


Chapter 4

Fictive Kinship Networks in Postsecondary Education: Lessons Learned from the “Village”

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ABSTRACT

To discuss the disparity of education among minorities in this country, the understanding of the problem is essential. Education equality for people of color is based on their socioeconomic status and ethnic backgrounds. The lack of knowledge and appreciation of Black culture is a practice of disengagement that prohibits the connection between instructor and student. Utilizing Tinto’s Model of Attrition and the Self-Determination and Resilience Theories, the chapter will explore the history of fictive kinship models, their impact on minority persistence in higher education and provide recommendations for the creation of networks on predominantly white institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

The Role of Extended Kin and Fictive Networks Within Ethnic Groups

Definition and Historical Context

Family is the cornerstone of most communities. The family may be defined as nuclear (mother, father, siblings); extended kin (i.e. grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins); and fictive (relationships much like nuclear and extended kin with unrelated blood ties) (Herndon and Hirt, 2004). Family serves as the primary source of potential; sets the parameters of widely held community standards; and provides influence on a student's educational views. Essential attributes of culture are shared beliefs, traditions, and language that express meaning in a shared social life. The fictive kinship network was coined and associated with education by John Ogbu (1978, 1991) and Signithia Fordham (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Extended and fictive kinship networks serve as a mutual aid system that nurtures, protects, mentors, and supports its members. The networks are extensions of a belief that concerted efforts are needed to succeed in the face of adversity. A fictive kin framework uses a cultural-ecological approach to the cultural identity of a peer group. The network can change over time due to physiological or psychological needs at varying stages of a member's life. Due to their foundation in shared values and similar perspectives, extended kinship networks foster happiness because they are freely chosen. Kinship boundaries are permeable and flexible depending on its members. Sarkisian and Gerstel (2004) outlined three determinants of kin support - 1) values and beliefs promoting family integration; 2) the need for support; and 3) the availability of resources to support the need. African American and Hispanic communities have a history steeped in extended kinship networks - "the village".

BACKGROUND

Previous Research

"Resiliency is a hallmark trait within the Black community," (Herndon and Hirt, 2004, p. 494). Hays and Mindel (1973) suggest that African Americans face a different set of situations and therefore, have different group structures. Hill (1972) suggested five primary characteristics of the African American family - 1) kinship bonds; 2) role flexibility; 3) strong work and education ethics; 4) a religious orientation; 5) strong coping skills. Hays and Mindel's (1973) research suggests a higher intensity and

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