

A MULTIGENERATIONAL APPROACH: CRITICAL ACCOUNTS OF THE  
POSTSECONDARY EXPERIENCES AND SUCCESS OF  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN

by

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Abstract

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This phenomenological study examined significant factors that influenced the degree completion rates (i.e. graduation) of ten African American men who graduated from U.S. accredited 4-year Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) between the 1960s and 2000s. Critical Race Theory in Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) was the theoretical framework used for this study. The primary means of data collection was two semi-structured interviews to learn about the participants' personal, precollege, college and post college experiences, as well as their recommendations for improving postsecondary access and success for African American males.

Themes that emerged from the data enabled the reaching of findings on significant factors that influenced these participants' college enrollment, persistence and degree completion. Study findings and recommendations for increasing the college enrollment and academic success of African American men include the need for : 1) colleges and universities to implement policies and practices that produce a welcoming environment for African American men, especially on PWI campuses, 2) parents and teachers' to nurture the postsecondary expectations of students as early as the elementary school, 3) vocational schools to be considered as a viable option for African

American males who may not be on or interested in pursuing a college education, 4) institutional hiring practices that promote an increased presence of African American staff, faculty, and administrators, and 5) mentoring programs that specifically target African American males beginning at the primary school level and continuing throughout college. This study also provides implications for research, policy, and practices intended to increase the postsecondary enrollment, retention and degree completion of African American men.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Racial inequalities have been significant to the history of the United States. From before the Civil War to present day, the struggles for equality in educational opportunities for African Americans have been a central part of Civil Rights and educational reform movements (Sadovnik & Semel, 2010). For most of U.S. history, a majority of the African American population was excluded from the educational system (Bowles, 2014). According to Jenkins (2006) there is more than 300 years of history in the U.S. higher education system; however, less than 139 years ago it was illegal for African Americans of any age to be taught how to read. He also contends that this historical deficit is substantial and continues to have a generational impact on African Americans.

Historically, African Americans have viewed education as essential to opportunities for improving their employment, political, and economic power (Duster, 2009). Although progress has been made since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African American males have higher rates of suspensions, expulsions, special education placement, and dropout than any group and continue to struggle to achieve educational and economic success (Caperton, 2010; Children's Aid Society 2014; Cohen & Nee, 2000; Cuyjet, 2006; Cuyjet, 2009; Devita, 2010; Eckholm, 2006; Few, 2006; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Harper 2009; Hodge, 2008; Holzman, 2006; Jackson, 2007; Jordan & Cooper, 2006; Kunjufu, 2001; Levin, 2007). This research is critical when considering that the overall well-being of African American men and boys has a direct influence on the strength of their communities, families, and the nation as a whole (Institute for Black Male Achievement, 2012).

Over the past 15 years, the college graduation rates for African American males (from 28% to 35%) and females (34% to 46%) have improved (Bond, 2006). However,

Harper (2011) found that between 1994 and 2008, an increase of one African American male undergraduate was accompanied by an increase of five White male students. The implications of his findings support continued disparities in general enrollment for this population when compared to their white counterparts. A call to action to address these challenges continues to be initiated at national and state levels.

At the national level, President Barack Obama issued a memorandum in February 2014 to the heads of executive departments and agencies concerning the expansion of opportunities for boys and young men of color (Holzer, 2009). This document was in response to data released which revealed that boys and young men of color, regardless of socio-economic background, are disproportionately at-risk from their childhood years to college and beyond. In particular, the report addressed the disparities in which many boys will enter kindergarten less prepared than their peers in language and literacy skills which affects their present and future academic success (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). To address this issue, the My Brother's Keeper Initiative was established by the president as an effort to measurably improve expected educational and life outcome for this population. President Obama noted that the purpose of the initiative is to help determine public and private efforts that work, how to expand upon them, how to better involve local and state officials, and how federal government policies and programs can support community efforts (The White House Government, 2014).

Various states have also been involved in the effort to improve educational and social opportunities for boys and young men of color. For example, Texas implemented Closing the Gap 2015 agenda to address enrollment disparities of underrepresented students. The Texas Higher Education College Board (THECB) has allocated over \$28 million in state and federal funding over the last few years for programs providing direct services to disadvantaged students. This program funding has been designated to

support economically disadvantaged or underrepresented students. The majority of the funding is targeted toward institutions of higher education with large numbers of African American and Hispanic students as a part of the Accelerated Plan for Closing the Gaps by 2015. The THECB places emphasis on helping the state meet its goals, with improved persistence and completion rates for African American students, particularly African American males (The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010).

As previously mentioned, a great deal of the literature on African American male collegians focuses on their underachievement and what they lack in terms of college preparatory resources, social and cultural capital, and school agents who support their achievement (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Harper 2009). However, according to Matthews and Williams (2007), attention to how African American males achieve success while overcoming historical and institutional barriers can be helpful in engineering effective and relevant schooling experiences for all children. This perspective supports the shift in studies by researchers on the academic success of African American males through an anti-deficit reframing lens (Harper, 2010). According to Harper and Griffin (2011) using an anti-deficit framing of African American men's college access and success by understanding what enables their achievements rather than barriers to degree completion is essential for closing racial and gender gaps in postsecondary education. For my study, I sought to examine the generational and institutional experiences of African American college graduate men and how their experiences influenced their persistence to degree completion.

#### Statement of the Problem

There continues to be a persisting and significant postsecondary enrollment and completion gap between African American and White students. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2010), the total number of students enrolling in degree-

granting institutions for the fall of 2009 (all data in thousands) was 20,427. Of these students, 12,730 were White, and 2,919 were African American. A closer look at the data reveals that African American male enrollment at degree-granting institutions compared to White males and females, and African American females, lags significantly. With regards to gender, 8,769 were White males, 1,037 were African American males, 7,136 were White females, and 1,882 were African American females. The disparity in African Americans, especially male enrollment in higher education institutions, precipitates their absence in higher education, which subsequently reflects their disproportionality in degree recipients.

Since the mid-1980s, there has been an increasing gender gap in the awarding of baccalaureate degrees, particularly with respect to African American men. According to Devita (2010), more than two-thirds of all African American men who enter college depart before earning their college degree, which is the lowest degree completion rate among all races and sexes. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) stated that individuals with higher levels of education are less likely to experience unemployment, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. There is substantial evidence which supports that attending postsecondary institutions helps individuals to do better in life overall. According to Baum, Ma, and Payea (2010), overwhelming evidence reveals that going to college influences the way people behave and make decisions, and as a result, individuals become more productive and better paid members of the workforce. Carnevale and Desrochers (2002) noted that people who go to college tend to come out with a certain amount of polish and understanding about how the world works, which is valuable information for the workplace and life. The value of a college degree is unprecedented. However, as previously suggested, college attendance itself has a positive impact on individual lives.

The Dellums Report (2006) findings indicate that in 2002 57percent of earned bachelor's degrees were awarded to women. According to the report, among Hispanics, three degrees were awarded to women for every two awarded to men. As for African Americans, women recipients outnumbered men by a still larger margin of two to one. The national college graduation rate for African American males is 33.4% compared with 44.8% for African American females (Valburn, 2010). While these findings are troubling for African American men, the presence of men of color especially Alaska American, Native American, and Hispanics in general are underrepresented in U.S. colleges and universities. Valburn (2010) substantiates this with the following data: the national college graduation rate for Hispanic men is 41.1% and 33.8% for Native Americans and Alaska natives. The report further noted that the graduation rate for White males was 54.5% and 60.6% for Asian/Pacific Islanders.

The connection between education, employment and earnings exists and magnifies the significance of schooling and quality of life for individuals in general. Presently, nearly 60% of all jobs in the United States require higher education (Hanford, 2012). According to College Overview (2012), college graduates on average earn about \$10,000 to \$30,000 a year more than those with just high school diplomas, while continued education in a specialized field of study or work to earn a master's or a doctorate could yield \$100,000 or more a year in salary. The data substantiate the economic benefits of attending and completing postsecondary education. According to Smeeding (2006), postsecondary education will be among the most important determinants of the labor market success and therefore one of the nation's most crucial means of reducing persistent economic inequalities.

Prior to exiting high school, most students are faced with two choices: college or workforce. Generally speaking, three types of students are far more likely to attend

institutions of higher education: students from upper-income families, students with university-educated parents, and females (Frenette, 2006). The relevancy of this descriptor magnifies segments of society (i.e. low income families, first-generation college students, historically marginalized males, etc.), whose presence on college campuses is either unexpected or atypical. This information also reveals that opportunities for social and economic growth through postsecondary education are often contingent upon mitigating factors precluding academic ability (Frenette, 2006).

The present decline in historically underrepresented student enrollment in higher education poses a concern for society as a whole. More specifically, the national decline in the number of African American males attending and graduating from college is concerning, according to Wilson (2000), because of immediate implications for the men themselves and the long-term economic, social, and political consequences for society. Moreover, Cuyjet (2006) noted that the underrepresentation of this population in higher education has a considerable impact not only on their employment opportunities and earning ability, but it also negatively affects their social status in U.S. society. Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify individuals, policies, programs, and opportunities that facilitated the academic persistence and success of African American men who graduated from four-year institutions in the United States across five decades (i.e. 1960s to 2000s).

#### Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

My dissertation study was influenced by the roadblocks my five brothers experienced in Kansas City public schools, my sons' pathways towards and away from higher education, and my commitments as a practitioner to increase the number of underrepresented students, especially African American males, gaining access to, persisting through, and graduating from college. Therefore, the purpose of this study was

to examine the experiences of African American males who successfully obtained their bachelor's degree from U.S. accredited four-year institutions. I was particularly interested in learning more about the individuals, program, events, policies, and opportunities that influenced African American men to graduate from college. As such, the general research question I explored for this study asked: How can the multi-generational experiences of African American male college graduates contribute to discourse about ways to improve the higher education enrollment, persistence and degree completion rates of African American? In addition, I sought to answer more specific sub questions which focused on the following: a) How do they describe their postsecondary experiences and success across generations? b) What significant influences shaped their college enrollment (i.e. access and readiness)? and c) What significant influences shaped their college success (i.e. persistence and degree completion)?

Using a phenomenological approach and Critical Race Theory in Education framework, I documented the lived experiences of 10 African American men who obtained bachelor's degrees from Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States. I was particularly interested in highlighting the experiences of African American men who graduated from college over the past 50 years (e.g. 1960s through 2010s). A phenomenological approach was used to gather data because it offers an opportunity to understand what these experiences mean to these individuals from their first-person perspectives (Pollio, Henley & Thompson, 1997). Additionally, this methodology allowed participants to completely describe their individual experiences with emphasis on their perceptions of these experiences and how they found meaning in those experiences (Sambaugh, Hector, & Carr, 2011).

Critical race theory is an important theoretical approach for this study because it allowed for mixed strategies, research methods, and definitional premises while critiquing racial reform effects in education (Closson, 2010). This framework argues that race continues to be a significant factor in producing inequalities in society and educational institutions and can be helpful in unveiling and exposing racism in its various forms within education (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Solorzano, 2000). Critical race theory is value-based and committed to social change for individuals, families, groups, and communities by leveling the playing field through various political, legal, collective, or personal means (Ortiz, 2010). Analyzing African American males' persistence and degree completion at four-year institutions through the CRT lens allowed for the validation of individual experiences and perspectives while addressing challenges that can be posed due to race, racism, and its intersectionality with other forms of subordination and domination (e.g. gender, social class, nativity, sexuality, etc.) (Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Hale, 2009). Overall, an examination of the graduation outcomes of African American men from four-year colleges and universities could contribute to the research, practice, and policies targeting the enrollment and degree completion for this population.

#### Personal Relevance

Growing up my father always told me that African American females had it easier than African American males. As I entered adulthood, I began to further reflect on the complexities of this conversation based on the experiences of my brothers and sons in K-12 schools and higher education settings. My sisters, Tammy, Rhonda, Vanessa, Margaret, and I were able to successfully navigate through the K-12 educational pipeline in Kansas City, Missouri. Unfortunately, my five older brothers, Derrick, Jeremy, Jordan, Ralph, and Jonathan, experienced intensive scrutiny and disciplinary actions in school, which often affected their abilities to achievement at their maximum potential.

My two eldest brothers, Jeremy and Jordan, were found to have high IQ scores based on a diagnostic test they took during their elementary school years. Although school officials visited my home and spoke to my parents about my brothers' academic assets and the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) opportunities available through the school district, they were never placed in these programs. While Derrick was able to graduate from high school, Jordan, Jeremy, Ralph, and Jonathan ended up dropping out. As for Jeremy and Jordan, they were hauled off to prison during their teenage years for an extended period of time. As they spent their young adult years in the penitentiary, it was difficult for me to accept that their academic talents would not come to fruition.

Thirty-five years later another dilemma emerged with my two sons, Kameron and Samuel. Although they had positive experiences in their K-12 schools, they encountered different realities in their attempts to obtain college degrees. My oldest son, Kameron, was an average student and outstanding athlete throughout his K-12 schooling. After graduating from high school, he enrolled in a public four-year Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Although Kameron was a member of the men's basketball team, he had to pay for his college expenses through loans, grants, and a full-time job during his senior year. Despite his academic and athletic commitments, financial obligations, and changing his major twice, he was able to obtain a Bachelors of Science degree in five years.

When my youngest son, Samuel, graduated from high school five years later, his higher education experiences were significantly different. Throughout his primary and secondary school years, he participated in the Gifted and Talented (GT) program and took college preparatory courses. Samuel was also considered an outstanding athlete. However, despite his academic and athletic abilities, he was not offered any university scholarships. After high school, he decided to attend a four-year Historically Black College and University (HBCU) with the support from financial aid and Pell Grants. After

his first semester, he decided to withdraw from college citing deficiencies in the academic programs and student housing conditions.

The following semester, Samuel enrolled at a PWI and secured private funding to pay for his tuition costs. Despite excelling academically and receiving positive feedback from his instructors, he withdrew from school prior to the end of the semester and enlisted in the military. Samuel informed me that although he enjoyed the academic programs and opportunities provided on campus, the university was too expensive. Therefore, he decided to join the military in order to access their education benefits, which would assist him with completing his postsecondary degree in the near future. Unfortunately, Samuel has yet to enroll back in college. Witnessing the success and challenges my sons encountered in higher education left me with mixed emotions. While their father and I were proud when Kameron obtained his college degree, we were astounded that Samuel's post high school experiences had taken an unexpected detour.

The lack of support Samuel received at the HBCU was surprising based on my own academic experiences in this type of institution. I attended an HBCU in Mississippi as a student athlete. I received academic support from my peers, teaching staff, and athletic coaches. Because of the encouragement and financial assistance I received from these individuals, I was able to obtain a bachelor's degree in five years. Twenty years after earning my undergraduate degree, I enrolled in a master's program at a PWI located in the Midwest. On average, I was the only African American in each of my classes, and often felt isolated and alone. My experiences at this institution were different from Kameron, as he felt connected and received the resources and opportunities necessary to complete his college degree. Kameron's academic success at the PWI, and Samuel's postsecondary detour are the underlying motivation for this study.

Their vastly different experiences peaked my interest in examining the factors that influenced African American males' academic success at four-year institutions, and how that information could be used for improving programs developed to increase enrollment and degree completion rates for this population. My aspiration is that the information gleaned from this study can contribute to the emerging research on academically successful African American men at four-year institutions, and also impact institutional policies and practices established to support sustainability for historically underrepresented students on college campuses.

#### Research Goals

The goals of this study are to provide higher education policymakers, administrators, and practitioners with a better understanding of the experiences of African American men in higher education, and contribute to the growing body of literature on developing and/or sustaining recruitment and retention programs for this population. This study could serve as a starting point for higher education officials interested in understanding the complexities of race, gender, and other social constructs, institutional climate, and student success. Narratives from these college graduates could be used to develop culturally relevant curriculum and practices aimed at helping African American men persist and graduate from four-year institutions. In addition, this research study can be used to enhance diversity initiatives and policies designed to address the unique needs of historically underrepresented students. Improving the interaction between higher education staff and students of color (i.e. African American males) can promote a climate of inclusion, support, and respect for this population (Strayhorn, 2008). Despite the challenges and misrepresentations these men encountered on a daily basis, their stories of perseverance, success and/or commitment to excellence can serve as

inspiration for other men of color, especially African Americans, attempting to gain access to and persist through college.

An additional goal of the study was to contribute to the development of recruitment and retention programs for underrepresented populations, particularly African American males. While almost three-fourths of higher education institutions have recruitment programs specifically for underrepresented students, only 42% have retention programs designed to support these students once they matriculate into college (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2003). Retention programs for underrepresented students in higher education affirm that students who become fully integrated both socially and academically are more likely to be committed to the institution and obtaining a college degree (Eimers & Pike, 1997). The development of programs designed to increase the enrollment, persistence, and degree completion of African American men is also important in supporting their academic success. Therefore, the overall goal of this study was to illuminate the individuals, programs, policies, and opportunities that contributed to the successful retention and graduation rates of these men of color.

#### Overview of Dissertation Chapters

In Chapter 1, I provided an overview of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, personal relevance, and research goals. In my review of the literature (Chapter 2), I discuss information related to the history of education access and equity for African Americans, critical issues impacting African American males' preparation for and access to college in PreK-12 educational settings, the challenges to the persistence and degree completion of this student population in institutions of higher education, and the programs, policies, and practices that contribute to the success college enrollment and graduation rates of African American males. In this chapter, I also

highlighted the current scholarship that argues for the focus on the achievements of African American males as well as how I hope to contribute to this current conversation. In Chapter 3, I describe the theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory in Education that informed my study. In Chapter 4, I describe my research design, which included my research approach, methodology, site, participant selection and recruitment strategies, data collection and analysis procedures as well as issues related to trustworthiness. I also provided additional information about my role as a researcher, limitations to this study and implications for research, policy, and practice. The following documents are included in my appendices section: recruitment letters, consent form, demographic information sheet, and interview protocol.

#### Conclusion

The desire for African American men to continue beyond their PreK-12 schooling and graduate from college is often depicted as atypical. Therefore, centralizing the experiences of African American men who successfully obtained a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution can add to the growing body of literature focused on their academic success (Harper, 2009; Jett, 2011). I seek to examine their higher education experiences based on different personal, institutional (e.g. HBCU vs. PWI), socio-historical (e.g. Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s vs. Anti Affirmative Action Measures of the late 1990s and 2000s) and generational (e.g. 1960s to 2000s) influences. In addition, I hope their stories and recommendations can contribute to improving college preparation, enrollment, and retention efforts for African American boys and men across the PreK-16 continuum.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

From slavery onward, African Americans, especially males, have historically had an uneasy relationship within society and their status as targets of policy regulations have been marked by considerable tension and debate (Fultz & Brown, 2008). The Dellums Report noted during the past 25 years, a series of public policies have cumulatively affected the life options for young men of color, which in turn has impacted their high school dropout rates, declining enrollment in postsecondary education, and increased incarceration rates (Harper, 2006).

The overall objective of this study was to examine educational experiences that contributed to the academic success of African American men who successfully completed college across generations. Despite the plethora of literature focusing on their deficiencies, the recent shift in scholarship which highlights their educational progress and achievements was reviewed (Berry, 2003; Berry & McClain, 2009; Harper, 2012; Jett, 2009; McGee & Martin, 2011; Palmer & Young, 2008; Parsons & Kritsonis, 2006; Sheppard, 2005; Thompson & Lewis, 2005). Therefore, I first examined the history of education access and equity for African Americans across the P-16 continuum. Second, I discussed critical issues in P-12 schools that affect possibilities for African American males to successfully prepare and gain admission to college. Third, I highlighted the factors that hinder opportunities for this population to persist through and graduate from higher education. Fourth, I provided an overview of some of the federal, state, and institutional initiatives that have been established to improve college access and success for this population. I concluded this chapter with not only a review of current scholarship arguing for the need to focus on the academic achievements of African American males, but also how my work fits into this conversation.

## The History of Education Access and Equity for African Americans

The education of African American people has historically been subjected to opposition and radical changes since their arrival as slaves in the United States. Slave codes were used to reinforce the degrading status of slaves, and one of the codes excluded them from being educated (Harris, 1993). Following the Civil War, freed slaves continued to be ostracized and subjected to poor-quality schools (Harris, 1993). While the end of the Civil War had promised racial equality, by 1900 new laws and old customs created a segregated society that condemned Americans of color to second-class citizenship. During the Reconstruction period, education for African Americans was specifically focused on teaching them to be subservient and agriculture workers (Woodson, 1933). According to Litwack (2009), schools that tried to teach African Americans more than basic skills to be good workers were denied funding by White supporters. Beginning in the 1930s, African American lawyers from Howard University School of Law and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) campaigned to dismantle constitutionally-sanctioned segregation. In 1952, African Americans from five different communities across the country bravely turned to the courts to demand better educational opportunities for their children, which would later be known as *Brown v. Board of Education* (Warren, 1954).

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court stripped away constitutional sanctions for segregation by race and made equal opportunity in education the law of the land. The decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* marked a turning point in the history of race relations in the United States. Desegregation brought new hope to African Americans with a shared vision that education was the answer to progress (Abraham, Burrell, Whitlock, & Adams, 2003). However, many African Americans found integration was met with resistance and did not necessarily equal access to education (Burriss-Kitchen &

Burris, 2011). While the public education system was undergoing challenges to separate but equal laws, institutions of higher education were experiencing similar pressure for change. Up to that point, African Americans who attended postsecondary schools were exposed to curriculums which justified segregation and taught menial career opportunities (Woodson, 1933).

Following the American Civil War, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were established for African Americans who were prohibited from attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), (Redd, 1998). HBCUs were founded by white philanthropist in 1837 to train free African American to become teachers (Coleman, 2015). The first HBCUS's were private, nonprofit institutions established and funded without state government support (Redd, 1998). With the passage of the Morrill Act in 1890, states practicing segregation practices in public and private colleges were required to establish institutions for African Americans or forfeit federal funding (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2010). Following the act; nineteen Black colleges were established and by 1927 there were seventy-seven HBCUs (Redd, 1998). Today there are 105 four-year HBCUs; 60 public and 45 private throughout the country (Nettles, Wagener, Millett, & Killenbeck, 1998).

Prior to 1960, enrollment of African Americans at PWIs was scarce; integration increased following momentous events such as the Great Migration, military desegregation, and Brown vs Board of education case (Purnell, 2012). During the 1960s, the country underwent social unrest with the Civil Rights Movement playing a significant role. African Americans demanded equal rights in all aspects of society, and education was no exception. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave the federal government greater power to enforce desegregation in education(ASHE Higher Education Report, 2010) Following the abolishment of education segregation, more African Americans began

enrolling at institutions of their choice, with enrollment at PWIs increasing at rapid a rate (Purnell, 2012). In a continuation to improve academic achievements for African Americans, student-led initiatives were cultivated.

The Black Studies Movement (1965-1972), addressed the struggles of African Americans on college campuses and is considered the most significant racial reform movement in the history of U.S. higher education. It was the protracted struggle of African American students who demanded, and sometimes demonstrated for, reforms on college campuses across the country (Rogers, 2012). Today, more than 50years following Brown v. the Board of Education, African Americans are still deprived of quality education (Burriss-Kitchen & Burriss, 2011).

#### Challenges to the Education of African American Males in PreK-12 Schools

Student interaction with teachers, counselors, and administrators has the ability to shape student academic connections positively or negatively. The education of African American children, especially males, offers unique consideration. An example would be Banks' (1993) assertion that when African American males experience academic challenges, psychologists often labels them as having inferior cognitive capacities; however, that suggestion is rarely made when white students experience the same difficulties. Milner (2007) found that teachers often view African American male students through deficit lenses, which result in inaccurate, incorrect, and harmful perceptions. These perceptions dictate the nature of interactions between African American male students and their teachers (Noguera, 2008) which, if continued, may negatively impact academic their achievement.

The following section of this review examined factors that hinder the academic success of African American males in K-12. The factors I reviewed that have been found to negatively impact African American males in primary and secondary school are: school

curriculum, having access to college preparatory classes, overrepresentation in special education, racial disparities in school discipline, and limited parental involvement.

### *The K-12 School Curriculum*

Academic preparation in K-12 school plays a significant role in students' preparation and readiness for college. Astin (1982) found that academic preparation before college has the strongest relationship to first-year college student outcomes. He also noted that high school grades, aptitude test scores, and study habits were insignificant to student persistence in lieu of their secondary school curriculum. Educational policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act that influence K-12 curriculum disproportionately shapes experiences of students of color and low-income students, who often attend schools that lack the necessary resources and opportunities to prepare them for academic success in college (Burke, Adler, & Linker, 2008). Furthermore, teachers and administrators working with culturally diverse students need to develop specific strategies that access their learning needs and abilities (Espinosa, 2005). Cultural relevancy of the curriculum has been advocated as instrumental in promoting academic success and reducing the achievement gap for students of color, (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010). According to Ladson-Billings (2000), the culturally relevancy of the curriculum has proven instrumental in increasing school connectedness and increasing academic achievement of African American students. For African American students, especially males, the oppressed realities they experience could help them learn from their own situations and the context for social change and transformation (Prier, 2006). The cultural strengths these students bring into the classroom can be transformed into lifelong skills when viewed as assets (Espinosa, 2005).

### *Underrepresentation in College Preparatory Courses*

Primary and secondary school experiences and academic preparation of African American males contribute to their presence, or lack thereof, at institutions of higher education. Goldrick-Rab, Harris, Kelchen and Benson (2012) noted that higher education enrollment and completion gaps between White and students of color, as well as wealthier and disadvantaged students, have less to do with poor recruitment and retention strategies or the high cost of tuition and more to do with inadequate academic preparation leading up to college. Cuyjet (2006) contends that factors contributing to the disproportionately low presence of African American males at institutions of higher education can be placed into two basic categories: those preventing African American males from ever getting to college in the first place, and those leaving them unprepared when they arrive on the campus. For example, Rosa (2013) found in her study on high achieving African American males that school context, high quality educational opportunities, and pre-college educational opportunities influenced college degree completion.

Participation in post-secondary education often requires college preparatory coursework, which supports academic success (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006). However, guidance counselors often discourage enrollment in advanced level courses for African American students, which could decrease their opportunity to attend a postsecondary institution (Bailey, 2003). According to Griffin and Allen (2006), colleges and universities often consider the rigor of a student's high school curriculum, including the number of advanced placement (AP) courses and exams taken, when making admission decisions. However, a variety of rigorous courses in all fields are limited in schools that serve low-income students; nor do these schools provide opportunities for honors or AP courses, which limits their ability to build the proper academic foundation for college work

(Haveman & Smeeding, 2006). In general education, gifted education (GT), and AP classes, African Americans have received more attention than other racially, ethnically, and linguistically different (RELD) students; this is likely due to their experiencing the least amount of school and economic success as a group (Ford, 2012). According to Frye and Vogt (2010) African American students are half as likely as White students to be placed in Honors or AP English or math classes and 2.4 times more likely than White students to be placed in remedial classes, which again leaves them at a disadvantage with regards to college readiness. Anderson (2005) cited the steady decline in the academic achievement of African American males and the steady increase in the number of African American males being suspended, dropping out, and being identified with special education as causes for concern. The contrast in the underrepresentation of African Americans, especially males, in Honors, AP, and GT courses is significant when examining their overrepresentation in Special Education classrooms.

#### *Overrepresentation in Special Education*

According to Rodney, Crafter, Rodney, and Mupier (1999), nationally, African American boys score lower than any other group on standardized tests and are three times more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to be misplaced in special education or classes for slow learners. Bridges (2009) found that in academic settings African American males are placed in remedial and special education classes at a greater rate than European Americans or African American females. Wilson and Banks (1994) also found that African American males are disproportionately labeled mentally retarded, placed in special classes, and are the recipient of corporal punishment more than their White counterparts. According to Harry and Klinger (2008), this may be based on views about behavior, as well as what constitutes a disability, disorder, or special education needs which varies across cultural groups and subgroups.

Since behavior is context bound and riddled with subjectivity and opinions, it can be internalized differently by teachers and professionals, who often contribute to classroom management problems, suspensions, and referrals to special education (Ford, 2012). A major concern and primary area of litigation has been high incidence disabilities (i.e. emotional and behavioral disorders, intellectual disability) and the pipeline to special education, meaning suspensions and expulsions for African American males. This leads to them being less likely to participate in college preparation classes and be eligible for admission into a university (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). These educational challenges often predestines them to a life of unemployment and crime, and in the greater scheme of things, the nation suffers globally (Ford et al., 2008).

#### *Racial Disparities in School Discipline*

In their study on school discipline and racial disproportionality in juvenile justice systems, Nicholson, Birchmeier, and Valentine (2009), found that African American students were treated differently when schools made disciplinary decisions, and were significantly more likely to be targeted for out-of-school suspension than White students even when they committed the same offense. Since the 1970s, an increase in suspension rates has doubled for all non-White groups but not for Whites. In 2006, approximately one out of every seven African American students enrolled in K-12 public schools was suspended at least once compared to about one out of every 20 White students (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) contend that documentation on the disciplinary overrepresentation of African American students has remained consistent despite no obvious differences in severity of behavior by White students. Bireda (2002) argues that the lack of knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity to the culture of African American students, especially male student, are the premise of faulty assumptions and negative expectations for academic success, which lead to

disparities in school discipline. According to Rudd (2014), a 2009-2010 survey of 72,000 K-12 schools indicated that while African Americans made up only 18% of enrollment sampled, they accounted for 35% of those suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once, and 39% of all expulsions. The over-exposure to school discipline places racially and ethnically diverse students at increased risk for negative outcomes (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009), especially when considering student engagement in academic studies is a strong predictor of achievement (Brophy, 1988). Challenging racially biased disciplinary practices is critical considering how these practices contribute to students' involuntary departure by systematically excluding and discharging problematic students (Rumberger, 2004). According to Bireda (2000), African American students, particularly males, often become trapped in a cycle of alienation that spirals from disciplinary referrals to suspensions and expulsions to academic failure and dropping out.

#### *Challenges with Parental Involvement*

There is a distinct connection between parental involvement and student academic success in education (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008). According to Jeynes (2005), the degree to which parents are involved with their child's schooling is directly related to positive educational outcomes. There are various meanings used to describe what parental involvement is; for this study, it is defined as any parental attitudes, behaviors, styles, or activities that occur within or outside of school setting to support students' academic and behavioral success in school (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006). The functionalities of parental involvement can be multifaceted and include activities such as homework assistance, school participation, and active supervision (Graves, 2010). The relationship between academic achievement and parental involvement refers to the influence that parental role could have on their child's academic

achievements (Fan, Lindt, Arroyo-Giner, & Wolters, 2009). Conversely, limited parental involvement in their child's education could inadvertently result in negative educational outcomes.

According to McCarron and Inkelas (2006), regardless of the role of socio-economic status, parental involvement plays a critical part in the educational achievement of students. Caspe, Lopez, Chu, & Weiss (2011) noted that the limited parental involvement for African American children could be detrimental to their overall educational development. These findings are significant considering that educational leaders, practitioners and/or support staff may expect low-income and African American students to fail (Rogers, 2006). Parent expectations and involvement have the propensity to support the academic success of their children despite the low expectations of school leaders and educators. For example, in their study on the parental involvement of low-achieving students, Chen & Gregory (2009) found that student grade point average and classroom engagement was associated with parents' high achievement and attainment expectations. An additional example is the overall findings from Fan et al. (2009) which noted that parents who reported higher aspirations for postsecondary education tended to have children with confidence in their abilities to complete school work and increased behavioral engagement in school. To provide wraparound support for these students, teachers and educators need to understand the culture and how to effectively maneuver through barriers when communicating the parental role in academic achievement.

According to Velsor and Orozco (2007) barriers, which affect low-income parents' involvement in their children's education, are often related to teachers' attitudes and school climate. In general, limited parental involvement increases educators' stereotyping of African American parents and often view their lack of involvement as negligence (Lopez-Robertson, Long, & Turner-Nash, 2010). This is significant when considering that

any miscommunications between parents and teachers could lead to low student motivation, high suspension and dropout rates, and frequent placement in special education programs for students with emotional disabilities (Brown & Brandon, 2007). The mismatch between backgrounds of the teacher and parents could lead to perceived differences in education related values and influence the teacher's perception of student's academic abilities (Hauser-Cram, Sirin, & Stipek, 2003). In their study on parental involvement of economically disadvantaged African American parents, Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, and Efreom (2005) found that school receptivity was a strong predictor of school involvement. They also found that open dialogue between parents and the school, as well as sponsored activities for parents, significantly predicted their level of school involvement. Moreover, creating educational climates that are open and inviting and could assist with increasing parental involvement in schools (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000).

### Summary

The literature review revealed factors that hinder the academic success of African American males in primary and secondary schooling. Factors that negatively impact their educational achievements are: limited parental involvement, racial disparities in discipline, overrepresentation in special education, school curriculum, and underrepresentation in college preparatory courses. These factors can also obstruct their interest or ability to continue their education beyond high school. For African American males who enroll in institutions of higher education, familiar or new challenges may be awaiting them upon admittance, which could impact their educational outcomes.

### Challenges to the Higher Education Enrollment and Success of African American Males

African American males enrolled at institutions of higher education may encounter challenges to degree completion. A review of the literature to will examine how

financial aid, grants and students loans, institution type, student engagement, and participation in college athletics impact their retention and graduation rates.

#### *Financial Aid, Grants, and Student Loans*

Despite palpable merits of attending institutions of higher education for social mobility, access to these institutions is unfavorable for some segments of society. Students who aspire to attend may be disadvantaged due to disparaging family background characteristics (Frenette, 2007). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, working class families, and middle class families are dependent upon financial assistance to commence and complete their higher education journey. The role of financial aid and its impact on the decision of students of color to enroll or drop out of college is significant. Titus (2006) reports that first-time students and currently enrolled students from families with low incomes are unlikely to persist to degree completion, and college completion is negatively influenced by being a member of an underrepresented group and unmet financial needs. Students unable to attend institutions of higher education due to financial reasons may apply for student grants, loans, or scholarships. These monies are often awarded based on socioeconomic factors, athletic ability, and proven academic success.

The emerging shift in the type of financial assistance provided to students has contributed to the decrease in enrollment of students and low socioeconomic students. These students have preconceived notions that college is unaffordable and therefore unattainable for them, though most are unaware of available financial aid or resources available to support college attendance (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006; Paulsen, 1998). The Pell Grant program is targeted at low-income students and allows many of them to enroll in college regardless of their financial situation (Baum, 2007). Financial assistance that does not require repayment is attractive and receptive to prospective and current

students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, despite the appeal of the Pell Grant, it has failed to keep up with rising college costs and therefore requires students to seek additional aid elsewhere. In 2006, instead of increasing funding for Pell Grants, Congress instituted two new grant programs for a subset for Pell recipients (Baum, 2007). The economic condition of African Americans in the low-income groups is highly correlated with their ability to pay for and stay in college (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). For African American students, the lack of parental support and limited funding negatively affects college attendance and retention (Seidman, 2005).

### *Institutional Types*

#### Predominately White Institutions (PWI)

Students of color at PWIs encounter additional stresses that come from being a minority (Swail, 2003). According to Wilson (2000) African American men and women bear similar sociological and psychological scars of racism and bigotry. The alienation experienced by students of nontraditional backgrounds in their campus environments is indicative of a deep underlying problem that is not being addressed (Smith & Wolf-Wendel, 2005). The lack of diversity in student population, faculty, staff, and curriculum limits their interactions inside and outside the classroom, which can affect their academic performance and social experiences (Chavous, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Smith, 2004; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Swail, 2003). An important factor which affects college students' persistence according to Roberts and Styron (2010) is that of being socially integrated and connected to others, especially other students.

College, for most students, is not only a time of academic pursuits but also an opportunity to explore or enhance themselves as social beings. Zamani (2000) maintains that students of color are more likely to excel in institutional environments that are culturally diverse, programmatically inclusive, and supportive of multiple approaches to

the acquisition of knowledge. Persistence is determined in part by how the individual student's motivation and attitude toward attaining a degree fits with his experiences on campus (Hyatt, 2003). A difficult adjustment for many students is in the campus environment itself. Thus, PWIs should develop strategies for making the campus environment less hostile to students of color, more specifically African American males (Claar & Cuyjet, 2000). In contrast, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) supposedly offer students of color a friendly environment while promoting cultural pride, education, and institution commitment.

#### Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)

African Americans comprise the majority of the student population at Historically Black Colleges and Universities' (HBCUs) throughout the United States. HBCUs were originally established in the nineteenth century under legal segregation for the purpose of educating African Americans. The amended Higher Education Act of 1965 defines HBCUs as any historically black college or university established before 1964, whose principal mission was (is) the education of Black Americans (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). Towards the middle of the twentieth century, more than 90% of the African American students enrolled in higher education were educated in HBCUs (Kim & Conrad, 2006). HBCUs reportedly admit students who are less prepared based on traditional standards; however these institutions graduate greater portions of African American students than those attending PWIs (Smith & Wolf-Wendel, 2005). These institutions are reportedly able to cultivate African Americans' self-esteem, self-pride, and confidence, which often leads to academic success (Swail, 2003).

Students at minority serving schools share common values and experiences with their peers, become more engaged, and develop a strong support system (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). According to Palmer and Maramba (2010) the racial homogeneity at

HBCUs is encouraging and motivational, which is a dominant factor in fostering academic success among African American male students. Nevertheless, there remain challenges to degree completion for African American males attending HBCUs (Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). The literature suggests that intentional strategies to retain African American males in higher education require resources and programs tailored to meet their specific needs regardless of institution type (Garibaldi, 2007; Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Palmer, Davis & Hilton, 2009; Robert & Terrell, 2008 ).

#### *Student Engagement and Involvement*

Roberts and Styron (2010) contends that while students must experience academic success to remain in college, it is also important that they become involved and engaged in other areas of college life. Student engagement is a critical component of the learning process and increases the likelihood of academic success regardless of the quality of educational opportunities (Bebeerine, 2013). To assist with initiatives to enhance student engagement, national and local organizations' findings are examined and often utilized to develop strategies. For example, the National Survey of Student Engagement's (NSSE) emphasis is on enriching the discourse on college quality by providing diagnostic information that can inform educational improvement initiatives (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2013). This measurement tool examines students' level of diverse engagement within the classroom as well as perception of the college environment.

Aspects of student engagement include: student-faculty interactions, student collaborations, active learning, faculty feedback and expectations, and welcoming campus environment (Strayhorn & Devita, 2010). Student engagement involves a positive attitude towards school, teachers, peers, and academic learning (Fredricks,

Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). However, for low income students and students of color, external factors beyond their control may negatively impact their attitude towards school. An example of these external factors includes limited resources to pay for college and low social expectations for college degree completion (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 2006). Student engagement has become progressively prevalent in addressing dropout prevention as well as high school reform initiatives (Betts, Appleton, Reschly, Christenson, & Huebner, 2010). Connor and Pope (2013) argue research has shown that student engagement in learning declines significantly as students advance through school. Therefore, strategies and policies implemented to increase engagement for this population are critical to address education gaps at all levels of education.

#### *The Realities of African American Male Student Athletes*

According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association, in 1990 African Americans made up only 9.7% of undergraduate enrollment, while African American males made up 51% of football players and 65% of basketball players at Division 1 institutions (Beamon & Bell, 2006). In 2004, 10.4% of male undergraduates were African American; yet 30.5% of all male student athletes at Division 1 institutions were African American (Harper, 2006). Harrison and Lawrence (2003) noted that although Division 1 schools enrolled 45% more African American women than men, there were 3.2 times as many African American male athletes who made up nearly one third of total male student athletes.

Across all Division I institutions, African American males comprised 54.6% of football teams and 60.8% of men's basketball teams in 2004; however, higher representation among players does not solidify equitable representation among graduates (Harper, 2006). Harper (2006) further argues that perhaps nowhere in higher

education is the disenfranchisement of African American male students more insidious than in college athletics at major universities.

Eligibility to participate in college athletics is dependent upon the athlete's physical ability on the court or field in addition to academic achievement within the classroom. Academic concerns for African American student athletes is often overlooked until the high school level where attention is focused on maintaining eligibility and meeting college admissions requirements; however, early disengagement from school and overemphasis on sports often results in underdeveloped functional skills (Dawkins, Braddock, & Celaya, 2008). For many African American males, low academic expectations during their high school years put them at a disadvantage in college (Donnor, 2005). According to Harrison (2008), high school grade point average continues to be a factor in subsequent academic achievement in college for African American and white male student athletes; however, white student athletes' high school grade point average was a stronger predictor of college grade point average when compared to their African American counterparts. Moreover, as a group, African American male student athletes had the lowest high school GPA and ACT/SAT scores, has the lowest GPA in college, were more likely to enroll in easy courses and majors, and were least likely to graduate compared to all student-athletes (Benson, 2000).

#### Summary

The literature suggests African American males are often subjected to factors beyond their control that have a significant impact on their education outcomes and continuing education aspirations. These factors include financial aid, grants and students loans, institution type, student engagement, and participation in college athletics.

Approaches for Improving College Access and Success for African American Males  
across the P-16 Continuum

To increase African American males' enrollment, persistence and graduation rates on college campuses, establishing initiatives that help them successfully graduate from high school as well as transition to and through college are critical. These efforts often include academic enrichment, mentoring, and culturally relevant interventions to strengthen their academic and career trajectories. In this section of the literature review, I discuss educational initiatives which seek to improve the educational achievement and outcomes of African American males across the P-16 continuum.

Educational Initiatives for Increasing College Access and Readiness for African American  
Males

There are no greater challenges in education today than motivating, educating, and empowering African American male learners (Kafele, 2012). Two of the areas of focus have been on improving their high school graduation rates and increasing their enrollment in higher education (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012). Programmatic strategies which actively engage African American males in their academic journey have the propensity to increase their educational outcomes. This section discusses select programs that support students of color, specifically African American males, academic development and transition to college.

*Precollege Programs*

College Preparatory

High school programs that are most successful in increasing college enrollment and retention emphasize elements of strong mentoring relationships, academic vigor and support, and effective instruction (Dukakis, Duong, Velasco, & Henderson, 2014). Programs like TRIO employ different combinations of these programmatic elements in

order to provide typically underrepresented students an opportunity in the college system. These federally funded initiatives are outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for disadvantaged students. One of the first and largest Trio programs is Upward Bound (UB). The program provides underrepresented students with college preparatory and personal enrichment classes. The program is focused on building up student's college going identity and academic preparedness through exposure to college environment and rigorous course work. UB provides after-school tutoring, academic instruction in core curriculum, TAKS/PSAT/SAT/ACT preparation, college tours, workshops, summer residential program, monthly community service opportunities, and cultural & educational field trips. The program is available to students after their eighth grade of school and two-thirds of selected applicants must be low-income potential first-generation college students.

Through participation in the UB program, students are able to overcome class, social, and cultural barriers to higher education. Continued participation in the program increases the likelihood of enrolling in four-year institutions and earning a bachelors degree. An additional part of the Trio programs, is the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). This is a competitive grant program that seeks to increase the number of low-income students academically prepared to enroll in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides state and local community grants who offer support services for impoverished middle and high schools. GEAR UP is unique because it requires cooperation between K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, local and state education entities, businesses and community-based organizations. These community partnerships are required to leverage local resources and match federal monies, and tasked with creating a common agenda to effectively facilitate education aspirations and attainment for low-income students. One of the major

differences between GEAR UP and UB is that it provides program services for students in the 7th grade, follows them through high school graduation, and also their first year in college. By providing academic services such as; college awareness, tutoring, mentoring, academic preparation, financial education activities, and college scholarships for underrepresented students, GEAR UP is addressing the leak in the educational pipeline which occurs between high school and college for this population.

### Mentoring Programs

Mentoring has been shown to increase academic motivation and persistence among high school students (Dukakis, et.al., 2014). It has also been shown students who are mentored have better school attendance, an increased likelihood of going to college, and better attitudes towards school (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2008).

Participation in mentoring is enhanced when the mentor and mentee spend quality time together consistently over a period of time, and build a strong connection characterized by mutuality, trust, and empathy (Hollingshed, 2010). An example would be a mentoring program in Ohio that begins engagement with African American males and their parents at the elementary level. The Hearts and Minds (H&M) mentoring program focuses on math, science and writing as a way to prepare African American males for careers in the medical field. The University of Cincinnati Medical Center offers high school students exposure to health care careers in its Medical Explorers Program. Students from diverse backgrounds meet twice a month and experience various career options in the hospital.

H&M partnered with a local hospital, which has more than 20 African American doctors, nurse practitioners and physician assistants to mentor students. The program works with students from fourth grade through their senior year in high school, and helps them prepare for standardized college tests and assists in securing financial aid. H&M also requires parents to engage as part of a team approach to helping their sons, which

often impacts their academic success (Curnutte, 2014). The Male Initiative Project (MIP) is another mentoring program that where engagement begins early. Enrollment in the school based program begins in middle school and continues through high school. MIP was established based upon research which revealed a continuous decrease in the college enrollment and graduation rates of students, particularly males of color in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). MIP partnered with DePaul University to create a network of school-based mentoring programs, which depends on volunteers to sustain its efforts.

The program aims to improve the high school graduation rates of African American and Latino males in Chicago Public Schools through school-based mentoring, leadership development training, and team building to empower participants to pursue education as a catalyst to success. MIP also strives to encourage lifelong learning and educate the community on issues that involve reaching out and helping this population (Male Initiative Program, 2014). African American male high school students deemed at-risk are referred or recruited to join the African American Male Mentoring Initiative (AAMMI). The basis of the program is to empower mentees to make positive choices that will enable them to maximize their personal potential. Participation in the program also prepares them for postsecondary opportunities through academic enrichment classes. AAMMI provides education classes for mentees and their parents on how to access resources to assist with college tuition. Since its inception in 2012, AAMMI has had 95 percent of its mentees matriculate to post-secondary education.

#### Summary

This section highlighted a select number of program initiatives developed to increase the academic achievements and postsecondary access for students of color, especially African American males. These programs are by no means all-encompassing but are reflective of programs aimed improving the college readiness and access for

African American males. In the next section, I discuss programs which support college retention and success for students of color, more specifically, African American males.

#### Educational Initiatives for Increasing the College Retention and Success for African American Men

African American men entering institutions of higher education could benefit from participation in programs which sustain their retention and matriculation to degree completion. According to Harper (2012) nationally, less than one-third of African American men earn bachelors degree within six years, which is the lowest degree completion rate among gender and racial groups. Participation in academic and social supports can help African American men deal with challenges that can interfere with college completion (Hairston, 2013). This section discusses select programs that support students of color, specifically African American males, college retention and success.

#### *Postsecondary Education*

##### Retention programs

African American males enrolled at institutions of higher education face distinctive degree completion issues. According to Harper and Kuykendall (2012), these issues often include being underprepared for the rigors of college work and limited school engagement. Approaches in response to improving the college success of African American male student often include retention strategies. In response to African American men college completion rates, the Georgia university system's developed the African-American Male Initiative (AAMI) and has programs on 27 of the 31 campuses. The system encourages colleges and university participation by providing matching grants of up to \$30,000 per year. Each institution designs its own variations. For example, The Georgia Institute of Technology, for example, offers a multi-week immersion program for new African American male students, so that they will more

quickly appreciate the level of study required to be successful. Less-selective institutions have created programs that help at-risk students with intrusive advising and abrupt interventions delivered in person when they cut class or fail assignments. An additional example of Georgia's institution program design innovations is the Morehouse Male Initiative (MMI). Morehouse University has a long-standing tradition of academic excellence, and has created a program to support the academic success of its all-male student population.

The program objectives are to provide a holistic approach to education through formal and scientific understanding of best practices for educating students. The focal point of the program is education, which integrates leadership, community service, and character building while developing African American men. Other states have incorporated the AAMI initiative on college campuses. In Texas, a state-wide initiative was launched by The Texas Higher Education College Board (THECB) to increase the college outcomes for African American males. The THECB provides targeted funding to help improve historically low African American male participation and success rates in Texas higher education. In 2009, it created AAMI across college and university campuses. The AAMI is designed to intensify the state's focus on improving the educational success for African American men on college campuses. Since its inception, participation in AAMI has proven to increase college persistence and degree completion.

The program utilizes strength-based practices that building upon on progress made by students. Participation in AAMI has had a positive impact on the success of students of color through strengthened mentoring, academic support, and other services aimed increasing college degree completion. Lastly, the Rising to the Occasion program, at the University of Akron, is part of AAMI network. The program is an educational recruitment and retention model implemented to increase the number of African

American males enrolling and successfully graduating from university. Students who participate in the program are actively engaged by the campus community and become acclimated to the academic rigors of college. The program is designed to assist in the emotional and academic development of students that focuses on self-esteem, identity development, leadership, resiliency, and professional development. The program also engages members of the community which include; K-12 educators, prospective students, parents, and faith-based establishments. Since its inception, AAMI has impacted the number of bachelor's degrees earned system wide by African American men.

For African American men attending community colleges, participation in retention programs often support their transition to four-year colleges. The Center for Male Engagement (CME) which is located on community colleges in Pennsylvania is geared towards African-American males. CME provides its members with targeted academic and non-academic support designed to enhance their skill sets, cultivate a sense of belonging, and build resolve as they pursue degree completion. CME provides supportive services, which are specifically designed for African American males and assist with broadening their perceptions while cultivating a sense of belonging in academia. The programs focus is on improving the educational outcomes of African-American male students, and provides a community atmosphere where they are supported by peers and mentors. Participants are also provided with an assigned support coach, and participate in life skills workshops and cultural enrichment activities.

CME also sponsors a four-week, summer program for African-American males that have graduated from high school or received a GED, and intend to enter the college for the first time in the fall term. The summer program provides an enhanced orientation to the college and its resources, giving new students the opportunity to engage in life at

the college prior to the larger population arriving on campus. Participants receive an enhanced orientation to college as well as community resources. Upon successfully completing the summer program, participants receive a stipend and automatically become CME members. In addition to providing college preparatory assistance for African American males, CME also conducts studies to inform social and public policy on the educational and life outcomes of African American men.

### Mentoring Programs

Participation in a mentoring program has been found to have the propensity to strengthen academic confidence, which supports retention strategy goals (Hollingshed, 2010). Mentoring programs that target students of color, specifically African American males, can provide motivation and encouragement through developing relationships (Contreras, 2011). The Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) is mentoring one many organizations aimed at increasing the college graduation rate for men of color. The organization was founded in 1990, in response to the underrepresentation of African American and Latino males on college campuses. Its mission is to increase African American and Latino males' graduation rates by offering programs to provide financial needs, personal development, and mentoring, tutoring, and behavioral help. The program also offers a peer community, which consists of mentoring involving students, advisors, peers, and primary and secondary student mentoring. The Black Male Initiative (BMI) is a national program that also provides holistic services to increase African American men presence on college campuses.

The City University of New York ([CUNY](#)), BMI program sponsors or funds projects across the various campuses intended to increase the enrollment and retention of students from underrepresented groups, especially African American, Caribbean and Latino males. The programs, while focused on these groups, are available to students of

any race and gender. The primary objective is supporting projects that provide access for students from various populations, particularly the most severely underrepresented populations in higher education. BMI is also located on the campus at Philander Smith College, a private Historical Black College and University (HBCU). The program is an institution-wide, presidential-level program aimed at personally reaching the African American men on campus.

BMI provides levels of social adjustment, supportive relationships with mentors, and institution connection to increase student satisfaction and success. Organizers hold a series of events throughout the year to generate program interest and to get as many African American men involved as possible. One of BMI aims is to create a sense of community with a family-like atmosphere where African American males feel that they belong (Rodden, 2009). BMI is also located on the University of Maryland at College Park. Undergraduate at the university helped start the program amid concerns about the relatively small number of African American professors on the campus. BMI was initially a forum for undergraduates and African American administrators and professors to get to know one another. The program evolved addresses community issues and arranges volunteer opportunities for African American male undergraduates at local schools.

#### Summary

This section highlighted programs developed to improve the postsecondary outcomes for African American men. The overarching goal of these programs is to support their college retention and degree completion. There are a vast number of programs which seek to increase African American male enrollment, persistence and matriculation to college degree; the ones listed in this review are an example of initiatives undertaken to improve their postsecondary educational outcomes.

### *Connections to my Research Study*

As previously mentioned, a great deal of the literature on African American males in education focuses on their underachievement and what they lack in terms of college preparatory resources, social and cultural capital, and school agents who support their achievement (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). However, there has been a shift in literature which examines academically successful African American males in P-16 education settings. According to Brown and Donnor (2011), there is a push for colleges to focus more on why some African American males are academically successful and to measure the impact of programs intended to help while embracing those that look promising. Harper (2006) labels the research shift as anti-deficit achievement framework. He defines anti-deficit achievement framework as research which highlights the successes of African American males instead of their failures.

Harper (2010) used an anti-deficit achievement framework in his qualitative study on how to explore and better understand the enablers of students of color achievement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). He describes the framework as a means for researchers to deliberately attempt to discover how students of color have managed to succeed in STEM, instead of relying on existing theories to repeatedly examine deficits. According to Harper (2010), the anti-deficit achievement framework revolves around questions asked by researchers, which allows researchers seeking to improve student success in STEM to learn more from those who have been successful and to offer insight into their success. In the study, he utilized data collected by the National Black Male College Achievement Study (NBMCAS) from 219 African American male undergraduates recognized for their academic achievements. The participants each completed a two to three hour face-to-face individual interview, and some participated in follow-up interviews over the phone. Harper (2010) found that STEM majors participated

in specific math and science programs that contributed to their college readiness and academic success. He also found that same-race peers played a critical role in developing a sense of belonging in STEM courses and identified key undergraduate experiences that influenced their academic commitment.

Martin and Harris III (2006) conducted a qualitative study on conceptions of masculinities among academically driven African American male athletes. In the study, masculine conceptions were defined as feelings, beliefs, and interpretations about masculinities that encourage men to engage in and express positive gender-related behaviors and attitudes. In institution of higher education, productive masculine conceptions have been associated with increased positive student outcomes for African American males (Harper, 2005). According to Martin and Harris III (2006), most of the research on African American male athletes portrays them with a common set of problematic attitudes and beliefs. They argue that images that counter prevalent negative portrayals of African American male student athletes are needed. For the study, Martin and Harris III (2006) conducted individual interviews with 27 academically driven African American male student-athletes attending four Division 1 universities. They found that participants overall understood their purpose and place in society, therefore provided perceptive assertions of accountability, endurance, and vision. Martin and Harris III (2006) also found that participants were guided by intrinsic values of character, respect, and integrity, which was reflective of their academic success and positive influence on others. The academically driven African American male student-athletes dealt with challenges by staying focused on their academic pursuits and unwavering determination to succeed beyond expectations of African American men in college (Martin & Harris III, 2006).

In his qualitative study on successful African American male mathematic students, Berry III (2005) investigated limitations participants encountered and the compensating factors they experienced. According to Berry III (2005), very little research addresses the causes of disparities in mathematic achievement for African American males. He also contends there is limited research that examines why some African American males achieve at a high level in mathematics despite many obstacles. Berry III (2005) argued that in order for more African American males to achieve academic success, it is critical to focus on success stories of African American men and boys to identify the strength, skills, and significant factors needed to develop success. There were a total of eight participants for this study; however, two were selected in the context of descriptive portraits. The participants for the study were middle school students enrolled in Algebra I. To capture the stories of the students, individual interviews, parent/guardian interviews, teacher interviews, classroom observations, review of documents, and mathematical autobiography were utilized. Berry III (2005) found that parents supported and advocated for their sons, and that participants used circumstances as motivation to succeed. He also found that participation in an academic co-curricular activities provided participants with resources and additional learning experiences which contributed to their success. Lastly, participants were involved in athletics year-round which was a motivating factor for maintaining good grades and also provided structured activities during non-school hours that possibly helped circumvent the participants getting into trouble (Berry III, 2005).

Gayles (2006) also conducted a qualitative research study on achievement, race, and meaning among high achieving African males. According to Gayles (2006), the study is an examination of the cultural assignment of meaning to academic achievement for participants. Through the use of case studies on five high-achieving African American

male high school seniors, the influence of negative stereotypes on academic achievement is explored. Gayles (2006) conducted unstructured interviews and observations with all participants. He found that despite the stereotypes, student academic achievements were not hindered. Gayles (2006) noted that the stereotypes motivated participants to disprove the stereotypes instead of succumbing to them by disidentifying with academic achievement. He also found that participants' fear of confirming negative stereotypes was not as important as disproving negative stereotypes, that the stereotypes reflected more about people who reproduce them than about them as a student.

#### Summary

Harper (2012) contends that the voices of African American male students who have succeeded and graduated from college are rarely solicited. He argues that a shift in research must occur if educators and policymakers are to make serious progress in improving rates of success among this population and that their instructive insights on what it takes for African American men to succeed in college is important. Warde (2008) also believes that this paradigm shift in the research is important for the younger generations and that it gives hope in contrast to the dismal reports on the status of African American males in education.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature suggests that while there are negative factors which continue to impede the academic success of African American males, there has been an influx of educational initiatives and programs in K-16 to increase their presence and persistence in higher education. The literature also suggests that despite the plethora of studies which emphasize the failures and deficits of African American males in numerous capacities, there is a shift in reporting their educational successes which could provide

educators, stakeholders, and policy makers with information to support their academic achievements.

## Chapter 3

### Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used to examine the educational experiences of African American college graduate men. Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that challenges the dominant culture's portrayal of race and racial power in the American legal culture as well as society as a whole (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Moreover, applying CRT provides the opportunity for identifying meanings and experiences for people of color. When applied to education, CRT is utilized for exposing how mainstream educational institutions promote racism (and other forms of subordination such as classism, sexism, etc.) through teaching practices, curriculum, and school designs that privilege White culture and ignore how race and racism impacts the lives of students of color (Knaus, 2009). Prior to the development of CRT, race, racism, and racial realities were generally ignored among interrelationships and phenomena incorporated in theories pertaining to students and their development (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

CRT was developed as an extension from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), through the works of legal scholars such as Kimberle Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell, and Alan Freeman (Delgado & Stefanic, 1998). CLS challenges traditional legal scholarship that focuses on doctrinal and policy analysis that spoke to the specificity of individuals and groups in social and cultural contexts (Gordan, 1990). According to Ladson-Billings (1998), CLS critiques mainstream legal ideology for its portrayal of U.S. society as a meritocracy. However, it fails to include racism in its critique, which was a source of contention for legal scholars of color. Crenshaws, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995) contend that CRT is an intellectual movement, which is specific to our postmodern

and conservative times notwithstanding a long tradition of human resistance and liberation.

CRT has been used in various disciplines of study, such as social work (Freeman, 2010), public health (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010), women's studies (Bernard, 1993; Wing, 2001), ethnic studies (Early, 1994), and education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994; Milner IV, 2007) to examine and expose racial disparities within society.

#### Critical Race Theory in Education

In 1994, Ladson-Billings & Tate introduced CRT to the general field of education. They argued that race continues to be a significant factor in producing inequalities in society and educational institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Solorzano and Yosso (2000) define CRTE as an approach to understanding the problems in education through the lens of communities of color. CRTE is also used to highlight the prominent role of race and racism in educational systems (Solorzano, 1998).

Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) identified six principal tenets of CRT in education: 1) the intercentricity of race and racism; 2) challenge dominant ideology of meritocracy, neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness; 3) commitment to social justice; 4) centrality of experiential knowledge; 5) utilization of interdisciplinary approaches; and 6) Whiteness as property.

According to Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) the first tenet of CRTE is intercentricity of race and racism. This tenet recognizes that race and racism are central, endemic, and permanent fundamental parts of explaining and defining how U.S. society functions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Moreover, they emphasize that racism is a normal part of American life, which makes it hard to identify as well as difficult to eliminate and address.

In the second tenet, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contend that CRTE challenges White privilege, meritocracy, race neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness claims. This tenet further disputes claims produced by the dominant culture and challenges its deficit findings of people of color. Gotanda (1991) surmises that colorblindness and race neutrality has been adopted as a way to justify ignoring and dismantling race-based policies (e.g. Affirmative Action) designed to address social inequity.

According to Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995), the third tenet of CRTE is a commitment to social justice which offers a transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression. Yosso (2005) maintains this tenet serves as a tool for exposing social injustice in education and works towards eliminating racism.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), define the fourth tenet as the ability to legitimize the lived experiences of people of color by recognizing their experiential knowledge. They argue that stories told by the dominant group are constructed to justify their power and maintain their privilege. This tenet of CRTE uses a method referred as counterstorytelling. Counterstorytelling according to Delgado (1999) refers to a method of telling the untold story of people of color. In addition, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggest counterstorytelling provides the opportunity for the oppressed to communicate their experiences and reality.

The fifth tenet of CRTE is utilization of interdisciplinary analysis. According to Delgado & Stefanić (2007), this tenet refers to the idea that each race has its own origins and ever-evolving history. They further contend that no race has a single, easily stated, unitary identity. This tenet challenges history as we know it and questions underlying truths beyond what or whose history we have been taught. Furthermore, interdisciplinary methods challenge historicism and the unidisciplinary focuses of most analyses, and

insists that race and racism can be placed in both a contemporary and historical context through the use of this method (Delgado, 1984).

The final tenet of CRTE according to Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) is Whiteness as property. They argue that in the realm of education, access to high quality, rigorous curriculum have been almost exclusively enjoyed by White students. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) further argue that tracking, honors, gifted, and advanced placement course have been re-segregated by schools. While there are six tenets of CRTE, two of the tenets have been selected to analyze my findings.

One of the tenets used for this study was intercentricity of race and racism. This tenet provided an opportunity to examine ways in which race and racism impacts the academic achievement of African American college graduate men. Utilizing this tenet exposed various ways in which racism and other forms of subordination continually manifest itself, despite espoused institutional values regarding equity and social justice (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). Furthermore, this tenet allowed me to illuminate the unique ways African American men over a 50-year period navigated and negotiated their experiences on various U.S. higher education campuses in order to obtain a college degree.

The second tenet that I used for this study was the centrality of experiential knowledge. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) noted that CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, and draws on their lived experiences. This tenet is significant to my study because I examined the realities of African American males who graduated from four-year institutions which is in stark contrast to the plethora of literature which focus on their absence and/or declining numbers on U.S. college and university campuses (Alon, 2010; Bailey, 2011; Daniel, 2007; Holcomb, 2010; Hyatt, 2003; Noguera, 2008; Wilson, 2000). Through

counterstorytelling, the exposure and critique of normalized dialogue that perpetuates racial stereotypes and challenges to stories constructed by the dominant group can be exposed (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) assert that critical race methodology in education challenges traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color. They contend that the use of counterstorytelling is a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege by shattering complacency and challenging the dominant discourse on race. This tenet related to my study in that it allowed for the recounting of personal experiences with race, racism, successes, policies, opportunities, and roadblocks in higher education over a period of 50 years and how academic success was obtained despite perceived challenges.

#### The Use of CRT in Educational Research

Various education scholars have used Critical Race Theory in Education (CRTE) to examine disparities across multiple levels of the PreK-20 continuum. These studies have focused on the: a) success and challenges experienced by various stakeholders such as students, families, teachers, and leaders and b) policy and practices which promote and hinder educational access and equity for communities of color.

#### CRTE in K-12 Education

Milner IV (2007) used critical race theory to investigate how teachers' successful practices in urban schools counter, disrupt, and interrupt pervasive discourses that only focus on the negative characteristics of teachers and students in urban schools. He conducted a qualitative study to examine nontraditional teaching techniques that yielded nontraditional academic success. According to Milner (2007), student success was not

concrete, learning was reciprocal between teachers and students, and counterstories revealed learning was possible despite socio-economical background.

Knaus (2009) utilized critical race theory in a qualitative study to demonstrate how instructional techniques that encourage student voice as a foundation for academic excellence. To investigate this topic, he taught a writing class at a transitional high school in California. The students the author worked with were predominantly African American and Latino, and most had involvement with juvenile services. The class design supported an environment for students to express themselves freely and share their lived experiences. Knaus (2009) argued that applying critical race theory attributes to self-reflective teaching and the development of classroom structures enables students to express critical, culturally-rooted voice, and emphasizes how to listen to students as part of framing a classroom.

Huber, Johnson, & Kohli (2007) utilized CRT to examine the role of schools in instilling and perpetuating internalized racism within students of color. In their qualitative study, internalized racism was defined as internalization of negative stereotypes or judgments of one's racial group. They noted that the psychological processes children experience when internalizing racism and factors in schools that may contribute to it. According to Huber, Johnson, & Kohli (2007), early works in psychology dealt specifically with African Americans and the effects of internalized racism on self-concept. They argue that although internalized racism was rarely studied in education, it is embedded in three fundamental components to the functioning of schools. These components consisted of teachers (e.g. acknowledging the predominantly white teaching force and teacher education faculty), curriculum (e.g. state textbooks that lack representation of people of color), and school resources (e.g. unequal resources between predominantly white and non-white schools). The authors used CRT to examine how institutions maintain and

perpetuate racial hierarchies in which whites are consistently ranked above students of color. They found that the internalization of racism by students of color has the propensity to negatively impact their psyche, perceptions, and academic performance. They also found that specific components of schools need to be reformed in order to accomplish educational and social justices.

Howard (2008) applied CRT to a qualitative study on the schooling experiences of African American males in PreK-12 schools. He indicated that one disturbing reality about the plight of African American males in schools has been the relative silence from the educational community at large and from the educational research community in particular. The author noted concerns that despite the research on African American male underachievement in education, it appeared that widespread failure for this population is accepted as normal. For this study, he used CRT to shed light on how African American males believe race and racism play a role in their schooling. According to Howard (2008) the use of counterstorytelling within a CRT framework provided participants a platform to discuss race-related issues. He found that participants were not only aware of the ways in which race shaped how they were viewed by their teachers and school administrators, but also revealed their intent to eradicate negative racial stereotypes held about African American males.

Duncan (2002) conducted a qualitative study to examine the different stories students, teachers, and administrators use to explain the exclusion and marginalization of African American male students. He asserts that because African American males are constructed as a strange population with attitudes and values that are fundamentally different from other students, their marginalization and oppression are understood as natural and primarily of their own doing. According to Duncan (2002) the racially informed relations of power are fixed in the outwardly objective social languages (i.e. science,

popular culture, and media) that students, teachers, and administrators use to make claims about the academic experiences of African American male students. Through the use of CRT, he explored the academic and social lives of African American male high school students. The author found that the CRT framework allowed participants to express their experiences through counterstorytelling which allowed their voices to be heard. He also noted that the use of narratives to frame his research yielded compelling and disconcerting evidence to support participants' stories. He concluded that a concrete step towards eliminating oppression of African American male students and providing space for their narratives is in challenging structures of domination in schools. Duncan (2008) recommended the removal of institutional conditions in schools that prevent African American male students from participating in their academic journey.

#### CRTE in Higher Education

There have been several studies that used CRTE to understand the experiences, policy, and practices that impact faculty, staff, and students within the higher education context. For instance, Fasching-Varner (2009) applied CRTE to examine the institutional and individual problematic of race and white supremacy in a pre-service teacher education program in a Midwest university. He contends that White academics engage in discriminatory warfare in what is a systematic racist oriented training program, and that the very nature of teacher education in the U.S. maintains and breeds education disparities. McDowell (2004) used CRT to explore race and racism in marriage and family therapy (MFT) education. She found that participants viewed race as a relevant factor in shaping their experiences in the MFT training program and that through the use of CRT, racism was acknowledged as normal and contributed to social justice in the education program. Comeaux (2010) explored faculty perception of academic success of African American and White student athletes through photo elicitation. He applied CRTE to

explore faculty perceptions about African American and White U.S. college student-athletes' academic and post-undergraduate accomplishments. Comeaux (2010) found that faculty viewed African American student-athletes' accomplishments less favorable than the accomplishments of White student-athletes.

When applied to student experiences, CRTE has exposed the influences of race and racism on students of color in colleges and universities. Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000) conducted a qualitative study on the impact of racial microaggressions on campus racial climate. The study participants consisted of a group of African American students who attended three predominantly white institutions in the United States. According to Pierce (1978), racial microaggressions are defined as everyday subtle, and often automatic, putdowns and insults directed towards African Americans. Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000) found that the effects of racial microaggressions can have a negative impact on the campus racial climate, and CRTE allowed them to recognize, document, and analyze experiences from African American affected by racial microaggressions.

Freeman (2011) examined how CRT can be used to explore developing racial consciousness through which students can understand lived experiences during the post-civil-rights movement era. In his essay on teaching history, critical race theory, and social work, he argued for using the autobiography of President Barak Obama in social work classrooms to explore issues of race and African American identity. According to Freeman (2011), narratives from important figures such as Barak Obama could illicit ideas and meanings of racial progress, as well as help students fully grapple with persistent questions of racial inequality in the U.S. He contended that despite having the first African American president, society as a whole is experiencing an era of deindustrialization, growing economic inequality, skyrocketing incarceration rates, and

dysfunctional public school systems in which the majority of children are non-white. The author used CRT to examine how some marginalized groups and individuals appear to make racial progress while overall structures of race and power remain intact. Freeman (2011) found that through the use of CRT, reading the autobiography might provide insights through which students can postulate what it means for society to have elected its first African American president. He also found that CRT exposed how race continues to affect the lives of poor African Americans in the U.S. in both overt and unseen ways. According to Freeman (2011), while most visible signs of racial discrimination have been banned, racial inequalities persist and often become more ingrained in society.

Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009), utilized CRT in their analysis of policies that have effected African American students' participation and degree obtainment in higher education. The authors conducted a qualitative study to examine the recurrent struggle for racial equity despite policies enacted to close college opportunity gaps between African Americans and whites. According to Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009) policies that have affected participation and degree completion rates for African Americans have taken a downward shift in some states. They contended that this shift permeated previous policy efforts to address enrollment declines, inequitable funding, forced desegregation at HBCUs, affirmative action, and race-based admissions at PWIs. Harper, Patton, & Wooden (2009) argued that in order to achieve racial equity, policy makers in public and institutional sectors need to be aware of structural barriers that produce disparities in college access and success. The authors found that CRT is particularly useful for examining policies affecting African American students in higher education, since racial subordination is among the critical factors responsible for the continuation of racialized disparities and opportunity gaps. Additionally, Harper, Patton,

and Wooden (2009), argued that using a CRT lens is essential for illustrating how various policy decisions impact African Americans duration in higher education.

Recently, scholars have used CRTE to highlight the academic success of students of color, especially African American males. For example, Harper (2009) used this theory in his study of academically successful African American males at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). He used counter narratives to challenge the plethora of studies that portray African American males as underachieving or unlikely to succeed in higher education. Harper (2009) found that there was an overlooked population on PWI campuses that consisted of African American males who were academic achievers as well as student leaders inside and outside the classroom. The author also found that these men often experienced racism and success simultaneously. He contends that their success entails multifaceted strategies, which include engagement in student organizations, positive relationships with like peer groups, and opportunities to publicize academic successes to Whites that possess deficit views of African American men. Harper (2009) further explained that these African American males chose to present themselves positively through participation in campus leadership positions and also confronted campus racist stereotyping acts immediately.

Jett (2011) conducted a case study on the mathematics education of an African American male doctoral student at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). He used CRTE to examine the participant's undergraduate and graduate experiences. The author noted that there were no experiences with race and racism during the participant's undergraduate studies, based on the demographics the HBCU which consist of mostly African Americans. However, race and racism was encountered while attending a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) for graduate studies. The encounters consisted of racial profiling, low expectations, and doubt in his abilities. Despite these challenges,

academic success was achieved through assignment collaborations, ethnic-gender matching mentoring, and postgraduate preparation. According to Jett (2011), applying CRTE to explore the academic success of African American males in mathematics through counterstorytelling could attract more African American males into mathematics education.

### Conclusion

Critical Race Theory in Education (CRTE) provides a lens through which race, racism and education can be examined, while highlighting experiences that are relevant to the population in my study. The philosophical approach to CRTE is appealing based on its strong conceptual framework, which assigns meaning and practical application of the research findings regarding students of color (Daniel, 2007). Closson (2010) suggests that a CRTE framework, whether used alone or with other frameworks, attempts to examine why racism has persisted and shed light on aspects of the dialogue on racism and other forms of subordination that has been left out of previous discussions.

The application of CRTE to my study provided an opportunity to highlight how African American men perceived their college experiences, and how their perceptions are similar and/or different based on institutional type or periods of enrollment. CRTE provides an outlet for the voices of African American men who were able to successfully obtain bachelor's degrees over the past 50 years to be placed at the forefront of the discourse about educational trajectories of this population. Their stories can also inform recruitment and retention initiative focused on increasing the college enrollment and graduation rates of African American men.

## Chapter 4

### Research Design

The research design used in study was a qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is appropriate to use when a problem or issue needs to be explored and there is a need to study a group or population. He also noted that qualitative studies are conducted when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study. When conducting a qualitative study, the researcher's goal is to better understand human behavior and experience, while seeking to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe those meanings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). The use of qualitative research for this study allowed me to explore the academic experiences that have contributed to the successful completion of college for African American men over a 50-year period. This study was essential for illuminating their realities in postsecondary settings and the individuals, programs, policies, events, and opportunities that contributed to their degree completion.

### Methodology

Phenomenology is the research methodology that was used for this study. According to Husserl (1927), phenomenology is the systematic examination of the types and forms of intentional experience, and the reduction of their structures to the prime intention. He further notes that phenomenology is a descriptive, philosophical method which seeks to examine lived experiences and its impact on the particular phenomenon. Giorgi (1997) asserts that phenomenology in its most comprehensive sense refers to the totality of lived experiences that belong to a single person. He further contends that the aim of phenomenology is to determine what an experience means for the person who had the experience and can provide a comprehensive description of it. A

phenomenological approach was used to examine the generational and institutional experiences of African American college graduate men. This methodology allowed me to examine the participants' academic, personal, and social experiences and how these experiences shaped their postsecondary trajectories.

#### Site

I used the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Metroplex as a recruitment site. I selected this metropolitan area because it is one of the regions in Texas with a significant number of African American residents and communities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), African Americans comprise only 12% of the population in the state. Yet, African Americans make up 22.9% of the population in Dallas County, and 15.6% in Tarrant County, which are the most densely populated areas in this region. The distinctiveness of the study with regards to the generational experiences of African American men college graduates required expansion into other counties. Therefore, prospective participants living in the surrounding counties (e.g. Denton, Collin, Johnson, etc.) in the DFW area were not excluded. This recruitment site was also selected because of its potential to yield the diverse sample required for this study.

#### Recruitment Process

A sampling frame was developed to recruit the defined target population. According to Miles & Huberman (1994), a sampling frame is commonly prepared in the form of a physical list of population elements. They contend that a well-constructed frame allows the researcher to gather the defined target population without the need to worry about contamination, with incorrect entries or entries that represent excluded populations. Therefore, the criteria for participation in this study included: 1) identifying as an African American/Black man, 2) being 18 years of age or older, 3) obtaining a bachelor's degree from an accredited public or private four-year Predominately White Institution (PWI) or

Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the United States, 4) graduating from a college or university between the 1960s and 2000s and 5) being a resident of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, a metropolitan area in the North Texas region (See Table 4.1 below).

Once I received UTA Institution Review Board approval, I sent recruitment letters to potential participants through various institutional and organizational list serves (See Appendix: Recruitment Letter). The first respondents who met the criteria for this study received an email containing inquiries about setting up an interview and an information sheet to complete in order to obtain additional demographic information about them (See Appendix: Participant Email and Appendix: Participant Background Information Questionnaire). Respondents not selected received an email thanking them for their willingness to participate in this study (See Appendix: Non-Participant Email).

#### Participant Selection

The participants selected for this study were 10 African American men who earned their bachelor's degree at U.S. accredited four-year public and private institutions between the 1960s and 2000s. To obtain variation for this study, I learned about the experiences of two different groups: five African American men who graduated from Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs), and five African American men who graduated from Predominantly White Universities (PWIs). I utilized purposeful sampling to obtain seven participants for this study. According to Maxwell (1996), purposeful sampling is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to obtain important information for the study. Selecting times, settings, and individuals that can provide information needed in order to answer my research questions is the most important consideration in qualitative sampling decisions. This sampling method was selected based upon Maxwell's (1996) contention that it

allows the researcher to deliberately select cases, individuals, or situations and can also establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals. Snowball sampling was used to reach a broader range of prospective participants in order to complete requirements for this study. More specifically, this sampling technique allowed me to ask participants to recommend others who fit the criteria to participate in this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Through snowball sampling, three participants were selected.

According to Boyd (2001), two to ten participants or research subjects are sufficient to reach saturation. Creswell (1998) recommends long interviews with up to 10 people for a phenomenological study. For this study, interviews were conducted with a sample of 10 college graduates: five men from PWIs, and five men from HBCUs who graduated between the 1960s and 2000s. Participants were selected on a first response basis according to their year of graduation and institutional type (See Appendix: Participant Recruitment Letter). Once individuals were selected for this study, additional interested participants were notified via email that their information would be retained until the completion of and in the event someone withdrew from the study (See Appendix: Non-Participant Email).

#### *Demographic Table Summary.*

The ten African American college graduate men who participated in this study represent a heterogeneous group with varying personal, academic and social realities. These men came from two- and single parent households across various states. In addition, they have similar and different pre college and college experiences. (See Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Participant Demographics

Table 4.1						
Participant Demographics						
Name	Birthplace	Familial Type	College Type	Year Graduated	Athletic Scholarship	College Prep Program
Maurice	Texas	Single Parent	PWI	1966	No	No
Bernard	Texas	Two Parent	HBCU	1967	Yes	No
Fletch	Louisiana	Two Parent	HBCU	1975	No	No
Lyle	Indiana	Two Parent	PWI	1974	No	No
Landon	Texas	Two Parent	PWI	1981	Yes	No
Mitch	Louisiana	Single Parent	HBCU	1982	Yes	No
Carter	Rhode Island	Single Parent	PWI	1998	No	Yes
Bob	North Carolina	Single Parent	HBCU	1996	No	No
Ellis	Philadelphia	Single Parent	HBCU	2007	No	Yes
Azel	Mississippi	Single Parent	PWI	2003	No	No

## Data Collection

I used the following methods for this study: a) interviews, b) field notes, and c) memoing. Phenomenological interviewing is a specific type of method which describes the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). This form of interviewing also involves an informal, interactive process that utilizes open-ended comments and questions as well as conversations aimed at putting the interviewee at ease (Moustakas, 1994). Two face-to-face interviews were conducted, which involved: a) one interview about their personal and pre-college experiences and b) second interview about their college and post college experiences as well as recommendations for improving postsecondary access and success for African American males. (See Appendix: Interview Protocol A and B). I also conduct one follow-up interview over the phone to obtain clarification. The Informed Consent Document (See Appendix: Informed Consent Document) was reviewed prior to conducting each interview. After reviewing the consent document, I obtained the participants' signature indicating their understanding of the interview purpose and process. Each interviewee was given a pseudonym to protect their identity and assigned a code (i.e. Joe D. 16 March 2014) to assist with the data collection process. All interviews were audio-recorded, lasted between one to two hours, and occurred at a location and time that was most convenient for the participants.

The data collection process also included the use of field notes during interviews as recommended by Lofland and Lofland (1999), in effort to circumvent forgetting comments or observations. The authors emphasize the importance of field notes by the researcher to retain data gathered; the notes were written throughout the interviews, and follow-up interview. Another method used in this study was memoing, which involved writing other than actual field notes, transcriptions, or coding (Maxwell, 1995). For

example, memos were written during the data collection and analysis process detailing observations, actions, and interactions with the interviewees as well as the review and coding of interview transcripts. I completed memos on borders surrounding transcriptions while listening to participant's interviews to capture additional data.

Utilizing a process in which to properly store and categorize data is important and can assist with organization of the data collected. Therefore, I used the data collection method recommended by Groenewald (2004), which consists of files with divisions for the various interviews. More specifically, I filed hard copies of the documentations that included: 1) the informed consent form, 2) notes made during the interview, 3) field notes for subsequent interviews, 4) additional information participants offered during the interviews, 5) notes made during the data analysis process (e.g. grouping of units of meaning into themes), 6) draft transcripts and analysis of the interviews presented to participants for validation, 7) confirmation of correctness and commentary by participants regarding the transcript and analyses of the interview, and 8) additional communication between participants and myself. As a novice researcher, I believe this organizational method ensured that the data did not get mixed up or misplaced. In addition, I stored audio files, interview transcriptions, field notes, and memos electronically on a password-protected computer and on multiple hard drives as precautionary measures.

#### Data Analysis

The audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, as recommended for phenomenological data collection. According to Mishler (1986), the transcript is a partial representation of the interview; however, it can reflect the interview as fully as possible by being verbatim. I used five steps of Hycner's (1995) data analysis process to guide and present an overall structure for analysis and organization of the study (Creswell, 2006). The steps include: 1) bracketing and phenomenological reduction, 2) delineating units of

meaning, 3) clustering units of meaning to form themes, 4) summarizing each interview, and 5) extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

Bracketing is a form of phenomenological reduction where the researcher's meaning and interpretations are suspended (Hycner, 1995) and the focus of the research process is rooted on the topic and question (Moustakas, 1994). More specifically, it requires the researcher to set aside assumptions and biases and to suspend theoretical beliefs, preconceptions, and presuppositions (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). One method for completing this task requires the researcher to address presumptions prior to analysis of the data (Hycner, 1995).

The next step in the analysis process as recommended by Hycner (1995) is delineating units of meaning. This requires the researcher to meticulously review transcribed interviews in order to extract participants' meanings (Hycner, 1995). During this process, I used field notes and memos to assist with retaining the essence of the participants' meaning with the phenomena.

The third step of analysis is clustering units of meaning to form themes. According to Hycner (1995), this step requires the researcher to develop a list of non-redundant units of relevant meaning, and then try to determine if any units naturally cluster together. Moreover, the meaning units are clustered into themes, which are then used to develop descriptions of the experience (Moustakas, 1999).

The fourth step in Hycner's (1995) data analysis process is the summarization of each interview. This process is described as a written summary of each interview incorporated with the themes cited in the data (Hycner, 1995). Each interview is summarized to describe the meaning and essence of the experience, which may also include verbatim examples from transcribed interviews as suggested by Moustakas

(1999). At this stage of the analysis, I wrote a summation of each interview with findings specific to each participant.

The final step Hycner (1995) describes is a composite summary of all interviews to capture the essence of the phenomenon being investigated. This process is an overall composite of the entire groups' meanings and essences of the experiences (Moustakas, 1999). The researcher's objective at this point is to provide a collective summation of the data and capture the impact of the phenomena on interviewees. The use of this process ensured that the data was handled properly.

#### Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the extent in which findings are an authentic reflection of the personal or lived experiences of the phenomenon under investigation (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). It can be obtained through the use of rigorous validation strategies as noted by Creswell (1999). The steps I took to ensure the rigorousness of my study included: 1) data triangulation, 2) member checking, 3) interview comparison, and 4) bracketing. Triangulation of the data was used to validate findings in order to substantiate the trustworthiness of the study. According to Arksey and Knight (1999), triangulation is a form of collecting data from two or more sources to contrast findings. The forms of triangulation used for this study were interviews, memos, and field notes. According to Miles & Huberman (1994), member checking allows participants to read through the data and analyses and provide feedback on the researchers' interpretations of their responses; this provides researchers with a method of checking for inconsistencies, challenges the researchers' assumptions, and provides them with an opportunity to re-analyze their data. Participants received a copy of their interview transcripts to validate whether or not their perspectives were captured accurately.

Constant comparison is evaluating one piece of data with past data, and it enables the researcher to identify emerging themes within the research project not considered on its own (Anderson, 2010). I used constant comparison of interviews to compare participants' generational, social, and institutional experiences. This procedure contributed to the trustworthiness of this study's findings on the similarities and differences reported by participants. The final step in ensuring the trustworthiness of this study was bracketing. Specifically, I set aside my biases and judgments prior to the analysis process, and continued doing so throughout the analysis (Moustakas, 1999).

#### The Role of the Researcher

I am a parent of two African American males, one who obtained his degree from a PWI, and the other who attended a PWI and an HBCU without earning a degree. As a researcher, I am aware that in order to seem truthful in my study, I need to acknowledge any preconceived notions, judgments, assumptions, and opinions I may have about this issue and how it will be addressed. I controlled my biases through the use of bracketing as recommended by Moustakas (1999) to assist with maintaining an unbiased approach throughout the study. I am also aware that being a female researcher may have created undue anxiety, tension, and influenced the participants' level of comfort. According to Moustakas (1999) gender plays a significant role when conducting a study, and female researchers often encounter control issues with male participants. He stated that this issue often occurs due to participants' view of dominant roles within society and passive role as an interviewee. I addressed this issue by meeting with participants at a public place of their choice and at a date and time that was most convenient for them.

#### Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the design of the study, data analysis, ethical considerations, steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of

findings, and role of the researcher. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 will detail participant biographical information and describe the findings of this study.

## Chapter 5

### An Introduction to the African American College Educated Men

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the educational experiences, challenges and successes of African American men who graduated from college over a 50-year period (e.g. 1960s to 2000s). More specifically, this study explored the generational similarities and differences within their pre-college, college and post-college experiences. Purposeful and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit participants who met the criteria for study: 1) identified as an African American/ Black man, 2) was 18 years of age or older, 3) obtained a bachelor's degree from an accredited public or private four-year Predominately White Institution (PWI) or Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the United States, 4) graduated from a college or university between the 1960s and 2000s and 5) resided in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, a metropolitan area in the North Texas region.

Ten African American men between the ages of 29 and 78 agreed to contribute to this study. While all of these men currently reside in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, Bernard, Maurice, and Landon are from Texas; Fletch, Lyle, and Mitch are from Louisiana; Azel is from Mississippi; Ellis is from Pennsylvania; Carter is from Rhode Island, and Bob is from North Carolina. Carter was the only participant whose parents were immigrants from West Africa.

Five of the participants (Maurice, Mitch, Bob, Azel, and Ellis) came from single parent households, four participants (Bernard, Fletch, Lyle, and Landon) came from two-parent households, and one participant's (Carter's) parents were divorced by the time he was a toddler. Ellis was raised by his godmother. At the age of 16, Mitch rented an apartment for his three younger siblings and himself and had a part-time job, while excelling in athletics and academics. In regards to their socioeconomic (SES)

backgrounds, five participants (Lyle, Mitch, Azel, Ellis, and Bob) grew up in low-income households and five participants (Bernard, Maurice, Fletch, Landon, and Carter) were raised in middle-income households. While six of the participants (Lyle, Mitch, Landon, Bernard, Azel, and Ellis) were first-generation college students, four participants (Maurice, Bob, Fletch, and Carter) grew up with family members who had a bachelor's and/or advanced degrees.

Five men (Bernard [1960s], Fletch [1970s], Mitch [1980s], Bob [1990s] and Ellis [2000s]) who graduated from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and five men (Maurice [1960s], Lyle [1970s], Landon [1980s], Carter [1990s] and Azel [2000s]) who graduated from Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) between the 1960s and 2000s participated in this study. While eight of the participants (Bernard, Maurice, Fletch, Mitch, Landon, Bob, Carter, Azel, and Ellis) entered college as first-time freshmen, one of the participants (Fletch) transferred from a PWI to an HBCU due to the campus racial climate during that time. One participant (Landon) began his collegiate athletic career at a community college due to his low high school G.P.A. and transferred to a four-year institution on an athletic scholarship. Another participant (Lyle) entered college as a married man with children in his late 20s after serving in the U.S. Air Force and working as a computer programmer. After these African American men completed their bachelor's and/or advanced degrees, they pursued careers in the fields of criminal and juvenile justice, education, medicine, corporate finance, and computer programming.

In the proceeding section, I provide a brief description of each of the participants' personal, pre-college, college, and post-college experiences to capture the essence of the lived realities that contributed to their academic and professional achievements. Prior to each of the profiles are quotes highlighting their responses to an inquiry about what being a college-educated African American man means to them.

## Participants' Profiles

*1960s*

"Well, it means that...you have achieved, and you never finish achieving, but it was the groundwork for where I am today. And...also it...enabled me to be able to help other young people...stress to them the importance of education."

(Bernard, Class of 1967)

Bernard was born and raised in Apple, Texas in a middle class, two-parent household where education was a priority and seen as a way to open doors that were previously closed to African Americans. Although he was considered a first-generation college student, his two older siblings completed their college degrees before him. Bernard attended all-African American primary and secondary schools where his teachers were all African American, lived in the community and were considered to be well-respected and special people who were held to high standards. Although he had a speech impediment in elementary school, he was a high achieving student until high school when he began actively participating in sports (e.g. football and track) and working alongside his father as a custodian. His secondary schooling was also influenced by the Civil Rights movement, which inspired him and others to be their best. Due to his principal's lack of interest in sports, Bernard was not recruited to college for his athletic abilities. It was his instructor/ mentor, Mr. Allen who advocated for him to be considered for a track scholarship during a competition at Evergreen A&M College.

After Bernard graduated from high school, he enrolled at Evergreen A&M College (an institutional type that African Americans were only allowed to attend during that time) in Texas, received a full track scholarship after his first semester, and was made captain of the team of following year. In addition to participating on the track team, Bernard pursued his degree in physical education and joined other student organizations (e.g. a

fraternity). He attributed his success at Evergreen A&M College and maturity as a young man to the familial and supportive environment, his relationships with professors and peers (who were predominately African American), and mentoring by his coach and elders. After college, Bernard entered a career as a teacher at Summerville Independent School District in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex for 27 years. Although he is currently retired, he drives the local school bus in order to stay connected to kids.

“Well, well to be honest with you, I've always thought of um...I've always thought myself as a man first, as a college-educated man second, and as an African American third.” (Maurice, Class of 1966)

Maurice is an only child born and raised in Independence, Texas in a middle class single-parent household. For Maurice, education was a way of life, considering his mother had a master's degree, his father had a bachelor's degree, and his maternal uncles and paternal and maternal grandparents were all physicians. At the age of six, his father abandoned him and his mother. It was then his maternal uncles (James and Leroy) would fill in the gap and serve as role models throughout his life. Maurice attended segregated schools from Pre-K-12, and graduated as the “top boy” from high school and enrolled at University of Benbrook a public PWI in North Texas, where he majored in biology.

At the University of Benbrook, Maurice excelled academically and was encouraged by his academic advisor Allen Holmes to apply for a student teaching opportunity, which was traditional for high achieving undergraduate students to pursue on campus. His application was denied and he was informed by Dr. Richard White, the biology department head, that “no Blacks would ever teach whites.” However, the following year, with the help of his advisor, he reapplied and became the first African American to teach a class on campus. The following year he transferred to Lone Star

College, another PWI in north Texas, because it was closer to home. Maurice was unable to be a part of any student activities because of his race and was denied the opportunity to establish a fraternity on both college campuses as a result of the racial climate at the time. He continued to excel academically despite the racial challenges he encountered and became the first African American male to graduate from Lone Star College.

After graduating with honors, he applied to six professional schools in Texas to pursue his medical degree. However, none of the schools he applied to accepted him, which he attributed to his former biology department head at University of Benbrook. Maurice subsequently enrolled at Gregg University, a private HBCU in Washington, D.C. After completing his medical degree, he began working as a physician in Texas. Although he is a retired medical physician, he continues to provide on-call medical services to local hospitals.

*1970s*

“Well, it...obviously means a lot. Because...it's very clear...that's what makes a difference...in one's life in terms of success. It gives you an opportunity to succeed and...create a lot of pride in your parents' eyes as well in that it was something they preached all the time and that they worked very, very hard for. So it was obviously that it was something that they thought was important. And they thought it was important...especially ...for us... black folks.... So taking that next step and moving beyond was very, very important. And, the way everyone spoke of it back in those days was...you had to get education and everybody was pushing towards that.... So for the five of us...to make that happen, and considering the fact that my dad got as far as the ninth grade, my mom the second grade, it was...something to be proud about.” (Fletch, Class of 1975)

As the youngest of five boys, Fletch was born and raised in a middle class, two-parent household in Brown, Louisiana, where education was seen as a way of making something of one's self. Although neither of his parents had a high school education, they raised their five sons to successfully navigate through the K-16 educational pipeline. While Fletch attended all black primary and secondary schools, he was mandated to transition into a predominately white high school his senior year, which he described to be full of fights and anger from both black and white students. Fletch did enough academically to "get by" in his formative years, was briefly involved in his school band, worked to help support his family and was suspended various times and eventually expelled, which he attributed to normal teenage boy things or being mischievous. Besides his family, a gentleman he referred to as "boss man" was the principal of the school he attended and kept mischievous boys like him in line.

By the time Fletch graduated from high school, his parents could not afford to send him to college. Therefore, he got a job and enrolled in Uptown College, a local public PWI. Fletch only attended this institution for one semester because he did not fit in and felt the White students and instructors let him know that his presence on campus was not welcome. After he withdrew from this college, he got a job to save up money so he could enroll at the school of his choice—Bank University, the same public HBCU that his brothers attended. At the age of 20, Fletch enrolled at Bank University and returned home each summer to work at a factory in order to save money for his tuition. During the academic year, he worked as a student assistant to help fund his continued enrollment, joined several clubs and organizations and became a member of an African American fraternity. Unlike his previous institution, Fletch felt a sense of family, belongingness, and enjoyment between faculty, staff, and students. After graduating from college, Fletch was able to obtain employment in corporate finances and relocated to Missouri to start a new

life. He worked there for over 25 years before retiring and relocating to Florida. Fletch and his wife moved to Texas eight years ago so they could be closer to his wife's family.

"It means having confidence and no more worries" (Lyle, Class of 1974)

Lyle is the oldest of nine children, born and raised in a low-income, two-parent household in Catalina, a small town in Louisiana. His mother stayed at home, and his father was a functioning alcoholic who abused his mother. Lyle grew up during the pre-Civil Rights era in a predominately African American neighborhood. Yet, his primary and secondary schools were racially mixed, and he did not have any African American teachers. He considered himself to be an average student who participated in sports and was involved in clubs (e.g. President of the NAACP junior chapter). His involvement in clubs was shaped by events happening in the world during that time (e.g. Emmitt Till's death, racism, etc.) and his desire to be a movement leader in order to improve his community. Although Lyle's father was present in his life until he graduated from high school, there were men in his neighborhood that he considered to be his role models and mentors.

As a first-generation college student, Lyle decided to enlist in the U.S. Air Force for six years. After being discharged, he moved back home to help his mother with his sibling since his father deserted the family and to enter a career in the computer industry. At the age of 29, he decided to pursue a college education at Midwest State University, a public PWI in Indiana, based on his experiences training college educated white men only to have them become his supervisor. As a non-traditional student, Lyle was married with three children and working multiple jobs. He did not spend a lot of time on campus or go to many classes because the syllabi was altered for him to work on special projects for several institutions, including Midwestern State University, while receiving course credit. Although Lyle was not involved in extracurricular activities, he had good relationships with

the university president and professors, based on his interactions with them for his computer projects. For example, Lyle considered his university president, Dr. John Carr (a white man), his mentor as John taught him how to do things properly and made sure he had the resources necessary to successfully complete his projects. After graduating from college, he accepted a computer job with the telephone company and moved to Chicago with his family. Lyle is retired and works part time as a teacher's assistant for a local school district.

#### *1980s*

"It means a lot. It means...a lot that...we had to struggle...to...get us to vote and get us...into the colleges. And obtaining a...college degree...is something that...we been striving for; people...like Martin Luther King and them marched for us to help us get...where we are today. So, it means a lot to have a college degree...to break some of those barriers of black guys...not going to college and...being college graduates." (Mitch, Class of 1982)

Mitch was born and raised in Dunhill, Louisiana in a low-income, single parent household with seven siblings. During his K-12 schooling, busing was being implemented which required him to move around to different schools. Mitch's mother died when he was 15 years old and he and his siblings went to live with their older sister, Rosalyn. Because he did not get along with Rosalyn, he ended up living with friends for two years until he was able to secure an apartment for himself and his siblings. Since Mitch was a successful scholar athlete (i.e. B average football and track star), he received extensive support from his teachers, coaches, and administrators, especially as it related to securing an apartment, car, and job to support his siblings and himself. Although he was not familiar with the college preparation process, he was recruited for his athletic talents by various colleges and universities.

After graduating from high school, Mitch received a full scholarship to play football at Wright University, a public HBCU in southern Louisiana. During college, he considered his football coach and professors to be his mentors because they always spoke to him about taking care of his responsibilities and preparing for life. Mitch's experiences at Wright University were some of the greatest times of his life as there was always someone available to help him navigate his experiences on campus. More specifically, Mitch felt connected to the school and everyone he encountered was like family and a resource to him, which contributed to his persistence and subsequent graduation from college. After graduating from college he played professional football for eight years and upon retirement became a high school teacher in Texas. Mitch obtained an advanced degree in educational leadership and is working towards his principal certification.

"It...means achievement, ...that I can accomplish something, or I can set goals and achieve them. It's meant everything to me because it's been the foundation of my professional career." (Landon, Class of 1981)

Landon was born and raised in Frances, Texas in a middle class, two-parent household with four siblings, and his parents instilled the expectation of college attendance at a young age. He was a child of the 1960s and experienced hardships from desegregation and busing. During his elementary school years, Landon was one of three African Americans attending his campus. By the time he reached middle school, his primary school campus became predominately black due to white flight, and he was bused to predominately white middle and high schools. He was an average student, heavily involved in sports, and did enough academically to be eligible to play. Because of Landon's football talents, Southeastern University, a Division 1 private PWI in Texas

recruited him. Yet, he was unable to attend the university due to his low grade point average.

He was sent to a Middleton College to pull his grades up before transferring to Southeastern University. At this two-year college, there were other talented athletes from around the state who were in the same situation. Because of the various all-star players at this junior college, they won title games with him as the starting quarterback. His role as starting quarterback was historical as he was the first African American male to play this position in the 100 years of the school's history. The campus he transferred to, Southeastern University was not welcoming towards African Americans. However, Landon's experiences were different from other African American students as he benefited from the perks associated with being a student athlete and was accepted into exclusive circles and student organizations. He was very committed to obtaining his degree because there were no other financial opportunities to assist with his education at the time. Therefore, he often separated himself from his friends so he could study at the library. During the last four semesters of college, Landon made the dean's list and was on track to graduate. After graduating from Southeastern University, he pursued a career in criminal justice. Landon recently returned to school after a 30-year hiatus and earned a master's degree in criminal justice.

*1990s*

"It means a lot to me. It means...especially as it relates to my two boys, it's something that I hold that it will be...something that they will aspire to – aspire to do, and I guess I'm just one of the ones that made it." (Bob, Class of 1996)

Bob was born and raised in Keystone, a small close-knit town in North Carolina, in a low-income household by a single mother who had him at the age of 16. Despite suffering from sickle cell anemia, a lifelong hereditary blood disorder, which kept him in

and out of the hospital frequently, his family, religion, and self-determination, played a significant role in his academic success. Bob attended predominately Black primary and secondary schools, and was held back in the second grade due to excessive absences, which were the result of his illness. Besides taking college preparatory courses, Bob played on his high school's basketball and baseball teams. Although his mother was not very involved in his education, his uncle who was his role model spoke to him about life and being successful in his pursuits. Bob did not plan to go to college, but decided to apply because all of his friends were going, and he didn't want to feel left behind.

Bob decided to enroll at Beaumont University, a public HBCU in North Carolina. Because of his illness, he decided to pursue a degree in psychology, which would allow him to enter a career that did not require hard and intensive labor. Bob described Beaumont University to be the best experience of his life as professors were very positive, had high expectations of their students, and were committed to preparing students for the real world. Due to his medical condition, his college was funded by a private agency. Through this agency, he was assigned to Mr. Goode, an African American male coordinator who also became his mentor and pastor, who frequently checked in on him, conversed with him about life issues, and supported his academic goals. In Bob's junior year, he experienced a major setback with his illness, which kept him out of school for a semester. This near-death experience brought him deeper in his spiritual relationship and more committed to graduating from college. After completing his degree with the support of his faith, family, and friends, Bob entered a career in criminal justice where he has been working for the past 17 years.

“It means, everything to me 'cause it's a way for us to be successful in this system...in America...with our education, the way it's structured...you have to have education in order to be able to advance to certain things in life and for the

things that I want in life....I don't want to have boundaries. I don't want to have limitations. And the only way for me to...have that...freedom is to get my education. So in this country...to have my education...not only gives me opportunities, but it also makes me more competitive with other people for certain opportunities....” (Carter, Class of 1998)

Carter was born and raised in Palestine, Rhode Island to West African immigrant parents who divorced when he was a toddler. Carter's father had a bachelor's degree, his sister has a master's degree, and his mother is currently working on her bachelor's degree. Carter grew up in a middle class household with his older sister, Mary whom he admired because she excelled in school. Because of Mary's academic achievement, teachers expected him to be just as smart and well behaved as her. During his elementary school years, his mother was deported back to West Africa due to an expired visa. Carter was sent to a boy's home, and his sister was sent to a foster home until they were able to reunite with their father. Upon his mother's return two years later, Carter decided to stay with his father and stepmother (whom his father eventually divorced), and his sister moved in with their mother. It was during middle school when he got involved in various sports that his grades began slipping from As and Bs. Once Carter entered high school, his father made him choose one sport (i.e. basketball) so he could focus on his education and purchased a car for him, which he used to go work at a local grocery store.

After graduating from high school, Carter gained admission to Larchmont College, a public PWI in Rhode Island where he majored in justice studies. Prior to the fall semester, he enrolled in a College Initiative Program, which helped underrepresented students get acclimated to college life, take summer courses on campus prior to the fall semester, learn about the financial aid process, and network with current and former student participants. During his sophomore year, he joined the men's basketball team

and eventually became team captain. Carter also experienced a racial identity transformation as he became very passionate about and involved in activities related to the black community, diversity, and establishing a positive racial climate on campus. During his junior year, his father died in a car accident six months after relocating to Texas with his third wife and children. Carter immediately became the man of the house and moved to Texas after graduation to help his stepmother raise his younger siblings. After five years of working several jobs, he began working as a Probation Officer for the Department of Juvenile Justice. Carter is currently enrolled in a Master of Arts program.

#### *2000s*

“I feel it’s very important. I feel that it helped me...to get where I’m at currently in life and it has...been an asset to me as a whole, being educated.” (Azel, Class of 2003)

Azel was born and raised by a single mother in Norfolk, a small racially diverse town in Mississippi. As the first person in his family to attend college, he shared how witnessing his mother’s financial struggles and her educational values motivated him to achieve at his maximum potential. As the oldest of four children, it was also important for Azel to be a role model for his siblings. During his PreK-12 school years, he attended predominately white schools, with the exception of the two years his family moved around. He not only was actively involved in various extracurricular activities (e.g. student government, science fair, sports, etc.), but he also excelled in academics and athletics. Azel said he was blessed to have teachers such as Mr. Binds, an African American male educator, who helped him see success beyond football and set the foundation for his college career.

During Azel’s senior year, his college choice process was based on the types of academic and athletic offers he received within his home state. He decided to attend

Fillmore University, a public PWI in Mississippi, to pursue a degree in political science because it was closest to his home. Although Azel was not a student athlete in college, he found that most people assumed that the few African American undergraduate men on campus were athletes. His social engagement practices at Fillmore University were limited due to his work obligations. When he was on campus, his social interactions were exclusive to other African American students and the Minority Student Alliance Program, which provided retention support to historically underrepresented students. After college, Azel relocated to Texas and began a career in criminal justice.

“Being a college-educated African American male means, for me, more than anything...serving as a role model for other young men...of color to see that, yes, you can make it. You know, my story's very similar to the story of the scholars that I have here at my school and a lot of young men, period...African American men. So just letting them know that, yes, despite your circumstance from growing up...hard work, diligence, having that faith in God can really get you to the point of becoming a college graduate, so pretty much serving as that – that model, that mentor, saying that "Hey, if I made it, you can surely make it." (Ellis, Class of 2007)

Ellis, the oldest of five children, was born and raised in a low-income, single parent household in Stratton, Pennsylvania. Because of his mother's drug addiction and father's incarceration, he lived with his godmother until the age of 15, while his siblings lived with his grandmother. Despite his familial circumstances, Ellis excelled academically and was actively involved in sports throughout his PreK-12 education. Although he was the valedictorian of his high school, he was unfamiliar with the college application process and planned to continue working at a local retail store after he graduated. It was his Latino male counselor, Mr. Rincon, who told him that he was going to college and

selected institutions for him to apply to. Because Ellis respected his counselor, he decided to apply for and was accepted into King College, an all-male private HBCU in the South.

Although Ellis was placed on academic probation his freshman year of college (which he attributed to the deficiencies of his high school curriculum), he immediately learned how to manage his academic, work, and extracurricular responsibilities. He decided to major in elementary education because he was determined to be a kindergarten teacher. Ellis spoke about King College with pride as he considered his professors to be role models and mentors who would push students, including himself, to do their best. If it were not for his experiences on campus, he would not be where he is today.

After graduating from college with honors, Ellis was offered a full scholarship to complete his Master of Education at Lansing University, a Tier 1 university in Michigan. After graduate school, Ellis relocated to Texas with his now wife to teach at the primary school level for a few years. However, he felt that being a teacher did not put him in a position to create positive changes for kids, and his voice was limited. Therefore, he pursued his principal certification, which helped him obtain a position as an assistant principal in an inner-city high school. Presently, Ellis is not only pursuing his Ph.D. in education, but he is also the principal of Paul Robeson Elementary School, a predominantly African American campus. Although he works at one of the most economically disadvantaged schools in his district, he beams with pride when speaks of his young “scholars,” how much they have accomplished, and the importance of providing children with a good foundation in order to be successful throughout their lives.

## Summary

This chapter provided a glimpse into the personal and academic lives of 10 African American men across five generations (1960s-2000s) who achieved academic success in college. In addition, it was important to share their background information to assist with understanding the interview responses in the following chapters. In Chapter 6, I will explore these African American men's perceptions of their pre-college experiences and how these experiences shaped their academic trajectories (e.g. college access and readiness).

## Chapter 6

### Our Pre- College Experiences

In order to fully capture the 10 African American college graduate men's successful pathways to and through college it is important to first highlight their realities during their K-12 schooling. Therefore, this chapter addresses the following research question: What significant influences shaped their college enrollment (i.e. access and readiness)? More specifically, I discuss the academic, personal, and social experiences that facilitated their transition into higher education. Although three participants' pursuit of alternative routes (e.g. 2-year college, military, and leaving college to work) immediately after high school, all of the men in this study transitioned into 4-year PWIs and HBCUs between the 1960s and 2000s. This chapter will address the following themes: 1) familial educational values and expectations, 2) K-12 school contexts, 3) being young, African American, and male in school, 4) significant accomplishments, 5) critical challenges and setbacks, and 6) college preparation and college choice.

#### Familial Educational Values and Expectations

One of the themes that emerged during my initial interview with various participants was the importance of educational values and expectation for their families. Regardless of their familial structure (e.g. single parent vs. two parent homes), socio-economic status, parents' educational background, and the decade in which they attended K-12 schools, taking advantage of educational opportunities and achieving academic success was emphasized by their family members. For example, Bernard, who grew up in a two-parent household in East Texas during the segregation era, described how his mother and father, who were not college educated, always "stressed" the importance of education to their eight children. Fletch, who also was raised in a two-parent home during segregated times in Louisiana, based his achievement around his

parents' expectations. He said, "I never performed to the level I could. I did enough to keep my parents happy and that was...not making anything less than a B." Although Fletch described his academic performance as "making decent grades" in order to continue on to the next grade level, his parents who did not pursue postsecondary education often preached to their four sons the importance of success through education (e.g. attending college). For Maurice, an only child raised during the '50s and '60s in a single-family home, education was fundamental. He said:

I am not a first-generation college student. My mother's grandmother, my great grandmother finished college and my great grandfather finished college, they both had the highest degree they could obtain at that time. My mother was a teacher, she had a bachelor's from Clark College, and then she went on to attend University of Benbrook and got a Master's of Education back in the '50s. Both her brothers are physicians, those are my uncles. I had a good family background...a very good background, they laid the foundation well for me.

Maurice also attended segregated schools throughout his K-12 schooling and excelled academically. When his grades began to slip below a B average in middle school, Maurice improved his grades by formulating an academic plan. He said that, "I told my mother when I was in the eighth grade I'm not gonna make any more Cs, and I didn't. And each semester I'm gonna start eliminating Bs. By the time I finished Lincoln I had straight As, no Bs."

As a native north Texan, Landon described how his father, a mail carrier, and mother, a homemaker, instilled in him and his four siblings the importance of going to college from an early age. He explained,

They put it [college] in my head as young child that I was going to college before I knew what that was all about. But they planted that seed in...my head. They planted it in all of our heads that we were going to school. So I made up my mind...at a very young age I was going to college.

Although his parents were not college educated and did not have the money to send their children to college, Landon recognized his parents' expectations for him and his siblings to continue their educational pursuits after their K-12 years.

As a child of divorced West African immigrants, Carter described the educational expectations that were set forth in his household. Not only were his father and sister college educated and his mother currently pursuing her bachelor's degree, but also, many of his extended family in Africa and the U.S. had advanced degrees. He informed me about the various conversations he had with his father through his K-12 education about educational values and expectation. He shared:

My father always used to tell me...“When you go to school...it's not playtime. It's only playtime when it's playtime. There's a time to play and a time to be serious. And when you're in school, you're serious.”

Because his father wore suits growing up as the son of a principal, he expected Carter to do the same. Although Carter ended up not wearing suits to school, his father still emphasized, “You need to have the mindset. When you get to school, it's business and it's not play.” Throughout his elementary school years, Carter received many awards for his straight As, perfect attendance, and citizenship. As he transitioned to secondary school his grades dropped down to a B average because of the challenging curriculum and his involvement in multiple sports. It was even during this time that Carter's father would question why he was not performing at his maximum potential.

Growing up as the oldest of four children to a single mother who had a high school diploma in Mississippi, Azel attributed much of his success to the value his mother placed on education. He explained: “I came from a...home in which it was...taught that education was your way to...make it and that you had to put forth your best effort.” Even if he encountered failure, he learned not to give up, and if he committed to keep trying hard, he would succeed eventually.

### Summary:

This section focused on how familial educational values and expectations influenced the participants' K-12 academic success. The theme emerged as most of these men acknowledged how familial expectations were significant in encouraging their educational achievements and nurturing postsecondary aspirations. Overall, familial educational values and expectations inspired participants to excel academically.

### Our K-12 School Context

With the participants attending K-12 schools across different generations, they shared various stories about their school contexts. These men reflected on their experiences attending different school types (e.g. predominately black, predominately white, racially mixed schools) in several regions (i.e. South, East Coast, Midwest) across the United States. Depending on the years they were enrolled in school, they shared positive and challenging stories about attending segregated and/or integrated schools, being required to attend other schools outside of their communities based on desegregation and busing orders, or attending racially mixed and magnet schools. In this section, I discuss participants K-12 school types and experiences.

For those participants who attended all or predominately black schools prior to integration, they often described the significant role school officials played on their campus and community. Bernard described the ways in which teachers were valued and committed to student learning in his East Texas community. He said:

Our teachers were strict and they stressed learning....Back in those days a teacher in the neighborhood was really looked up to as someone special... you respected teachers all the time.

The educators throughout his K-12 school years were not only valued and respected by various community members, but they also lived in and were involved with

the communities they served. Maurice attended a segregated school in North Texas and reflected on how teachers were committed to helping student succeed. He stated:

For one thing, the teachers when I was K-12 took a personal interest in you, it was like you were an extension of them. They really felt that they owed it to you and your parents to give you whatever you...whatever it was that you needed to succeed and they took it as a personal reflection on them if you did not succeed.

Maurice attended school during a time when “separate but equal” school settings were deemed constitutional. Because of this, teachers would often remind students, “You know there are people who think that you cannot learn and that we cannot teach. But we want you to prove that wrong. We can't prove it wrong, our time has come and gone for that, but you can.” Fletch also reflected on his experiences attending segregated schools and living in segregated communities. He said:

Brown, Louisiana at the time I came up was segregated. And...black people and white people did not go to school together....Where we lived was segregated as well. So in my neighborhood were...people who didn't have money, doctors, teachers, the principal lived across the street...my neighbor across the street was my first through third grade teacher.

During this time, African Americans were required to attend segregated schools and live in segregated communities. Because of these restrictions, there was diversity within black neighborhoods based on socioeconomic status, educational background, and professional careers. As Fletch shared, he lived in a community that comprised a range of residents — from poor families to his school principal.

Although Lyle grew up in Indiana during the segregation era, he was able to attend schools with black and white children. He explained: “They didn't have no black schools in my town. But I lived in a black neighborhood but went to.... all mixed schools. I never had a black teacher until Harrisburg State.” Although Lyle's schools were not segregated, he revealed that he lived in a black neighborhood and did not have any African American teachers until he reached graduate school.

Landon who attended K-12 schools in North Texas during the late 60s and 70s spoke of his experiences with desegregation, white flight and bussing. When his family moved from the poorer side of town to the white suburbs, he was one of three African American kids in his elementary school.

We moved into an all-white community...white flight occurred so much so by the time I was in the sixth grade, it was a majority black school, and we were bused from our community in Raytown to an all-white school and community.

In the excerpt above Landon highlights the critical time period when the demographics of a white suburban community began to shift as black families started moving there. His elementary school went from being predominately white to majority black over the course of a few years. By the time he entered the sixth grade, he was also being bused from his now all black school to an all-white school in another community. In reflecting on this experience he shared:

So we experienced...desegregation, and all the ills of that in terms of conflicts between blacks and whites and watching that so that was part of my upbringing. I had the benefit of going to school with whites, and in a segregated school.

Landon felt that attending desegregated schools had a profound effect on him and helped in his adjustment at predominantly white school settings throughout his academic career. Mitch also experienced the effects of school busing. He stated,

I went to an elementary school that was mixed from first to third grade. And then when they started busing I went to another school from fourth to the sixth grade. And then I went back over to the other side...cause they split up again, kind of zoning us...in junior high for seventh and eighth grade. And from there we were bussed over to a high school that was 60/40 percent – 60 percent white, 40 percent black.

Mitch recalled several school busing experiences during his elementary and middle school years. By the time Mitch reached high school in the late '70s, school busing had decreased, and he would remain there until graduation.

Carter attended K-12 schools in Rhode Island and discussed the racial tension in the surrounding neighborhood. He attended a predominately white elementary school

during the '80s that he described as, "All the minority students...most of them. We kinda came from the same area. And then we went to the area where the elementary school was, which was a high population of Italian people." Carter shared that because of where he lived, he had to walk to get to school. Sometimes as he walked to and from school, Carter would encounter racially biased people in the community. He said,

I had issues with race...like race relations when I was a kid. Because I grew up in the projects...obviously I grew up around my people. But then when I went to school there was some was tension because we were around a lot of Italian people. So there was a lot of...there was a lot of negativity and people spitting at you when you walked to school and stuff like that. I'd get in fights...used to get into fights all the time because...the blacks and the Hispanics were kinda together 'cause we lived in the same place.

Carter would eventually move with his father in fourth grade and out of the community in which his mother had lived. He attended predominantly white middle and high schools within the community in which he lived.

Bob attended K-12 schools in North Carolina during '80s. He lived in a relatively small community and described his schools, "It was predominantly black...I think Native American was the least amount of students that we had there throughout the school system." Bob had good experiences with his teachers although he was frequently absent due to his illness. Despite the absences, by the time he reached high school, Bob was placed in college preparatory classes while his friends were assigned to remedial. Azel attended K-12 schools during the 1990s in Mississippi, and like Bob, he too lived in a relatively small town. He said,

The majority of my K-12 education I attended predominantly white schools. On two separate occasions while in elementary school...for a whole two separate years I attended a predominantly African-American elementary school...when we were moving around.

Azel shared that he was aware of the racist history associated with his birthplace and he himself was exposed to racist acts during his K-12 schools. Growing up in Philadelphia during the '90s, Ellis attended K-12 schools within his community. He describes his

community and schools, “The neighborhood in which I grew up in was Southwest Philly...considered really low-income...and I went to predominantly African American schools in that community.” However, when he was in the 10th grade, he transferred to a magnet school which he considered one of the more diverse campuses in the city. Once he transferred to the magnet school, Ellis had access to resources and organizations unavailable at his former schools.

### Summary

This section focused on participants’ K-12 school types and experiences. Many of these men were fortunate to have nurturing teachers who encouraged, and often demanded, academic excellence. Most of the participants described living in segregated neighborhoods and attending segregated schools. However, some were able to attend mixed schools based on demographics, while others through desegregation initiatives. Moreover, participants’ K-12 experiences provided the foundation for their postsecondary ambitions.

### The Realities of Being an African American Male in K-12 Schools

In this section, I explore participants’ perceptions on how being an African American male shaped their K-12 experiences. Their attitudes and beliefs about themselves played a critical role in their educational outcome. For example, the adults in Bob’s life did not inform him about the importance of education. He said, “I was an average student, my mom didn’t stress to me the importance of education. I felt like if I had somebody stressing to me and told me the value of education, I probably would have been an all A or A-B student.” Bob realized on his own that his performance in the classroom was contingent upon his attitude about education. He said,

I guess, at first the whole thing of having a sense of...that you was not as smart or inferior to the white students. Then...I got to a certain point...I just kind of said, “Well, I got a brain just like they [white students] got. I just...need to apply myself.

Bob was self-motivated and had a positive attitude regarding his abilities as a student. Early in his K-12 schooling he began motivating himself to perform at his full potential in the classroom.

Academic performance was also important to Ellis as an African American male. After a rough elementary start which he described as, “my grades were pretty good; my behavior was pretty bad. And I believe my behavior in elementary school was bad stemming from my family structure and background.” Ellis lived with his godmother because his father was incarcerated and his mother was addicted to drugs. When Ellis reached middle school, his teachers’ “no nonsense” approach prompted his school behavior improvement, which positively impacted his grades. During these years, Ellis was cognizant of teacher expectations of him because of his race and gender. He shared:

I would say my race, class, and gender...may have been affected when it came to teacher expectation. So being a young African American male, they would anticipate "Oh, well, we can't wait for him to get in trouble. We...we're surprised when he's able to perform well academically.”

When Ellis got to high school, he noticed that he was treated differently from his peers. His thoughts were, “When I went to high school...I had some other friends that were black males that people didn't wanna work with. After they [white students] see that you're able and capable of keeping up academically, then that really changed.” Ellis expressed his teachers and peers would often seem surprised that he could comprehend and execute assignments and was regularly invited to join study groups that were uninviting to other African American males.

Growing up in a small town in Mississippi, Azel primarily attended racially mixed K-12 schools. He said,

I got along with pretty much...everyone at school...did I face some forms of racism? Yes. But it wasn't something that was so blatant that made me want to

just...give up on going to school or leave, or do anything...or leave my surroundings or anything like that.

Growing up in Mississippi, Azel acknowledged exposure to the tumultuous race relationship prevalent between African Americans and whites in his hometown. However, despite exposure to racialized incidents, his overall K-12 experiences were positive.

#### Summary

In this section I explored participants perceptions on how being an African American male affected their K-12 schooling. Their [participants'] attitude supported their fortitude to do well in school through personal confidence and self motivation which positively influenced their K-12 academic outcomes.

#### Significant Accomplishments

In this section I discuss the participants' perceptions of their K-12 accomplishments. For three of the participants (Mitch, Landon, and Bernard), their accomplishments were based on receiving full athletic scholarships to pursue their postsecondary goals. For Mitch, who was orphaned at 15 years old and was providing for three of his siblings at 16, obtaining a full scholarship to pay his expenses was the only way he could attend college. He said,

I didn't know...actually what college was until some of the guys on the football team started saying that they was going to college. And then some of the coaches were coming around, trying to get players to go to college. And then I guess I was there, and I was...one of the [ones]...on the team. And then they started offering me stuff. And I think it was an accomplishment to get a scholarship to go to college.

Despite being orphaned at 15 years old and supporting three of his siblings, Mitch was able to maintain his grades in school. He also had a part-time job his senior year and was able to remain involved in athletics.

As one of five children, Landon was aware that his parents were unable to financially support his postsecondary goals. He too relied on his athletic skills to obtain a

full scholarship. However, because he focused primarily on athletics his grades suffered. Landon was unable to attend the Division 1 school that recruited him, but he maintained his scholarship status at one of their partnering junior colleges. Landon stated:

K-through-12...I think the most significant accomplishment was earning a scholarship to go to college, that's why I played sports. I had a sister in front of me and I knew my parents didn't have the money to pay for me to go to college. I wanted to go and athletics was a way for that to happen. So...for that to happen and for me to get a full ride and to go to college was the most significant accomplishment for me and throughout my grade school years.

Landon had aspirations to attend college as a small child because his parents inspired him to reach beyond high school education. He was proud that he could use his athletic abilities to obtain a scholarship, which was his overall purpose for playing sports in high school.

Bernard was also raised in a home where education was valued. His older siblings had already graduated from college while Bernard was still in high school. Although his parents could afford to send him to college, his coach was instrumental in getting him a scholarship. He explained:

My senior year...I explained earlier that I didn't get a chance to go to the state. And he [Mr. Allen] came by the house and said, "I'm going down to Evergreen, and I want you to come go with me." And we went down...he took me and introduced me to the track coach and said, "This kid needs to run track." And you know...the track coach said, "Well, I don't have any scholarships." He [Mr. Allen] said, "I don't care. His parents can afford to send him. He's coming down here anyway." And he [Coach Price] said, "Well, if he comes out and make the team, I'll see to it that he gets on a scholarship." And by the end of the first semester, I was on a full scholarship. I had earned a full scholarship.

During his senior year, Bernard's school principal refused to allocate funds for the track team to participate in state finals competitions. He was therefore denied the opportunity to showcase his athletic skills to college recruiting scouts which would have likely secured him a track scholarship. Although it would take a college semester for Bernard to obtain a track scholarship, he considered it a K-12 accomplishment because of his high school teacher's intervention.

For others, significant accomplishments were centered on academics. Ellis experienced a wide range of accomplishments during his K-12 school years in Pennsylvania. He shared:

I was the MVP of the basketball league when I was younger. I received the black belt in martial arts, Eagle Scout and Boy Scouts. So those were more my personal accomplishments. Academically, I would say graduating from high school...top of my class...as well as...being able to learn how to play chess in middle school and becoming one of the city champions at the time, which was really exciting, as well as...city champion for the oratorical contest. So those were some of my huge accomplishments...being a young child.

Throughout his K-12 schooling, Ellis participated in a broad range of academic extracurricular activities, while maintaining his honor roll status. He was also involved in several activities within his community, despite the impoverished household he grew up in.

Azel was considered a top high school recruit because of his athletic talent on the football field. His ability to excel in sports and academics made him a premium Division I prospect. Regardless of his athletic skills, Azel considered his school grade point average and participation in scholastic competitions as significant K-12 accomplishments. He said:

I was a regular...I regularly participated in science fairs and state science fairs...and placed on a reasonable zone. Also, national, geography bees. As far as the organization I was in, placing on the state level...in the clubs and...organizations I was in high school. So, it's a wide variety...from an early age I was active...so I could pretty much participate in any kind of school function and actually place in it.

Azel was also an outstanding football player in high school and heavily recruited by Division 1 schools. He was offered several athletic scholarships but rejected the offers so he could fully concentrate on academics. Although Azel is proud of his athletic accomplishments, he considers the ability to compete in state and national scholastic events as more relevant and more significant than sports.

## Summary

In this section, I highlighted the participants' K-12 accomplishments. For three of the participants, (Bernard, Landon, and Mitch) their accomplishments were related to acquiring full athletic scholarships to pursue their postsecondary aspirations. For others (Ellis and Azel), their accomplishments were reached by excelling in various student competitions and clubs. The ability to attain these successes during their K-12 school years increased confidence in their educational and intellectual abilities.

## Critical Challenges and Setbacks

In this section, I will explore the K-12 challenges and setbacks participants experienced. For Mitch and Ellis, their setbacks occurred when they both experienced the death of a family member or guardian. As mentioned previously, because of the life choices of Ellis' parents, he lived with his godmother from birth until her unexpected death when he was in middle school. He said, "I would say the most difficult and challenging grade level was probably the seventh grade, because that was the year in which my godmother who raised me passed away from non-small cell lung cancer."

Not only did Ellis witness his godmother pass away in March of that year, but also his grandfather had passed just a few months earlier in December. During his time of grief, getting good grades in school was not a top priority. However, Ellis was surprised when he received his final report card and discovered he had not neglected his studies entirely. He shared:

My grades began to slip with all that was going on personally. Now, after she died in March and I got my last report card in the seventh grade, it was honor roll. So that was really uplifting and exciting...and just made me wanna cry, because after all that stuff that I went through that seventh-grade year, being able to finish off strong like I did was really...really encouraging for the upcoming years and years to come.

The death of Ellis' family members, especially his godmother, was traumatic for him during his middle school years. However, he was encouraged by his academic ability to maintain his grade point average, and it has sustained him through the years.

Mitch and his seven siblings were raised in a single parent household. When his mother died, he could not quite understand how to deal with the situation. He said,

My mom died when I was 15...I really didn't understand that...you know, your mom died, and you don't have a dad. And, that was kind of a big setback to me because I really didn't...I didn't understand that, you know? It kind of threw me for a loop...when my mom died...that was my biggest setback...when my mom died. That was kind of the only setback I had.

As previously mentioned, Mitch moved in with his older sister for a short period of time before moving into his own apartment at age 16. He also decided to move three of his siblings into his place and was able to maintain the apartment and take care of his siblings until he went to college the following year. After his mother's death and throughout his time in high school, Mitch grades remained above average.

When Carter was in elementary school his mother was deported to West Africa. He was sent to a boy's home and his sister was put in foster care until authorities were able to locate his father. Because of the close relationship Carter had with his sister, he was more traumatized by being away from his sister than his mother. He said,

My mother got deported while I was in...fourth grade....cause we were living with my mother. And then one day we came home and she wasn't there, and we really didn't know what was going on. So me and my sister...you know she was two years older than me...so...she was like my other mother. And we always spent time together. So during that period of time my mother got deported, I had to go to an all-boys' home and my sister went to a foster home for two weeks. So we were separated and...really...that was more traumatic for me than even understanding where my mother was.

Bob was also too young to understand how his illness caused a setback when he was in elementary school. He explained, "When I had to repeat the fourth grade, that hurt me a lot because I was like, "Why are you keeping me back?" I didn't understand I missed the

majority of the school year. And I got on the bus and friends were picking at me on the way home...and I really felt bad.”

Bob would miss quite a bit of school over the years because of his sickle cell illness, but he was unrelenting in that he could overcome the challenge through his faith. He said, “I would get sick and be in my room talking to God, thinking about life and things. It created a no-quit, I'm gonna fight to the end attitude. Having faith in God helped me to grab hold of something greater than me to pull along through life when things got tough.”

Bernard also had challenges during his elementary years, which he eventually overcame. He had a speech impediment and was often teased by kids because of it. He stated,

I remember growing up...about the third grade, I had a speech impediment, which was stuttering. And so therefore, I had trouble...talking in the class...and kids would laugh at you and I overcame it. But, in that process...people automatically think that you're not that smart. But I...managed to overcome it...from then on...I was a decent student.

Through all the teasing, Bernard was able to figure out how to defeat his speech impediment. He discovered that taking time before he expressed himself and slowing down his talking helped him overcome communication challenges. For Maurice, his setback came when he was six years old and his father left his mother. This situation was confusing for him, and throughout the years he was unsure what happened to his father. He said, “Well my father left my mother and me when I was six. So I guess that was a setback of sorts...we didn't know whether my father was dead or alive.” Maurice expressed that he was really too young to understand his father's disappearance, and because his maternal uncles were always around, it didn't impact him as much as it could have.

## Summary

The challenges and setbacks the participants experienced during their K-12 schooling were explored in this section. They were faced with various challenges (e.g. familial death, deportation, illness, etc.) and throughout it all remained academically engaged. For the most part, these men did not harbor contempt for the setbacks they endured. Instead they used the situations to persevere in other areas and times in their lives. The strength to overcome the life issues provided the participants with opportunities to press forward with their educational goals.

### College Preparation and Choice

In this section, the participants' college preparation and choice is examined. Transitioning from high school to college is a critical step in a student's life. Being connected to individuals, programs and initiatives could assist in making the transition smooth. While Ellis participated in a college preparatory program, he had no intention of enrolling in a postsecondary institution. However, it was upon the insistence of from the Mr. Mendez, the program coordinator, counselor, and teacher, that he applied to King University. Ellis said:

In high school I was in the college-prep program and I had a counselor who was the coordinator...and also my psychology and Spanish teacher, Mr. Mendez. He pretty much told me that "You're gonna go to college and you're gonna go to King College." And before then...I wasn't thinking about college. Surely wasn't thinking about King College, but he told me that day in his office...he didn't even look at me...he kept looking at his computer screen. He said, "You're gonna go to King." And I said, "Well, Mr. Mendez, since I respect you as a mentor, I'm gonna at least look into King College.

Although Ellis was the valedictorian of his school and initially planned to continue working at a retail store after high school, he ended up applying for and was admitted to King College. He expressed that, "I got my start at a HBCU because of what a Hispanic male told me I was going to do".

Carter was also involved in a college preparatory program which provided a smooth transition from high school to college. However, it was his parents' expectations as well as sibling competition that influenced his decision to enroll. He said,

I guess it was the expectation that even on mother's side, academics...master's. My father's side they got doctors and lawyers and so it was always academics. That was the expectation and once my sister went to college, it was like a no brainer...I was going. I was not gonna do anything else...I was going to college.

Carter was mindful that the preparatory program would provide up to two years financial support. Therefore, he made his college selection based upon college costs and location, which was the city in which he lived.

Because Landon, a standout athlete, was not academically eligible to attend the Division 1 school that recruited him, he enrolled at a junior college. He admittedly was not focused on academics while playing sports and did only enough to remain eligible. Landon's lack of motivation cost him a Division 1 scholarship to Southeastern University, however it did provide him with the opportunity to pursue his postsecondary goals. He said,

I had to end up going to Middleton College and what dictated that was Southeastern University. They said, "This is where we send all our guys to get your grades up. That's where you're going." It ended up being a kinda D [1] school where all southeast conference colleges sent their athletes that needed to get their grades up.

Although Southeastern University was Landon's first college choice, he considered himself fortunate that the university did not withdraw his scholarship and he was able to attend Middleton College.

Like Ellis, Bob did not have any plans to pursue postsecondary education. He was working at a local grocery store when he did a quick assessment of his future career options. He said,

My senior year I had not applied for college yet. I don't even think I had taken the SAT. All I knew was that all my friends were talking about going to college and

I'm like, "Man. I just don't want to sit around here in Keystone...and keep bagging groceries. I gotta do something.

The conversations Bob's peers had about their college interests inspired him to consider his own as he did not want to stay in his town "bagging groceries." As such, he was able to enroll at Beaumont University despite his late application submission. He considered this process to be the best decision he could have made for his life.

Maurice's mother, who received her master's degree from Benbrook University, influenced his college choice. He was very familiar with the campus and thought it was a good choice. He said,

I was going with my mother and I knew where the place was...what it was about...and that kind of influenced me to Benbrook. Then Lonestar it was Charles Williams. We struck up a conversation, he found out I was in college at Benbrook and he was talking to me and...my mother and he said, "Why didn't you send that boy to Lonestar?" And Lonestar had just integrated. So I took it as a personal invitation 'cause it was, he didn't have to say that, he didn't have to invite me. I had already done some courses there, but when he said that it was kind of like a personal invitation so I said okay...I really should transfer because of that and other reasons that's what influenced me.

During the time Maurice was in college, Lonestar had begun integrating campus and was accepting African American students. He said that Mr. Williams was considered an unofficial ambassador for Lonestar and owned a successful car dealership. Maurice felt that Mr. Williams had extended him a personal invitation to Lonestar, which he accepted. Maurice also hails from a family of scholars, which also influenced his decision to enroll in college. After he graduated "top boy" from high school, Maurice was prepared for the academic challenges of college.

#### Summary

In this section, I described the influence that shaped the participants' college preparation and choice. Only two of the participants (Ellis and Carter) were involved in college preparatory programs. For others, the influence of familial and/or friends determined their college selection. One of the participants' (Landon's) initial college

choice was unattainable because of his grade point average. Overall, these men's college preparation and choice were influenced by their families, friends, and financial assistance. In addition, their academic foundation prepared them for the challenges of higher education.

### Conclusion

The major themes that emerged from the precollege experiences of these African American male college graduates that influenced their K-12 academic success were: familial educational values and expectations, K-12 school contexts, being an African American male in school, significant accomplishment, critical challenges and setbacks, and college preparation and choice. Familial values and expectations were attributed to the academic success of participants. This finding is further supported by Steinberg (1996) who found that familial influence remains important to children even into their teenage years. Findings further indicate that families who provide structure and expectations for education in child rearing can help their children achieve (Greif, Hrabowski, & Maton, 2000). The K-12 schooling context differed across generations. The participants' experiences were however quite similar, regardless of school type. They had positive interactions with their teachers and were able to do well. As for being an African American male in school, the participants who attended racially diverse schools primarily taught by white teachers experienced low expectations. For participants who attended predominantly black schools, their experiences with teacher expectations were positive. According to Kober (2001) teachers' lower expectations for students of color is based on perceptions of current performance, not academic potential. He further noted that students live up or down to teacher expectations.

For these men, significant accomplishments were viewed as self-fulfilling goals which increased confidence of their academic abilities. Reaching postsecondary goals

gave these men personal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment (Griffith & Graham, 2004). Participants who experienced challenges and setbacks during their K-12 schooling were able to not only maintain their grade level, but use the experiences as sources of strength in other areas of their lives. Lastly, college preparation and choice were contingent upon familial influence, K-12 curriculum, college preparatory programs, and financial assistance. Overall, familial values and expectation, K-12 school contexts, being an African American male in school, significant accomplishments, critical challenges and setbacks, and college preparation and choice were significant factors that influenced college access and readiness. In the next chapter, I will share the postsecondary experiences of these African American men.

## Chapter 7

### Our College Experiences

The African American men in this study described how they perceived their postsecondary experiences and the influences it had on their academic achievement (i.e. college persistence and degree completion). In Chapter 6, I presented the participants' perception of their pre-college experiences and significant influences that encouraged college enrollment. In this chapter, I highlight the participants' reflections of their postsecondary experiences, challenges, and successes, as well as the individuals, groups, actions, events, organizations, and activities that contributed to degree completion. The findings were analyzed through the lenses of Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The four main themes examined in this chapter include: 1) Self-Determination, subthemes: a) setbacks, and b) setting goals; 2) Mentoring, subthemes: a) university officials (e.g. administrators, professors, and support staff), and b) athletic coaches; 3) Environment Fit, subthemes: a) sense of belonging, and b) social isolation and/or exclusion; and 4) Student Engagement: subthemes: a) retention programs, b) student organizations, and c) athletics.

#### Self Determination

Participants across generations discussed the importance of reaching set goals during their postsecondary years. Through my conversations with them, they appeared to be unrelenting in their pursuit of a college degree, which is reflective in the determination used in their goal planning and overcoming barriers. These men possessed the confidence to persevere in college through academic planning and continuation despite many setbacks. They were focused on obtaining a college degree, which demonstrated how self-determination could support educational achievement. For this study, self-determination is characterized as learned skills and procedures associated with knowing

and valuing one's self as the basis for creating plans, taking action and learning from experiences (Eisenman, 2007).

*Critical set-backs.*

As Bob struggled with sickle cell anemia, he depended on his spiritual relationship with God to see him through each episode of pain and hospitalization. Bob did not see himself as a victim and did not use his disease as a crutch. His determination to persist through and graduate from college serves as an inspiration to others living with lifelong illnesses. Despite Bob's various bouts with sickle cell crises and hospital stays, he was able to obtain his degree in four and a half years. During his college career, he described a life changing experience that illuminated and forced him to get his priorities "straight" and "focus" on his postsecondary goals. He said,

The one major one was in 1992...during one of the times I had to sit out, and I was home working and...got sick in the month of October, and...spent a whole month in the hospital, almost died in the hospital...from a gallbladder [that] got infected and it started shutting down my kidneys, and...I had to go on a respirator and...dialysis, and then...you know, the Lord brought me out of that, so...when I got back to college that – that spring semester, uh, that's what kind of shifted everything for me. I got my priorities straight and focused on, you know, my grades and stuff, and it just helped me to get, you know, my priorities straight and everything else...in order.

For Bob, giving up on his college dream was not an option. He was so committed that there were times he said, "I would drive myself to the hospital when I was in excruciating pain and then after being in the emergency room for maybe hours at a time...still groggy from the narcotics...sneak back out the emergency room to get in my car and drive back to campus." Through these difficult moments, Bob never gave up academic pursuits.

Carter also shared a setback that occurred during his junior year when his father passed away in a car accident in Texas. He and his father shared a very close relationship, and it became apparent during the interviews that he respected and admired his father a great deal. As the oldest male of his siblings, Carter explained that his father prepared him to take on responsibilities as the head of household in his absence.

Although Carter felt that he would have plenty of time to enjoy his life before he took on that role, an unforeseen tragedy occurred after his father moved to Texas with his step mother and younger siblings. He shared,

My [father's] family moved to Texas when I was going into like my sophomore year..., my sister was away at the Peace Corps...and...my mother lived in Massachusetts, so she was close. So...I was like, "I'm not leaving. I'm in college. I had too many friends that left and came back or transferred, couldn't transfer credits, and when they were moving, I already knew I'm not coming. But my dad was like, he – he didn't want me to stay. He wanted me to come to Texas.

While Carter's father's relocation to Texas was unsettling, his death was devastating.

Carter described this time in his life as, "just kind of dealing with all the different family dynamics and having to stay strong because I'm the man in the house now and that was probably the most difficult thing I ever had to deal with in my life." The impact of losing his father suddenly and becoming head of the household at 23 years old caused inner turmoil for him. Carter reluctantly returned to school but assured his stepmother that once he graduated from college he would relocate to Texas and help care for his siblings. He forged ahead in pursuit of his college degree and relocated to Texas after graduation to carry out his family responsibility.

Despite these setbacks, Bob and Carter demonstrated self-determination in an attempt to successfully complete their postsecondary education. Bob relied on his spiritual relationship with God for strength and guidance during his hospitalizations. Following a near death experience, he became focused and determined to obtain a college degree which would support career limitations based upon his illness. When his father relocated to Texas, Carter initially remained in Rhode Island because he was determined to prove to his stepmother that he was capable of succeeding without his father's help. However, after his father's sudden death, he became more determined to get his college degree in order to help his stepmother provide for his siblings. For other

participants, setting and reaching educational goals was instrumental in their degree obtainment.

*Setting goals.*

Some of the participants expressed how setting and moving toward those goals assisted with their college completion. While these men articulated different methods and motivating factors for achieving their goals, each of them created an atmosphere which supported their determination to succeed. For some individuals this determination was influenced by family or career objectives. For example, as the starting quarterback for the Middleton College, Landon was often bombarded by social distractions (e.g. campus parties) due to his notoriety. To circumvent these distractions, Landon shared the following:

Knowing that I was there to get an education and nothing else, and I wasn't gonna do anything that would jeopardize that. So...I was all dialed in to doing what I needed to do to stay in good standing with the school. That's why I studied and just really focused on that...I think what helped me mainly was that I separated myself from my friends and focused on studying versus going out and hanging out...I wanted to get my degree in four years....I didn't have any resources to get it if I didn't get it in four years.

Because Landon's parents could not afford to finance his college degree, he emphasized that his athletic scholarship was critical to his continued enrollment. He also shared that, "I did all that I could to not bring any negative attention because I knew that was gonna be the one opportunity I had to get a free college education. That's why I studied and just really focused on that. So what was driving me was my desire to get a college degree."

Ellis' determination to succeed in college came from an intrinsic and familial source. When Ellis arrived at King College, a private HBCU, he considered the astounding effect of obtaining a postsecondary degree would have on his grandmother. He stated,

I know the first day I got there, the first thing I told myself was I want to graduate from King so my grandmother can see a group of black men graduate from college as

opposed to a group of black men getting locked up or getting killed or what have you. So that was one of my driving forces, for her to be able to come to graduation and see.

Ellis' familial dynamics would perhaps render most in despair. Having a father incarcerated and a mother addicted to drugs is not an ideal situation for any child. Ellis shared that many of his childhood friends were incarcerated, in gangs, or used drugs. He also described how he was on the same path to destruction before he met Ms. Albright, one of his middle school teachers. He said, "Ms. Albright set that foundation in the beginning with 'You're not gonna run me.' And I became a straight-A student with no discipline problems whatsoever." The encounter with his teacher motivated him to want something different for his life. And with the love and guidance of his godmother, Ellis beat the odds by excelling academically, and through sheer determination, he graduated from college with high honors.

Fletch was able to graduate from Bank University a public HBCU in Louisiana by exploring the best route to achieve his degree. Like Ellis, he made a decision early in his college career to be successful. Fletch discussed his mindset during his initial days on campus. He said,

And...of course, I was trying to figure things out when I first...arrived there, and one of the things that...a friend of mine and I did while sitting on the wall one day was to try and figure out how we could get through school right away and get out and have a job before we left the school.

Fletch worked with his friend Henry to set long-term goals and map the best way to successfully achieve these goals. The result of this collective determination and well thought out plan was securing employment prior to graduation. Upon graduation, Fletch had four job offers and accepted an accounting position with a major corporation in Missouri.

### *Summary.*

This section focused on the first theme of self-determination, which participants had towards completing their college degrees. A Critical Race Theory lens was used to explore how participants' setbacks and goals setting shaped their matriculation to degree completion. One of the tenets of Critical Race Theory used for this study is the centrality of experiential knowledge (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This tenet challenges traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color through the use of counter storytelling. For these men, whether overcoming setbacks or setting goals, counter storytelling provided an opportunity to expose and critique normalized dialogue that perpetuates racial stereotypes, and challenge stories constructed by the dominant group (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995). An example would be Ellis who was raised by his godmother in a low-income housing development. Despite his surroundings (e.g. poverty, criminal activity, drug use, etc.), he was able to graduate from high school and college with honors. Another example would be Landon who, despite being an exceptional athlete, was also committed to being academically strong student and considered being on the Dean's list as a source of pride. Overall, self-determination provided participants with the strength to endure personal and academic challenges as they continued their degree pursuits.

### Mentoring

Participants across generations discussed different examples of the guidance and support they received during their college experiences. Through the data analysis process, the second theme of mentoring emerged. These men were able to identify individuals who played significant roles in their persistence to degree completion. In this section, I discuss how for the participants, mentoring in the form of 1) university officials

(e.g. administrators, professors, advisor, etc.), and 2) athletic coaches aided in supporting their educational achievements.

*University Officials.*

The participants described how developing relationships with other men provided them with support and encouragement as they pursued degree completion. For Bob, who suffers from sickle cell anemia, support and accountability came from a relationship he had developed over years through his involvement the Vocational Rehabilitation Program at Beaumont University, a public HBCU which paid for his college expenses. Throughout my second interview with him, he spoke about his relationship with Mr. Goode, an African American vocational rehabilitation counselor. Bob said,

Vocational rehabilitation, they pay for the majority of my education...and that's where I met one of my mentors, which became later my pastor...I always enjoyed talking to older people 'cause you can get a lot from them because they're in a place where I'm trying to go, but I got in touch with him because he was my vocational rehabilitation counselor, and after the end of the semester I would have to go and report to him to show him my grades and, ...we just began to build up a relationship, a rapport, and he would always talk to me about...getting my life straight, and...making sure I make, ...good grades or whatever. But ...he was very significant in me completing college, 'cause he just kept, [saying], "Yeah, you're doing good, but you need to keep on doing this."

Through participation in the vocational rehabilitation program, Bob was able to develop a relationship with his counselor who supported and held him accountable for achieving his academic goals. The relationship Bob shared with his vocational counselor grew over the years into a lifelong mentorship, and they continue to remain in regular contact.

Lyle also established a unique rapport with various administrators and faculty while enrolled at Midwest State University, a public PWI, which contributed to his academic success. He began his undergraduate studies at 29 years old while he was married with three children and employed full-time in the computer industry. Because of his computer programming skills, he was given exemptions from the syllabus throughout his college career to assist administrators and faculty with special campus initiatives and

acquired grades upon completion of projects. Lyle's projects allowed for regular interactions with Dr. John Carr, the college president of Midwest State University, which subsequently turned into a mentoring relationship. He shared,

We were doing a project for the president of Hawthorne University, because I wrote in nine different programs for computers. Well, we was able to put all the stuff that he had from around the country and...the world that had to do with EEO and affirmative action, and get that in the computer where attorneys could use it, community people could use it, and professors could use it. I mean, 'cause they had all these reels where I studied on how to use that information...that I could use for any project, and I could share that with any professor doing anything. They had housing stuff on it, population stuff on it, and all this stuff was on the tape...I mean, he was the man, he's the one that mentored me.

Lyle was 29 years old, and married with two children when he enrolled at Midwest University. Although his time on campus was limited, he however was able to build a relationship with his college president through various campus projects.

Maurice's mentor came in the form of an advocate. Mr. Holmes, his major advisor, nominated him to be a student teacher in biology. Unfortunately, the department chair denied the request by based upon Maurice's race. The following year, Maurice spoke with Mr. Holmes about reapplying for the student teaching position. He was encouraged to fill out the application by Mr. Holmes who then volunteered to accompany Maurice when he turned in his application. He said,

And so the short story was, he said, "Now, I don't know whether you want to pursue this or not, or what you're willing to do, and what you would like to do or not do." He said, "Whatever you choose, I will support you – be supportive of you in that." And then I said, "I – I would like to pursue the teaching position as a student teacher in biology," and he said, "Well, if you're willing to fill out the application again, and resubmit it, I will go with you to the biology office. I will witness that you have handed it – hand-delivered it to the secretary of biology." So that's what I did. I filled it out again. He went with me, and I put it in the secretary's hand. So I became the first black student to teach biology on the campus of University of Benbrook, and I did stand before that class.

Although he was allowed to teach that year, the victory was short lived when one of his professors gave him a low grade. This prevented Maurice from continuing to teach at University of Benbrook which prompted his transfer to Lone Star College. Mr. Holmes, his advisor, left his position at University of Benbrook following the incident with Maurice and

relocated to his hometown in Michigan. The CRT tenet, intercentricity of race and racism was used to analyze Maurice's experiences at University of Benbrook. This tenet recognizes that race and racism are a permanent fundamental part of explaining and defining how U.S. society functions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and that it is often viewed as normal. When conflicts between unequal social groups occur like the one Maurice experienced with his department chair, the dominated group suffers (Delgado, 1996). Because he took a stand against the departments racist practices, Maurice began receiving low grades from his professors before transferring to Lone Star College. He was later denied enrollment at medical schools across the state of Texas, which Maurice attributed this to his department chairs parting remarks, "You'll never get into medical school in Texas."

Carter was assigned an academic counselor once he completed the Preparatory Enrollment Program (PEP). He discussed how Mrs. Davis kept him focused on his academic plan. Carter said,

After I got out of the PEP program, I had this one counselor, Mrs. Davis. She was – I mean she's just great. She just kept me focused no matter what I was doing. 'Cause I'm doing all these things. I'm having a good time, but she really had the plan laid out, like she showed me the end. "Like this is what you have to do to get here. This is what you have to do specifically. This is what you have to do to graduate. These are the classes you have to take. This is how many credits you have. This is how many credits you need. This is how long it's gonna take you to get there." Just having that person to lay out that plan, having that person there that had the end in mind and reminded you of that constantly until, you can see that vision, because once you see it, then all your energy goes to, "Oh, man, I see it just like you see it."

Mrs. Davis was instrumental in keeping Carter focused on his educational goals and was an intricate part of his college experiences. So much so that at his graduation, "she was like right after my mother, and my sister...she was right there in line after I got my diploma."

*Athletic Coaches.*

Some of the participants reflected on how their athletic coaches were influential to their college success. For example, Bernard described the multi-faceted roles Coach McDaniel at Evergreen A&M College, a public HBCU provided to support his degree completion. He stated,

We got support from...mainly our track coach. Not only was he...the track coach, he was somewhat of a father figure to all of us. And during the summer...when I had to go to summer school a couple of summers, you know he...took care of us, you know made sure we were in the right classes. And...you look back and he knew what he was doing and it meant something to us.

Bernard also described how the relationship between him and his coach had grown over the years and that by his senior year he, “was the captain of the track team, and Coach McDaniel was named the head football coach also. And by me being the captain, he turned our track team over to me to train while he was away coaching football.” Bernard found that the added responsibility and support he received from his coach helped him mature and served as a catalyst for sustaining his college career.

As for Mitch, the lifelong lessons he received from his collegiate football coach remains with him to date. Being raised in a single-parent household without a father, Mitch was orphaned at 15 years old. He did not have any male influences during his pre-college years and served as primary caregiver for three of his younger siblings at 16 years old. Mitch received a football scholarship to attend Wright University, a public HBCU, and established a meaningful relationship with the team’s head coach. He shared:

It was great, playing for Coach Simmons. I learned a lot from...one of the legends...Me and him used to walk to practice, ‘cause sometime I’d be late. And I walked down there with him, and he tell me, ..., you know, “Son, you gotta stay ready, you know, for what you’re trying to do here at Wright” ...I used to walk and talk with him a lot and learned a lot about him. And...he used to tell me some things that was...worldly type things and the things that I need to... know. And I used to kind of wonder some of the things he used to say, ...a lot of wisdom...and I used to put it together and, and ask

other people what it meant. And I see that he was giving me a lot of stuff that I needed to be successful out in the world.

Mitch spoke about watching Coach Simmons on television when he was growing up and how he had always wanted to play football for him. It was obvious during both interviews that Mitch admired and respected Coach Simmons, and that this relationship was essential to his overall development at Wright University. The conversations he had with Coach Simmons inspired him to reach for excellence on and off the field. The mentorship his coach provided was influential in promoting his academic and athletic successes throughout his college career.

#### *Summary.*

This section focused on mentoring, which was the second theme that emerged from my conversation with these men about the postsecondary experiences. The participants identified influential people who contributed to their academic success throughout college. For some, mentoring was provided through casual conversations and continuous interactions; for others, athletic coaches provided guidance and inspiration to succeed. Mentoring is not limited to familial influences and can be developed through shared interests, vocations, and skills according to Biggs, Musewe, and Harvey (2014) which was consistent to the previous data analyzed. The next section will highlight how environmental fit shaped the academic experiences of these African American men during their college years.

#### Environmental Fit

In reviewing participants' postsecondary experiences and overall campus environment, the third theme of environmental institutional fit emerged quickly from the data. For this study, environmental fit pertains to the student-university fit and its relationship to with satisfaction and well-being (Gilbreath, Kim, & Nichols, 2010). Across generations, these descriptions of their campus environments were reflective and parallel

based on institutional type. During the second interview, participants were asked to describe their campus environment and overall experiences both inside and outside the classroom. This section will explore how 1) sense of belonging, and 2) social isolation/exclusion shaped their view on their campus experiences.

### *Sense of Belonging.*

Participants from all generations discussed the value in having a nurturing and familial type of environment to help facilitate their academic success. Fletch described the positive experiences he had at Bank University:

The environment, I guess I can sum that up by the motto of Bank University. Uh, it's "Where everybody is somebody," and President Franklin, he was the president of Bank University when it was first started, and of course Bank University is 100 years old now,...he and Coach Adams, and Coach Burns and a few more of those kinds of guys were the ones who started it up and created the reputation that Bank University had over the years....he was not dissimilar to my high school principal, the one that they call Boss Man....It was that kind of an environment....this was almost like a high school environment in terms of how teachers or professors interacted with students, and with relatively small classes as well. And...so it was classroom, it was intimate, you knew the instructors... very well, every one of them, and there was..., a level of comfort there that didn't existed in my other environment. I really felt that these folks had my interest at heart...and all my other brothers had gone there. And it was just kind of tradition, so that's where I wanted to be. And, that's where I was comfortable.

Research suggests that the homogeneity of HBCUs is encouraging and motivational, which is an important aspect in nurturing academic success among African American males (Palmer, 2010). Fletch had previously attended an Uptown College, a public PWI in which he described as, "It was the worst...semester of anything in my life. Because it was obvious they didn't want you there, I mean it was literally obvious. And, so I quit, I literally quit." He enrolled at Uptown College in 1970, a time in which civil rights legislation and school desegregation were being enacted across the country. Fletch chose to leave his initial college choice due to the negative environment and transferred to a school where, "substantially, I just fit. I mean it was just a fit and it was just a comfortable society." Like Fletch, a sense of belonging was also highlighted in Ellis'

description of his college environment. He attended King College, an all-male private HBCU in Georgia, where he was able to relate to his peers from various demographic backgrounds. He said,

King College is considered for the most part, a private HBCU...when I first got to King College it was unlike any other experience ever in my life. I never imagined being around so many well-educated African American brothers that were...in one place for one particular mission, and that was to graduate from college and to...better themselves. So the culture and the atmosphere at King College begins in the very beginning with the whole induction process...before the first day of class you spend a whole week pretty much just getting inducted into the King College culture and knowing the expectations that they have when it comes to being a man of King College. I was able to fit in with everybody that was there because there was an abundance of African American men...with a couple of here and there you may run into one or two Asian or Caucasian students but that was very far and in between.

By all accounts, Ellis embraced a campus environment which was inviting and encouraged educational achievement. The relationship with his peers also struck cords of familiarity described as, "You know, most of us came from single-parent homes, low income...most of our experiences and testimonies were pretty similar and alike, we could relate to one another."

For Fletch and Ellis, the welcoming campus environment and commonalities with teachers and peers provided an atmosphere that promoted academic success. These finding are in concert with Merisotis, (2005) who noted that a frequently reported benefit from students at minority serving schools is the special shared student experience that makes students feel at ease with their peers and contributes to their success.

#### *Social Isolation and/or Exclusion.*

Some of the participants described their campus environments as an unwelcoming space and often experienced social isolation and/or exclusion. However, despite these challenges, they were able to successfully graduate from their institutions. Although Landon was an outstanding athlete and held a position of notoriety at Middleton College, a public two-year college in Oklahoma, he was cognizant of the campus racial

climate. In the following excerpt, Landon shared his experiences on campus as a student athlete during the 1980s. He said,

It wasn't a very good climate because we were so few. We were in a very rural... predominantly white community...and so all the things that come with being...a minority in that kind of environment...you were just always careful about where you went, who you were with, how late you were out. You were just mindful of the fact that you were living in and attending school in a community that was,...that really didn't welcome you there because you were a student athlete going to school free and...it just wasn't a very welcoming environment. I'll put it like that.

When Landon was enrolled at Middleton College there were approximately 10,000 students and only 10 percent were African American. He stated that most of the African Americans attending were scholarship athletes from out of state or other parts of Oklahoma. Yet, despite their accomplishments on the school's athletic teams, the community and campus itself remained mostly uninviting. However, because of his notoriety, Landon shared he received several invitations to join student organizations, whereas no other African American students were recruited to join. Landon stated, "I would say because I was an athlete, I think I was accepted more than the few who were attending just to get a college education. I was probably welcomed in more circles than they were because of my notoriety." Landon shared that despite the negative environment, because of his athletic abilities, he was connected to one of the big financial boosters in the community which permitted access to things (i.e. student organizations, clubs) other African Americans weren't allowed.

For Carter, interactions with peers outside his racial circle at Larchmont College in Rhode Island were kept at a minimum. He stated that "It was a predominantly white college, but the people that I interacted with were for the most part minorities." Carter reflected on his experiences with racial incidents on campus and how most of them were handled:

There were a couple of situations where...people [were] called niggers or something like that and I'd be like, "Oh, so what did you do...?" "I didn't do [nothing] –"

"You didn't do nothing? Hold on a second. Where is this person at?" Kinda like, um, [snaps fingers] what's the movie, Higher Learning....get the crew together and go confront him...'cause – that's kind of what we gonna do. You ain't just gonna be calling niggers and all that and it's not going to be addressed. Like I remember a couple of situations where, you know, there'd be like four or five people discussing it and the next thing you know, about 15 people are going towards the dorm like, "Yo, where does this person live at? Let's go confront him about this." Because...he's [not] gonna be calling folks out their name and stuff like that.

From early in his youth, Carter described how his father taught him to be a leader and what it means to be a man. Because his father had instilled confidence and racial pride within him, he was able to withstand and address racial incidents appropriately. When Carter enrolled in college in 1993, he admittedly had a different mindset with regards to race and ethnicity. He spoke about how he began embracing his heritage during his college years. Carter said,

Well, I think that my race shaped me because by the time I got to college, I was like...you know, I'm just a strong black man and you can't tell me otherwise because I don't believe you. There's nothing that you can do that I can't do. I can get all, as just like you can, I can play sports, I can be a part of this club. So, I was very prideful of who I was and confident in my abilities.

Carter chose to socially isolate himself by primarily socializing with students of color and limited his interactions with white students to academia matters. He shared that once he got to college he began reading history books on Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Marcus Garvey that cultivated racial pride and an activist attitude. Carter's attitude change and college persistence supports Bridges (2010) who noted one coping strategy that assists African American males tenure at institutions of higher education is having a strong sense of identity and knowing the history of what African Americans experienced to matriculate.

#### *Summary.*

In this section participants' descriptions of their college experiences and campus environments were examined. There were stark differences in their reflections of their colleges and universities and interactions with various members of their learning

communities, which formed the third theme of environment fit. Participants across generations who attended HBCUs describe their campus environments as “It was the best place I could have went for my education,” “We were involved in the entire college,” and “Substantially, I just fit.”

Those participants across generations who attended PWIs described their campuses to be uninviting: “It wasn't a very good climate, really didn't welcome you there,” “I was a minority of a minority,” and “There was so few of us, I think there was one black professor there.”

The CRT tenet intercentricity of race and racism (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995) was used to analyze the participants' perceptions of their college environment and how it shaped their experiences. This tenet allowed for the exposure of findings based upon race and racism during analysis of environmental fit contingent upon institutional type. Overall, environment fit significantly shaped participants experiences in college, which varied based on institutional type. In the next section, I discuss the role student engagement played in these men's college completion.

### Student Engagement

One of the themes examined in Chapter 6 from participants' pre-college experiences was student engagement. In reviewing participants' college experiences, the final theme that emerged from the data was also student engagement. Student engagement for this study is defined as the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities and the extent to which the institution gets students to participate in activities that lead to student success (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). Across generations and institutional types, these men described the various forms of campus involvement. In this section, I examine how participant

engagement in 1) retention programs, 2) student organizations, and 3) athletics, supported their college persistence and eventually graduation.

#### *Retention Programs.*

The participants discussed campus initiatives and programs they were engaged in that promoted college retention. Azel describes his involvement with a campus support group:

We had a peer support group on campus our freshman year that we were involved in...[provided] guidance on what to do and just to get over that freshman hump. So a lot of that played a major role in what was going on. "Because some of those...people that were involved in that peer support group were some of the main contributors on campus. Whether it be student government...Greek organizations or other associations on campus. So we were able to get an idea of interacting with different people from different areas. And help to basically the typical struggle that...a freshman away from home the first time may have. They were able to help you out with that.

Azel attended a large PWI in Mississippi in which he described as having "approximately 20,000 students, approximately 4,500 African-American." Because he worked full time off campus to pay for college expenses, he did not participate in many campus activities.

One of the perks of being part of the peer group was the social aspect. Azel was able to connect with what he considered "like minded" peers who were focused on getting their degree. He shared that being a part of this peer group his freshman year enabled him to develop friendships that continued throughout college and beyond.

The campus initiatives and programs Carter participated in primarily targeted students of color. As previously mentioned, by the time Carter enrolled at Larchmont College he had underwent a surge in racial pride. When he graduated from high school, he spent the summer on Larchmont College through a college preparatory program which targeted students of color. Carter stated:

There were initiatives to encourage African Americans to attend school like the Preparatory Enrollment Program...It was somewhat of a program that really focused on minorities and attending college, so I was a part of that. So every year, we would have freshmen in class that came in and the majority of that class was minorities. That was one of their initiatives, you were part of it for the first two years and it was really more of a

startup kind of program. After your sophomore year, they kinda let you go on your own 'cause if you made it to that, you wouldn't really need them anymore.

Carter was able to mentor incoming freshman who were engaged in the program during his junior year in college. Carter shared that he would talk with the younger students about racial pride and breaking stereotypical barriers that claim African American males cannot succeed academically. Carter expressed that he was mainly involved in campus activities which supported African American students' interests. He discussed how most campus initiatives targeted specific groups in order to engage them in the campus environment and that he was particular about which campus initiatives he participated in.

For Azel and Carter, participation in retention programs was instrumental in getting them acclimated to the college setting, while supporting their educational goals. These men were able to be connected to programs designed to increase their college persistence through the various campus initiatives. Azel spent very little time on campus outside of going to class because he worked full time to pay college expenses. The social aspect of the peer support program allowed him to connect with other students on campus and form lifelong relationships. Carter's involvement in the preparatory program lasted for two years and gave him the accountability and support needed to adjust to the academic demands of college.

#### *Student Organizations.*

Participants across generations were involved in various campus organizations and academic clubs. For example, Ellis who was employed full time at a local retail store was also actively involved in a variety of student organizations. He said:

While on campus, I was....playing the intramural basketball, so I continued with basketball to some extent. I was a part of different organizations that related to education. So a lot of those organizations were at Sojourner College...being part of the Honor Society down there. And also I'm doing some work with oratory as well as chess, so those were some of the things that I really did on a smaller scale whenever I had the time, given the fact that most of the time I worked when I wasn't at school.

Ellis was quite engaged in campus activities, despite having to work to pay for his college expenses. He expressed his disappointment in not being able to join a fraternity while at King College. He wanted to pledge the fraternity because the school president and several professors he respected and admired were members of the fraternity, but he was denied the opportunity because the fraternity was suspended during his time at the school.

Bernard's status as a student athlete at Evergreen A&M College limited his campus involvement, and at one point he said, "I had to change my major into something that was...conducive to being able to maintain my scholarship." However, despite his busy schedule, he too was able to participate in campus organizations:

On campus I was involved in – back then we had an athletic social club, and it was called the Panther Club. And...we thought it was the greatest club on campus. [Laughs] And...I also joined the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity, and you know of course that's national. And...to this day...I still have a lot of friends that we stay in contact with, and it's been very positive.

For each interview, Bernard appeared dressed head to toe in Evergreen A&M College school paraphernalia. Although he graduated from college in 1967, his student experience has kept him connected with the school throughout the years. He shared that he and his wife go to homecoming events every year and that they enjoy themselves immensely each time. Bernard also shared that as a student he felt a part of the entire university and enjoyed the level of comfort he experienced while he was there. He is a staunch supporter of Evergreen A&M College and seemed to enjoy sharing fond memories of his time there.

As for Fletch, participation in student organizations and clubs at Bank University was intentional and useful for his college persistence goals. He was not alone in his pursuit for degree completion. He and his friend Derrick established their college completion plans. He said:

We joined the Accounting Club. We joined the Business Club, and we joined – both of us joined....the fraternity Kappa Alpha Psi, ...the Gamma Psi chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated.

Fletch shared that he and Derrick decided during their first year of college that they would join clubs and organizations to boost their engagement with their peers and professors. He believed that joining student organizations would increase his engagement on campus, thereby improving his chance of persisting to degree completion.

For these men, being engaged in school organizations and clubs provided opportunities to become more integrated in the school culture, thus increasing their possibilities of persistence to degree completion. Through participation, they were able to network with peers which often manifested into lifelong relationships.

For Maurice, participating in school organizations or clubs was not an option. When he enrolled at University of Benbrook in 1962, he was not allowed to participate in any campus activities due to his race. He asked the school's president if he could start up an African American fraternity. Maurice said, "We...the black men wanted to have black fraternities. And we were told, 'No, not yet. We're not ready for that.' When he transferred to Lone Star College three years later, he again requested to start up a fraternity. The school denied Maurice's request, and he received the same response he had gotten from University of Benbrook. However, because he was an outstanding scholar, he was allowed to be a part of the school's honor society. Because Maurice was not allowed to participate in any of the activities, the extent of his involvement was having his picture taken with the group.

Lyle too was unable to participate in campus organizations or clubs based upon his standings as a nontraditional student. He was given special permission to complete projects for Midwest State University which limited his time on campus. Lyle also wanted to start an African American fraternity on campus but was unable to because perspective

members did not have the required grade point average to pledge. He said, "I was an older student, and being the oldest of all these black kids. And all these kids going to school wasn't very academically minded. And most of them had less than 2.0." Lyle did not mention any other interest while being in college, and did not attempt to start up the fraternity again during his time at Midwest University.

For Maurice and Lyle, attempts to be engaged were thwarted by school officials. For Maurice, being an African American at a PWI during the early 1960s proved challenging for his student engagement. Although he wanted to be a part of the campus, it was made clear his presence was not wanted, only tolerated. For Lyle, who began his college career at 29 years old, student engagement was limited by interests, the special projects he worked on which kept him out of the traditional classroom, as well as him being a nontraditional student.

#### *Athletics.*

A few of the participants, including Landon and Mitch, reflected on their campus environment through experiences as student athletes. More often than not, they characterized their experiences as being different from other African American students on campus. For instance, when Landon described his experience at Middleton College he said:

[the] population was probably 80%-85% white....maybe 10% African American, and the rest was other. Most of the African American students on campus were there based on some kinda athletic scholarship... basketball, football, [and] track mainly. Being African American, I played quarterback at that school. I was the first African American to play that position. Well, just being the first African American quarterback and starting and taking... that team and raising the level of play and getting to national rankings, which hadn't happened in over 20 years there...that gave me a lot of notoriety. And so when you walk around, you get noticed....white people on the campus be [it] students, teachers, others,...paid attention to you because of the position that I played, the sport that I played. Again, I think as an athlete...you get some privileges that everyday -, African American students don't get. So I...I got a lot of help if I needed it...with just resources, whether it's school, whether it's financial living conditions....I really had a good situation.

During his time at Middleton College, Landon was able to take his football team to national competitions, which gained him notoriety. He used his popularity to gain access to student organizations where most African American students on campus were not accepted. His coaches introduced him to a big financial booster in the community. Through the connection, Landon was able to further extend his access to campus functions and organizations.

Mitch was also engaged at Wright University through participation on the school's football team. He described his experiences as being a part of a "football fraternity" where everyone looked out for each other. He said:

Well...I played football at Wright University...It was really popular back then. Everybody was going to the pros or trying to get to the pros, and a lot of the NFL, Canada, and Europe people was coming around on campus trying to get the players, to bring 'em up...to the next level. Football was the only thing I participated in. So it helped me out a lot, you know, being...at Wright University playing football. I think football stood out a lot at Wright University, to mold me and help me out. So we had all the asset[s] and...all the help you could get, and I didn't really encounter a lot of setbacks at Wright University. Matter of fact, I love Wright University. It provided me...the degree and got me a lot of other things. Wright University was great for me. I think that was a great experience. It was the best place I could have went for my education.

Mitch also discussed the perks that came with being an athlete and how he was accepted in all areas of the university. He compared his campus environment to a high school setting, where everyone knew each other and that it was the best place for him to be. During the time Mitch attended Wright University, it had gained the reputation of producing great football players. The university was also gaining attention from its musical band which performed at various venues across the U.S. For Mitch, being an athlete at Wright University was an exciting time in his life and precipitated his professional athletic careers.

As outstanding athletes, Landon and Mitch were able to participate in all social aspects their school provided. While Landon expanded his social circle by, "Playing football, baseball, as a side sport." He was also involved in the "student senate and

psychology club.” Mitch on the other hand, restricted his engagement to football: “It was the only thing I participated in. Football players had our own, we had our eternity fraternity.” Nevertheless, through their participation in athletics these men were able to remain engaged while matriculating through college.

#### *Summary.*

In this section, the participants described their campus environments and experiences. Most of the participants reported being involved with school organizations and clubs. These men also recognized that participation in athletics, organizations, clubs or campus initiatives were beneficial to their social development, which motivated their continued enrollment and subsequent degree completion.

#### Conclusion

The major themes that emerged focused on the perceptions of the lived experiences of participants’ college experiences. These themes were: self-determination, mentoring, environment fit, and student engagement. A Critical Race Theory lens was used throughout the analysis on participants’ perception of their college experiences. The theme of self-determination emerged as participants reflected on how they were able to persist to college completion despite setbacks and by setting academic goals. The distinct connection between self-determination and school completion highlights important outcomes for future employment opportunities (Eisenman, 2007). Mentoring was the second theme that emerged as participants discussed individuals who were supportive and encouraging as they sought to reach their educational goals. This theme is directly aligned with Biggs, Musewe, and Harvey’s (2014) findings that mentoring has the potential to both stimulate positive and discourage negative effort. The third theme that emerged from participants’ college experiences was college fit. Across generations, institutional type was prevalent in descriptions of their overall college experiences.

Based upon institutional type, participants either described a sense of belonging or feelings of social isolation. Although participants in this study persisted to college completion, in general college fit is essential for student satisfaction, well-being, and performance (Gilbreath, Kim, & Nichols, 2010). Participants across generations were involved in various extracurricular activities during their college careers. The final theme that emerged from the data was student engagement. For these men, school engagement included social organizations, retention programs, and athletics. According to Wiggan (2007), participation in extracurricular activities has the propensity to contribute to student academic success. Overall, self-determination, mentoring, college fit, and student engagement sustained participants' resilience in obtaining their college degree. The next chapter will discuss conclusions, key findings, and implications for future research.

## Chapter 8

### Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the study and analysis of major findings. I also discuss implications for future research, policies and practices to increase the postsecondary achievements of African American men. Lastly, limitations of the study will be discussed, followed by my concluding thoughts.

#### Overview of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the postsecondary experiences of African American men and significant factors that influenced their college success. According to Devita (2010), two-thirds of African American men who enroll in college leave before earning their college degree. He also found that the rate of college completion for African American men was lowest among all race and sexes. For this study, I intentionally highlight the academic achievements of African American men across generations who obtained a college degree. Moreover, I approached this study using anti-deficit framing (Harper, 2006) to understand enablers rather than obstacles in their matriculation to degree completion.

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of 10 African American men who successfully obtained their bachelor's degrees at U.S. degree-granting institutions across five generations (i.e. 1960s to 2000s) and how their lived experiences influenced degree completion. The general research question for this study asked: How can the multi-generational experiences of African American male college graduates contribute to discourse about ways to improve the higher education enrollment, persistence, and degree completion rates of African American? More specific sub-questions focused on the following: a) How do they describe their postsecondary experiences and success across generations? b) What significant influences shaped their college enrollment (i.e.

access and readiness)? and c) What significant influences shaped their college success (i.e. persistence and degree completion)?

Critical Race Theory (Knaus, 2009; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995) was the theoretical framework used to examine how participants' perceptions of their academic experiences influenced their college degree completion. For this study, I used two tenets of CRT (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995), which were the intercentricity of race and racism, and centrality experiential knowledge. Intercentricity of race and racism contends that race is a normal part of U. S. society which makes it difficult to identify and address. Whereas centrality of experiential knowledge provides people of color an opportunity to communicate their experiences and realities through counter-storytelling.

As previously mentioned, a qualitative research design was used for this study. Using a qualitative approach is appropriate for empowering participants to share their stories (Creswell, 2007). The research methodology used in this study was phenomenology. This methodology allowed me to examine participants' lived experiences (Husserl, 1927) and the impact on their postsecondary success. I used purposeful and snowball sampling to recruit participants who met the following criteria: 1) African American male, 2) 18 years of age or older, 3) obtained a bachelor's degree from an accredited public or private four-year Predominately White Institution (PWI) or Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the United States, 4) graduated from a college or university between the 1960s and 2000s and 5) resident of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

I selected 10 African American male college graduates, five men from PWIs and five men from HBCUs who graduated between the 1960s and 2000s, to participate in this study. I conducted two face-to-face interviews with each participant on their pre-college, college, and post-college experiences, in addition to recommendations for improving

postsecondary access and success for African American males. Pseudonyms were used to keep the participants' identities anonymous. Upon completion, all interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. Triangulation of the data (i.e. interview, fieldnotes, memoing), member checking (participants received a copy of their interview transcript for validation), and bracketing (researcher set aside any biases or judgments) was conducted to ensure trustworthiness.

### Key Findings

In this section, a summary of key findings as it relates to each of the research questions will be discussed.

1. How do African American college graduate men describe their postsecondary experiences and successes across generations? Based on analysis of the in-depth interviews, it was revealed that participants' perceptions of their postsecondary experiences were consistent across generations based on institutional type. All of the participants who graduated from an HBCU described their experiences in favorable ways. Participants expressed how much they enjoyed being a part of their school and had great interactions with peers and instructors. One participants' (Fletch's) description of the campus environment that resounded throughout the interviews was "I just fit; I mean it was just a fit." Another participant's (Mitch's) description that echoed in the findings was "I loved (HBCU), it was the best place I could have went for my education." The experiences these men described support the literature on how racial homogeneity at HBCUs encourage and motivate African American male students and is a dominant factor in fostering their academic success (Palmer & Maramba, 2010).

Participants who attended PWIs across generations described their overall experiences quite differently than their HBCU counterparts. For instance, participants who attended PWIs during the '60s, '70s, and '80s described experiencing blatant forms of racism. An example of this would be Maurice (Class of 1966), who was denied the opportunity to student-teach while at University of Benbrook. Although he met all of the requirements and was recommended for the position by his advisor, he was informed that no Blacks could teach white students at University of Benbrook. Another example is Landon's (Class of 1981) description of the open hostility he received while attending a small PWi located in a rural, mostly white community. Throughout his time at a Middleton College, he was aware that his presence was unwanted on campus and throughout the community. The remaining participants who attended PWIs described their experiences as associating primarily with other African Americans and limited campus engagement. Although these men were able to persist to degree completion, being subjected to a negative atmosphere and experiences of alienation are often symptomatic of a deep underlying problem not being addressed on PWi campuses (Smith & Wolf-Wendel, 2005).

2. What significant influences shaped their college enrollment (i.e. access and readiness)? Educational expectations and attitude are often developed during primary and secondary years. To fully understand the participants' postsecondary experiences, it was important to explore how past educational experiences influenced their pre-college academic success. Findings that emerged from the data revealed the significance of familial educational values and expectations, K-12 school contexts, being a young, African

American male, significant accomplishments, critical challenges and setbacks, and college preparation and college choice. Participants described how their families contributed to pre-college success through the articulation of academic expectations, which were also reinforced by their teachers, and which ultimately prepared them for postsecondary education. Being part of a college preparatory program exposed participants to the nuances of college and prepared them for the academic challenges of postsecondary education. Once enrolled, participants were engaged in various mentoring relationships, student retention programs, and organizations which supported their persistence in college. Within Critical Race Theory is the premise that all children can learn and succeed given the same resources and opportunities as the dominate group (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The use of counter storytelling allowed these men to share their academic achievements which disputes generalized perceptions of them as underachievers.

3. What significant influences shaped their college success (i.e. persistence and degree completion)? This phenomenological study was conducted to examine and compare the lived experiences of African American males across generations and sought to explore the sources utilized which sustained their academics. Participants described the importance of self-determination as key to their educational success which cultivated their academic progression toward degree completion. These men were determined to obtain their college degree by persevering through personal setbacks (e.g. illness, loss of parent) and environmental setting (e.g. social isolation/exclusion).

The participants also established educational goals and developed plans which gave them a sense of direction for reaching their goals. Participants across generations and institutional types shared that having a positive relationship with an adult who served as a role model, mentor, or advocate, was instrumental in their persistence and degree completion. The support these men received came in various forms of mentoring, role modeling, advice, and high expectations. Consistent positive engagement, goal setting, and familial support reinforced self-determination which categorically influenced academic success. Critical Race Theory challenges the dominant group's discourse which focuses on the failures instead of achievements when reporting on people of color. Using the theoretical framework of CRT with a phenomenological method allowed participants to share perceptions of their lived academic experiences through the use of counter storytelling. The use of CRT exposed the intercentricity of race and racism that permeated their K-16 journey, directly or indirectly. For example, Ellis graduated valedictorian from high school but was placed on academic probation once he entered college. He said, "How can you become valedictorian at a magnet school...get accepted to college and you're automatically on academic probation without even taking a course?" Although he exceeded expectations in high school, his high school curriculum did not meet college standards.

#### Participants' Recommendations

1. How can the multi-generational experiences of African American male college graduates contribute to discourse about ways to improve the higher education enrollment, persistence, and degree completion rates of African

American males? When asked what recommendations these African American men had for improving the college enrollment and success for African American males, four of the participants (Landon, Carter, Azel, and Fletch) recommended parents and teachers plant seeds of college enrollment early in children's school years. For Landon, having that seed planted as a child by his parents, "motivated and drove me to get a college degree." Another suggestion was exposing children to college campuses by participating in campus school fairs or college tours. Two of the participants (Landon and Carter) made this recommendation because all African American males may not be interested in college. Therefore, they should be placed on a vocational track to pursue other interests. As Carter so eloquently stated, "even though the vocational center is not an academic environment, it still emphasizes training for post-high school life." College choice was also recommended as essential for the retention of African American males. Mitch recommended that perspective students and their parents go on college tours where they can discern the college atmosphere and how it could impact retention. He and Ellis both recommended that school counselors work closely with parents and students to evaluate financial responsibilities when selecting college choice.

While most of the participants discussed the benefit of having a positive adult in their lives who supported their academic achievements, only two (Bernard and Bob), recommended mentoring for improving the postsecondary academic outcomes of African American men. Bernard and Bob both discussed that having a positive relationship with successful African American men in the community and/or through a mentoring program could

impact the educational outcomes for students of color. Bernard noted that most inner city African American boys are surrounded by negative role models (e.g. gang bangers, drug dealers, etc.) and are often without guidance from positive adult males to show them a different way of life. Bob believes that the younger generation could learn from the older generation of African American males who have made it and are living productive lives. He stated, "We got too many good people not saying anything or not doing anything...just talk to them and encouraging them...show them another way to go in life." Bob discussed that many of the young men of color he mentors do not often view college as a way to improve their station in life and instead are bombarded with media images, which often glorifies negative lifestyles of African American males.

Lastly, one participant (Lyle) recommended a change in university hiring practices to increase the number of African American professors on college campuses. He said, "The hiring people are white, and they're gonna hire based on recommendations with somebody else out there, and they usually are white. We don't have many black folks that's gonna make it through that glass ceiling. It's not just for women, it's for black men too." Lyle believed the presence of more African American professors could raise the level of comfort for students of color at PWIs. He recommended that PWIs expand their employment recruitment search to HBCUs and other minority serving schools to obtain a more diverse applicant pool.

#### Implications for Research

According to Bush and Bush (2013), after more than 40 years of research, no uniform theory has emerged as a foundation and frame that explains the lives of African

American boys and men. This statement is profound and challenges researchers to look at this population with renewed interest and perhaps a new lens. Researchers need to expand upon the use of African American Male Theory (AAMT) as a theoretical framework to analyze the trajectory of African American male success in public education (Bush & Bush, 2013). The use of AAMT in future research on African American males' educational experiences could inform institutional practices to promote their academic achievements.

Researchers should also examine the multigenerational experiences of African American men who have earned advanced degrees (M.A., M.S., M.B.A., J.D., M.D., Ph.D., Ed.D., etc). This research could support postsecondary institutions policies and practices for increasing the number of underrepresented students of color, especially African American males, in advanced degree programs. Research studies ought to explore the multigenerational postsecondary experiences of successful African American women college graduates. This research could reveal perceptions of their postsecondary experiences and inform institutional policies and practices aimed at increasing their presence on college campuses.

Lastly, the vast information on the plight of the African American males is extensive and somewhat disheartening as it focuses on deficiencies and seemingly overlooks their triumphs. Research studies that only focus on the educational challenges of African American males can create unfair and deficit perceptions of this population as a whole. Therefore, researchers need to shift the monolithic discourse about the problems this population faces across the PreK-16 continuum to highlight the individuals, opportunities, and conditions that contribute to their academic success (Grier-Reid, 2013; Harper, 2005). To increase African American males' educational attainment, researchers should increase studies on college completers to gather insight on how they were able to

persist despite common challenges specific to this population (Harper, 2012). Research on successful African American college graduate men across generations will not only provide critical information about ways to strengthen higher education policies and practices for underrepresented students, but could also serve as an inspirational tool for future generations of college going men of color.

#### Implications for Policy

The participants in this study can help inform educational policies focused on improving the college enrollment, retention, and completion rates of African American males. Their stories revealed the need for colleges and universities to develop policies based on critical initiatives (e.g. inclusive campus environment, cultural diversity, and articulation agreements with K-12 schools and community colleges) that contributed to their success in college.

Colleges and universities should implement policies that support the use of multiple evaluation tools (e.g. surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, etc.) to gauge students' campus satisfaction. Application of these tools could provide information for developing strategies to increase students' campus satisfaction and substantiate current engagement practices proven to successfully engage African American males (Kuh, 2001). Retention programs designed specifically for African American men should also incorporate the use of multiple assessment tools to examine programmatic goals, practices, and outcomes. This effort could support better understanding of which resources and opportunities best meet the needs of this population. Furthermore, the use of various research methods would allow participants the opportunity to validate policies and practices that seek to maintain their presence on college campuses. For universities and colleges that receive funding from the state and federal initiatives, the use of different assessment tools could support the need for and effectiveness of current practices. This

is essential because funding requirements include tangible evidence of effective programs that support the academic achievements and outcomes of African American males. University policies which include instructor surveys could also be further developed to include class interactions, teacher expectations, and opportunities for engagement. This process would allow underrepresented students, especially those on PWI campuses, to provide feedback that could be instrumental in addressing issues such as social isolation, exclusion, and campus racial climate.

Lastly, institution policies should be revised to require cultural competency training for newly hired and tenured employees. The challenges the participants encountered on campus with university officials (e.g. faculty, staff and administrators) point to the need for policies centered around culturally competency training and resources in order to improve the campus climate for historically underserved students. Institutions should require faculty, staff, and administrators to participate in cultural competency training session annually. These training sessions should be mandatory and part of their professional development plan. Overall, strengthening the policy efforts focused on African American undergraduates can help develop their sense of belonging on campus, especially at Predominately White Institutions, and improve their persistence and degree completion rates (Harper, 2004).

#### Implications for Practice

The development of culturally sensitive hiring practices for faculty, staff, and administrators at four-year institutions would provide an opportunity for students of color to see individuals from similar racial, cultural, and/or community backgrounds (Wright, 2008). Having culturally diverse staff in a variety of employment and leadership positions throughout the campus could also increase the understanding and support for underrepresented students, particularly African American males. Therefore, institutions of

higher education should consider expanding their hiring practices to include deliberate recruitment and retention of racially diverse applicants. These practices should include job fairs and distribution of employment opportunity notifications at postsecondary institutions that primarily serve students of color.

Participants in this study recommended that African American males be exposed to college campuses to peak their educational interests beyond high school. Moreover, colleges and universities should collaborate with K-12 schools to expose underrepresented students to higher education. University partnerships, which provide campus events such as college tours, summer enrichment programs, sports activities, and academic competitions, are significant in increasing potential students' interests in postsecondary education (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). Therefore, colleges should also broaden opportunities for K-12 students to actually observe campus life and college instruction through academic summer camps as well as after school and weekend enrichment programs, which could promote college attendance.

As anticipated, study findings advocate for the expansion of institutional practices to establish mentoring programs in primary and secondary education which target African American males' connectedness to academic achievement and increase their postsecondary aspirations (Falconer & Hays, 2006; Lee, 1999). Mentoring programs need to be developed with community leaders and entrepreneurs to provide African American males an opportunity to be exposed to positive and successful role models beyond sports and entertainment. According to Palmer and Gasman (2008), mentoring programs designed explicitly for African American males not only support their academic efforts, but help with understanding themselves and their role in society. Participation in mentoring programs has the propensity to positively impact African American males' self-esteem and confidence during their adolescent years, and also supports developmental

challenges and successes over time (Dukakis, Duong, Velasco, & Henderson, 2014). Therefore, school based mentoring programs should be implemented during primary school years and continue through college completion. Implementing these programs and practices could promote an increase in African American male enrollment at four-year institutions and support their persistence to degree completion.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to the experiences of 10 African American men who had successfully obtained their bachelor's degree from U.S. accredited colleges and universities between the 1960s and 2000s. Future studies may also include the lives of African American men who graduated from college prior to the 1960s and after 2010. This addition will not only allow for the inclusion of narratives related to pre-civil rights, pre-integration and Jim Crow eras, but also the realities of Generations Y (Millennials) and Z (those individual born after 1995). Second, all of the men who participated in this study were born and raised in the United States. Additional research studies may also consider the multigenerational experiences of Black immigrants who graduated from U.S. institutions of higher education during the specific time period. Third, the selection process for this study required purposeful and snowball sampling in order to accommodate my travel and time constraints. Therefore, participants for this study were selected on a first response basis according to their year of graduation, institutional type and residence in the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex. Examining the experiences of African American men who live in different regions (North, East, and West) of the state and the U.S. may allow for more diverse reflections about the individuals, programs, policies, settings, and practices that shaped their access to and persistence through college.

### Concluding Thoughts

There is a vast amount of scholarship exploring the academic, social, and personal challenges affecting the academic trajectories of African American males across the PreK-16 educational pipeline (Berry, 2005; Bonner, 2001; Bonner, & Bailey, 2006; Cuyjet, 1997; Davis, 2003; Harper, 2003; Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Jackson, & Moore, 2006; Kunjufu, 2002; Noguera, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008). For this phenomenological study, I focused on the pathways to and through college for 10 African American men who graduated from a four-year institution over the past 50 years. I intentionally highlighted their PreK-16 experiences and achievements to facilitate a dialogue to support successful learning conditions and outcomes for diverse student groups. Their personal accounts can assist leaders, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to improve the enrollment and completion rates of historically underrepresented students, especially African American males. The information gleaned from this study can be used to identify factors necessary for enhancing institutional and programmatic efforts specific to the retention and graduation rates for this population.

On a more personal note, throughout this research process, I did not waver in my desire to complete a qualitative study of these African American men who have, by societal standards, beaten the odds. When I began the interview process, I was not prepared to be engrossed in and amazed by their stories of triumph, strength, and commitment. For some of these participants, continuing the road to success despite being considered second-class citizens with limited access to educational opportunities, gave me a glimpse into their lives and the everyday challenges they faced as racialized, gendered, and classed beings. Their narratives captured in this dissertation could never do justice to the oral reflections of their lived experiences. I felt honored that they decided

to share such deep and personal experiences with me. For the generation of men who by some deficit accounts were destined for failure, I say thank you.

Thank you for being a beacon of hope to other African American males who find themselves scrutinized, rejected, and stereotyped based purely upon external factors. The stories they shared can give hope to those individuals who find themselves in personal and social situations that may hinder possibilities to achieve at their maximum potential, be educated, and employed. Again, I have been privileged to listen to these African American men describe their amazing life stories and as a few of them mentioned, "I know more about them than most people." I am forever grateful and appreciative of the time we shared during this study, and truly blessed to know each of them.

Appendix A  
Recruitment Letter

Greetings,

My name is Michelle Amrine. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policies Studies (ELPS) in the College of Education at the University Texas at Arlington. Under the guidance of Dr. Ifeoma Amah, I am conducting a dissertation study as partial fulfillment for my coursework and doctoral degree.

I am writing to invite you to participate in my study, which examines the factors that influenced the college completion rates (i.e. graduation) of African American men who graduated from U.S. accredited 4-year institutions (e.g. Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Through this study, I hope to learn about the academic experiences of 10 African American men across generations, more specifically over the past 50 years (i.e. between the 1960s to 2000s).

This study will involve two face-to-face interviews to learn about your precollege, college and post college experiences. A follow-up interview may also be required if the initial interview was not complete and/or to obtain additional information from you. The interviews may last between 60 to 90 minutes and occur at a location that is most convenient for you. Also, the interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure I capture your response accurately. Your participation in this study will be confidential and a pseudonym name (i.e. fake name) will be used to protect your anonymity. In addition, your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation in this study at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Please note that, there will be one participant selected from each generational period and institutional type (e.g. one African American man who attended an HBCU in the 1960s and one African American man who attended a PWI in the 1960s). The first participants who respond to and meet the criteria for selection will be contacted. Letters of interest will no longer be accepted once the anticipated number of participants has been obtained for this study. If you are selected to participate in the study, you will receive an email with additional information about the study and scheduling an interview time. If you are not selected, you will receive an email of gratitude for your interest in this research.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please complete the following information below and return it to me via email at [mbamrine@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:mbamrine@mavs.uta.edu). The deadline for submitting your participant interest forms is (INSERT DATE AFTER UTA IRB APPROVAL).

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at via email or by phone at (817) 715-0616.

Sincerely,

Michelle B. Amrine, MLA.MSL  
Ph.D. Candidate  
The University of Texas at Arlington  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
817.715.0616  
[michelle.amrine@mavs.uta.com](mailto:michelle.amrine@mavs.uta.com)

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the information below:

Name:  
Hometown:  
College Attended:  
Major/Minor:  
Year Graduated:  
Current Profession:  
Email Address:  
Phone number:..

Appendix B

Selected Participant Email

Dear Sir,

First and foremost, thanks for your interest in participating in my qualitative research study which examines the educational experiences of African American men who graduated from college across generations.

Second, based on your immediate response to this email announcement, you have been selected to participate in the study. I plan to begin the two-part interview process January 5, 2015 and have all interviews completed by February 16, 2015. As stated in my initial email, interviews may last between 60 to 90 minutes and will occur at a location and time that is most convenient for you. A follow-up interview may also be required, which would last between 30 to 60 minutes.

If you are still interested in participating in this research study, please contact me via email or by phone regarding the possible dates and times you will be available to meet. The deadline for scheduling an interview is January 24, 2015.

Again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Michelle B. Amrine MSL, MLA  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Texas at Arlington  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
817.715.0616  
[michelle.amrine@mavs.uta.com](mailto:michelle.amrine@mavs.uta.com) .

Appendix C

Non-Selected Participant Email

Dear Sir,

First and foremost, thanks for your interest in participating in my qualitative research study, which examines the educational experiences of African American men who graduate from college across generations.

Second, based on the number of initial responses I received from other participants, I have reached the maximum number of participants based on your institutional type, year of college attendance, and graduation year.

Although I do not anticipate having any problems interviewing the selected participants, I will retain your information for the duration of the study. Once the study is completed, I will securely dispose (i.e. shred) your personal information.

Again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Michelle B. Amrine, MSL, MLA  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Texas at Arlington  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
817.715.0616  
[michelle.amrine@mavs.uta.com](mailto:michelle.amrine@mavs.uta.com)

Appendix D  
Informed Consent Document

## INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

### PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Michelle B. Amrine  
College of Education  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
mbamrine@mavs.uta.edu

### FACULTY ADVISOR

Ifeoma Amah, Ph.D.  
College of Education  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
[iamah@uta.edu](mailto:iamah@uta.edu)

### TITLE OF PROJECT

A Multigenerational Approach: Critical Accounts of the Postsecondary Experiences and Success of African American Men.

### INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a study about the postsecondary experiences and successes of African American men who graduated from U.S. 4-year institutions of higher education across the generations (i.e. 1960s to 2000s). Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine the postsecondary experiences and success of African American men who graduated from U.S. college and universities (i.e. 4 year institutions) between the 1960s and 2000s.

### DURATION

Participation in the study will require the completion of: 1) a participant background information questionnaire, which should last between 15 to 20 minutes. 2) two face-to-face interviews lasting between 60 to 90 minutes each, and 3) follow-up interview may also be required, which would last 30 to 60 minutes.

### NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

The number of anticipated participants in this research study is 15.

### PROCEDURES

The procedures, which will involve you as a participant includes the completion of:

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10/13/14 10:30

1. A participant background information questionnaire to obtain personal, familial and academic information about you.
2. Two face-to-face interviews, which involves: a) one interview about your personal and pre-college experiences and b) second interview about college and post college experiences as well as recommendations for improving postsecondary access and success for African American males.
3. A follow-up face-to-face or over the phone interview may be conducted to finish up an incomplete interview and/or to ask additional questions based on your initial responses.

The interview will be audio recorded to ensure that I capture your responses accurately. After the interviews, the recordings will be transcribed verbatim, which means it will be typed exactly as it was recorded, word-for-word by the principal investigator (myself) and/or a professional transcriber. The recordings and transcription will not be used for any future research purposes not described here.

#### **POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

While there are no direct benefits from your participation in this study, you may feel a sense of personal gratification from sharing your experiences and contributions to research on African American men who have successfully graduated from college.

#### **POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORT**

There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort expected as a result of your participation in this study. Should you experience any discomfort, please inform the researcher (myself). You have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence and may do so by informing the researcher.

#### **COMPENSATION**

Participation in this study does not involve any cost or payment to the participant.

#### **ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES**

There are no alternative procedures for this study. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time with no consequences.

#### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time with no consequences.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. To ensure your anonymity, all participants will be given a pseudonym (i.e. fake name), which will be written on their interview sheet and audio recordings. All information gathered will be strictly confidential throughout the study. Access to participant information is restricted to the primary investigator (myself), and my faculty advisor (Dr. Ifeoma Amah). A copy of this signed consent form, digital recordings, notes and transcriptions of interviews from this study will be stored in a locked cabinet located in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (Trimble Hall 103J) for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be

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published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway. It will remain anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirement. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

**CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS**

Questions pertaining to this research study may be directed to Michelle B. Amrine at 817.715.0616 or [mbamrine@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:mbamrine@mavs.uta.edu) and/or Ifeoma Amah, Ph.D. at 817.272.0991 or [iamah@uta.edu](mailto:iamah@uta.edu). Questions regarding your rights as a research participant or a research related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817.272.2105 or [regulatoryservices@uta.edu](mailto:regulatoryservices@uta.edu).

**As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent    Date**

<b>CONSENT</b>	
By signing below, you _____ (Please print your name) confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about the study’s purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntary agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.	
_____ <b>PRINT NAME OF VOLUNTEER</b>	_____ <b>DATE</b>
_____ <b>SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER</b>	_____ <b>DATE</b>

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Appendix E

Participant Background Information Questionnaire

This section is to be completed by the researcher:

Participant#

Pseudonym (i.e. fake name):

Date of Interview:

CONTACT INFORMATION

Primary Phone Number:

Alternative Phone Number:

E-Mail Address:

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Were you born in the United States?  
 Yes  No

Hometown:

Current Place of Residence:

Racial/ Ethnic Background:

Fathers highest level of education attained: (Check one)

- Some Elementary  Elementary Graduate  Some Middle School/Junior High School  
 Middle School/Junior High School Graduate  Some High School  
 High School Diploma/GED  Some College  Associate's Degree  
 Bachelor's Degree  Graduate/Professional Degree  Unknown

Mother's highest level of education attained: (Check one)

- Some Elementary  Elementary Graduate  Some Middle School/Junior High School  
 Middle School/Junior High School Graduate  Some High School  
 High School Diploma/GED  Some College  Associate's Degree  
 Bachelor's Degree  Graduate/Professional Degree  Unknown

Additional Information:

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ACADEMIC INFORMATION:

Were you the first person in your family to obtain a college degree?

- Yes  No

Additional Information:

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Did you receive your bachelor degree(s) from a college or university in the United States?

- Yes  No  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Name of college or university where you received your bachelor degree (Name of Institution/ City/ State/Country):

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Institutional Type (Part 1):

- 4-year public (non-profit)  4-year Private (non-profit)  
 4-year public (for-profit)  4-year Private (for-profit)

Institutional Type (Part 2):

- Predominately White Institution  Historically Black College and University  
 Hispanic Serving Institution  Tribal Affiliated Institution  
 Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions

Did you transfer from a community college?

- Yes  No

Did you participate in any of the following programs affiliated with a community college?

- Dual Enrollment Program  Early College High School  Not Applicable

What was your Major(s) and Minor(s) in college?

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---

How did you pay for college? (Check all that apply)

- Financial aid  
 Grants  
 Work Study  
 Scholarship (academic, athletic, etc.)  
 Loans  
 On campus Job  
 Off campus Job  
 Familial Support  
 Military

- Credit
- Savings
- Tuition reimbursement
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Year graduated from college:

\_\_\_\_\_

Type of Degree(s) Received (e.g. B.A., B.S., A.B., etc.):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Advanced Degree(s) Obtained (Type of Degree and Institution):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Current Profession:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Additional Information:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix F  
Interview Protocol: Part 1

Participant's Name:	
Date:	Location:
Time Interview Started:	Time Interview Finished:

#### Reminders

- Prior to interview make sure the participants complete the demographic information form.
- Both researcher and participant must sign the consent form prior to the interview.
- Make sure that the interview questions are helping me address answer the following research questions

#### General Question

- How can the multi-generational experiences of African American male college graduates contribute to discourse about ways to improve the higher education enrollment, persistence and degree completion rates of African American males?

#### Specific Questions

- How do they describe their postsecondary experiences and success across generations?
- What significant influences shaped their college enrollment (i.e. access and readiness)?
- What significant influences shaped their college success (i.e. persistence and degree completion)?

#### Opening Remarks:

I would like to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to speak with me today. As I have mentioned before, I am conducting interviews with African American men who successfully obtained their bachelor's degree across five generations (e.g. 1960s to 2000s). For this interview I hope to learn about your personal and pre-college experiences. This interview will take about 60 to 90 minutes to complete. The findings obtained from the interviews will be used to identify factors that contributed to the success of African American men in higher education. This information may also be used to highlight the individuals, policies, practices and initiatives necessary to increase the college enrollment, retention and degree completion of this population. This interview will only be used for the purposes listed here and on the consent form, and will be strictly confidential. More specifically, you will be given a pseudonym name (i.e. fake name) and will not be identified by your name in the research findings and in any conversations. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

#### Introduction:

1. Can you tell me about yourself (Probes: hometown, familial background (e.g. socio-economic status), familial structure (e.g. two parent vs. single parent, siblings,) etc.), educational background (e.g. first generation college student), current familial status (married, single, divorced, have children, etc.)
2. What does being a college educated African American man mean to you?

#### Pre-college Experiences:

1. Can you tell me about your K-12 educational experiences? (Probes: What types of school(s) did you attended (e.g. private vs. public? Predominately black vs. diverse? What type of student were you (e.g. high, average or low performing, good vs. getting into trouble, etc.)? What extracurricular activities were you involved in? etc.)

2. In what ways do you think race, class and/or gender (e.g. being an African American male) shaped/ impacted your K-12 educational experiences?
  - a. If yes, can you share an example(s) with me?
  - b. If no, why do you think your race, class and/or gender did not shape your K-12 educational experiences?
3. Can you tell me about any significant accomplishment(s) [academic, personal, social] you were able to achieve during your K-12 schooling?
  - a. If yes, why do you think you were able to achieve these accomplishment(s)?
  - b. If no, why do you think you were unable to achieve these accomplishment(s)?
4. What type of challenge(s)/ setback(s) [academic, personal, social] did you experience during your K-12 schooling?
  - a. If yes, can share an example of the challenge(s)/setback(s) you experienced? How were you able to overcome these challenge(s)/ setback(s)?
  - b. If no, why do you think you were able to avoid any challenge(s)/ setback(s) during these years?
5. What individuals, activities, policies, programs and/or courses, prepared you to be successful in school? Prepared you for college?
6. Who/What influenced your decision to enroll in college? What about your college selection?

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in this interview. I greatly appreciate everything you have shared with me. I will be in contact with you once this interview is transcribed for the second interview about your college and post college experiences as well as your recommendations for improving college access and success for African American males. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, comments and/or concerns..

Appendix G  
Interview Protocol: Part 2

Participant's Name:	
Date:	Location:
Time Interview Started:	Time Interview Finished:

#### Reminders

- Prior to interview make sure the participants complete the demographic information form.
- Both researcher and participant must sign the consent form prior to the interview.
- Make sure that the interview questions are helping me address answer the following research questions

#### General Question

- How can the multi-generational experiences of African American male college graduates contribute to discourse about ways to improve the higher education enrollment, persistence and degree completion rates of African American males?

#### Specific Questions

- How do they describe their postsecondary experiences and success across generations?
- What significant influences shaped their college enrollment (i.e. access and readiness)?
- What significant influences shaped their college success (i.e. persistence and degree completion)?

#### Opening Remarks:

I would like to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to speak with me today. As I have mentioned before, I am conducting interviews with African American men who successfully obtained their bachelor's degree across five generations (e.g. 1960s to 2000s). For this interview I hope to learn about your college and post college experiences, as well as your recommendations for improving college access and success for African American males. This interview will take about 60 to 90 minutes to complete. The findings obtained from the interviews will be used to identify factors that contributed to the success of African American men in higher education. This information may also be used to highlight the individuals, policies, practices and initiatives necessary to increase the college enrollment, retention and degree completion of this population. This interview will only be used for the purposes listed here and on the consent form, and will be strictly confidential. More specifically, you will be given a pseudonym name (i.e. fake name) and will not be identified by your name in the research findings and in any conversations. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

#### College Experiences:

1. Can you tell me about your experiences at [INSERT NAME OF COLLEGE]?
  - a. How would you describe your campus environment? (Probes: student demographics, type of university, private vs. public, HBCU vs. PWI, campus climate for African American students?)
  - b. What was your major(s)/minor(s) in college? Why did you select this major(s)/minor(s)? How were your experiences in your classes? Interactions with students? Faculty?
  - c. What extracurricular activities (e.g. student government, sports, fraternity, student support services, job, etc.) were you in involved in on and/or off campus?

2. In what ways do think your race, class and/or gender (i.e. being an African American male) shaped your experiences at [INSERT NAME OF COLLEGE]? Were your experiences similar and/or different from other students on campus? Other students of color? Other African American students?
3. Can you share an example of any significant accomplishment(s) you were able to achieve in college?
  - a. If yes, why do you think you were able to achieve this accomplishment(s)?
  - b. If no, why do you think you were unable to achieve any accomplishment(s)?
4. What type of challenge(s)/setback(s) [academic, personal, social] did you experience while you were in college?
  - a. If yes, can you tell me about your challenge(s)/setback(s)? How were you able to overcome your challenge(s)/ setback(s)?
  - b. If no, why do you think you were able to avoid any challenge(s)/ setback(s) during these years?
5. Can you tell me about the levels of support (e.g. individuals, programs, policies, initiatives, etc.) you received/ utilized while in college?
6. What do you think help you graduate from [INSERT NAME OF COLLEGE]?

Post College Experiences and Recommendations:

1. What did you do after you graduated from college? (e.g. enter the workforce, graduate school, military, etc.)?
2. What is your current profession? What made you choose this profession? How long have you been in this profession?
3. While the numbers of students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities has increased, there continues to be lower participation and graduation rates for African Americans males.
  - a. What factors do you think are contributing to the lower college enrollment and graduation rates of African American males?
  - b. Based on your own experiences as African American college graduate man, what recommendations do you have about ways to improve the college enrollment and success for this population?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share that we may have not discussed during this interview?.

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### Biographical Information

Michelle B. Amrine has worked with adolescent boys in alternative school settings in Missouri, Illinois and Texas for over twenty-five years. As a behavior intervention counselor, she assisted at-risk boys with their academic, personal and social development in juvenile state operated facilities. She also worked as a social skills and character education instructor for primary and secondary students. Her research interests centers on improving the educational experiences and outcomes for African American students, especially males across the PreK-20 continuum.

Michelle obtained a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education from Jackson State University as well as a Master of Liberal Arts and a Master of Science in School Leadership with concentrations in Education from Baker University. She has worked on gender specific initiatives and presented findings at various conferences. In addition, Michelle facilitated workshops on Breaking Barriers, a Professional development workshop which provides PreK-12 educators with instructional strategies for addressing the needs of students of color. Her future plans include consulting with 2-year and 4-year institutions on ways to increase the enrollment, retention, and degree completion of underrepresented students, especially African American males.