grade outcomes the best. However, all generally agree on the characteristics which describe the black student who would be likely to adjust successfully to a non-minority populated college. Case in point, the black student who was reared in a middle-class setting, grew up with or had a high degree of prior interaction with whites, good grades in high school, relatively high standardized test scores, and had both parents living in their rearing household is more likely to do well at a majority white college as opposed to an African American student who does not possess these traits.

*Social Support*

Social support can be defined as the extent to which a person's basic social needs for assistance are gratified through interaction with others. Social support includes such concerns as affection, identity, positive reinforcement, and security felt by the student (Schwitzer et al., 1999). Throughout the discipline of sociology the concepts of social support, social bonds, group interaction, integration, and their analyses have always been a primary consideration when explaining human behavior. Social support is seen as a basic building block in an individual's well being and undoubtedly will influence a student's performance in college.

Problems regarding social support are more serious for black students when one takes under consideration that the majority of programs for black students emerged from the issues raised during the black militant protest movements of the 1960s and the early 1970s (Karenga, 1993; Marable, 1997). Since political figures and scholars have assumed that the problematic era of race relations has passed, little attention is given to minority-centered programs. When universities need to make budget cuts, it is usually the minority adjustment or development program that is the first to get the axe (Feagin, Hera, and Imani, 1996). Administrators at white institutions frequently fail to realize that there are succinct differences between black and white students (Feagin, Hera, and Imani, 1996).

A major dilemma when black students make efforts to create viable networks of social cohesion is that it often has to be done in the white college environment, which for many of them is foreign territory. African American students are forced to operate in surroundings wherein professors, administrators, and other students regularly hold negative and stereotypical views about them (Smith, 1991). On other hand, it is intriguing those African American students, who are more likely to have social support networks at a historically black college or university, report better grades and greater intellectual growth in these academic settings (Fleming, 1983; 1984).

*Academic Preparation*

Academic preparation is essential to flourishing grades and adjustment to an educational setting. Several social scientists (Nora and Cabrera, 1996;

Tinto, 1987) have noted that the lack of proper academic preparation on the part of black students as a primary causal variable in their adjustment problems. Scholastic training includes such items as high school performance, college preparatory courses, and SAT/ACT exam scores. Allen (1985) has documented the utility of black students' high school performances (e.g., average grades and rank in graduating class), high school racial composition, and secondary school desegregation experiences as predictors of collegiate educational outcomes. Morgan (1990) and Willie and McCord (1972) document that high school grades are among the most significant forecasters of college grades and progression rates. Also, the lower high school grades of many black college students may well be attributed to socioeconomic status as opposed to any innate deficiency. Furthermore, a problem, which occurs in some African American households, is that the student is told that he/she should aspire to go to college; however, the training for college entrance examinations is not stressed to the same extent (Fleming, 1984).

*Curriculum*

African American students have been shown to adjust better in academic settings in which the course work is either centered around or at least includes to some extent an Afrocentric focus (Johnson, 2001; Marable, 1997). Core curriculums inclusive of African centered courses have been proven to be more receptive to the special development needs of African American college students (Johnson, 2001). Additionally, problems encountered by black students in white college settings can also be linked to behavioral/educational concerns in tertiary and secondary school. Lastly, affirmative action and other programs designed to create campus diversity have been handicapped by not including supplementary programs to aid black students in making the transition to college and to aid in meeting its expectations.

A number of researchers (Allen et al., 1991; Gurin and Epps, 1975) have identified some of the precipitators of the stunted intellectual growth of some disadvantaged black students while at the same time offering some affable solutions. Despite the fact that it is not the focus of this project, the same set of factors which have been identified as contributing to the under achievement of black students (e.g., socioeconomic status inadequate educational opportunities) also are reflective of the urgent need for a college that helps to resolve some of the dilemmas. To put it succinctly, black students (both males and females) need a core curriculum that acknowledges the uniqueness of their history with slavery, perseverance, and resistance, and how these struggles have helped to shape who they are today. Perhaps this might serve as an explanation as to why African American students show a strong orientation toward majors and professions that focus on helping people (Lang and Ford 1988; Nettles 1988).

*Performance in Bi-Racial Settings*

Levels of black student adjustment to white college surroundings can be gauged via looking at their performance in bi-racial settings. Schwitzer et al.

(1999) posits that a critical detriment to black student retention and matriculation is their racial experience within the white college environment. When black students do not feel as competent as white students their performance is negatively impacted (Asamen, 1989; Lang and Ford, 1988; Steele, 1992). Hence, it is plausible to insinuate that the disadvantaged student does not feel that he or she is competent. Racial discrimination and dissatisfaction with earlier educational experiences influence the attitude and expectations of black students as they enter bi-racial environments (Ancis et al., 2000; Asamen, 1989).

Success on the part of black students has been attributed to a number of indicators. For instance, the black student who attended a private high school generally performs well in a white college setting (Nettles, 1988). This may be due to the fact that parochial schools are more likely to have a standard curriculum that is college preparatory in nature. Nevertheless, African American females tend to have better grades than African American males across the board, high school and college (Eitzen and Baca-Zinn, 2000). As relative to our current study, African American females tend to adjust better than black males at predominantly white colleges (Fleming, 1984). A primary reason is that black females are viewed as less threatening to white dominated power structures (Fleming, 1984). Furthermore, black females have higher completion rates than black males at predominantly white colleges despite reporting more intellectual growth at historically black colleges and universities (Eizen and Baca-Zinn, 2000; Fleming, 1983).

Similar to black males, black females who performed best at white colleges tend to come from integrated high schools and have higher incomes on the average than those of females who attend black historically black colleges and universities. Several inferences can be made regarding the performance of African American students in bi-racial settings. First, a high degree of interaction with white students may be accompanied by anxiety over the consequences of displaying competence and assertiveness. Black females are more assertive at white as opposed to black colleges fact could be used to explain why black students frequently avoid or limit their interactions with nonminority group members. Second, performing academically in the presence of whites can result in apprehension, even without a high degree of interaction, or when the student comes from a disadvantaged background and is cognizant of this fact. Third, African American students who were raised in a predominantly white community typically experience very few problems in a bi-racial setting.

Finally, several ideas are noticeable when examining black student adjustment, performance retention that can be extended to African American females. First, black students who make it through the first two years at a predominantly white college generally stay until graduation (Allen, 1986; Asamen, 1989). Third, black students who perform better on standardized tests usually feel more competent and are more likely to graduate when attending a predominantly white college although their standardized test scores do not predict how well they perform while they are there, (Lang and Ford, 1988; Nettles, Thoeny, and Gosman, 1986).

## Method

Our study attempts to describe the social adjustment processes of African American female students in a predominantly white college setting based on in-depth interviews with ten students, both from undergraduate and graduate levels at a large university in the Midwest. Respondents ranged in age from their late teens to late thirties and were from various socioeconomic backgrounds. The students were asked a set of loosely-framed, open-ended questions that centered on the major causal factors that were then extended to the levels of social adjustment among African American female students. Interviews typically lasted over one hour each were recorded and then transcribed for the purpose of detailed analysis and for accurate quoting of students' viewpoints.

Interview responses were analyzed using content analysis according to the format outlined in Berg (2004). Berg (2004, p. 269) posits that content analysis is "a passport to listening to the words of the text and understanding better the perspective(s) of the product of these words." It allows for recurring themes and thought patterns to be condensed from responses and made amenable for systematic comparison. The ties between the data and the literature were illustrated through the institutional fit and student integration models, student adjustment model, and the transactional model. Primary consideration was given to the Nguzo Saba as presented in Johnson (2001). Johnson (2001) employed the Nguzo Saba as an analytical tool in the development of African American student adjustment programs.

The Nguzo Saba, as a tool for use in the development of contemporary student adjustment programs, "allows for the incorporation of authentic African American values in the development of African American college students" (Johnson, 2001, p. 417). Thus, it implores student affairs professionals and administrators to examine what African American college students say about themselves, psychologically and socially (Johnson, 2001). It serves as a step in transcending long-standing student development theories rooted in European psychology (McEwen et al., 1996).

## Findings

The findings in our study both corresponded to and differed from the findings in the student adjustment literature. Three recurring themes stood out in the students' responses. These themes are focused on three areas: racial prejudice, social alienation, and faculty student relations.

### *Racial Prejudice*

One of the most common occurrences among the female students interviewed was their perception of racial prejudice. Racial prejudice, as an analytical construct, was examined through the prism of Smedley et al.'s (1993) transaction model and Murguia et al.'s (1991) student-institutional fit perspective. The use of these typologies allowed for an enhanced comprehension of the influence of racial prejudice on adjustment. For instance, one respondent lamented:

> I came here because I got a full track scholarship and that's the only reason I came here. I mean, I have faced a lot of racism here ... different instances through my time here, dealing with both professors and other students. We [black students] talk at student meetings and if a student has taken a class wherein a professor has said something racist, then you are going to get pissed off and then I won't take the class. I probably won't avoid them [the professor] if they were sexist, because I believe that racism supercedes all prejudices.

Another student commented,

> Well, I'd just say that "race" is always a factor. What people see outside always affects initial perceptions of who you are ... because they have categorized you as a group and you are not an individual until they know you. Some of it [racism] has changed after three years, but being African American, social issues that go along with the race that I am.

When analyzing the first response, student transaction model contends that experiences of racism in the campus environment can result in maladjustment and stress. Therefore, the student athlete, who seemingly feels that professors often make racially insensitive comments, can be assumed to have experienced at least a minimal degree of anxiety over the situation. Similarly, student-institution fit approach would contend that the racism experienced by the second respondent results from a lack of tolerance from the campus environment for differences in values, morphology, and ways of conduct attributable to African American students in general, and female students in particular. Finally, both of the preceding findings tie into the larger body of literature (Cabrera et al., 1999) that suggests that racism and discrimination have an adverse effect on the college experience of African American college students.

The female students' perceptions of racial prejudice can be understood via the usage of the principle Ujima. Johnson (2001) contends that Ujima encourages collaborative problem solving. Thus, when asked to assuage the experiences of African American female college students, Ujima can act as a catalyst for the development of female groups by being centered on alleviating prejudice.

Additionally, the principle of Umoja, as discussed by Johnson (2001) can be employed as a buffer against the deleterious effects of racial prejudice. Umoja (unity) calls for the development of programs designed to bring together African Americans and peoples of other cultures. Numerous researchers (Schwitzer et al., 1999; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003; and Sedlacek, 1996) have buttressed the notion that the white college environment will enhance the adjustment experiences of African American female students.

*Social Alienation*

African American students, particularly females, have long viewed the white college setting as one that can be alienating (Feagin, Vera, and Imani, 1996; Fleming, 1983). Feeling alienated is one of the principal reasons for differ-

ences in retention rates between black and white students (Cabrera and Nora, 1996). The respondents' responses that can be discerned as indicative of alienation were varied. Some females pointed to the lack of black students as a major component of the alienation that they experienced, while others mentioned inadequate funding, and others made note of the lack of an African-centered curriculum and black-oriented student programs.

For instance, several females levied the following complaints:

> I always felt isolated here, especially as an undergrad because you walk in a class of one hundred students, usually; there are about two African American students. And when we are talking about African American people or whatever, the whole class is looking at you.

> I feel isolated here, for example, homecoming celebrations. There's nothing really for black people to do.

> There's nothing really here to keep an African American student at this school. There are not a lot of events that are really geared toward black students; they [the university] really don't give us a lot of money.

The three preceding comments were scrutinized according to Tinto's (1993) student integration model. Concerning alienation, Tinto (1993) views students feeling not welcome as facilitated by the female not feeling welcome to participate in university programs or interacting with white faculty. The first respondent expressed alienation as resulting from a lack of programs geared toward African American students. The second respondent saw the university environment as alienating due to a lack of black student presence in the classroom.

Kujichaguila is a principle of the Nguzo Saba that represents self-determination (Karenga, 1993). When using this principle as a modicum of analysis of black student alienation, it promotes program implementation centering on black students' own opinions on matters that affect them (Johnson, 2001). The aforesaid programs are those that provide funding for black student groups or speakers with an African-centered focus (Johnson, 2001). Such programs cannot be seen as devoid of merit because data have shown a deleterious college environment has a significant role in black student retention problems. Furthermore, Cabrera and Nora (1996a) contend that curricula created with African American students in mind exert a positive influence in areas such as academic performance, commitment to the institution, and matriculation.

## Faculty-Student Relations

Relationships between black students and white faculty have received much attention in the social adjustment literature. The participants in the study made statements that affirmed the importance of congenial relations between a black students and white faculty in the university setting.

For example, one African American female posited:

> They [white professors] don't like to deal with race—they don't mind talking about Native Americans, Indians, Japanese, and Asians. However, it's something about the dynamic of black and white. They don't mind comparing African Americans with Native Americans, but when it comes to comparing with whites, the faculty, being mostly white, seem to personalize it like you are talking about them as a person. This would be very different at a black college.

While the preceding student espoused feelings that suggested that white professors have difficulty moderating discussions concerning black-white dynamics, to the contrary, some students had more positive experiences with white faculty. For instance, one African American female argued:

> I've had no problems with white faculty, although I had one black professor and I was the only black girl in her class, she treated me like everyone else. She didn't pressure me more because we are the same color or give me an "A" or "B" because we are the same color.

Finally, another student had a positive experience with a white faculty member:

> I don't find race to be a negative factor. Actually, my white professors encourage me and tell me to strive for a Ph.D. They also inform me of the opportunities available to minorities. I have never felt they gave me a bad grade or anything else because of my race. I have never heard of any such racist and sexist professors. They may be boring but nothing else.

Using student adjustment model, the two positive experiences can be viewed as conducive to an optimal level of social adjustment. Specifically, student adjustment model contends that within the academic domain, encouraging interactions with white faculty members engenders positive affective and cognitive development of the student. Additionally, they can lead to academic and intellectual development, a greater commitment to attaining a college degree, and more commitment to their respective educational institutions on the part of black female college students.

As a diagnostic construct, Kuumba can be seen as an integral component in understanding the optimal experiences of respondents with white college faculty. Johnson (2001) indicates that Kuumba is manifest when black students are encouraged to infuse an African American perspective into classroom discussions and assignments. This is made even more evident as the previous respondent explains how her white professor pushed her to seek out opportunities available to minority students. Moreover, positive student-professor interactions germane to the emergence of Kuumba are prevalent in the student adjustment literature (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003). Schwitzer et al. (1999) and Nettles et al. (1986) both stress that optimal interactions between black students and white faculty precipitate positive adjustment outcomes. Finally, Suarez-Balcazar

et al. (2003, p. 430) maintains that "the interaction between students and faculty is a fundamental component of students' academic success."

*The Nguzo Saba as an Analytical Tool*

In this study, primary consideration was given to Nguzo Saba (seven principles) as a possible component in the development of future college adjustment programs for black females. Johnson (2001) endorses the use of the Nguzo Saba as a foundation for the development of programs to aid in the adjustment and matriculation in the white college environment. Thus, the utility of the Nguzo Saba was examined via its effectiveness relative to the three recurring themes in our research.

In the area of racial prejudice, the concerns of the black female students focused on perceptions of them by nonblack students. In dealing with this concern, the Nguzo Saba, encourages the restructuring of experiences of racism. Johnson (2001) contends that this process involves a foundation rooted in an indigenous African-centered identity that makes such experiences more manageable. On the other hand, when examining social alienation, the Nguzo Saba could be used as part of a pre-college adjustment program. Such a program could facilitate a sense of collective identity that encourages the female to develop support groups (either formal or informal) with other African females to counter feelings of alienation. Finally, an embodiment of the Nguzo Saba in a black female adjustment program context can encourage the female to have not only a positive self concept but would also persuade to view helpful white faculty as allies in navigating through the white college environment.

## Discussion and Conclusions

We examined several factors that are related to the levels of social adjustment of black students in white college environment in this research project. Several of the factors proven to be significantly related to black student adjustment within the white college environment (e.g., grades, academic preparation, performance in biracial settings, etc.) via the social adjustment literature (e.g., Schwitzer et al., 1999; Sedlacek, 1996), were not as important to our group of respondents. Additionally, more introspection into other variables, such as socioeconomic status could prove to be fruitful areas of study. Finally, the use of probability sampling techniques, i.e., the use of a simple random, stratified, or cluster sample designs would yield findings generalizable to the larger populations of black students at predominantly white colleges.

Nevertheless, a few of our findings can be viewed as helpful to further scrutiny of the black female adjustment process. First, the focus on women, especially when black females are attending universities at higher rates than their male counterparts, can only add insight into how their rates of adjustment can be improved. Second, use of Nguzo Saba, as advocated by Johnson (2001), could possibly result in further legitimatization of black and African American studies programs and departments at all universities, be they black or white. In conclusion, investigation and research into how faculty opinions

and attitudes can have positive impacts on black students may lead to a greater emphasis on the importance of diversity training of all university employees at predominantly white colleges.

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