

THIS IS AMERICA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION INTO THE
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN ATTENDING A
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY WHILE ON ACADEMIC PROBATION

By

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this investigation was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of educational experiences of eight African American (AA) men on academic probation, while attending a predominantly White college institution in the Southeastern part of the United States. While over the past decade increased attention has been given to the collegiate experiences of AA men, there has been little attention given to AA men who continue to struggle academically and are at the greatest risk of failing. **Method:** This study utilizes Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Intersectionality Theory. **Results:** Participants in this study reported experienced *Misrecognition*, *Diminished Confidence* and *Racial Distancing*. **Discussion:** Implications for future research and social work are discussed.

Key terms: African American, men, academic probation, Predominantly White Colleges, and Universities (PWI), Intersectionality Theory

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Chapter I

Introduction

Over the past 30 years researchers have consistently found that African American (AA) men are less likely than any other demographic group to graduate from a four-year collegiate institution (Allen, 1987; 1992; Bean, 1990; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006a; Harper & Davis, 2012; Harper & Harris, 2012). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2014), only 33 to 35% of AA men who attend four-year institutions complete their programs within six years. When compared to other demographic groups we see that AA men graduate at a rate approximately 2% below American Indians and Alaskan Natives (37%), 14% below Hispanics and Latinos (49%), 25% below Whites (60%), 30% below individuals who identify with two or more races (65%) and 13% below all students (48%) (Harper, 2006a; Harper & Harris, 2012; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). As a result, less than 17% of AA men over the age of 25, versus 32% of all men and 33% of all woman, possess a degree from a four-year post-secondary educational institution (Black Demographics, 2014; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014; Ryan & Bauman, 2016; US Census Breuer, 2013).

The persistence of below average education success for AA men has drawn the attention of universities and scholars from across the country. In their attempts to better understand this phenomenon, researchers have found strong correlations between AA men's below average educational outcomes and their overexposure to educational experiences of racialization, marginalization, alienation, cultural incongruence, isolation, underrepresentation and misrecognition (Allen, 1992; Feagin & Fleming, 1984; Harper, 2015; Marmot, 2004; Pager, 2008; Willison, 2009). While these findings are important, they are compounded by research that suggest that not only are AA men among the most negatively stereotyped populations on

university campuses but, negative social encounters informed by these stereotypes are unavoidable (Feagin, 1992; Feagin & Eckberg, 1980; Harper, 2012; 2015; Harper & Hurtado; 2007; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007).

By focusing on the experiences of AA men, researchers such as Harper (2012) and Kim and Hargrove (2013) have helped to broaden the scope of accountability when attempting to explain factors that contribute to AA men's below average educational outcomes. For example, investigations into the lived experiences of AA men attending predominantly White colleges and university institutions (PWI) has drawn more attention to the persistence of racially hostile campus environments, as well as marginalizing university policies, practice and procedures (Harper, 2009; Harper & Jenkins, 2006; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). The attention given to these issues has contributed to the prioritizing of a newer body of research which focuses on the creative ways in which AA men successfully navigate these challenges (Harper, 2012; Houston et al., 2010). According to Harper (2012) scholars, and collegiate institutions have a great deal to learn from AA men who have been academically successful, despite all the institutional and social factors that are stacked against them. Furthermore, Harper (2012) and Houston et al., (2010) suggest that insights into this specific population can contribute to the identification of skills, resource and techniques that may be more easily appropriated by other AA men seeking academic success.

Still, as the research on collegiate AA men has shifted and grown, significant gaps in the literature have developed. For example, while it is reasonable to assume that the skills used by one group of AA men can be appropriated by others, this idea also suggest that all college AA men face similar intuitional challenges. Such assumptions not only lend themselves to suppositions regarding a homogeneous set of educational experiences, but they run the risk of

overlooking the nuanced ways in which other social identifiers, such as educational classification, and institutional type, intersect with issues of race and gender to inform a distinct set of college experiences and barriers to achievement for different groups of AA men.

Purpose of Study

To fill this gap in the literature this investigation will utilize a qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to explore the educational experiences of eight AA men attending a PWI in the Southeastern part of the United States (U.S.) while on academic probation. The primary objectives of this investigation are to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the educational experiences and needs of this specific population, while helping to provide scholars, educational institutions, and social workers with the knowledge they require to more fully respond to the diverse needs and challenges of collegiate AA men. For the purpose of this study, the researcher adopted the selected university's definition of academic probation which is defined as any person who has a cumulative grade point average below a one point nine.

Significance to Social work

While the poor educational outcomes for AA men have been well documented, considerably less attention has been given to the varying ways in which AA men's educational outcomes, and overexposure to negative, racially informed, educational experiences intersect and impact their long term economic, social and quality-of-life outcomes (Allen, 1992; American Psychological Association Task Force on Socioeconomic Status, 2014; Booker, 2007; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; Feagin & Fleming, 1984; Hall & Rowan, 2001; Harper, 2015; Marmot, 2004; Pager, 2008; Robertson & Mason, 2009; Schwitzer et al., 1999; Willison, 2009). For example, according to recent findings, non-degreed AA men are more than 50% less likely than any other similarly qualified demographic group to gain employment, engage healthcare

services, or secure economic means of social advancement (American Psychological Association Task Force on Socioeconomic Status, 2014; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; Marmot, 2004). In addition, scholars have found that when compared to degreed AA men, non-degreed AA men are not only overrepresented, but they are overexposed to poverty, incarceration, substance abuse, and psychological distress (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; Harlow, 2003; Marmot, 2004; Status, 2014). Furthermore, research has shown that poor collegiate outcomes for AA men matriculate throughout their life-course in a way that is distinct from other demographic groups; thus, having a uniquely negative impact on their long-term quality of life (American Psychological Association Task Force on Socioeconomic Status, 2014; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

Therefore, to the extent to which the presence of disparate educational outcomes and AA men's negative campus experiences intersect to impact quality of life factors, social works should be involved (Allen, 1987; Garibaldi, 1992; 2007; Harper, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Kunjufu, 1995; Strayhorn, 2008a; 2008b). However, despite ethical obligations, social work (SW) researchers have been arguably silent. The perceived silence from SW may be partially attributed to difficulties in accurately determining the extent to which SW is committed to the exploration of AA men's collegiate outcomes and educational experiences. For example, SW researchers invested in this topic may publish their work in an educational journal that has no direct ties to the social work profession. As a result, it is difficult to fully identify the extent to which SW researchers are invested in the educational experiences of AA men. However, while these nuisances may present very real challenges for determining SW's commitment to engaging the education experiences and outcomes of AA men it is considerable less difficult to identify the number of SW related research outlets, that prioritize them. For example, a review of the

University of Houston's *Journals in Social Work and Related Disciplines Manuscript Submission Information*, which was last updated in the summer of 2016, found that of the 200 plus SW or SW related journals reviewed, only one had an expressed focus on AAs educational outcomes and experiences and one on AAs' issues broadly speaking (i.e. the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* and the *Journal of Black Studies*).

Although a review of topic specific outlets does not allow for a clear determination of SWs' involvement, the fact that such a determination cannot be easily reached does raise some questions. Notwithstanding, to the extent to which post-secondary educational attainment and negative racially informed campus experiences intersect to impact quality of life factors for AA men, SW researchers and practitioners are ethically obligated to be explicitly involved (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). As an active and explicit participant, SW has the capacity to contribute to the solution by providing educational scholars and educational institutions with academic and non-academic supports within university settings. For instance, on the micro and mezzo-levels, social workers are uniquely qualified to support collegiate AA men in their efforts to identify stakeholders, allies, power differentials, and monetary and nonmonetary resources. Furthermore, SW practitioners are also equipped to contribute to collegiate AA men's efforts to organize and leverage their resources to promote sustained institutional changes in policies, practices, procedures and university cultures (Hardiman, Bailey & Griffin, 2007; National Association of Social Workers, 2008). Therefore, leveraging the skills of SW professionals could prove to be an effective tool for researchers, and institutions looking to positively respond to the needs and challenges faced by collegiate AA men.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, the persistence of poor educational outcomes among AA men have been a concern for scholars and educational institutions across the country. The enduring nature of these concerns have been informed by the limited presence of AA men on college campuses (3%), as well as their comparatively and consistently low graduation rates (approximately 25% below their non-AA colleagues) (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013; Valbrun, 2014). Over the past few decades, a variety of analytical techniques and practices have been implemented to understand, explain, and address AA men's low graduation rates, as well as their relatively contentious relationship with post-secondary education institutions. The two most prominent analytical frameworks utilized are loosely known as "*deficit-based*" and "*strengths-based*" models of interpretation and analysis (Feagin 1992; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). This chapter will provide readers with an overview of the most prominent conceptual and theoretical models used in the exploration of AA men's post-secondary educational experiences and outcomes.

Deficit-Based Models

Deficit-based models emerged as a dominant theme in educational literature in the early 1980s. According to Feagin (1992), the popularity of these models hinged on their tendency to absolve educational institutions of any specific responsibility by prioritizing "...racial group deficits in personal, family, intellectual, and moral developments..." (p. 548). For example, a deficit-based approach would argue that AA men's over-exposure to poverty, single-parent

homes, low parental educational achievements, and poor secondary educational resources renders them ill-equipped for college success (Feagin, 1992). More precisely, a deficit-based model would likely conclude that poor educational outcomes among AA men may be attributed to a series of personal, family, social and economic conditions which, comparatively speaking, deny AA men equal or equitable access to the intellectual, emotional, or preparatory resources needed to ensure academic success on the collegiate level (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

Historically, deficit-based models were widely supported. However, in the last decade they have come under considerable criticism. Some of the most prominent criticisms have been levied by scholars such as Kim and Hargrove (2013). Kim and Hargrove (2013) have suggested that deficit-based models contextualize the academic failures of AA men in a way that insulates collegiate institutions from any perceived wrong doing while reinforcing traditional stereotypes regarding AA's intellectual inferiority. According to Kim and Hargrove (2013), the former is done by excluding explorations into the potential impacts of university policies, practices, and cultures on AA men's outcomes. Conversely, the latter reinforces traditional stereotypes by suggesting that when AA men arrive on college campuses they are, with rare exception, ill-equipped to meet the university's academic or intellectual demands or expectations. According to Harper (2009) situating AA men within this narrative increases their exposure to stereotype-threat and poor educational outcomes (Harper & Jenkins, 2006).

Strengths-Based Models

In attempts to provide a counter narrative, individuals such as Harper (2006, 2009, 2012), and Museus (2011) proposed a series of "positivistic" or "success-based" approaches. In contrast to deficit-based models, positivistic approaches focus on the strategies used by high achieving AA men to secure educational success (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). According to Kim and

Hargrove (2013) positivist approaches are essential for researchers and institutions seeking to better understand factors which contribute to AA men's educational success (Harper, 2012).

The emergence of positivistic based models within educational research has allowed scholars to identify and explore new and alternative ways of understanding the varied educational experiences, successes and behavioral outcomes among collegiate AA men. In addition, they have offered researchers insight into alternative bodies of knowledge which challenge the efficacy of deficit-based models and the institutional practices within post-secondary education. The recent prioritization of AA men's stories, experiences and world views has also provided investigators with additional insights into how this population creatively develops and employs strategies to successfully navigate a social context riddled with racially informed challenges (Harper, 2012; Furr & Elling, 2002). For example, Hoston et al. (2010), Furr and Elling, (2002) found that strength-based approaches provide investigators with a better understanding of how AA men attending PWIs negotiate issues such as "social adjustment", one of the strongest predictors of minority student academic success (Robertson & Mason, 2008). Correspondingly, Harper (2012) suggest that positivist models provide enquirers with a body of counter-narratives which speak to non-Eurocentric educational experiences and views of post-secondary educational environments.

Campus Experiences by Institutional Types

Although the pervasiveness of educational barriers which disproportionately impact AA men may suggest that AA men experience all university settings as hostile, this is not always the case. For example, when examining the experiences and educational outcomes of AAs attending both PWIs and HBCUs, we see clear distinctions. An example of experiential differences across institutional types was first captured in Walter Allen's 1992 study. Allen's

(1992) study included 1,800 AA students; 872 attending PWIs, and 928 attending HBCUs. The primary objective of Allen's (1992) investigation was to gain insight into how students' backgrounds, campus experiences (informed by racial composition/unity) and individual personality orientations were associated with outcomes related to occupational aspirations, social involvement and academic achievement. While utilizing survey data and quantitative, multivariate analysis, Allen (1992) found that a series of individual and institutional characteristics served as statistically significant predictors of success.

However, when controlling for institutional type, Allen (1992) discovered that AA students attending HBCUs outgained those attending PWIs. Although Allen's (1992) findings were not uncommon at the time, the size of his investigation provided support for much smaller projects; most of which found that when compared to AAs attending HBCUs, those attending PWIs were more likely to be exposed to negative racial encounters and underperform academically (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Fleming, 1984; Nettles, 1988). In attempts to better understand the unique relationship between AA men and PWIs it is important to review research trends that examine AA men's educational experiences and outcomes across institutional types.

Predominantly White Colleges and University Institutions (PWIs)

In 1987, William Sedlacek published a synthesis of research, focused on the educational experiences and outcomes of AA men attending PWIs. This investigation proved to be a significant contribution to the literature to the extent that it was followed by an uptick in research. Since then, numerous studies have emerged, many of which have affirmed the findings noted by Sedlacek (1987). Researchers such as Hurtado (1992), Cabrera and Nora (1994), Ancis, Sedlacek and Mohr (2000), Suarez-Balcazar, et al., (2003) and most recently, Harper (2015), have found, much like Sedlacek (1987), that AA men attending PWIs report more

frequent experiences of differential treatment than their minority or majority male peers (Feagin, 1992; Harper, 2012; 2015).

Despite the persistence of negative collegiate experiences reported by AA men attending PWIs, it is only recently that studies have begun to focus on them exclusively. However, despite the historical absence of disaggregated data, there has been a recent upsurge in research documenting the impact and persistence of miss-ascriptions associated with AA men attending PWIs. For example, between 1997 and 2012 scholars such as Fries-Britt (1997), Brown (1999), Harper, (2009), and Harper and Davies (2012) reported that AA men attending PWIs were often viewed as needing remedial educational support, displaying limited interest in academic achievement, exercising low academic prowess, and maintaining a heightened interest in athletic success.

While it may be suggested that these labels are simple identifications, void of discriminatory intent, outcomes from Feagin and Eckberg's 1980 study would disagree. According to Feagin and Eckberg (1980) differential treatment is, at its core, discrimination, and may take the form of racist jokes, preferential treatment, overt and passive aggression, marginalization, and typecasting (Feagin, 1992). Unfortunately, according to Feagin, (1992) and Feagin and Eckberg (1980), AA men attending PWIs are unable to avoid such treatment. In addition, Feagin, et al., (1996) has proposed that the cumulative effect of these encounters results in the experience of a single "oppressive-impact" which informs and shapes the educational outcomes of AA men (p. 575).

In 2003, a study conducted by Moore et al., confirmed Feagin's (1992) idea. According to Moore et al., (2003) AA men, majoring in engineering, developed an academic disposition in direct response to continued exposure to stereotypes which promoted the intellectual inferiority

of AA men. Moore et al., (2003) coined this disposition the “prove-them-wrong syndrome” (p. 96). According to Moore et al., (2003) the “prove-them-wrong syndrome” (p. 96) manifest itself in the form of hypervigilant study habits and educational activities specifically engaged to combat the persistence of perceived exposure to a series of negative, racially informed stereotype.

Similarly, in 2007, Smith et al. found that AA men attending a PWI expressed experiencing what they referred to as “battle-fatigue” (p. 227). According to Smith et al., (2007), “battle-fatigue” (227) is a form of mental, emotional and psychological exhaustion incurred via the need to consistently negotiate or dispel negative, racially-informed stereotypes. Much like Feagin, (1992), Feagin and Eckberg (1980), Smith et al., (2007) argue that these stereotypes are embedded within the institutional structures and norms of PWIs; as a result, they are pervasive and unavoidable (Dancy, Edwards & Davis, 2018). Ultimately, these scholars suggest that to the extent to which these practices and cultural ideologies have been institutionalized, AA men attending PWIs remain perpetually subject to acts of discrimination, racialization, alienation, marginalization, and misrecognition (Booker, 2007; Dancy et al., 2018; Hall & Rowan, 2001; Harper, 2015; Robertson & Mason, 2009; Schwitzer et al., 1999).

The institutionalization and impacts of such practices within PWIs was posited more than three decades ago by Feagin and Eckberg (1980) who argued that the negative experiences incurred by AA men attending majority White institutions may be attributed to the cultural ethos of PWIs (Feagin et al., 1996). While many have attempted to dispel such assertions, the idea of a racially specific cultural ethos among PWIs has been supported by some educational historians such as Clark (2010). According to Clark (2010) mainstream magazines, which arose in the 1890s along with the fledgling European middle class urban businessmen, aided in defining

cultural parameters, idealized self-perceptions and values for Europeans who desired to attend college. Clark (2010) suggest that images of higher education were defined by the aesthetics and values of traditional Victorian Culture which continue to be reflected and reinforced at institutions across the country.

Furth more, Clark (2010), Feagin and Eckberg's (1980) suppositions regarding the emergence and persistence of an Eurocentric educational environment, and its subsequent impact on minority student populations, is supported by woks identified via Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005;1991) synthesis of twenty years of research on college students attending PWIs. Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) synthesis called attention to the divergent ways in which minority and majority students experience collegiate life. Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) concluded that psychologically and socially, White college students inhabit a world that is distinctly different than the one occupied by their AA peers. Rankin and Reason's (2005) study supported Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) findings when they found that racial and ethnic minorities attending PWIs expressed higher levels of perceived racism and rejection than their European colleagues.

Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) findings were then reinforced by Hurtado's (1992) nationally representative, longitudinal study targeted the intersection among race, campus racial climate, social experiences and expectations. Some of the most salient findings from this study were that approximately one in four research participants perceived considerable racial conflict on their campuses. However, White students, who largely ascribed to the belief that race was no longer an issue, perceived considerably less racial tension than AA and Latino students. Furthermore, despite the recognition of racial tension, particularly among minority groups, few of them believed that their current institutions were fully committed to addressing racial conflicts. By and large, racial minority students expressed the belief that their respective

universities were either unmotivated or unwilling to address such issues. In an effort to contextualize students' beliefs regarding their universities' commitment to equality, Hurtado (1992) claimed that many universities, particularly larger ones, may be unconcerned with individual student needs. As a result, Hurtado (1992) asserted that the lack of perceived concern, on the part of universities, heightened minority students' exposure to racial tension, discrimination, and other forms of marginalization.

While some may argue the legitimacy of a single study, multiple investigations conducted during the 1990s supported Hurtado's (1992) findings (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996; Hurtado, 1994a; Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996; Smedely, Mayers & Harrell, 1993). For example, during their investigation, Smedely, et al. (1993) found that racially informed suppositions regarding intellectual inferiority elicited various forms of stress for minority students. In addition, the stress elicited by these events extended beyond the social pressures typically associated with attending highly selective universities (Smedely, et al., 1993). Hurtado (1994a) and Hurtado et al., (1996) found that Latino graduate students were subject to similar forms of stress. Hurtado, et al., (1996) argued that, even high achieving Latinos are likely to have difficulty adjusting if they perceive a climate where others consistently view them as special admits. Additionally, Hurtado, et al., (1996) argued that minority students also internalize these experiences because they are not as easily to identify as more overt forms of discrimination. In 1996, Hurtado and Carter's study helped reveal that perceptions of racial hostility negatively impacted Latino students' sense of belonging throughout their college tenure. In a 1994 study, Hurtado (b), found that 68% of the high achieving Latino students experienced some form of marginalization due to the limited cultural knowledge exemplified by majority students and professors.

Although much of the research addressing the experiences of minority men attending PWIs has focused on AA and Latino men, there have been some significant findings associated with other minority populations (Harper, 2015). For example, while examining the educational experiences of 158 Asian American men attending a PWI, Wong et al., (2011) found that three forms of stereotype threat emerged (Mind-Body, Nerd and Outsider). Wong et al., (2011) discovered that individuals who encountered the Outsider stereotype reported the highest levels of depressive symptoms, while those who encountered Nerd stereotypes reported the lowest levels of self-construal (the ability to construct one's personal identity). In either case, students exposed to these varying stereotypes were forced to negotiate a range of educational stressors informed by Eurocentric norms and their social positions as racial and ethnic outsiders (Wong et al., 2011).

The 2007 study conducted by Harper and Hurtado, mirrored and extended the findings cited in previous investigations. Harper and Hurtado (2007) interviewed a total of 278 students (a combination of AA, European, Latino, Asian and Native American) across five large PWIs. The targeted universities maintained a combined student population that was 73% European. The primary objective of this study was to gain a more comprehensive understating of how contemporary cohorts of minority and majority students experienced the racial climate of their respective universities. Additionally, Harper and Hurtado (2007) sought to identify the extent to which each group encountered racial discrimination, marginalization and alienation (three themes consistently identified in other studies focused on the experiences of minority students attending PWIs). Findings from this study affirmed the persistence of racial discrimination, marginalization, and alienation among minority students (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Over the past 20 years, researchers have found that racial minorities attending PWIs encounter a broad range of racial stereotypes. Although it is true that some stereotypes are more easily re-appropriated to the advantage of the stereotyped, they all, to varying degrees, have a negative impact on minority students' experiences and educational outcomes (Feagin & Eckberg, 1980; Wong, et al., 2011). However, according to D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993), despite the range of negative experiences reported by minority students, AAs continue to feel as though they bare the greatest burden of raciest remarks. Findings from studies conducted by persons such as Cabrera and Nora (1994), Ancis et al., (2000) and Suarez-Balcazar et al., (2003) found that AA men attending PWIs reported higher levels of overall dissatisfaction and racially informed differential treatment than Latin, Asian, and Native American students. More specifically, Ancis, et al., (2000) found that AA students consistently reported significantly more racial-ethnic conflicts, pressure to conform to various stereotypes, and less equitable treatment by staff, faculty and teaching assistants than their European colleagues. While examining the results of their study, Harper and Hurtado (2007) concluded that no matter the institution, AA students attending PWIs expressed the highest degree of dissatisfaction with the social environment when compared to the colleges.

In contrast, European and Asian students (who are often identified as model minorities) have been recorded as expressing the greatest satisfaction with their educational environments (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). For example, a 1993 study by D'Augelli and Hershberger reported that European students experienced high levels of acceptance and limited encounters with or awareness of racial stratification (Ancis, et al., 2000).

Nora and Cabrera (1996) found that even when European students encountered adversity related to campus culture, their perceptions were not only weaker than others', but their

interpretations were seldom linked to issues of race. Harper and Hurtado (2007) also uncovered that European and Asian students' social identifications as majority and model minority persons insulated them from many of the negative experiences incurred by less socially desirable populations. As a result, they were less likely to demonstrate the ability to identify aspects of the campus environment they would change. Additionally, Harper and Hurtado (2007) noted that European students reported the highest levels of satisfaction regarding campus culture. Furthermore, European students overestimated the degree to which racial minorities were equally satisfied (Harper & Hurtado; 2007).

While investigating why European students overestimated institutional satisfaction among minorities, Harper and Hurtado (2007) discovered that European students assumed that their personal experiences were representative of the larger student population. An interesting caveat to Harper and Hurtado's (2007) findings is that they intentionally targeted European student leaders. According to Harper and Hurtado (2007), the primary objective of targeting European student leaders was to engage individuals who, by virtue of their social position, and responsibilities, would be expected to possess a more expansive awareness of campus dynamics and subsequent issues regarding racial inequality. However, what Harper and Hurtado (2007) failed to account for is that often an elevated social position can further insulate individuals or groups from the harsh realities of persons with fewer social-safety-nets or forms of social capital (Burger & Luckman, 1966).

However, despite the perceived shortcomings of the aforementioned investigations, each has contributed to the existing body of scholarship which suggest that AA men are not only overexposed to negative stereotypes, but they are among the most negatively-stereotyped populations attending PWIs. In response to this existing body of literature, researchers have

started to examine the creative ways in which AA men negotiate such experiences and persist to degree completion. According to Allen (1992) this shift in research is essential for universities who are truly interested in the academic success of AA men. The value of this shift is rooted in its ability to provide colleges and universities with insights into how to support, replicate, and expand examples of AA's educational success (Allen, 1992, p. 41).

Investigations emphasizing the success of collegiate AA men have, by and large, sprung out of a long-standing one-sided discourse emphasizing deficit-based analysis (Booker, 2007; Hall & Rowan, 2001; Harper, 2015; Robertson & Mason, 2009; Schwitzer et al., 1999; Smith, et al., 2007). Leading the development of such investigations are researchers such as Harper (2012c), Moore, Madison-Colomore and Smith (2003); all of whom have begun to argue that AA men attending PWI are not simply failing, but are consistently and creatively engaging in strategies which offset negative social experiences and support high levels of academic success (Bridges, 2010; Harper, 2006b, 2009a; Hébert, 2002; Herndon, 2003; Moore, et al., 2003; Museus, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008b; Williamson, 2010).

For instance, Harper (2009a) explored and identified successful coping behaviors among 143 AA males attending 30 distinct PWIs which helped to support their academic success. Similar to Moore (2003), Harper (2009a) using a qualitative analysis, identified that participants offset negative racially charged experiences by increasing their commitments to academic excellence, campus involvement and formal/informal mentoring. Harper (2009a) also discovered that participants' awareness of majoritarian views frequently fueled their desire to actively and intentionally develop same-race peer groups which supported more positive images and ideas of AA men. Harper (2006b) identified similar behaviors in a previous study which focused on 33 AA male undergraduates attending six separate Midwestern universities in the Big Ten

conference. Harper's (2006b) study also explored the degree to which AA men actively sought out positive peer relationships through campus clubs, university organizations, and fraternities, while seeking to advance the concerns of AA students on campus. Much like his 2009a and Moore's et al. 2003 study, Harper (2006b) concluded that high achieving AA men actively participate in social activities, retained a high self-efficacy, and promoted a healthy sense of racial identity; all of which contributed to their ability to successfully navigate racially informed barriers.

Although researchers such as Moore et al., (2003) and Harper (2006b; 2009a) identified campus and social engagement as a productive response to negative racial experiences, Bridges (2010) noted that equally successful AA men attending a PWI in the Southeastern part of the United States employed psychological distancing to combat discriminatory campus experiences. Participants in Bridges' (2010) study participants understood their educational experiences as part of an institutional narrative colored by a history of racial marginalization and misrecognition. Even further, Bridges' (2010) six participants suggested that their university served as a microcosm of mainstream society while simultaneously providing them with a framework to better understand how they would be treated and viewed when entering the larger social order. In an effort to negotiate their current setting, and prepare for future encounters, Bridges' (2010) subjects attempted to draw inspiration and personal value from the accomplishments of previous generations of AAs. In addition, they practiced distancing themselves from potentially negative racially informed encounters with peers, faculty and administrative staff.

Whether participating in activities or employing psychological distancing, participants in Moore et al., (2003) Harper (2006b; 2009a) and Bridges' (2010) studies utilized same-race peer

groups to fortify positive images of AA men; which helped to offset more negative majoritarian views. However, it is important to remember that AA men are far from a monolithic group. For example, a study conducted by Shelton, Bryant, and Brown (2016) found that AAs differed in their commitments to racial solidarity, values and perceptions of race relations based on a range of economic, educational and age cohort variables. To this point, Strayhorn (2008b) found that AA men who socialized with peers from various races and ethnicities were likely to exhibit a stronger sense of belonging. Conversely, Williamson's (2010) mixed-methods study of 99 AA males, majoring in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) at a PWI, found that participants distanced themselves from both AA and non-AA peer groups. In contrast, Strayhorn (2008b), and Williamson (2010) noted that, although their participants were considered successful, subjects reported the lowest levels of engagement with campus faculty and sought reinforcement and support via family relationships which existed outside of the university setting. Despite their varying levels of commitment to campus racial solidarity, same-race peer groups, university involvement, or interactions with faculty or family, these outcomes highlight the need for AA men to access supportive relationships while attempting to navigate what they perceived as a racially charged educational environment (Bridges, 2010; Harper, 2006b; 2009a; Hébert, 2002; Moore et al., 2003; Strayhorn, 2008b; Williamson, 2010).

In 2003, Herndon foreshadowed the findings of the aforementioned researchers by suggesting that successful, collegiate, AA men draw from and attempted to leverage a variety of social, psychological, emotional, financial, and even spiritual resources in order to successfully manage the experiential challenges associated with attending a PWI. However, unlike investigations which would follow, Herndon (2003) argued that given the unpredictability of

peer and university relationships, AA men who sought support and affirmation via family engagements and higher powers were more likely to be successful.

Despite the nature of their source, research suggests that AA men who have successfully moved in and through PWIs have done so by leveraging relationships from a variety of social, psychological, racial, ethnic and spiritual dimensions. To this extent, the reviewed research suggests that the success of AA men attending PWIs is largely informed by their ability to differentiate between constructive and deleterious communities, while simultaneously developing and engaging supportive social spheres, functioning within or outside the context of their respective institutions.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Over the past decade, researchers from a variety of disciplines have begun to give increased attention to the educational experiences of AA men who occupy post-secondary educational environments. Although post-secondary educational environments encompass an array of academic settings (e.g. community colleges, PWIs, HBCUs etc.), the vast majority of this research has focused on AA men attending PWIs (Harper, 2015). Carter (2016) asserts that the increased attention given to this sector of collegiate AA men is partially attributed to the fact that college-eligible AA men are more likely to attend a PWI than any other post-secondary institutional type. Carter (2016) argues that the increase in AAs choosing to attend PWIs versus HBCUs may also be impacted by students' expressed concerns regarding HBCUs long term financial stability. In addition, Carter (2016) asserts that many AA students have expressed concerns related to HBCUs abilities to provide resources or educational opportunities comparable to most PWIs. In addition, HBCUs are outnumbered by PWIs. Currently HBCUs account for only 3% of the nation's colleges and universities. However, despite their small

numbers, HBUCs account for roughly 11% of all AA undergraduate students and an estimated 20% of all AA graduates (Aud et al., 2012; Palmer & Wood, 2012).

Although HBCUs boast comparatively low levels of AA males (180,000), historically, they have been heralded for their ability to insulate, via racial homogeneity, AA students from the types of racialization which negatively shapes and impacts their experiences and educational outcomes at PWIs (Chavous et al., 2004). In addition, HBCUs have been historically applauded for their ability to provide AA students a campus environment that offers them culturally specific and supportive programming and a collectivist cultural ethos which supports and promotes more pervasive positive images of AAs (Museus, 2011).

Consistent with this belief, HBCUs have been praised for providing a safer and more nurturing educational environment for AA men (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Fleming, 1982; 1984; Kim, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006). Given this view of HBCUs, their relatively low levels of enrollment, and the belief that they tend to reduce educational barriers for AA students, studies examining the collegiate experiences of AA men attending HBCUs have been overshadowed by research focused on AA men attending PWIs. Despite the relative lack of attention given to this population, it is important to understand and explore research which has focused on the educational experiences of AA men attending HBCUs. Doing so provides investigators with a more comprehensive framework for understanding the experiences and challenges confronting AA men attending PWIs and collegiate AA men generally speaking.

Historically, research focused on AA men attending HBCUs found that AA men fared better, particularly as it related to cognitive gains and persistence to degree completion, than AA women attending the same institutions (Allen, 1992). In addition, AA men attending HBCUs

expressed more positive relationships with faculty, a stronger sense of connectedness, and were more involved in campus activities than AA men attending PWIs (Allen, 1992; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Davis, 1995; Fleming, 1982;1984; Kim, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006). Furthermore, despite the pervasiveness of open enrollment among many HBCUs (which grants educational admissions to student who would otherwise be academically excluded from entering college), AA men attending these institutions have been shown to be more likely to attend graduate school, express higher career goals, earn better grades, and perceive their college as more supportive than AA men or women attending PWIs (Allen, 1992; 1987; Wenglinsky, 1995). Coincidentally, studies conducted by Berger and Milem (2000), and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) demonstrated that both AA men and woman attending HBCUs reported greater levels of institutional satisfaction, social engagement, student involvement, and positive self-concept than their AA peers attending PWIs. Th effects of this were captured by the Thurgood Marshall College fund. For example, HBCUs comprise only 3% of all post-secondary intuitions, but their graduates account for 40% of AAs in Congress, 13% of AA Chief Executive Officers, 40% of AA engineers, 50% of AA professors, 50% of AA lawyers and 80% of AA judges (The Thurgood Marshall College Fund (2015)).

The significance of these achievements is magnified when we consider the comparatively limited amount of financial and educational resources generated and retained by most HBCUs (Carter, 2016). For example, according to Carter (2016) the average PWI maintains a budget twice that of a similar sized HBCU. Still, according to Chavous et al., (2004) and Thomas (1973), the success of HBCUs has less to do with monetary resources and more to do with their ability to cultivate a culture that is sensitive to the needs and experiences of AAs, as well as more tolerant of liberal forms of personal expression and social engagement (Chavous, 2004; Thomas,

1973; Walters, 1975). To this extent, HBCUs have been touted for their ability to provide AA students with not only supportive educational settings, but physical and psychological safeguards from more pejorative views of AA bodies (Chavous, 2004; Thomas, 1973).

Despite historically positive outcomes, recent trends suggest that a cultural shift on HBCU campuses may be taking place. For example, Harper and Gasman (2008) interviewed 76 AA men at 12 distinct HBCUs. During that time, they found that AA men reported feeling as though their educational institutions were becoming socially and politically more conservative. They also found that research participants were either afraid or unwilling to challenge existing norms (Harper & Gasman, 2008). They also reported that students' fear was rooted in the belief that their institutions' conservative ideologies were both pervasive (thus imposing on their self-concept, expressed sexuality, sexual orientation, and social power) and insurmountable (Harper & Gasman, 2008).

The experiences noted by Harper and Gasman (2008) are consistent with a variety of events which have occurred on HBCU campuses over the past 15 years. For example, in 2005, Robins and King called into question the imposition of Hampton's dress code as well as the university's conservative bent regarding issues of free speech and acceptable social conduct. In 2007, similar university policies and positions were expressed by administrators at Pall Quinn College, an HBCU in Dallas, Texas.

Additionally, research suggests that reports of heightened conservatism on HBCU campuses, and their negative impacts on the collegiate experiences of AA men, have been accompanied by a decrease in AA male retention and an increase in non-AA students and faculty (Gasmen, 2013; Harper 2006; Palmer & Wood, 2012). For example, in contrast to the positive outcomes noted by earlier researchers, recent investigations have found that AA men attending

HBCUs are exhibiting higher than expected attrition rates (Gasman et al., 2007; Harper 2006; Palmer & Wood, 2012; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). In his 2006 study, Harper found that some HBCUs purported that AA women were almost twice as likely as AA men to graduate within 6 years; a trend that did not exist 20 years ago.

Furthermore, the diminishing retention rates among AA men have coincided with HBCUs increase in student and faculty diversity. According to Gasmen's 2013 report, in 1980, AAs constituted 80% of the student population versus 76% in 2011. In addition, the United States Department of Education (1996) noted that there was a growing number of non-AA faculty now employed by HBCUs (44% tenured, 36% tenure track, 33% total.); a trend that has continued at many HBCUs today (Foster, 2001; Gasmen, 2013; United States Department of Education, 1996). Interestingly, the findings from Palmer and Woods' (2012) investigation suggest that between 1997 and 2007 there has been a 6% decline in AA men's educational achievement. Furthermore, Palmer and Woods (2012), also found that only 29% of AA men attending HBCUs, vs 34% attending PWIs, complete their degree program.

While the cultural ethos of HBCUs has been historically associated with providing AA men with the types of supports they often attempt to manufacture while attending PWIs, researchers such as Harper (2012b) continue to argue that, much like AA men attending PWIs, there is a great deal to learn from those who have been successful while attending HBCUs. Harper's (2012b) assertions are supported by previous research which suggest that, despite the institutional type, the needs of AA men remain the same. Like many of their colleagues attending PWIs, successful AA men attending HBCUs possess positive self-efficacy, seek constructive peer relationships, positive family supports, positive interactions with faculty, spirituality and engage in the campus community (Flowers, 2012; Fountaine & Carter, 2012; Fries-Britt &

2002; Fries-Britt, Burt, & Franklin, 2012; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008; Watson, 2006). However, while successful AAs attending PWIs and HBCUs demonstrate similar coping behaviors, their ability to readily access supportive resources, and their underlying experiential realities, remain distinctly unique. For example, Fries-Britt, Burt, and Franklin (2012) interviewed 44 AA males majoring in STEM fields at multiple HBCUs. Much like Moore et al., (2003) study, Fries-Britt et al., (2012) found that positive peer, faculty, and administrative relationships were key to participants' success.

However, unlike Moore et al., (2003), Friers-Britt's (2012) subjects did not express a need to force relationships with faculty; in many cases subjects claimed that faculty members actively initiated engagements. In addition, the AA men in Fries-Britt's et al., (2012) study did not demonstrate any of the distancing practices noted by Williamson's (2010) sample group. Building on the notion and impact of supportive relationships between AA men and faculty, Flowers (2012) found that senior engineering students attending an HBCU not only expressed a strong sense of self-efficacy, but they suggested that their positive personal beliefs had been strongly influenced by edifying relationships with instructors. Individuals in Flowers' (2012) study also stated that the university administrators were not only engaged, but often provided professional, developmental and networking opportunities which improved their skills and reaffirmed their sense of personal confidence.

Like previous studies focused on AA men attending PWIs, Hebert's (2002), Flowers' (2012), and Herdon's (2003) investigations revealed that family and spirituality played a significant role in the lives of AA men who were pursuing their academic goals. An example of the role of spirituality was documented by Riggins et al., (2008) who found that prayer was consistently utilized to manage stress related to academic success. However, unlike Herdon's

(2003) investigation, Riggins' et al., (2008) sample group claimed that their environment made it easy for them to verbally express their religious views, which helped to facilitate faith-based conversations with peers and faculty. Riggins et al., (2008) also noted that while his research participants professed to utilize prayer in times of need (i.e. to deal with general stressors of college life: academics, relationships, finances etc.) they also maintained a high level of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control.

The significance of felt-institutional support is highlighted by Palmer and Strayhorn's (2008) identification of the relationship between high levels of accountability, self-efficacy and academic achievement among 11 AA men who were academically underprepared when they enrolled at an HBCU. Similarly, while examining 233 HBCU students involved in Bridge Programs (strengths-based educational models designed to help underprepared students succeed), Fountaine and Carter (2012) found that all participants expressed experiencing positive academic gains. From these and other findings it becomes clear that AA men fare better in educational environments where they perceive institutional support. Still, it should be continuously emphasized that AA men are not a homogeneous group. Therefore, their educational experiences related to HBCUs cannot be relegated to a single narrative (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Palmer & Wood, 2012a).

In an effort to highlight this reality, in 2012, Strayhorn and Scott conducted a study which examined the experiences of gay and bisexual AA men attending HBCUs. While the purpose of the investigation was to better understand the lived experiences of gay and bisexual AA men attending an HBCU, Strayhorn and Scott (2012) also hoped to better identify and examine the various internal and external challenges these men face. Per Strayhorn and Scott (2012), the gay and bisexual AA men who participated in their investigation reported heightened

experiences of heterosexism, homophobia, isolation, marginalization, and invisibility. Thus, many of the subjects in Strayhorn and Scott's (2012) study expressed feeling out of place and unwelcomed within their respective institutions. Interestingly, not only did these young men's educational experiences mirrored their AA male colleagues attending PWIs, their coping strategies did as well. For example, in attempts to successfully navigate homophobic and heterosexist campus communities, many of Strayhorn and Scott's (2012) subjects established relationships external to their educational setting. In addition, many of these men elected to live off campus, thus exercising physical and psychological distancing. According to Strayhorn and Scott (2012), and Harper and Gasman (2008), identifying and engaging positive peer relationships outside of their institutional settings was key in their efforts to persist in their academic progress.

Summary

Over the years, both deficit and positivistic models of interpretation and analysis have contributed to the discourse circumscribing the experiences and outcomes of AA men attending PWIs. While the former has highlighted the various ways in which personal factors contribute to the poor educational experiences and outcomes among collegiate AA men, the latter have drawn attention to the dynamic ways in which AA men attending PWIs succeed despite racially informed institutional barriers (e.g. racialized campus ethos). Although varying in their approaches and emphases, each model has contributed to researchers' ability to identify correlations among AA men's persistent exposure to racialization, misrecognition, educational experiences, coping strategies, and educational outcomes (Allen, 1992; Amechi, et al., 2015; Aronson, 2012; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Feagin; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt, 1998, 2004;

Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001, 2002; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2013, 2015; Patton, 2006; Sedlacek, 1987).

While both approaches have contributed to the discourse, recent investigations have focused on more positivistic approaches. The relatively recent shift toward more positivistic models has been shaped by researchers' desire to gain a more holistic understanding of how AA men attending majority institutions guard against attrition and successfully respond and navigate, to and through, racialized educational settings.

Correspondingly, these models have also enabled investigators to identify strategies used by mainstream and high achieving collegiate AA men. The identification of these strategies has provided researchers and institutions with additional insights which are capable of positively impacting university practices, as well as their program and policy developments. In addition, these insights have provided researchers and other AA men with cognitive and behavioral practice strategies which serve as protective factors and support their educational success.

Despite the resources and insights provided by these models, specifically as they relate to the identification of behaviors which promote academic success, little attention has been given to the educational experiences of AA men who are on probation while attending PWIs. The lack of insight into this population is significant when considering the unique positionality of these men. The combination of documented heightened exposure to raciest institutional ideologies, which negatively impacts collegiate AA men at large, combined with their diminished educational classification (academic probation) places these AA men within a social and political position which is distinct from high achieving AA men and AA collegiate men general speaking.

To the extent to which this sub-set of AA men retain an educational status which is consistent with negative stereotypes regarding AA intellectual inferiority, these men run the risk of being

self-identifying with stereotypes they encounter. Given their respective social positions, these AA men are subject to a body of experiential knowledge which is unique to them. The exploration of such knowledge, and its corresponding experiential realities, may prove to be beneficial to the larger discourse on AA men attending PWIs as those who have been classified as high achieving.

Therefore, the purpose of this investigation is to address this gap in the literature by exploring the educational experiences of eight AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI in the Southeast region of the US. Insight into this population's educational experiences may help to provide researchers with a more nuanced understanding of the challenges AA men attending PWIs face.

Chapter III

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA). IPA is both a philosophy, with theoretical underpinnings, and a methodological approach to social science research. IPA is distinct from other qualitative approaches because of its unique combination of psychological, interpretative, and idiographic components (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). For example, with its strong idiographic focus, IPA aims to provide insights into how a given person, in a very particular context, makes sense of a specific phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Typically, these phenomena are related to some personal experiences of significance, such as a major life event (Smith et al., 2009). By focusing its attention in this way, IPA turns its gaze toward how human beings make sense of their lived experience. To this extent, IPA attempts to explore experience on its own terms "... rather than attempting to fix experience in predefined or overly abstract categories" (Smith et al., 2009, p.1)

According to Smith et al., (2009), IPA is an emerging, widely accepted, and rapidly growing approach to qualitative research. Although the development of IPA has been attributed to the field of psychology, IPA actively borrows from humanitarian disciplines such as philosophy and theology; and has found wide applicability within the arena of human science research (Smith, et al., 2009; Manen, 1990). The growing interest and utilization of IPA within the human sciences may be attributed to IPA's unrelenting commitment to the examination of lived experience; or more specifically, how human beings make sense of lived experience. IPA's commitment to experiential fidelity affords six reflective processes of experience and meaning-making. In order to accomplish this task, IPA merges specific aspects of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Smith, et al., 2009; Manen, 1990). In an effort to better

understand the varying ways in which these three have been brought together to contribute to the richness of IPA, it is important to examine IPA's historical and conceptual development.

Historical and Conceptual Development

The emergence of IPA within the human sciences has been traced back to Jonathan Smith's (1996). In his initial work, Smith (1996) noted psychologist, asserts that psychology had become increasingly experimental and had begun, in many ways, to neglect the reality of lived experience. In turn, Smith (1996) suggested that the discipline re-embrace the full breath of its values, focus and mission. In this sense, Smith (1996) argued that psychology should be both experimental and experiential. In an effort to aid in the facilitation of this re-turning, Smith (1996) proposes a qualitative approach which was rooted in the tradition and concerns of modern psychology and capable of engaging the depth of lived experience (Smith, 1996).

While the historical development of IPA has been largely attributed to Smith (1996), its ideological assumptions and theoretical underpinnings can be traced back much further. The two most prominent components of IPA have been appropriated from Phenomenological Philosophy, and Hermeneutical Theology. While these two traditions have long and storied histories, their respective contributions to IPA are marked by a few primary concepts and contributors.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology draws its value from the distinction between the human sciences and the natural sciences (Gadamer, 1975). In an attempt to explain this distinction, Gadamer (1975) states, "...the human sciences are connected to modes of experience that lie outside science... modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science" (p. xxi). Dilthey (1976) further explicates this distinction when he contrasted *Naturwissenschaften* (natural/physical science) with

Geisteswissenschaften (a methodological approach to human science). According to Dilthey (1976), natural sciences study things or objects in nature. To this end, natural sciences are prone toward taxonomy in an effort to categorize and predict the various ways in which objects behave (Dilthey, 1976). In contrast, Dilthey (1976) argues that human sciences are driven by *Geist* (mind, thoughts, consciousness, values, feelings, emotions, actions, and purposes) and concerned with conscious beings and the dynamic ways in which they create meanings and intentionally act upon and within their nature. Therefore, to the extent to which phenomenology is rooted in the human sciences, and driven by *Geist*, it attempts to understand the dynamic ways in which human beings simultaneously create and experience the world they inhabit (Dilthey, 1976; Hegel, 1977; Manen, 1990).

Historical and Theoretical Development

Husserl

One of the major contributors to phenomenology's development, and its subsequent value to IPA, is Abraham Husserl. Husserl's contributions are scattered among a range of publications; from his 1927 to his works in 1982. Throughout his writings, Husserl viewed science as second-order knowledge (secondary knowledge) which was wholly dependent on first-order experience (Husserl, 1927; 1982). Therefore, science, in its attempts to understand the world or the experiences of others within it, is informed and mediated by the individual experience. To this end, Husserl (1982) was primarily concerned with developing a phenomenological attitude / posture which would allow an individual to investigate and know their own subjective experiences and thus aid them in the identification of the essence or transcendental nature of a phenomenon.

To accomplish this task Husserl (1927) suggests a series of strategies that would later shape phenomenological inquiry and inform IPA. One of the primary contributions offered by Husserl was the idea of a *phenomenological attitude*. According to Husserl (1927), assuming a *phenomenological attitude* requires that an individual bracket predetermined attitudes and categories, step outside their *natural attitude* (our everyday experience of looking outward and its corresponding taken-for-granted categories of things) and reflexively turn their gaze inward. According to Husserl (1927), doing so would enable the individual to examine how they actively create both a phenomenon and their experience of it, via the act and quality of perceiving. This idea is largely driven by Husserl's (1927; 1970; 1982) belief that phenomenology should be primarily concerned with what is experienced in consciousness. However, consciousness is always conscious of something. Therefore, turning one's attention from things (out there) toward one's perceptions of those things allows them to be more fully conscious of the act of perceiving that which is perceived and experienced (Husserl, 1927). Husserl (1927) often referred to this process as *intentionality*.

Husserl's emphasis on first-person phenomenology, and transcendental knowledge have found minimal traction in qualitative, human science, research. However, his development and use of the phenomenological attitude, bracketing and intentionality have contributed greatly to the theoretical development of phenomenology and IPA.

Heidegger

While Husserl's phenomenological project was largely driven by the idea of a subjective, essential, transcendental knowledge, first-order experience and individual psychology, Heidegger (1927) focused his attention on how the individual knows what they know. Although Heidegger (1972) turns his attention away from Husserl's transcendental project, he does not

dismiss the value of Husserl's "*subject*". To the contrary, Heidegger renames Husserl's *subject* and then he situates them and their knowing within time. Heidegger (1927) renames Husserl's *subject* *Dasein* (there-being). For Heidegger (1927) the individual is always in the process of being in time, and thus fundamentally in relation. As a result, the individual is always a worldly person or person in context (Heidegger, 1927). In this respect the person, although capable of acting upon the world, is simultaneously influenced and bound by the world they act upon. As a result, Heidegger (1927) argues that self-awareness and knowledge are both reflexive and shared via a person's relation to the world and others within it. Heidegger (1927) refers to this relational dynamic as *intersubjectivity*. Heidegger's (1927) idea of intersubjectivity denotes a clear departure from Husserl's (1927) more self-contained subjective experience. In addition, Heidegger (1927) provides IPA with a contextual lens in which to view human behavior, meaning-making activities, interpretations, and experiences as relationally conditional.

Merleau-Ponty

Although Merleau-Ponty (1962) assumes the legitimacy of Heidegger's (1927) individual in time; he further suggests that the individual is always embodied. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962) the embodied individual is subsumed within themselves. Consequently, although thrown into a world of objects and meanings, the embodied subject can only perceive the world and its corresponding relations from their unique positionality (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). As a result, the embodied person remains estranged from the experiences of others, only perceiving and knowing them through the lens of their own subjective, embodied self (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). By reconstituting Heidegger's (1927) being-in-time as an embodied-being-in-time, Merleau-Ponty (1962) provided IPA with a more comprehensive understanding of the individualistic nature of

experience and the various limitations we encounter when attempting to understand or generalize the experiences of others.

Sartre

Much like Heidegger (1927) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), Sartre (1943;1948) accepted that human beings were both thrown into a world of relations and embodied. However, Sartre also acknowledged that these two conditions were unavoidable, and thus ran the risk of being perceived as deterministic of human behavior and experience. In addition, Sartre (1957) also acknowledged that human beings are not simply beings in time, but beings who are becoming. Conversely, Sartre (1957) argues that although we are embodied, we are also in the process of embodying. Sartre (1957) captures this process of becoming when he states, "...existence precedes essence" (p. 15). The idea of perpetually becoming what one is, not only suggests that human beings actively shape their perceptions of self, but they shape how they understand the world and their experiential encounters with it. In addition, the continued act of becoming implies that experiences are never fixed, but always subject to the being an individual is willing themselves to be (Sartre, 1957).

Hermeneutics

According to Smith et al., (2009), "Hermeneutics is the theory and act of interpretation. Originating in theology, hermeneutics was initially developed to ensure a more accurate interpretation and understanding of biblical text (Messer, Sass & Woolfolk, 1988; Smith et al., 2009). Over time, the idea of a "text" expanded (e.g. including literary works, personal narrative etc..) and hermeneutical modes of interpretation gained popularity across a range of disciplines (Messer, et al., 1988; Smith et al., 2009). Some of the most prominent forms of hermitical interpretation are methodological, ontological and critical (Messer, Sass & Woolfolk, 1988).

However, despite its various articulations, the heart of hermeneutics can be found in Hegel's (1931) critique of Kantian epistemology. In this work, Hegel (1931) argues that any critique of knowledge presupposes either a framework for knowledge or knowledge itself. Hegel (1931) fashioned a meta-critical prototype which was later adopted and expanded by hermeneutical phenomenologist such as Schleiermacher (1998) Heidegger (1927), Gadamer (1975) and Habermas (1970; 1979) (Messer et al., 1988).

As previously noted, hermeneutics can be divided into three distinct categories. However, despite their differences and points of emphasis, IPA draws from two of them (methodological and ontological). Therefore, it is important to provide a brief overview of methodological and ontological hermeneutics, their major contributors and their value to IPA.

Methodological Hermeneutics

Methodological hermeneutics finds its start with Schleiermacher (Palmer, 1969; 1988; Smith et al., 2009). According to Stanley et al., (1988), to address the inadequacies of the philosophical methods of his time, Schleiermacher (1998) argued that situating a literary work within its original context was a necessary step when attempting to understand the intentions of an author and the meaningfulness of their work (Palmer, 1969). Schleiermacher (1998) also put forth the first description of the "*hermeneutical circle*" (Palmer, 1969). Building on Hegel (1931), Schleiermacher (1998) argued that all knowledge is contextual, and the process of understanding the unknown demands that you reference that which is already known. In this respect, interpretation is circular, a relentless dialectic between the part and the whole (Schleiermacher, 1998). Geertz (1973) states, that Schleiermacher's (1998) hermitical circle marks "...a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure... to bring both into view simultaneously" (p. 239). To the extent to

which knowing is always circular and in flux (i.e. an outgrowth of a perpetual dialectic between the part and the whole), what is known and what is unknown is a constant approximation; life reveals quite different sides to us according to our point of view (Dilthey, 1961).

The import of Methodological Hermeneutics into IPA, and the current investigation into the educational experiences of AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI, rest on its abilities to contextualize participants, and highlight the dynamic relationship which informs the researcher's efforts to acquire knowledge and approximate the truth of the participants' experiences. In this regard the researcher is forced to acknowledge that his understanding of the subject is not only dependent on the subjects' willingness to make the unknown known, but their willingness to participate in an ongoing dialectic which reveals the subjects' truth to themselves as well as to the investigator.

Ontological Hermeneutics

While Schleiermacher (1998) provided IPA with a hermeneutical method for acquiring knowledge, Heidegger (1927) and Gadamer (1975) suggest a hermeneutical approach which raises questions and explores the origins of the knowledge acquired. According to Heidegger (1927), phenomenology is concerned with "... understanding the thing as it shows itself, as it is brought to light" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 24). In the same breath, Heidegger (1927) argues that phenomenology is also concerned with those things which remain latent or disguised. Heidegger's (1927) approach to phenomenology is largely informed by an ontological deconstruction of the actual phrase phenomenology. According to Heidegger (1927), phenomenology derives its meaning from the Greek word *phenomenon* (to show or appear) and *logos* (discourse). According to Smith et al., (2009), this suggests that a phenomenon is primarily perceptual, and logos is primarily analytical. Therefore, the act of performing hermeneutical

phenomenology is the process of analyzing that which shows itself. However, per Heidegger (1927), one does not simply approach interpretation via *tabula rasa* (void of perceived ideas). Correspondingly, Heidegger (1927) argues that interpretation is never a presupposition-less apprehension of a text as it is presented to us (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger (1927) suggests that fore-structures (preexisting bodies of knowledge, ideas and preconceptions) always accompany us in our acquisition of knowledge (Smith et al., 2009; Stanly et al., 1988). However, despite the persistence of fore-structures, they do not necessitate the knowledge we acquire (Gadamer, 1975; Heidegger, 1927). Gadamer (1976) suggest that an interpreter's awareness of their fore-structures can lead to bracketing, which mediate, but do not eliminate, the impact of fore-knowledge on the interpretation process.

Gadamer (1975) also contributes to the development of ontological hermeneutics through a series of suppositions regarding time, space and knowledge. While Gadamer (1927) ascribes to Schleiermacher's (1998) hermeneutical circle, he suggests that distinctions in time and space (particularly between the author and the interpreter) limit the accuracy of interpretative knowledge. According to Gadamer (1927), attempts to recreate the intentions of the author are beyond the scope and ability of the interpreter. Gadamer (1927) argues that unless the author makes their intentions explicitly known, the interpreter must turn their attention toward understanding the content of a text, void of understanding the author or their intentions. Ontological Hermeneutics informs this investigation into the lived experiences of AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI by providing an additional framework for which to understand the knowledge it is attempting to acquire. In addition, it challenges and attempts to protect the interpretative process by contributing to the examination of claims and by

highlighting the various ways in which a researcher's foreknowledge may inform how and what they are able to know and understanding about the participants.

IPA is described as epistemologically open, and therefore it supports the use of "theoretical concepts to assist in the development and elucidation of themes emerging from the research content" (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). For this reason, the researcher felt it would be beneficial to propose the utilization of Intersectionality Theory (IT). The import of IT is to aid the researcher in their effort to better contextualize and understand the educational experiences of AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI, in the Southeast regions of the US. It is believed that IT can provide addition insight into this area by helping to further situate subject's experiences within a larger sociopolitical and cultural context. The idea of contextualizing subjects' experiences is consistent with Sartre's (1927) becoming in time, Heidegger's (1927) being-in-time and Merleau-Ponty's (1962) subject positionality. IT does this by building on IPAs' assumptions regarding the contextualized person, via identifying and exploring the dynamic ways in which social labels, and their ascribed social value, intersect to inform participants' public and private contextualized selves. Furthermore, it was held that IT supported the investigator in their attempt to better understand how exposure to and understanding of these experiences were influenced by this sub-set of AA men's unique standpoint epistemology (i.e. the knowledge/perspective provided by the intersection of their race, class, gender and their educational status). While the researcher held that IT could positively contribute to identification and development of a more comprehensive context for understanding the educational experiences of AA men on academic probation while attending a PWI in the Southeast region of the US, it was also maintained that IT could do so without violating IPA's assumptions regarding the proper preconditions for the execution of an

explorative investigation (e.g. the absence of potentially biased models of contextualization, analysis, or interpretation) (Manen, 1990; Smith et al., 2009).

Intersectionality Theory

Introduction

The utility of intersectional analysis, also known as IT, is that it can provide the researcher with the resource they need better to acknowledge and engage the role of various social identifiers, their intersection and role in the contextualization shaping of an individual's or group's lived experiences. In 1989, AA feminist and legal scholar Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "*intersectionality*" (Crenshaw, 1989). Her primary objectives were to highlight and address the prolonged exclusion of AA women from European, American, feminist and anti-racist discourses while drawing attention to the unique ways in which AA women and women of color experienced the world (Manning & Mullings, 2000). To do so, Crenshaw built upon the works of critical social theorists such as Sojourner Truth and the Combahee River Collective (Bryant 2016).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Multicultural Feminist Movement noted that mainstream feminism failed to consider the complex phenomenological experience afforded to women of color (Floyd-Thomas, 2006). As a result, the Multicultural Feminist Movement framed a voice that was, by all accounts, a direct response to their exclusion from mainstream feminist dialogue (Hooks, 1984). During the 60s and early 70s, mainstream feminism, despite challenging hegemonic structures that relegated normality and truth to White protestant male subjectivity, maintained a myopic perspective regarding the lived reality of AA woman and woman of color. To this point, some scholars have argued that the early feminist movement of the mid-20th century viewed all AAs as men and all women as middle class and White (Hull,

Scott, & Smith, 1982). As a result, the experiences of oppression incurred among AA woman were relegated to the experiential reality and expressive voice of AA men. In turn AA women's intersecting experiences of sexism were similarly relegated to the lived reality of middle class, White, woman. In turn, the experiences afforded women of color were, at best, marginalized. To the extent that AA women utilized feminist constructs, they were forced to understand and articulate their experience of oppression through the eyes of AA men or the voice of middle class White women (Crenshaw, 1989; Floyd-Thomas, 2006).

The inability to express the fullness of their lived reality led AA women to develop an epistemology colored by intersecting forms of social categories and experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). In this regard, intersectionality became the means by which theorist who were AA woman could better understand the dynamic ways in which various biological and social classifications converged to inform and shape their lived experiences (McCall, 2004). Ultimately, IT emerged, via Revisionist Feminist Theory, to challenge the belief that gender, or any other biological or social classification, exists as an insulated factor determining a woman's fate (Manning & Mullings, 2000; McCall, 2004). In addition, IT has and does challenge epistemological assumptions and ideological structures that proliferate White heteropatriarchy and subsequent limited forms of knowledge (Floyd-Thomas, 2006).

Over the past decade, IT has gained popularity across a variety of disciplines (e.g. gender and culture studies, religious studies, sociology, and social work) (Hutchison et al., 2011). The recent appeal of IT may be rooted in its ability to provide researchers with additional tools to identify and analyze the dynamic ways in which various social labels (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, social economic status, etc.) intersect with power to shape individual and collective experiences (Collins, 1989; Hutchison et al., 2011; Floyd-Thomas, 2006). For this

reason, IT provided this researcher with a framework which is capable of calling into question pejorative constructs of knowledge, while emphasizing the need to prioritize the lived experiences of otherwise marginalized populations (Floyd-Thomas, 2006; Hutchison, 2011). Although much of the research that focuses on the collegiate experiences of AA men does not specifically identify a theoretical framework, many do. A review of 105 peer reviewed articles on AA men's collegiate educational experiences found that the most common explicitly identified theoretical approaches were Critical Race Theory and Social Identity Theory. Still, despite the prevalence of the aforementioned, a review of the current literature also suggest that a significant number of publications draw from, although not always explicitly, and utilized techniques consistent with intersectional analysis.

For example, the utility of intersectional analysis, is its ability to support the researcher in their efforts to engage the role of various social identifiers, their intersection and role in the contextualization of an individual's or group's lived experiences. While this is an important contribution of IT, the use of Standpoint-epistemology also provides the research with an additional conceptual frame to understand how a participant's unique positionality contributes to a distinct body of knowledge.

Standpoint-epistemology is a conceptual idea which attempts to challenge more traditional forms of knowing (Collins, 1986). Standpoint-epistemology proclaims that certain cultural complexities, ideological formulations and linguistic repositories contribute to the reification and monopolization of truth (Floyd-Thomas, 2006). IT maintains that the historical reification of limited forms of truth have not only been determined by those in power, but they delegitimize any perception, experience or forms of knowing acquired outside the experienced reality of those in power (Collins, 1986; Floyd-Thomas, 2006). In turn, IT recognizes the

limitations of traditional forms of knowledge and suggests that a *home-grown* discourse must be developed (Floyd-Thomas, 2006). According to Floyd-Thomas (2006) a *home-grown* discourse is rooted in the lived experiences of the individual or group. As a result, a home-grown discourse moves beyond misogynistic and myopic views of epistemology and flourishes in the concerns and realities of less empowered and marginalized populations (Collins, 1986; Floyd-Thomas, 2006). Ultimately, standpoint-epistemology holds that true knowledge cannot be shaped or reified by oppressive structures. To the contrary, knowledge and truth are positional and therefore perpetually in flux. As a result, standpoint-epistemology holds that a person's unique social position provides them with access to specific forms of knowledge which are equally as legitimate as more mainstream conceptions of truth.

Chapter IV

Method

The purpose of this investigation is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the educational experiences of eight African American (AA) men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI in the Southeastern part of the United States. To accomplish this task a qualitative method was selected to answer the following research question and sub-question.

1. How do AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI in the Southeast region of the US understand their educational experiences?
 - How do AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI in the Southeast region of the US understand/experience their educational classification?

According to Smith et al., (2009), qualitative research enables investigators to gain a more in-depth understanding of peoples lived experiences. In addition, Smith et al., (2009) contend that qualitative research helps to clarify how lived experiences and phenomenon intersect to inform both how we speak and respond to specific phenomenon within both academic and non-academic settings. Therefore, a qualitative approach known as IPA was chosen based on its ability to uniquely contribute to the researcher's understanding of the lived educational experiences of the chosen population.

IPA is a qualitative approach to social science research which acts as both a philosophy, with theoretical underpinnings, and a method (Smith et al., 2009). As a philosophical method, IPA relies heavily on the unique combination of phenomenological, hermeneutic, and ideographic components (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). According the Smith et al., (2009) these three conceptual models help IPA distinguished itself from other qualitative methodologies (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). For example, IPA utilizes a Heideggerian approach to

hermeneutical phenomenology which provides phenomenologist and IPA researchers with a double hermeneutic that contributes to a more structured approach to the interpretation of narrative experiences and phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). In addition, IPA's use of ideography helps to ensure that IPA informed investigations highlight the particularity of a phenomenon as it is experienced by a specific person or group of people (Smith et al., 2009). As a result, IPA offers the investigator the opportunity to bracket more fixed notions of experience while working with the participant to explore experience on its own terms (Smith et al., 2009).

Instrumentation Statement

IPA prioritizes the researcher as the primary instrument of interpretation, synthesis, and analysis. Therefore, it is best practice to provide a brief description of the researcher and their motivations for conducting the investigation. My decision to examine the educational experiences of AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI in the Southeast region of the US emerged as a direct result of my personal experiences. I am an AA male who has not only attend a PWI but, at various times, has been classified as being on academic probation and high achieving. As a result, I have been afforded a wide range of educational experiences. As time has passed, I have had the opportunity to reflect on these experiences and how they were impacted by my educational classification. As a result, I have decided to further explore how other AA men who have been classified as being on academic probation make since of their own educational experiences.

As an intellectual and aspiring scholar, I have been greatly influenced by theorists and researchers such as: James Baldwin, Ralph Elision, Howard Thurman, Peter Burger and Thomas Luckmann, Paulo Freire, David Blumenthal, Franz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Anthony Appiah, Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Tillich, and Fredric

Schleiermacher. As a result, I recognize my proclivity to view social behavior and experience through the lenses of social constructionism, social learning theory, psychological and behavioral cultural packages and existentialism.

As the primary researcher, I also acknowledge that my race, gender, and past educational classification partially identify me as part of the population I am researching. To this extent, this study is much more emic than etic. I also acknowledge that an emic approach contains a unique set of strengths and challenges. Regarding the latter, as an identifiable member of the focus population, I run the risk of imposing my experiences and ideas onto the data that is collected, thus omitting the unique experiences of each research participant. Conversely, as a demographic member of the focus population, I also recognize that I, via a similarly shared social position, retain the potential and capacity to identify research themes that may otherwise be missed by members who approach the existing study from a more etic perspective. Therefore, it was important that I, as the primary researcher, utilize strategies such as bracketing, memoing, triangulation and member checking to help emphasize the strengths of an emic approach by attempting to safeguard against its potential weaknesses (Smith et al., 2010).

Study Setting

This investigation was conducted at a mid-tier university located in the southeastern part of the US. The chosen institution is located inside the limits of what is now a minority majority city and within 10 miles of the city's main metropolitan area. The overall student population at the selected institution is approximately 29,000 with roughly 49% of the students falling between the ages of 18 to 21. Of the 29,000 students 51% identify as male, 49% as female, 33% as ethnic minorities, 59.7% as non-Hispanic White, 16.6% as AA, 8.7% as Hispanic or Latino and 6.8% as

international students. In addition, 46.1% of the faculty identify as male, 53.9% as female, 64.8% as non-Hispanic White, 15.7% as AA, and 9.3% as other.

Participants

Inclusion Criteria

All participants in this study were required to be a minimum of 18 years of age. Participants were also required to speak English, self-identify as AA, men, be actively attending the university selected for this investigation, and be identified, by this institution, as being on academic probation. The sample population consisted of 8 AA men who met all the criteria. The average age for all participants was 19.37 with an age range of 19 to 21 years.

Exclusion Criteria

All persons who were not currently enrolled or identified as being on academic probation by the selected university were excluded from this study. Other exclusion criteria included individuals who did not self-identify as being 18 years of age or older, AA, male, or English speaking.

Recruitment

No participants were recruited until after this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Texas at Arlington (the lead institution) and the educational site selected for data collection. However, in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act the selected institution was not allowed to provide information that would single out, or identify students on academic probation.

Therefore, due to the stipulations set forth by the Educational Rights and Privacy Act snowball and purposive sampling techniques were employed to recruit participants for this study.

Snowball techniques included study participants providing the researchers contact information to other individuals who met the requirements for participation. Purposive sampling involved the use of the selected universities server to disseminate an IRB approved email which is contained in Appendix B. Another purposive sampling technique that was employed included the dissemination of an IRB approved flyer which is contained in Appendix C.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted face to face and on an individual basis. All interviews were held at the place of the participants choosing. Participants were given a copy of the consent form prior to the start of the interview process. The researcher thoroughly covered data collection procedures, storage and the steps that would be taken to ensure full confidentiality for the participant. Participants were informed that the interview would last between 30 to 45 minutes (the average length of time per interview was approximately 45 minutes and consisted of no less than 37,000 words). All participants were informed prior to the start of the interview that the conversation would be audio recorded, deidentified and then transcribed. Participants were also informed that all audio recordings would be erased once they had been transcribed and a transcription accuracy check was completed. It was also communicated to all participants that there was the potential for a follow-up interview which would last no more than 45 minutes. Conversely, participants were also informed that they could decline participation at any time with no foreseeable repercussions.

Participants were also informed that the results of this study could be published and/or presented at meetings void of identifying information. Participants were informed that additional

research studies could evolve from the information provided. All participants were required to sign an IRB approved consent form prior to their participation in the interview process.

Therefore, a completed written consent form was obtained for everyone who participated in this study. Failure to complete the consent form resulted in the immediate termination of all activities associated with this study.

Lastly, data were collected by asking the following two questions:

1. Can you tell me what it's like being a student here?
2. Can you tell me what it's like being student here on academic probation?

To gain a more detailed understanding of participants lived experiences follow up questions were also utilized. The questions and follow up questions that emerged during the interview process were consistent with the iterative process noted by Smith, et al., (2009). These questions are also contained within the Interview Protocol Guide in Appendix A.

Data Handling

All subjects were assigned a pseudonym and an identification number which were replicated on all forms and all data collection documents. In addition, all information relevant to the research was kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's private office at 4764 Myers Lane Harrisburg North Carolinian 28075. All audio recordings were captured via a Digititeck 850. This device is a standalone recorded with no back up memory, internet connection of hard drive. Therefore, once files were deleted they were completely eradicated. The researcher deleted all digital recordings following the transcription of each set of data and then reviewed each transcription for accuracy.

Data Analysis Steps

Data analysis consisted of an iterative and inductive process informed by the outline that was provided by Smith et al., (2009). The outline provided by Smith et al., (2009) equipped the research with an analytic framework which was continuously referenced throughout the data analysis process. The data analysis process began with a word for word transcription of the audio recordings using Nuance Dragon Professional 15 Individual Speech Recognition Software. Once audio recordings were transcribed, they were then uploaded into a Microsoft version of Atlas ti8. Once transcriptions were uploaded into Atlas ti8, the researcher engaged in a series of steps designed to help them familiarize and immerse themselves in the data (Smith et al., 2009). The first step of the familiarizing and immersion processes consisted of the researcher listening to each audio recording independent of its corresponding transcript. During this time, no notes were taken. Once completed, the research then reviewed each audio recording, along with its corresponding transcript. At this point the researcher began actively rechecking for issues around accuracy of transcription and noting points of laughter or anything else which may have been missed during the initial transcription process. Once this step was completed, the researcher erased the digitally recorded version of the data and engaged in a general reading of each transcript.

The intent behind this initial reading was to simply aid the researcher in their efforts to further familiarize and immerse themselves in the material. This initial reading was then followed by a line by line analysis of each text. During the analysis phase the researcher sought to maintain an open mind, paying close attention to each word, and phrase, while making note of experiential claims, expressed emotions, and language usage. This step in the analysis process was informed by cyclical acts of identifying points of thematic convergence, divergence,

identification of commonality and nuance within a given text. The corresponding result of this engagement was the identification of emergent patterns (i.e. themes) (Smith et al., 2009). Once identified, themes were placed into a table and then cross checked with codes, their frequency and notes which were written into Atlas ti8. The researcher engaged and completed this process with a single data set before moving on to the next one. Doing so allowed the researcher to ensure continuity of analysis across data sets while supporting the researcher's efforts and desire to remain fatefully engaged with a single set of personal experiences. This approach also helped to ensure fidelity to the individuality of each participants experiences which is consistent with IPA's ideographic commitments (Smith et al., 2009).

Once the research completed this process for each set of data, he sought to identify connections and distinctions among emergent themes and across data sets. This part of the analysis process was informed by a dialectical engagement which moved cyclically between the broad and the particular, and between the researcher's foreknowledge and the participants lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

To maximize the quality and validity of this study the researcher also utilized triangulation. According to Smith et al., (2009), triangulation is a process designed to help support the validity of qualitative findings by subjecting data to multiple persons trained or capable of participating in the data analysis process. During the data analysis process the researcher engaged two independent researchers who could offer a more etic perspective and were trained specifically in phenomenological investigations or IPA. Both researchers were self-identified AA women with terminal degrees in education or sociology, Assistant or Associate professors at state universities, who are under the age of 45, and who graduate with honors at every point during their post-secondary education. Different transcripts were shared with each

participant. The researcher and a given group member then convened to discuss their respective findings. In areas where agreement could not be reached, the research tabled a given element or theme. Once agreement was reached and themes were mutually supported they were then presented to the researcher's dissertation co-chair. During this phase in the process the researcher's co-chair further challenged the researcher to think more critically about the classification of a given theme and its relative impact on the overall study. Although this portion of the process was challenging, it helped to reduce the potential impact of researcher bias while guarding against the deficiencies associated with more emic investigations.

Once themes were identified within and across cases, and agreed upon via triangulation, the researcher engaged in member checking. Member checking is a process by which a researcher presents their interpretation of a given qualitative data set to the research participant associated with that body of data. The Researcher met with each participant for no more than 45 minutes (average time spent discussing data outcomes with participants was approximately 35 minutes). The research informed each participant that their primary objective was to accurately capture the lived experience of the participant. Therefore, if the research had failed to do so, they encouraged the participant to help guide them in the interpretative process. The final result of this process was the identification of three major experiential themes: Misrecognition, Diminishing Confidence, and Isolation.

Chapter V

Results

The purpose of this investigation was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the educational experiences of eight AA men attending a PWI in the Southeastern part of the United States while on academic probation. To accomplish this task IPA was used to answer the following research question and sub-question:

1. How do AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI in the Southeast region of the U.S. understand their educational experiences?
2. How do AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI in the Southeast region of the U.S. understand/experience their educational classification?

These two questions were shaped by a review of existing research focused on the experiences of AA men attending predominantly white postsecondary educational institutions. Throughout the interview process additional questions emerged which helped the researcher gain a more in - depth understanding of the participants experiences as they related to the primary research question and sub-question. The identification and use of such questions was consistent with IPA's iterative interview process (Smith et al., 2009).

The analysis strategies provided by Smith, et al., (2009) were also used to help guide the data analysis process. During the data analysis process each interview was accessed individually. During that time the research listened, transcribed and coded each interview before moving to the next one. Once each interview had undergone the same analysis process the research sought to identify shared themes and distinct experiences across and within all available data. The data analysis process consisted of multiple levels of coding and the initial identification of five primary emergent themes: Misrecognition, Isolation, Diminished Confidence, Embodied

Stereotype Threat, and Distancing. However, after careful consideration and the use of triangulation these themes were distilled to three: *Misrecognition*, *Diminished Confidence*, and *Racial Distancing*.

Misrecognition

The first major theme that was identified while analyzing the data was related to participants encounters with *Misrecognition*. The term *Misrecognition* is used to signify any experience in which study participants felt as though who they were as students, people etc. was overshadowed by negative stereotypes associated with their race. For study participants the experience of misrecognition was most frequently express in relation to participants interactions with faculty, peers and student support services. Of the participants in this study eight expressed experiencing misrecognition when interacting with staff, eight when interacting with peers, and four when interaction with student support services.

Interactions with Faculty

Earlier in the interview, Anthony stated that he felt dismissed by a faculty member when seeking help. When asked to further explain his experience, Anthony stated,

Man, it's like every time I talk to a professor and shit, that's just how they be acktin, shit. But real talk though, they don't be like that wit everybody though. When they talk to them White girls they dam sho don't be like that, they be totally different though. They be sitin there all engaged and shit like, O let me help you pretty White girl (laughs) and I be like man come on cous really, it's like that though (laughs)? But it is what it is though you know, I grew up in the south man I know how White folk is man. Real talk, you know they don't really want us here no way, caus they think nigga stupid from jump so you know what I'm saying, you be

seeing that shit always too though when you be talking wit dem. Man, I be like man I need to be a White girl or somethin (laughs).

Similarly, when speaking with his professor about the anxiety he experiences when taking test, Brian exclaimed

...even before he recommended going to the learning center it's like he was looking at me as if I were lying or he just didn't believe me. I mean at one point he light-weight challenged me and was like well if you really understand the material it should be easy for you to take the test.

When asked to explain why he felt the instructor responded to him the way that he did Brian when on to say,

Honestly, if you ask me, that's just how they are. I'm like the only Black person in my class. I know for a fact that he doesn't do that with everybody, for real, because this one White girl in my class was the one who told me to go talk to him because she had the same issue and she was like she talked to him and he was super helpful and everything. But, not with me.

Similarly, when asked if he had spoken with faculty about any concerns or challenges he was having Hakeem stated, "I tried a couple of times when I first got her, but this the south, and you know what they think about Black people down here". Eric expressed a parallel view when he exclaimed, "I asked one professors for help, he strait up said, people like you always struggle with writing. I was sitting there thinking people like me (chuckles)? Did he just say that (laughs)? I didn't even know what to say."

While some participants spoke of their experiences of *Misrecognition* with faculty as all inclusive, others differentiated, noting distinctions among how some non-AA faculty responded to them. For example, when describing his experiences with faculty Franklin stated,

I know some of my professors just don't like Black people, they just make a lot of assumptions about us and you can tell. You can just tell by how they talk to you. You can just tell they think your dumb anyway (chuckles) so I don't even bother talking to them unless I have to (chuckles). But some of them are cool. One of my favorite professors is this White lady, Dr --- she's cool. She teaches criminal justice, I think she writes about like about criminal justice reform for Black people, something like that, I read one of her papers she gave us it was cool. She's always telling me I should study this or do this and always asking me about what's going on politically with Black campus organizations and stuff. And I've had two or three professors like her that weren't Black.

Similarly, when asked about speaking with anyone about challenges he experienced while adjusting to college life David stated,

...there's one professor I always talked to, this White dude, but he acts Black though (laughs) he's from Canada too so you know (chuckles), he's not like most of the professors here. You have to watch a lot of them, they say slick stuff sometimes, so you know what they think about you.

David went on to say, "If all my professors where like Dr. – I'd be straight, but most of my professors not like that, they just make a bunch of assumptions about you because you Black."

When initially asked about their experiences when interacting with faculty, participants did not mention any encounters or experiences of misrecognition when engaging with non-White faculty members. However, when asked if they had experienced similar encounters with non-White faculty one respondent stated, "yes." When asked to further explain his experience, Gabriel told a story of what happen to him late one night while looking for a place to study during midterms,

I was just walking around campus and decided to go into the engineering building because people are always in there studying and what not. So, I walk in and I mean as soon as I put my bag down this African dude walks over and just starts telling me that I can't be in the building. Mind you there are like 10 other people doing the same thing I'm doing right and he's like "you have to go". I don't know I've heard that Africans don't like Black people [AAs] and stuff cause they think we lazy or whatever I mean I don't know if it's a cultural thing or whatever but that was like the first time something like that ever happened to me personally.

Interactions with Peers

Much like their experiences of *Misrecognition* when interacting with faculty, all eight participants expressed parallel experiences while engaging with non-AA peers. Brian recalls sitting in class and being approach by one student who exclaimed, "I thought Black people didn't like math." Brian went on to say,

...stuff like that happens like in class on a consistent basis.... I am like the class expert on all people Black in all things Black right and it doesn't matter what it is it could literally be anything from soul food to like hip-hop, sports Black hair Black women literally anything that's been associated with Black people except math right (laughs), the one thing were in class to discuss.

When asked to explain his frustration with one set of class mates Hakeem stated,

I promise you, almost every time we had a group activity which seemed like every day, and the professor would tell us to pick a partner, mind you I'm the only Black person in the room, it was like a race to see who wouldn't get stuck with me (laughs). I mean nobody wanted to be my partner. I'd like look around and I was like the homeless guy (laughs), you know, you

never make eye contact with the homeless guy (laughs) and I know what it was, cause as soon as someone would sit down you could see it.

In a parallel vein, when questioned by his professor about why he doesn't speak up more in class Brian remembered thinking to himself, "Man (chuckles) I'm not about to say anything in class unless I'm like 150% sure, I'm like the only Black person in here and I know what they think about me, they already don't think that I know anything anyway."

While the experiences of Brian and Hakeem centered around negative stereotypes regarding AA's intellectual inferiority Chris and Franklin encountered experiences of misrecognition associated with stereotypes regarding AA's participation in sports and their assumed ability to be able to dance. Chris explains that when he attempted to approach two classmates about joining their study group

... one guy was like, O man we were going to ask but I thought you'd be playing basketball or something (laughs). I promise, I'm standing there thinking to myself, What? (laughs) did he just say that (laughs). Seriously, first of all I'm five foot eight and I suck at basketball (laughs) and secondly, seriously? (laughs). But that's just how they are sometime.

Similarly, Franklin recalls sitting in class while his peers were walking in and three White students approach him and said,

...hay you know how to dance right, how do you do, I don't even know what she said after that cause all I could think was this might be the first time you've ever said more than two words to me and this is what you came up with. The thing is, it would've been one thing if we were cool but we never spoke, and it's just, she figured he's Black I bet he knows (chuckles).

Although seven of the eight participants expressed experiencing *Misrecognition* when interacting exclusively with White peers, one participant noted similar experiences while interacting with other AA students as well. While reflecting on some of his experiences with peers Anthony stated, "...you expect White folk gone be White folk you feel me, but Black folk here funny too though. I mean, not all dem but a lot though." Anthony then went on to say,

My folk ant have no money. Shit, I'm the first person in my family to step foot on a college so I ant got a lot of the stuff they got. So when I be talking to them they be like man what are you doing here, you need to get yo shit together like I'm some Geechi nigga or somthin but they don't offer to help a nigga dow, just be judging me and shit. It's like seriously, that's what we doing?

Interactions with Student Support Services

While eight of the study participants expressed experiencing some form of *Misrecognition* when interacting with faculty and peers four expressed similar experiences when engaging student support services. For example, while speaking with educational specialist at the Learning Center about his test anxiety, Brian recalls feeling misunderstood. He states,

...so I asked them about like test taking techniques because I heard one person in my class talk about how they have test anxiety and they went to the Learning Center and they helped them figure out how to kind of deal with the anxiety and stuff. But when I brought that up to the people there they just kept talking about I needed to study more or work harder one dude was like have you considered a different major?

While reflecting on his experiences, Gabriel recalled being turned down by a math tutor soon after they met.

... I mean right when I sat down she looked at me like I did something to her (chuckles) and she got up and walked out the room. Five minutes later this guy walks in and is like, I'm sorry but we will have to find you a new tutor can you come back tomorrow. So I asked the guy what happened, and he just looked at me and didn't say anything, but it was clear and we both knew it (laughs).

When asked about his frustrations with seeking help from the learning center Anthony stated,

...really it's just a bunch of White folk who already think Black folk dumb anyway so when you ask questions and shit it's like they look at you like, I knew yo ass was dumb. It's like they there to help you but not really. It's like if you Black they just judging you and looking at you crazy. But if you White, it's like, O let me see what I can do, O, its ok everybody struggles from time to time, we all need help. Like seriously, I've heard them say that shit to White folk but when they talk to me it's on some other shit. It's like they look down on me like I'm just stupid and ant supposed to be there no way.

While the experience of misrecognition was one of the more prominent themes identified, it exclusively focused on an experience that was elicited by persons external to the participant. Correspondingly, the next major theme identified highlights many participants internal responses to the externally elicited experience misrecognition.

Diminished Confidence

The second major theme that was identified during the data analysis was the experience of a *Diminished Confidence*. The term *Diminished Confidence* refers to participants expressed experiences of a loss of confidence in their academic or intellectual ability. However, unlike the experience of misrecognition, the experience of diminished confidence was not consistently

associated with any specific set of interactions. For example, when asked about his college experience, Gabriel exclaimed,

It's just tough some days, its almost as if every time you turn around something is going wrong, someone says something off the wall [referring to racist and disparaging remarks from peers and faculty] you bomb an assignment, its just a whole lot of stuff and after a while you get to the point where you're like I don't know if I'm cut out for all this.

The experience of a diminished confidence was explicitly expressed by six of the eight participants while the threat of *Diminished Confidence* was noted by two. For example, explicit expressions of diminished confidence were articulated by Anthony when he was initially asked about his experience as a college student,

It's like when I came here I was like, cool this is college you know. I knew things wont like high school and stuff you know. I mean high school was cool, I ant really have to study or nothing I just did my work and I was cool. But here, I don't know, I be doing my work and stuff but you know, I even be trying to study but a brother still be strugglin. Real talk, I don't even know why, that's facts man. I go to class I try to do my thing but stuff just keep a nigga sideways like you ant got what it takes to make it here you feel me?

Later, while revisiting his experience as a student, Anthony went on to say, "I don't know man, this shit just been hard man. I know I ant no dummy or nothing least I don't think so but after while you start to feel like one though, you know what I mean?". Much like Anthony, Chris, and David expressed similar feelings regarding a gradual loss of self-confidence. For example, when asked to further explain his general frustrations with his classes Chris stated,

When I first got here I was super excited, but I would say by about midterms, I was sitting there like, I am so lost. It was just overwhelming, and when I talked to other people they would say stuff like, O, it's so easy, just do blah blah blah whatever and I would still be sitting there not knowing what was going on. And when you deal with that every day I don't care how smart you think you are, it just wears on you and you start to question yourself.

Conversely, when responding to a prompt about challenges he had during his first semester David exclaimed,

when you're really trying, I mean like for real trying and you look at your grades and you keep getting Ds and C minuses on everything it does something to you and you start looking around and everyone else is smiling and laughing and what not and you start feeling like they're just smarter than you.

Similarly, when initially asked about his college experience Eric professed, "it's just hard".

When asked what he meant by the term hard Eric went on to say, "Everything, it just wears on you, just being here. I mean the way people treat you, everything. You just get tired. Some days I just think maybe this isn't for me and I think about just doing something else."

In contrast to the gradual diminishing of self-confidence, expressed by others, Hakeem noted that on his first day of class he realized that he was underprepared for collage life and that others had information he did not. According to Hakeem this contributed to the experience of a more sudden and immediate loss of confidence.

I will never forget it, it was my first day my first class and I remember this one girl, she had red hair (laughs), she raised her hand and asked if we were going to go over the syllabus that day and everyone in the class was like, yeah are we going over the syllabus,

and I was sitting there thinking to myself, what in the world is a syllabus (laughs). I knew right then I was over my head (laughs).

Hakeem later went on to say, “When I came here I thought I knew exactly what I wanted to do but now, I’m, if I’m being real, I don’t know, I’m just trying to make it through this semester.”

While six of the participants explicitly expressed the experience of diminished self-confidence Brian and Franklin simply alluded to the threat of it. When asked to further explain his experiences interacting with peers and faculty Brian stated, “. . . I know I’m not dumb, but if you don’t watch out they will make you feel that way”. Franklin noted a similar experience when he exclaimed,

I’ll be honest, If I didn’t grow up where I did, if well I hadn’t been involved or around other people like me who were educated, and stuff and I just came here I seriously would be questioning myself. It’s so crazy to me so when you talk to a lot of professors and just whoever, if they aren’t like you it almost feels like they’re trying to make you feel like you don’t belong, like you’re not smart enough to be here, it’s crazy.

As previously mentioned, diminished confidence can be viewed as an internal response to the external stimulus of misrecognition. However, it is not the only response that was noted by participants. The last major theme identified not only highlights participants external response to the experience of misrecognition and diminished confidence but, in part, their efforts to guard against them.

Racial Distancing

The last major theme that was identified in the data was the expressed experience of *Racial Distancing*. The term *Racial Distancing* refers to participants expressed desire or attempts to personally withdraw from interactions with various types of potential supports. Like the

experience of *Misrecognition*, the experience of *Racial Distancing* was most prominently expressed in relation to two specific types of engagements, interactions with faculty and interactions with peers.

Interactions with Faculty

While discussing his unwillingness to reach out to faculty for help Gabriel stated,

Whenever I talk with one of my professor about anything I do feel like I'm risking something when I do speak. I understand I taught myself big boy decisions big boy consequences. If I decide to open my mouth I have to take whatever comes with it. But I also know that if I reach out to most of my professors for help and they actually hear me say I am having problems with something, potentially, I just dug myself deeper in the hole. I know what a lot of them already think of me I also know they won't say it but what they think of me and I know none of it is positive because I listen to them, everything they say, how they interact with different people differently because if I'm going to risk something I need to know who I'm talking to and asking for help and most of the time I don't see it in them so I just keep to myself and keep moving.

Similar to Gabriel, Hakeem observed the persistence of what he identified as potentially threatening behaviors among faculty which contributed to him choosing to distance himself and suspend initiating interactions.

I don't know, it's little stuff. In class people make little slick remarks [racial comments] and everybody laughs, even the professors sometimes, and, and even when they don't a lot of times they don't say anything, they act like they didn't hear it, it's not cool but what are you going to do? Most the time I'm the only Black person in the class so you know, and I know if I say something it's just going to make things worse so what do you do?

[long pause]. But yeah, it's tough like that, it wears on you and after a while you get to the point where you're like its better if I just keep to myself. At the end of the day I know I can't go to someone like that for help and expect them to be cool with me.

Brian and David mirrored Gabriel and Hakeem's approach after perceiving some faculty as unconcerned and disinterested. Brian stated,

To be honest it's like there's are a lot of professors here and stuff who say they want to help or like their job is to help but when you go and talk to them it's like they don't really either want to help or they don't know what to do it just depends on who you are. If you're the right person you get help or if you get lucky and find a cool professor then too and everybody knows who they are and all the Black students go to them even if they don't take their class (chuckles). So most of time I don't even bother with most of my professors, I know they could care less and it's just exhausting like in classes when people say things and some professors at least mine they don't really say anything so I don't really want to like voice my opinion and then find out later that the professor actually has the same views right as the person who I'm arguing with so it's like stuff like that you know so you just sit there you don't say anything so, most of the time I just try to figure my own stuff out.

David expressed a comparable view when he stated,

You can tell from day one who is in your corner and who isn't so if you find one, you better take advantage but once you know you know and it's on you. But personally, I just don't have the energy for it [engaging faculty who are perceived as not caring].

In contrast some study participants chose to reach out to faculty for help. While reflecting on such an encounter, Anthony recalls how he felt afterward.

So I was like alright I'll talk to the professor and shit and see what the deal is. So, I talk to him and shit and that cat was like, "your grammar is off" and I need to use APA. Done son (laughs). So I'm like nigga what I'm pose to do with that. Mind you, I don't even know what APA is you feel me (laughs)? This like my first semesters and shit so I'm sittin there looking crazy as fuck like I ant even supposed to be hear (laughs). I'm like I don't even know what to ask this cat now you know he was just so like matter of fact like he ant care at all, straight gangster wit it (laughs) so I was just like, what is APA (laughs) it was the only thing I could think of man you know, a nigga was throwed cous (laughs). Hold up though (laughs) to make it worst though this cat was like, "Google it" and straight walked off gangster status nigga like drop the mike (laughs). After that I was done, I was like man I ant asken these folk for nothin.

Later Anthony went on to say,

I mean you know how White folk is man, especially at places like this you know, they be thinkin niggas dumb off the jump anyway so they don't really be trying to help cats like me, I mean real talk so I don't be tryin to ask no way (chuckles). I mean I see how they be looking at me and shit when I say something in class so I just sit there and be like shit, I'll figure the shit out you feel me? (chuckles).

Interactions with Peers

Interactions with Peers is another area of engagement in which participants expressed experiencing *Racial Distancing*. Similar to their Interactions with Faculty, many participants decisions to engage in distancing, when interacting with certain populations of peers, was influenced by their experiences of *Misrecognition*, *Diminished Confidence*, and their personal knowledge of being placed on academic probation. For example, while reflecting on his

academic status and decision to engage in *Racial Distancing*, Chris noted experiencing both *Misrecognition* and a *Diminished Confidence*,

It's a weird place to be in, I don't know it's like when you're on academic probation and like half the people your around think your smart (referring to a previous statement about some of his Black colleagues) and the other half just think your dumb cause your Black you know if people find out that you're on academic probation it's like half the people you know you let them down and the other half you just affirm what they thought about you in the first place so you just don't say anything, you keep to yourself.... So, it's just like why say anything right? It's like you just try to figure it out without the people around you knowing so you sit in class a lot and don't really interact with anyone you just try to figure it out but you know if you could do it on your own you wouldn't be in this place but what do you do and so you just fall more behind and you kind of just want to give up.

Similarly, Brian's experience of being excluded from a peer study group, which contributed to him choosing to engage in distancing, not only caused him to reflect on his academic status but it touched on the experiences of *Misrecognition* and *Diminished Confidence*.

...so I don't know man its stuff like that and so after a while you just don't you just don't bother to ask because you know like deep down they really don't want you around. And so, what ends up happening is you're just kind of on your own unless you have another Black person in your class who understands you, you have to be because you can't real trust the majority of the people around you

Brian followed up his comments about his classroom experiences and his tendency to engage in *Racial Distancing* by stating

I don't know exactly what to say. I do know that it just feels like most of the time like I am alone and a lot of that is on me, sometimes it just feels safer that way...I don't know what they see when they look at me but I know it's not good, after a while you just get tired of dealing with that and so some days I would just wake up and be like I can't I just need to be around Black people and so I'll go to the student Center because that's where all the Black people hang out and I'll just sit there knowing I'm supposed to be in class or sometimes I would go to class and even though I should be in the library or like in my room doing work I'm so tired of being around White people and dealing with that all day I'll just go to the student center and just sit there and do nothing except be around Black people.

While recalling his experiences with colleagues Anthony exclaimed,

...its like cats be funny wit you you know like you be in class and niggas act like they don't wanna speak and shit, niggas just be like looking at you like you ant pose to be here or somthin man. I don't know, dat shit just be pissin me off and shit that's why I be like man fuck dem imma do me man and it is what it is man.

Anthony went on to say, "So I just be here trying to figure shit out but it's like you on your own. White folk don't mess wit you, a lotta Black folk act funny half the time so you just kinda keep to yourself." While recalling his interactions with one set of classmates Eric stated,

I listen to them, I do, and the stuff they say sometimes is just it's just I don't know. But I know I can't say anything, I'm always outnumbered, and I know it will just make things worse for me in the long run so I watch them and police myself. Like when the guy got shot on old concord near the university all the white guys were making jokes about it and

I'm like this is not a joke man its serious so for things like that I have to hold myself back because I might go off so it's just easier for me to not even really talk to them.

Eric later expressed,

Sometimes you start to feel like, like you don't feel like you really fit anywhere. I mean there's a lot of White people here and you realize that that even though when you first get here you think there are a lot of Black people once you're here for a while you realize there aren't that many of us. So, when you're in class you're usually the only Black person in there. Almost all my professors have been White, and everywhere I go it's just a lot of White people. And its funny because the ones you meet are usually indifferent or really theatrical about social issues and so a lot of them just look at you like, what are you doing here or they do stuff like wear Make America Great hats to class on the same day someone Black gets shot by the police like the guy who was shot near campus and I promise this guy shows up to class the next day with a Make America Great hat on and I'm just like are you serious. So, you just know to keep to yourself.

While most participants comments situated their experiences of distancing within a specific type of interaction (i.e. faculty or peers) some were less definitive. For example, while speaking about how he makes sense of being on academic probation Brian stated,

So, it's that kind of weird space where you're surrounded by people but you're really kind of alone because you can't really tell people the truth without some type of negative repercussion right. So even in areas where I struggle like with test taking I don't really say much because I know they may find out or know like that I'm on academic probation or something. But it would be different if I had like let's say like a 4.0 or something right, (laughing), and I was having problems then honestly I would probably be more

comfortable talking to like professors or somebody with like student services that might be able to help me because you know it doesn't matter how they look at me because I can always just be like well, 4.0 so whatever but just being in this position it, it makes it a little more difficult to open up to people about what your needs are because you will, at least I if I am being honest, I worry about how they're going to look at me so that's what I mean when I say it's embarrassing but it is what it is so I have to deal with it so I just try not to say much to people around stuff like that

Similarly, Hakeem stated

I know the classroom isn't a safe space. I know that typically, I am the only Black person in anyone of my classes. So, I sometimes I always remember regardless of what I am doing I will always have an audience watching me and listening to me and I also know that that audience typically thinks that I am or that I didn't earn the right to be there. So, I listen to a lot of conversations and I hear what they say I don't necessarily agree with them and the only time I interject is when I feel like it is poisonous to another person or group of people. Other than that, I just sit back.

While there were three major themes that were identified, participants' responses suggest that many of them were perceived as overlapping. The potential implications of this overlap and how it may inform future research will be discussed further in Chapter VI.

Chapter VI

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to gain a better understanding of the educational experiences of eight African American (AA) men attending a PWI in the Southeastern part of the United States while on academic probation. Results from this investigation suggest that participants in this study were adversely impacted by the various ways in which negative stereotypes associated with AAs informed how others perceived and interacted with them. Additionally, these young men expressed that the enduring and influential nature of such stereotypes not only contributed to their experience of *Misrecognition* and *Diminished Confidence*, but they informed their perceived need to engage in *Racial Distancing* in order to protect against the negative effects associated with such interactions.

At first glance, the results from this study are consistent with outcomes reported by previous investigators focused on the educational experiences of AA men attending PWIs. For example, the experience of *Misrecognition* supports Feagin (1992) and Feagin and Eckberg's (1980) assertions that AA men attending PWIs are not only overexposed but are unable to avoid differential treatment predicated on negative, racial, stereotypes. In addition, Harper's (2015) study, which examined the experiences of AA men across 30 PWIs, found that participants were consistently confronted with negative racially informed stereotypes which were reflective of their encounters with misrecognition. Similarly, the experience of *Racial Distancing*, which was identified during this investigation, is also a common theme found in the current literature. For instance, while exploring the educational experiences of six AA men attending a PWI in the Southeastern part of the U.S., Bridges (2010) found that psychological distancing was a common tool utilized by participants to guard against discriminatory experiences on campuses.

While the experiences of *Misrecognition* and *Racial Distancing* are consistent with existing literature, the recorded experience of *Diminished Confidence* is not (Booker, 2007; Dancy et al., 2018; Hall & Rowan, 2001; Harper, 2015; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Robertson & Mason, 2009; Schwitzer et al., 1999). More specifically, when viewed as a response to continued encounters with *Misrecognition*, the experience of *Diminished Confidence* is inconsistent with results found during other investigations. For example, after continued exposure to acts of misrecognition, participants in studies conducted by Smith et al., (2007) and Feagin, et al., (1996) were recorded as being subject to battle fatigue or a single oppressive impact. While on the surface these outcomes appear to be similar to the experience of diminished confidence, such responses imply an experience of psychological weathering, not a diminishing belief in participants' intellectual ability to persist to degree completion. In addition, the distinction in participants' responses also suggest a deviation in the resources AA men utilize when attempting to negotiate encounters with misrecognition.

For example, when confronted with the experiences of misrecognition, Harper (2015) and Moore et al., (2003) found that high achieving AA men responded to misrecognition by engaging in psychological distancing, and hyper vigilance. However, what is less explicit is the extent to which these behaviors were pored with participants awareness of their academic success. It is likely that the comingling of the three has helped provide high achieving AA men with a safeguard against enduring experiences associated with a loss on personal confidence. However, unlike their high achieving colleges, participants in this study lacked the tangible products associated with educational success. As a result, despite utilizing similar tactics, such as *Racial Distancing*, participants in this study were not able to insulate their sense of confidence from

persistent encounters with *Misrecognition* which resulted in experiences of *Diminished Confidence*.

Given that *Diminished Confidence* emerged as the most overtly unique theme in this study, it is important to understand its presence within the data. However, doing so cannot be done independent of its relationship to the experiences of *Misrecognition*, *Racial Distancing* and participants knowledge of being on academic probation. Therefore, to properly understand the experience and impact of *Diminished Confidence* it must first be situated within the context from which it emerged. To this end, the use of Intersectionality Theory (IT) becomes essential to gaining a more nuanced understanding of participants lived educational reality.

According to IT, a person's experiences are informed by the intersection of a series of social labels which they have either acquired or inherited (Collins, 1986; Floyd-Thomas, 2006). The reality of such is rooted in the understanding that social labels, although necessary for promoting the experiences of ourselves and others, are never simply self-referential (Burger & Luckman, 1966; Collins, 1986; Dyson, 2003; Floyd-Thomas, 2006). To the contrary, social labels always refer to indices of meaning which denote a person's or group's social status and relationship to power (Dyson, 2003; Floyd-Thomas, 2006). According to Floyd-Thomas (2006) the experiences we are afforded reside at the intersection of any given set of social labels. Conversely, the relationship between those labels and our experiences denotes a specific body of knowledge; a self-legitimizing truth which is distinctly unique, and subjective. According to Collins (1986) this is the essence of standpoint-epistemology and the foundation for a unique contribution to an otherwise standardized body of knowledge and truth (Floyd-Thomas, 2006).

To the extent to which we accept that experience, knowledge and truth

are positional realities, informed by the intersection of social labels, we cannot overlook the potential impact of participants' educational status relative to those from previous investigations. The importance of highlighting such is predicated on its ability to stand as the primary point of distinction between this population and those of previous investigations. Historically, studies focused on AA men attending PWIs seldom desegregated by academic status (Ancis et al., 2000; Anderson, 2002; Booker, 2007; Brown, 1999; Bridges, 2010). However, in the past decade scholars such as Harper (2015) and Williamson (2010) have begun to call attention to the need to de-homogenize the experiences of AA men attending PWIs. Nonetheless, in their efforts to do so, they have focused, almost exclusively, on AA men who are identified as high-achieving or perusing a degree in science, technology, engineering or math (Harper, 2015; Harper, 2012; Hébert, 2002; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Moore, 2006; Williamson, 2010). As a result, even in the face of recent efforts, little is known about AA men on academic probation, or how their unique positionality differentiates their educational experiences from other AA men who are identified as high-achieving or in good academic standing.

For instance, the social classification of academic probation provided several participants with a unique social vantage which fostered their willingness to internalize and self-identify with the stereotypical images presented to them during the moment of misrecognition. In addition, this same positionality helped to foster a certain level of acceptance regarding their diminished confidence. For example, during his interview Eric alluded to the dynamic ways in which *Misrecognition*, *Diminished Confidence*, and his awareness of his academic status, converged to inform his perception of his performative proximity to negative stereotypes of AA intellectual inferiority "...I can't even be mad if people look at me like that [referring to previous remarks about being viewed as "some dumb Black dude"], seriously, I mean shoot, I feel like one

sometimes, and fact is, on paper, I look like one.” Franklin spoke of a similar convergence/vantage informed experience when he stated, “It’s just hard being all the things people say you are.” While Eric and Franklin identified how their academic status intersected with how they viewed themselves and understood their educational experiences Brian spoke to the pervasiveness of knowing that you are underachieving and how this knowing is an inescapable identity which shapes your views of the world and your place within it, “...the thing is you know, and you know no matter where you go that you’re that Black guy. It’s embarrassing.”

According to IT, the presence of academic probation within participants’ educational narratives is deterministic of an academic experience and standpoint epistemology which is distinctly different from those reported by AA men who are identified as high achieving or in good academic standing. Conversely, by using an intersectional lens, we can broach a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of *Diminished Confidence* by situating it at the intersection of the ascription of academic probation, misrecognition, racial distancing, performative proximity to existing stereotypes, and the internalization of stereotypes of AA intellectual inferiority.

To this extent, the additional ascription, and its relative interactions with other social identifiers, can help researchers better contextualize experiential deviations among this study population. In addition, IT also highlights that despite shared vocabulary around a given experience, such as misrecognition, there may be significant differences in how this experience is understood, internalized and managed based on the intersections of unique sets of social identifiers which shape a given standpoint epistemology.

Limitations

The limitations of this investigation are informed by the selected methodology and the recruitment process. Regarding the former, IPA insist on a homogeneous sample population (Smith et al., 2009). As a result, findings which emerged from this study cannot be generalized to other persons on academic probation, AA men attending other university or any person who did not directly participate in this investigation. Additionally, the use of snowball sampling inherently excludes all students who were not accessible to those who participated in this investigation. While purposeful sampling was utilized to minimize this limitation, i.e. university email and flyers, such practices cannot account for persons who did not come in contact with these forms of recruitment. In addition, because the number of persons who could participate in this study were limited, all eligible parties could not be granted an opportunity to be involved. In addition, participants in this study were not homogeneous in age, grade level, or social economic background.

Given my race, gender and past educational experiences I have a personal investment in the topic under study. As a result, social desirability and confirmation bias remained a constant threat. I noticed the reality of both during the interview and data analysis processes. However, I was able to mediate these challenges, and those associated with an emic investigation, by utilizing bracketing, member checking and triangulation of the data.

Implications of the Study

This study was able to contribute to the literature by helping to guard against homogeneous views of AA men's education experiences by presenting a more nuanced view of the ways in which AA men's educational experience vary based on the presence of other social identifiers. In addition, it is held that this work also draws attention to the need to more fully

incorporate the use of IT into the work that is being done with AA men. The necessity of which is highlighted by the wide range of social identifiers which help to shape an equally diverse set of experiences, knowledge and truths. Failing to incorporate IT in future investigations will likely contribute to the marginalization of an already marginalized population's voice, needs, challenges and desires.

Implications for PWI

The knowledge obtained from this study raises questions regarding how PWIs approach and engage not only AA men, but more specifically, AA men who are identified as being on academic probation. Although educational institutions have begun to more closely examine how the prioritization of Eurocentric values, have and do adversely impact AA men, as well as women and people of color, considerably less attention has been given to how this same system of values articulates itself within more nuanced areas of post-secondary educational settings. For instance, given outcomes such as a diminished confidence, PWI's may need to pay closer attention to providing both pragmatic and psychological supports for students of color who are facing not only academic challenges but confrontations with negative stereotypes regarding their intellectual inferiority. In this regard PWIs should look to partner with social workers to develop supports specifically designed to promote self-confidence while simultaneously guarding against the internalization of experiences associated with misrecognition. Findings from this study also suggest that the need for such supports may be even greater for those who are, via their race, gender, and academic standing, in closer proximity to resembling negative stereotypes associated with their intellectual aptitude. In addition, findings from this study also point toward the need for PWI to take a closer look at their institutional practices, and how they may support,

encourage or ignore negative assumptions among faculty, administrative supports and students regarding race.

Implications for Social Work Practice

As previously noted, it has been well documented that there are strong correlations between AA men's over exposure to negative, racially informed, educational experiences, their below average educational performances, and their long term economic, social and quality-of-life outcomes.

For example, research has shown that poor collegiate outcomes for AA men matriculate throughout their life-course in a way that is distinct from other demographic groups; thus, having a uniquely negative impact on their long-term quality of life. Therefore, social workers who are seeking to more fully respond to areas where AA men are overrepresented, such as those with poor access to health care, those in poverty, those engaged in substance abuse, those suffering from mental illness and those who are incarcerated, should expand the scope of their inquiry, extending themselves into post-secondary educational institutions, and engage AA men who are at the greatest risk to fail.

More specifically, social workers should look to partner with university beyond the provision of micro level counseling services. Furthermore, social workers should partner with universities as these institutions seek to develop policies and practices that are more inclusive of a quickly changing educational landscape. In addition, social workers should also extend themselves into student organizations and higher educational communities to aid students and faculty in their development of more equitable tools practices and lenses; all of which are needed to more fully examine, challenge and support their own practices and those of their institution.

Implications for Future Research

Given the dearth of literature on this specific sub-population of college students, the identification of overarching themes represents a meaningful contribution to the field. However, findings from this study also raise significant questions regarding how various non-racialized social labels (e.g. age, economic status, education status, sexual identity etc.) intersect to uniquely shape AA men's educational experiences, internalization of racist encounters, behaviors and outcomes. Thus, future studies should include larger sample sizes as well as span multiple universities and university types (e.g. HBCUs, PWIs, private, public etc.). Future investigations should also give increased attention to participants' economic status, parental educational level, and early exposure to predominantly White educational environments. Lastly, future investigations should also look into university policies, practices, and initiatives related to racial and ethnic equity and students' educational experiences.

In addition, researchers looking to examine the educational experiences of AA men should consider a more deliberate use of IT to help in the identification of more nuanced difference within this population. The use of IT, and the examination of how other social identifiers intersect with race and gender to impact educational experience, is essential if the field desires to guard against more homogeneous views of AA men's educational experiences, needs, challenges and behaviors.

Research into the lived experiences of any marginalized population should look to more fully incorporate the use IPA as a methodology. It is my stance that IPA is uniquely positioned to aid in the process of identifying and elevating voices otherwise overlook. Lastly, the findings from this study also suggest a need to more fully understand the variables which impact why sub-populations of AA men internalize racist encounters differently, how they do they

internalize such encounters and what are the corresponding effects. However, such investigative inquires cannot be conducted independently qualitative techniques or an intersectional analysis.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Protocol Guide

The following types of questions are based on Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) suggestions for a formulaic set of in-depth interview questions (p. 59-61)

Process: Study subjects will be participants in an in-depth interview that will last approximately 30 minutes. This study utilizes an IPA and therefore the interview questions act as a guide to prompt exploration into the lived experiences of the interviewees and how they made and make sense of these experiences.

Research Project Overview:

Letter of Consent Process:

Next Steps After the Interview:

Participant Pseudonym:
Date of Interview:
Start Time:
Location:

Interview Question	Research Question Addressed
Section I: Background	
All demographic information will be captured on a single form approved by the IRB	
Section II Questions I	
Descriptive/Narrative: Please, can you tell me what its like being a student here? Prompts: •Can you tell me a bit more about that?	How do AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI in the Southeast region of the US understand their educational experiences?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What do you mean when you say 	
<p>Section II Question II</p>	
<p>Evaluative: Can you tell me about your feelings and thoughts about your experiences?</p> <p>Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Can you tell me a bit more about that? •What do you mean when you say 	<p>How do AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI in the Southeast region of the US understand their educational experiences?</p>
<p>Section II Question III</p>	
<p>Evaluative: Can you tell me what it's like being on academic probation here?</p> <p>Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Can you tell me a bit more about that? •What do you mean when you say 	<p>How do AA men who are on academic probation while attending a PWI in the Southeast region of the US understand/experience their educational classification?</p>
<p>Section III Potential Follow up questions</p>	
<p>Can you tell me your thoughts on diversity on campus (e.g. issues, programs etc.)?</p>	

<p>Did you speak with anyone about it? Who? Right away? Is this encounter part of a pattern? Do you think this happens to others? Have you witnessed anything? Please tell me about that. What is it like in class for you? What would you tell an incoming student about this campus? Is this what you expected your experience to be on this campus? How does this experience relate to life outside the campus? Is there anything else you wish to add?</p>	

Note: Evaluative question may be contained in the participant's response to the descriptive/narrative question. If so, the interviewer can move directly to prompts to obtain more data.

Appendix B

Email:

I hope all is well.

My name is Dante' D. Bryant. I am a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Arlington. I am currently looking for individuals willing who may be interested in participating in a study which focuses on African American men's' experiences with racism on campus. You were identified as a potential participant by either UNCC's Multicultural Resource Center, Student Organization Resource Center, or Campus Activities Board.

If you may be interested in participating or learning more about this study feel free to contact me via email or by phone by 817-888-5802.

Appendix C

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Dante' D. Bryant / School of Social Work / Phone: 817-888-5802 / Email:
Dante.Bryant@mavs.uta.edu

TITLE OF PROJECT

High Achieving African American Males & Predominantly White Colleges and University: An Interoperative Phenomenological Analysis of Race, Gender, & Educational Experience

INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a research study about African American (AA) men at this university. The purpose of this study is to better understand how AA men at this university understand negative racially informed experiences with peers, faculty and administrative staff. You were selected because you self-identify as a collegiate, AA male, 18 years of age or older with a minimum grade point average of a 3.4 on a 4.0 scale. In addition, you were asked to participate in this study because you also maintain a minimum of one appointed position within a student organization and are classified as a junior. Your participation is fully voluntary. Please note that your refusal to participate or discontinue your participation at any time will involve **NO** penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to better understand how AA men at this university understand negative racially informed experiences with peers, faculty and administrative staff.

DURATION

During this study you will be asked three specific questions: 1. Please, can you tell me about a time when you had a negative racial encounter with anyone on campus (peer, staff, administrator etc.)? 2. Can you tell me about your feelings and thoughts about what happened? 3. How have these experiences impacted how you approach your education? Follow up questions may be asked however; they will only be for the sake of clarifying participants responses to the one of the two designated questions. Your participation in this study will last anywhere between 30 - 60 minutes. However, the length of time will vary depending on the amount of information you choose to share.

NUMBER OF SUBJECTS

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

PROCEDURES

During this study you will be asked three specific questions: 1. Please, can you tell me about a time when you had a negative racial encounter with anyone on campus (peer, staff, administrator etc.)? 2. Can you tell me about your feelings and thoughts about what happened? 3. How have these experiences impacted how you approach your education? Follow up questions may be asked however; they will only be for the sake of clarifying participants responses to the one of the two designated questions.

The interview will be audio recorded. After the interview, the tape will be transcribed, which means they will be typed exactly as they were recorded, word-for-word, by the researcher. The tape will be destroyed after transcription. The transcription will not be used for any future research purposes not described here. The transcriptions will not contain your name. Instead you will be given an ID number, which will be located at the top of this form. This ID number will be used in place of your name on all subsequent forms and recordings to ensure your confidentiality.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

Although you will not receive any monetary benefit for participating in this study, this process will provide you with an opportunity to explore and express your personal experiences void of judgment or negative social ramifications. In addition, examining negative racially informed collegiate experiences of African American men at this university may help this university in its efforts to provide an educational environment that is more equal and equitable.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher, you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence.

COMPENSATION

This study will not provide participants with any form of monetary compensation.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

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

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence. Should you choose not to complete all study procedures, there will be no consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected [including transcriptions] from this study will be stored in a secured file cabinet in the office of Dante' D. Bryant for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be 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 requirements. 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 about this research study may be directed to the primary researcher Dante' D. Bryant at Dante.Bryant@mavs.uta.edu or at 817-888-5802. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the 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

CONSENT

By signing below, you 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 this 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 voluntarily 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.

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER