

Thank you for the opportunity to engage with your practice brief focused on the declining enrollment of Black men in higher education. This work is timely and important, as there have been renewed national calls to address the systemic barriers affecting Black men's access to and success in higher education. Your attention to the historical and contemporary factors shaping the educational trajectories of Black boys and men provides a valuable foundation for advancing this critical conversation.

I want to commend you for thoughtfully examining the educational experiences of Black boys and men, particularly how secondary education experiences influence their transitions to and persistence in higher education. Your attention to how racism and structural inequities shape these experiences is clear and well-articulated. You also effectively highlight the challenges Black men face in navigating predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and the need for more supportive and inclusive environments.

As you work to strengthen this document, I offer a few observations for consideration:

- 1. Structural Clarity and Target Audience**

The practice brief would benefit from a clearer structure to help the reader understand the main points and specific practice implications. It is currently unclear how each section connects to the brief's overall argument is ambiguous. A more focused literature review on Black boys and men's secondary and postsecondary experiences would provide a stronger foundation for the proposed recommendations. Additionally, please clarify the intended audience for the practice implications. Are you directing these recommendations toward higher education administrators, faculty, or student affairs professionals at PWIs, HBCUs, and/or PBIs? Tailoring the implications to institutional contexts would enhance the document's relevance and impact.

I also suggest reconsidering the title "The Vanishing Act." While creative, it may unintentionally frame the issue of Black men's enrollment in higher education as a performance rather than a serious endeavor pursued by Black men. Further, the current title, which states the "decline of Black men..." has the potential of framing the issue as a deficiency among Black men themselves rather than a complex issue shared between the student population and higher education institutions. A revision to the title could suggest a more strengths-based approach.

- 2. Strengths-Based Framing and Anti-Deficit Approach**

The brief primarily relies on deficit-based narratives about Black boys and men's challenges in educational settings. While these narratives are important for context, integrating scholarship on agency, resilience, and success would offer a more balanced perspective. For example, Whiting's (2006) Scholar Identity model provides a framework for understanding how Black boys develop academic success and identity. Dr. Shaun Harper's anti-deficit framework could also help shift the focus toward institutional responsibility and the strengths Black men bring to

higher education. Furthermore, exploring how Black men leverage peer networks, spirituality, and community support to succeed would enrich the narrative.

3. Practice Implications and Intersectionality

The practice implications need more specificity and depth. You mention Black Male Initiatives (BMIs) as a strategy to support Black men in college, which is an important step. However, emerging research, including work by Dr. Qourtne Hutchings, has highlighted that BMIs can sometimes be exclusionary for Black queer men. Dr. Adrian Huerta's scholarship on men of color success initiatives would be helpful in refining your recommendations.

I appreciate the mention of supporting Black men's mental health. Johnson and Florestal-Kevelier (2024) provide a valuable framework for collective impact in this area. The Ecological Validation Model (Kitchen et al., 2021) could also inform a more holistic approach to recruitment, retention, and graduation. Establishing an institutional task force to examine and address these issues, similar to recent efforts at Morgan State University and the Black Men's Success Initiative at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, would offer concrete steps toward systemic change.

4. Humanizing the Experiences of Black Men

Finally, I encourage you to humanize the experiences of Black men by acknowledging the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and more. Black men's experiences in higher education are complex and varied; addressing these intersections would enhance the nuance and applicability of your recommendations. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to supporting Black men, and your brief would benefit from recognizing this complexity more explicitly.

In closing, this practice brief has strong potential to contribute critical insights to an urgent issue in higher education. Through greater structural clarity, engagement with strengths-based frameworks, and more targeted practice implications, this document can serve as a meaningful resource for institutional leaders working to advance the success of Black men in higher education. I appreciate the opportunity to engage with your work and look forward to seeing the impact it will undoubtedly have.

Citations:

Johnson, J. T., & Florestal-Kevelier, R. D. (2024). Brother, We Got You: A collective impact approach to addressing Black college men's mental health. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2024(186), 39-47.

Kitchen, J. A., Perez, R., Hallett, R., Kezar, A., & Reason, R. (2021). Ecological validation model of student success: A new student support model for promoting college success

among low-income, first-generation, and racially minoritized students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 62(6), 627-642

This point is very important to raise as it has implications on the educational trajectories of Black boys and men in the US. Something to think about: Stating the specific racial demographics of teachers and/or the pervasiveness of white supremacy and whiteness in education could help to clarify further why teachers who lack cultural awareness and relevant strategies can harm Black children/boys.

Throughout the transcript, the authors make claims like these, and these statements will be better supported with citations. Please consider adding citations.

To ensure that readers know what ADHD is, please spell it out. An abbreviated text is unnecessary if the term is not used again.

This text is appreciated as it departs from deficit narratives around Black boys educational experiences. It demonstrates how educational systems can partner with Black boys to ensure their overall success in educational contexts. At the same time, this section, as it is written right now, has the potential to suggest that Black boys are individuals who only rely on the support of others in order to succeed. I suggest that the authors consider reviewing the scholarship of Dr. Gilman Whiting who has discussed the scholarly identities of Black boys in gifted education. His conceptual model offered a series of ways Black boys construct their scholarly identity, and thus, see themselves as scholars.

Here is a citation for your reference:

Whiting, G. W. (2006). From at risk to at promise: Developing scholar identities among Black males. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 17(4), 222-229.

Are individuals minorities? or they are they minoritized by systems of power and oppression? I argue for the latter. Educational scholars have moved away from using the language “minorities” to described populations of people who have been marginalized due to systems of power and opportunities. Please consider using the language of “minoritized” as it speaks to how systems of power have oppressed individuals rather than suggesting that groups of individuals are at fault for their social status in society. I’ve included a citation for your review.

Wingrove-Haugland, E., & McLeod, J. (2021). Not “Minority” but “Minoritized”. *Teaching Ethics*, 21(1).

Is this true of all Black men? Consider offering a more nuanced picture of the experiences of Black men. Also, since these are claims, please add citations to support the statements offered.

Which types of Black institutions are being referred to here? Historically Black Colleges and Universities and/or Predominately Black institutions? Please specify.

It appears that the authors are suggesting HBCUs are viable spaces for the inclusion and success of Black men in higher education. However, scholars have conducted extensive research in this area to uncover some of the shortcomings these institutions have in supporting Black men. Additionally, research has sought to move beyond considering the racial identities and gendered experiences of Black men at HBCUs by detailing how these institutions have marginalized Black queer men. These are important factors to consider when thinking about the challenges Black men face in higher education as they are not a monolith. Typically, scholars have prioritized the experiences of Black cis-heterosexual men and this adds to further marginalization of Black men as a whole. This practice brief should consider the multiple, complex ways Black men show up in higher education by reviewing and discussing literature that speaks the ways Black men exist at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, religion, class, dis/ability, and more.