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African American Males' Perception of Factors that Contribute to Success in Higher Education

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African American Males' Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to Success in Higher Education

by

Gary D. Oliver

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Department of Language, Literacy., Ed.D., Exceptional Education., and Physical Education
College of Education
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Dedication

To my family, parents (George and Minnie Oliver), sisters (Julia Golden and Vanessa Williams), brother and sister-in-law (George, Jr., and Stephanie Oliver), nieces (Alexandria and Madison Williams, Lauryn and Laylah Oliver) and nephew (Kedron Golden), I cherish your understanding and patience as I traveled this journey. There may have been moments when I was absent from family gatherings or activities. However, you remained steadfast in your encouragement and continued to push me to completion. I hope I fulfilled the dream of all those who came before me but could not go this far in education and be an inspiration for those after me to continue their education. I love you all!

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Abstract

Over the past decades, many studies have concluded that African American students' college completion rate and success lag far behind other students attending college in the United States (The JBHE Foundation, Inc., 2006). More specifically, these studies have confirmed that African American male students' success rates remain disproportionately low compared to other ethnic male groups. Unfortunately, few notable studies identifying African American males achieving higher education or completing their academic pursuits have been presented as part of the Black male student narrative.

This study aimed to understand better the resources and experiences that positively affect African American males who completed their degrees from a Predominate White Institution (PWI) and to identify resources needed to support African American men at a public research-based institution of higher education.

Chapter One: Introduction

We have all heard that "*there are more Black men in prison than in college*," which often creates a false narrative for African American men within the United States. This statement was once paraphrased in 2015 by then-presidential hopeful Ben Carson as he campaigned for office (Tom Kertscher, 2015). According to the 2012 American Council on Education report, this statement is inaccurate and may have never been (Bryan J. Cook, 2012). Statistics show that in 2015 there were 745,660 black men in prison compared to 1,437,363 black men in college (Strauss, 2019). Nonetheless, the media and other outlets continue to repeat the cliché that Black men do not enroll and complete college. While this statement has proven to be inaccurate, the fact is that the success of African American men in higher education is an issue that needs to be addressed and presented differently to society (Cuyjet, M. J., 2006).

Over the past decades, many studies have concluded that African American students' college completion rate and success lag far behind other students attending college in the United States (The JBHE Foundation, Inc., 2006). More specifically, these studies have confirmed that African American male students' success rates remain disproportionately low compared to other ethnic male groups. Unfortunately, few notable studies identifying African American males achieving higher education or completing their academic pursuits have been present as part of the Black male student narrative.

Nationally, the number of men entering college and completing their degrees has decreased over the years, complicated by the declining numbers of men entering college. There are vast disparities between African American males and other male demographics who

complete their high school education and enroll in higher education institutions. For instance, recent data from Florida indicates that the number of African American men completing high school has decreased by 63% since 2009 (Why Black Male Achievement Matters, n.d.).

According to reports by Black Demographics (<https://blackdemographics.com/education-2/education/>), about “23% of Black men 25 and older had attended some college although 12% of them completed a degree compared to 60% of “all men” who attended college, two-thirds of which (66%) have completed a degree”. Additionally, an enormous disparity between Black men and “all men” in America is that only 19% of Black men have a bachelor's degree compared to 35% of “all men,” and only about 7% have associate degrees (Black Male Statistics, 2017).

Another factor contributing to the low number is the lack of exposure to African American male role models who have completed their college degrees. As the numbers continue to decrease nationally, exposing African American male students to other African American men who completed their degrees has become even more significant, particularly for students from specific social or economic backgrounds.

Identifying and defining student success is one of the hottest topics in higher education today (Grites, 2016). National attention was brought to African American male college achievement or lack thereof in 2014 when then-President Obama announced the My Brother's Keeper program. His announcement also came with pledges from philanthropists for \$200 million to support Black student achievement (the White House, 2014).

The concept of student success looks different for each institution, with the ultimate goal of recruiting, retaining, and graduating students. Interest in student success is often categorized into three key stakeholder groups – student, institution, and government (Borden & Holthaus, 2018), each with their perspective and agendas for promoting student success at an institution.

Success in higher education will provide students with a wide range of benefits and opportunities. Most notable is the prospect of achieving a goal and obtaining employment after completing their degrees. More specifically, this may mean a chance to move from one social-economic status to another for African American males.

Institutions have many vested reasons for ultimate student success. It is more than the students obtaining their degrees; it is also about proving to others outside of higher education that the institution can provide qualified individuals for whatever field they may enter. For instance, Amelia Parnell (2018) suggests that most postsecondary institutions identify student success as the successful completion of their collegiate experience with the knowledge and tools to thrive in today's society. Furthermore, student success demonstrates the institution's commitment to helping facilitate students' enrollment to obtain their degrees while identifying that each student or demographic of students has unique circumstances they have worked through.

Finally, the governmental interest in student success focuses on policies within the state and nation. The more successful institutions are, the more apparent it is that the government (state or national) is implementing procedures for the institutions to be effective and efficient, especially regarding specific ethnic groups and demographics (Middaugh, 2011).

Purpose Statement

As an employee of a public research institution, I often see the number of Black male students enrolling and pursuing undergraduate degrees decreasing over time. Most institutions try to implement programs and services to increase their retention and graduation rates for African Americans, and some have experienced slight improvement for minority students in general. However, the graduation rate for African American males remained unequally low

compared to other male students, as highlighted in the information provided by the Black Male Statistics in paragraphs three and four.

While the numbers may be lower than expected, African American males are graduating from predominantly white institutions (PWI). This study identifies African American men who completed their college education at a PWI and identifies the factors, strategies, and support resources that contributed to their success.

Exploring the factors contributing to African American male students' success in higher education is instrumental in telling a narrative that is sometimes narrowly or subjectively viewed. There have been numerous studies on why African American males are unsuccessful in higher education. Most are written from a deficit model and mainly focused on the rationale of why they are not successful in identifying ways to alleviate these circumstances instead of focusing on those who are successful (Harper S. R., 2012)

McWhorter (2000) explains that some researchers describe the achievement gap for African American males in higher education as due to a culture of anti-intellectualism within the African American community. This phenomenon in the culture sends negative stereotypes about Black men during an era of oppressive behavior by a dominant culture in power (Fuller, 2017). Besides the generations of negative racial perceptions of African Americans, Black male students must also overcome the negative stereotypes associated with their race and gender (Jackson & Hui, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2016). It is important to note that McWhorter's theory is met with criticism among researchers who study African American academic achievement. They emphasize that anti-intellectualism does not exist in society and argue that McWhorter utilizes too much generalization in this theory and lacks accurate data to support the idea (Tsao, 2015).

Fryer (2006) suggests that this theory is more of a judgment than an explanation to lower academic achievement by African Americans.

If administrators within higher educational institutions knew from the start those factors African American male students found beneficial in their academic pursuits, they would implement or support those services and programs on campus to alleviate failure before it becomes an issue in their institutions. The outcome of this research can become, to some extent, a blueprint or plan to help African American males matriculate through higher education institutions. Ultimately, this will help increase the retention and persistence rates for African American male students, which, in turn, will benefit the institution with retention and graduation outcomes. Furthermore, this research can also assist in remedying the disparities of African American males regarding educational and social-economic status (Jackson, et al., 2013) and, in the end, benefit the African American community overall.

Research Question

This research is designed to understand better resources and experiences that positively affect African American males who completed their degrees from the university and identify resources needed to support African American men at a public research-based institution of higher education. It constructs a different narrative often perpetuated by literature, media, and other outlets, displaying African American males as either not obtaining or completing their college education. The overarching research question guiding this study is: What factors do African American males perceive contributed to their academic success in higher education while matriculating at a public Predominant White Institution (PWI)?

Theoretical Framework

This research focuses on Vincent Tinto's theory of student integration, which concentrate on students' persistence, retention, dropout, and graduation rates in higher education. Tinto's theory suggests that "integration" is one of the most critical aspects of persistence and dropout rates. More precisely stated, this theory proposes that the more students connect to or become ingrained within their institutional setting, the more likely they will persist to graduation.

His theory has two unique aspects: academic integration and social integration. Academic integration identifies the factors associated with the student's academic pursuit (i.e., major, professors, performance, grades, and others). Social integration is how the student adapts socially to friends, organizations, belonging, and others (Tinto, 2015).

Tinto suggests that administrators should examine the factors of students' persistence, retention, dropout, and graduation through the students' eyes. His previous work details how institutional actions can affect retaining students. It focuses on what students identified as to why they remain at an institution to complete their degrees. More specifically, he recognized that students would persist towards graduation at a particular institution based on their **1)** goals, **2)** motivation, and **3)** drive to persistence. These overarching factors are influenced by how the students feel at the institution based on their **1)** self-efficacy, **2)** sense of belonging, and **3)** perception of the curriculum (Tinto, 2017). It is essential to note that factors reside within the student and are not necessarily institutional, although institutions can enact policies and programs to foster the internal factors.

It is important to highlight that when discussing integration within higher education, particularly for African American men, the focus is on the students' ability to connect to the university and not lose their sense of identity or concept of who they are as individuals. Instead,

the students should be encouraged to remain their authentic selves while contributing to the diversity of a university setting. If we look at integration from a business or mathematical perspective, it is the process of combining two or more things to create a whole. This is also true for African American males in higher education institutions. Their integration into the institutional setting should include combining who they are as individuals with exposure to an institution's academic and social aspects to allow for positive outcomes. A positive transition into the educational setting provides students with a psychological investment in their learning environment (Kinsella et al, 2022).

This is why utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a crucial part of this research. It will provide opportunities for African American males to articulate their narratives while gaining the knowledge and experience of higher education settings for academic success. Originating in the legal context, CRT focus on the idea that race is a social construct and has no specific underlying biological implication for people. Instead, people utilize ethnicity to classify humans into hierarchical social groups and employ it as a method of power and control (Grosfoguel, 2004). CRT scholars in education use the theory to provide a voice or "name your reality" and ensure that a different narrative is provided based on the individual(s) involved (Ladson-Billings G., 2016).

Ordinary, one would not necessarily consider combining the concept of integration with CRT. However, it is my position that CRT can be utilized to allow African American males to frame their experiences and provide a better understanding of the factors that contributed to their success in completing their college degrees. In other words, CRT is used as a mechanism where African American males can wholly and openly share their lived experiences and provide validation of their experiences.

Rationale for Study

Each semester, commencement ceremonies are held to celebrate students' success in reaching the milestone of degree completion. This long-standing tradition of "Pomp and Circumstance" is a symbolic ceremony to publicly acknowledge the individual student's success walking across the stage. It announces that the student has met all the academic requirements to obtain their degrees, somewhat of a "rite of passage" for academia. Furthermore, to the administration, commencement means that they have provided all the necessary support for student success outside the classroom by recruiting, retaining, and finally graduating students. Yet, the national numbers of college completion and graduation for African American males remain low compared to other male races and ethnicities.

For instance, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<https://nces.ed.gov/FastFacts/display.asp?id=72>) indicates that from 2018 to 2019, there were 803,184 male students awarded bachelor's degrees. These numbers include data from 50 states and the District of Columbia from higher educational institutions. The information is also gathered from postsecondary institutions that receive Title IV funding. The demographic breakdown of degrees conferred by race/ethnicity according to NCES is – White 64.3%, African Americans 10.3%, and Hispanics 13.9%. It is important to note that other racial and ethnic demographics are not included in this case but are highlighted in the information provided by NCES.

Table 1 below is a reproduction of White, Hispanic, and African American male graduates with a bachelor's degree between 2018-2019 so that the actual numbers can be seen in comparison. Again, this table does not display other races or ethnic groups included in the total 803,184 graduates.

Table 1:*2018-2019 Male Bachelor's Degree Conferred by Race/Ethnicity*

Race/Ethnicity	Total Number	Percentage
African American	710,817	10.3 %
Hispanic	111,642	13.9%
White	516,447	64.3%

This research location is at a large urban university within the southeastern portion of the United States. The institution is a multi-campus, predominately white, research-based university with a Carnegie R1 standing. Additionally, this institution comprises two smaller campuses in neighboring cities approximately 30 to 60 miles from the main campus. This research-intensive institution continues to be ranked as one of the nation's top institutions for community-engaged research by the Carnegie Foundation. It has been deemed as one of America's fastest-rising universities by the *U.S. News and World Report* in 2021. It most recently underwent reaccreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and received raving reviews for its programs and educational efforts. Moreover, the institution offers opportunities for a growing global partnership with regional businesses and other industries within the area.

Significance of Study

One of the primary missions of higher education institutions is to provide opportunities for a diverse and inclusive environment where there is an exchange of knowledge and ideas to prepare students for active perpetration in a democratic society. Institutions must examine if their

specific institutional mission truly lives up to the dedication to success for all students, specifically the African American male population (Dulabaum, Innovation in the Community College, 2016).

Extant literature suggests that African American men usually face significant challenges in higher education and are usually less successful than men from other ethnic or racial groups. One research method examined less frequently is to review those individuals who have had success in higher education and provide sources of best practices that could be advantageous to the institution and African American male students specifically.

Overview of Study Design

This study identifies the resources and services that African American male graduates of one institution utilized to complete their degrees using narrative inquiry methods. A narrative research design allowed data to be gathered by collecting stories from participants' lived experiences (Cresswell, 2009). Individual interviews were conducted to help provide detailed information on the type of services the participants utilized while enrolled at the institution.

The interview process was conducted by individual recorded interviews with seven African American male alumni volunteers identified with the assistance of the institution's Alumni Association and personal recommendation of participants. Data collection was analyzed with first and second-cycle coding to help interpret themes that emerge within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Results from this study are used to address the overarching research question of identifying those factors that contribute to success in higher education for African American males - resulting in recommendations to be utilized by the university to implement for future academic success for African American male students.

Definition of Terms

For this research, the terms below provide a brief description of the language utilized within the research. These descriptions give a more comprehensive understanding of the information discussed moving forward. It is also important to emphasize that African Americans and Black will be utilized interchangeably throughout the research. However, they both will represent the same demographic.

African American: Refers to African descendants whose ancestors were born, raised, or reside within the United States.

First-generation: Students identified as the first individual in their immediate family who attended college.

Integration: The method by which a student becomes inclusive in the campus community on a social or academic level.

First-year students: Students enrolled within their first year of college.

Community: Sense of belonging with individuals of similar characteristics. Opportunity to fellowship with others who have the exact attributes.

Support: Areas (physical, emotional, or financial) where students can gain additional assistance during difficult times.

Motivation: Stimuli, influences, or personal initiatives encourage individuals to engage in or complete a task.

Mentors/Mentorship: Person(s) or situations in which individuals agree where one individual provides support, guidance, or advice during enrollment.

Success: Process of completing an undergraduate degree and advancing towards professional or personal goals.

Challenges: Adversity, obstacles, or personal tribulations cause students not to continue pursuing their academic pursuits.

Retention: The process of retaining a student at an institution based on programs and services to assist the student in completing their degree.

Persistent: Continually efforts to obtain a degree. Enduring and preserving efforts despite obstacles or challenges.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI): An institution of higher learning where 50% or more of the student population is White students.

Summary

As mentioned earlier, this research examines the campus experiences of African American males who completed their bachelor's degrees at a public, research-intensive, predominantly White institution (PWI) of higher education. The design of the research questions allows the participants to share their experiences while enrolling at the institution. After understanding how the participants completed their education at this public PWI, administrators will have a blueprint or plan to assist African American men enrolling in their institutions. This information also provides a different narrative about Black men in higher education.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Over the past decades, many studies have demonstrated that the rate of college completion and success for Black/African American students lag far behind the percentage of other students attending college within the United States. More specifically, these studies confirm that Black/African American male students' success rates continue to remain disproportionally low compared to other ethnic male groups overall (Why Black male achievement matters, n.d.). Unfortunately, few notable studies identify African American males achieving higher education or completing their academic pursuits. Most studies concentrate on why they are not completing college instead of those who have obtained a college degree and what they did to finish college.

Exploring the factors contributing to African American male students' success in higher education is instrumental in telling a narrative that is sometimes narrowly or subjectively viewed. Most research on the topic is written from a deficit model and highlighted in the media, journals, policy reports, and other outlets (Wood & Palmer, 2015). They mainly focus on why African American males are unsuccessful in higher education and then identify ways to alleviate these extraordinary circumstances. Usually, this research depicts the Black male as lazy, at-risk, unintelligent, or other negative stereotypes (Brooms, 2017). If administrators within higher education institutions identify factors contributing to success for African American males in higher education, they could implement specific services and programs to alleviate failure before it becomes an issue on their campuses.

This survey of the literature/literature review challenges the narrative currently presented about African American males' success in higher education. While the distinct emphasis concentrates on understanding factors that create difficulties for college completion for African American/Black males, it also provides additional background and information on college success for this student demographic. As a result, the guiding question for this review is "*What are the contributing factors of success for African American males in higher education institutions,*" while focusing on the variables of a) enrollment, b) retention, c) and achievement from a critical race theoretical (CRT) framework. It is important to note that the term "African American" is used interchangeably with "Black" when referencing the demographic of male students throughout this review.

This review examines the barriers to college enrollment for African American males and provides a historical perspective of enrollment trends for this population within the United States. The design of this literature review is to provide insightful information on the status of African American males and provide potential areas for improvement to increase enrollment in postsecondary educational institutions.

Equally crucial to enrolling African American males in college is the concept of retaining and keeping them enrolled. Higher educational institutions appear to be somewhat negligent in this aspect. This literature review is instrumental in identifying those factors that have not been successful while investigating possible conditions to enhance retention. Best practices on how these theories help implement concepts for the African American male student population are also reviewed.

Understanding the Black and African American male achievement spectrum in higher education is paramount to providing insight for success. Bonner (2010) explains that our colleges

and universities must vigorously discuss self-perception, self-esteem, and racial identity regarding the African American male on our campuses and in our classrooms. Furthermore, these aspects of African American males are paramount for their success in higher education. Providing concentrated efforts to examine issues facing African - American males' success in higher education collectively and separately ultimately contributes to the student's success.

A selection of qualitative peer-reviewed journals, book sections, statistical reports, and other Black male achievement sources provide data for this review. Overall, most of the information within this literature review stems from researchers expanding on or utilizing the concepts of student development and success by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) as a foundation for their research. However, most current information and analysis on this topic comes from journals focusing specifically on African American education as a targeted population, which allows limited opportunities for cross-referencing student success to utilize broader resource options.

Enrollment Trends of African American Males

Higher education administrators identify Black male students' recruitment and retention as one of higher education's most significant diversity challenges today (Jaschik S., 2006). Regrettably, the enrollment of African American males in higher educational institutions has been declining since the late 1990s. According to Washington and Newman (1991), Black females continue to outnumber the completion rate of high school and enrollment in college compared to Black males. The Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014) reports that in 2002, Black men comprised only 4.3 percent of all students enrolled in higher education (p. 5). Washington and Newman (1991) argue that "Black males sustained greater losses in higher education participation rates than any other racial or gender group in critical

areas such as enrollments, the number of degrees earned, and the number of faculty positions held" (p. 23).

Despite numerous educational organizations and agencies' efforts to explain the decline of African American males' enrollment in higher education, the numbers remain substantially low. McClure (2007) reports that in 2000, Black males comprised approximately 7.9 percent of the population between 18 and 24. Nevertheless, they contain no more than 5.2 percent of the undergraduate student population. Unfortunately, by 2004 the numbers dropped to roughly around 2.8 percent. In contrast, Black female enrollment increased by 126 percent between 1976 to 2002.

According to Palmer et al. (2010), African American men only compose about 4.3% of the total enrollment in higher educational institutions. Ironically, this is similar to the percentage reported during the late 1970s. Moreover, they indicate that more than two-thirds of African American men enrolled in higher educational institutions do not complete their degrees within six years. This trend has seemed steady over the past two decades and has generated considerable concern and alarm in higher education. According to Brooms (2018), the US Department of Education in 2011 reported that only 34% of Black males completed four-year degrees over six years. Their data is drawn from public, private, and for-profit institutions, with the lowest attainment rate for all races and genders. Jon Marcus (2017), an author with the Atlantic, reports in his educational column that men are becoming the new minority on college campuses, with women comprising more than 58 percent of the college population nationally. Regrettably, these statistics are even more alarming regarding Black men's enrollment in colleges nationwide.

Roosevelt Littleton (1995), a former dean of students at Mary Holmes College and current Research Development Officer at Jackson State University, argues that African American

males are beginning to disappear from higher educational institutions in America. His research demonstrates a rapid decline of Black men entering college starting around 1989 and subsequently being on the decline. This matter affects Black male students at the undergraduate level, and consequently, their enrollment in master's and doctoral programs continues to move negatively.

Scholars in Black male enrollment conclude that several factors contribute to the lack of admission of Black men in higher education institutions and identify several social, economic, and cultural factors as the main reasons for the decrease in enrollment. African American males faced many issues, such as the lack of preparation for college and exposure to other Black men who completed their college education, as factors that contributed to the declining numbers (Littleton, Jr., 1995). Additional research by Palmer et al. (2010) demonstrates that the outcome in preparation for college by African American males tends to be the lowest compared to any other demographic within the United States. These statistics affect African American males from participating in higher education. Further research exposes that over half the Black men enrolled in high school still do not obtain a diploma (Eckholm, 2006), putting the African American male even more in a dire situation within educational statistics.

While the historical and current trend of Black male enrollment in higher education seems somewhat discouraging, recent scholars conclude that there are opportunities for enhancement. For instance, Lamb et al. (2013) indicate that most of the studies formulated from data collected in the mid to late 1990s and that new research on African American male enrollment provide current and updated information. It's necessary to examine a broader range of factors that influence college preparation and enrollment for African American males to include elements that are both intrinsic and extrinsic motives.

For example, Texas State University collaborates with nine other colleges and universities to form a consortium focusing on minority male student success. As a result of their efforts, they are able to partner with local high schools and other community agencies to support minority males preparing for college. Additionally, data from their research is shared openly to help male students throughout the state by providing the necessary information on overcoming the barriers to college enrollment for minority male students (Blaschke, 2012).

Individual K-12 school systems or districts examine and implement college readiness and preparation programs to alleviate the enrollment gap of Black men in college. Many focus on policies and individualized programs within their districts' schools system to support Black male students, particularly in academic focus and overall college and career preparedness. The Council of Great City Schools (2012) highlights several significant national K-12 systems and school initiatives. Several are with local higher educational institutions or community agencies to help improve academic performance in school and promote college enrollment of Black males.

National organizations such as the 100 Black Men of America and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. promote education within the K-12 school to support college enrollment and completion as part of their organizations' missions and objectives, specifically targeting African American males but open to all students. The 100 Black Men of America promotes education as one of its four pillars for organizational effectiveness. They provide mentoring in local high schools promoting student success (100 Black Men of America, 2020). Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. encourages "Go-to-High School, Go-to-College" as one of their national programs. This project concentrates on the importance of students completing secondary and collegiate education as part of their agenda for advancement for African American male students (Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., 2020). These national organizations consist of professional

African American men who spend countless volunteer hours working with youth in various communities as part of their organizations' obligations to the community. More importantly, they provide opportunities for African American male youths' exposure to Black men who have completed their college education and are now working in their fields.

Scholars such as Geiser and Santelices (2006); Harris (2012) support extrinsic motives such as participation in high school athletics, advanced placement, or pre-college preparation programs for African American males contribute to the possible increase of enrollment for Black males in higher education institutions. However, we should remain mindful of collegiate programs that recruit underprepared students only to participate in sports and do not have the student's best interest in completing their college education. New research indicates that high school students' college and career readiness programs significantly focus on educational reform. These programs' main objectives are to narrow the disparity gap between African American males and other racial or ethnic sub-groups (Bryant, 2015).

One avenue currently being explored as an extrinsic motive to promote college enrollment for African Americans is the prospect of family resilience to encourage and support the student's efforts to enter college. Danforth and Miller (2018) indicate that although many African American male students may not come from backgrounds where attending college was the norm, the family still has a non-traditional effort to encourage their students to explore and eventually enroll in postsecondary institutions.

Educational opportunities are a valued tradition of Black families. Especially when opportunities for certain family members to advance in education past their parents or grandparents. Black males' enrollment in college provides opportunities to enhance their upward social and economic mobility (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2014). Thus, providing a sense

of pride and success for the entire family. Therefore, the extrinsic motive of family support of assisting and encouraging Black male students to enroll and complete their college education is vital for enrollment efforts.

In summary, college enrollment for African American males may seem bleak. The historical data on the matter demonstrates much more work to encourage and support Black males enrolling in college. However, new movements are established to promote high school completion and college enrollment for African American male students.

Retention

Vincent Tinto (2006), who is considered the "guru" of student retention, indicates that "student retention is one of the most widely studied areas of higher education" (p. 1). Work completed in the area provides researchers with substantial information in the complex field of student persistence and institutional retention. His theory of student retention proposes that a student's willingness to integrate into an institution is based on the perceived care provided and is paramount to increasing the likelihood of remaining enrolled until completion (Hepworth et al., 2018). Information such as this encourages administrators to think of different ways to handle retention at their institutions. The most challenging part for administrators is reshaping institutional practices or policies that deal with students from diverse demographic backgrounds.

Extant research defines retention as students remaining at an institution until they complete their education or degree. However, it is essential to know that retention can often be interchangeable with persistence. The difference is that retention is institutionally measured and used with graduation data. This data is usually required to be reported by the institution to state

and federal governmental agencies. Persistence is student-driven and identifies the student's desire and determination to remain in school or at a particular institution.

Additional factors defining retention at the institutional level include the makeup or characteristics of the institutions, whether the student remains within a particular major or if the student stays within a specific educational system. These characteristics significantly affect retention rates for an institution or educational system (Hagedorn L. S., 2006).

An alarming awareness is prompted by the research on the complexity of retaining African American males within colleges and universities. Several studies demonstrate that African American males do not graduate within six years or fail to graduate overall once they enroll in college (Brooks et al., 2013). Current data indicates that the retention rate for African American males remains the lowest compared to their other racial and ethnic counterparts (Strayhorn T. L., 2010). James Mbuva's (2011) methodological review of data collected by scholars concludes that there are four overarching themes that colleges and universities face regarding the retention of African American male students – "a) pre-entry attributes, b) goals and commitments, c) institutional experiences, and d) personal and normative integration" (p.94).

African American male students' pre-entry attributes to college play a significant factor in their retention efforts. Pre-college preparation and experiences usually impact students' academic performance at the collegiate level. This, in turn, typically generates the level of retention that a student may have at an institution based on their level of performance. Hagedorn et al. (2001) describe some of the challenges in pre-entry: receiving lower scores on standardized tests or subject areas, placement in learning challenge programs, or out-of-school suspension instead of programs to help deal with or alleviate behavioral issues.

Holloman and Terrell (2010) suggest that K-12 and higher education institutions fail to understand the importance of pre-entry attributes' influence on African American males. Notably, African American males face considerable challenges in seeking support for enrolling in and attending college. They argue that these institutions do not differentiate pre-entry programs for African Americans as opposed to other demographics. In retrospect, they are fashioned in a homogenous manner to suggest that all students' processes and college decision-making are similar and influenced by the same behaviors. Instead, the focus should be on the demographics of African American males as a group and individually as they process the prospect of enrolling in and attending college.

Likewise, Flowers (2004) suggests that students' pre-entry or pre-college experience and characteristics play a significant role in their educational outcome, focusing on retention. On average, students who participate in pre-college programs typically will have higher retention rates than those who do not. He explains that "pre-college programs designed to increase African-American students' academic awareness and provide African-American students with college success skills may have the potential to enhance African-American student retention in significant ways" (p. 28). These programs help provide the essential skills for academic success by introducing the students to what is expected at the college level before enrolling.

Earlier research by Astin (1975), Bean (1982), and Pascarella et al.(1987) finds that when students have set goals and aspirations before enrolling in college, it provides an early indication of their possibility of attaining a degree. African American men need options and a desire to pursue their education beyond high school. Terrell Strayhorn (2008) accentuates early education aspiration by stating that "Black men who hold aspiration are five to thirteen times more likely to be retained than those who hold lower aspiration" (p. 79). Thus, provide additional support for

programs and services promoting African American students' aspirations and goals before college.

Once students enroll in their institutions, there need to be measures that keep them connected. Students committed to certain higher educational institutions are usually satisfied and remain to complete their degree goals, which intersects directly with early degree aspirations before college and provides another parameter for retention for African American males. Hrabowski III and Pearson, Jr. (1993) share that historically, successful social integration and relationship with an institution are essential for the overall retention of African American males. The connection and commitment to an institution help set the foundation for degree attainment. Robust relationships and commitment opportunities provide the environments for African American males to see themselves as belonging to and integrated into the institution. Mondisa and McComb (2015) expand on the research of Hrabowski III and Person, Jr. (1993) and recognize that committing to an institution involves providing support programs and activities that will enhance the overall student experience at a particular institution. They also support the need for further research to explain better the roles of formal and informal opportunities to connect.

For African American males, the institutional experience can often be multifaceted because they often face several challenges as they enroll within an institution. Cuyjet (2006) suggests that administrators must address several factors contributing to positive experiences for African American males at the collegiate level. Several factors include creating a positive classroom experience, providing personal relationships with a mentor, and providing an opportunity to serve in leadership positions.

Brooms (2017) reinforces Cuyjet's (2006) ideas by iterating that Black males' success in college is heavily influenced by how they perceive and experience the campus environment. He suggests that "perceptions and experiences profoundly impact their collegiate career across their personal, social, and academic lives" (p. 89). How the African American male student feels about the campus, how they see themselves within the makeup or fabric of the college, and how the school accepts their presence (or does not accept it) is instrumental to retention.

Jelisa and Brooms (2018) follow up on earlier work and advocate the importance of African American males having a personal and normative integration within their college environment. They also suggest that students connect and belong to groups or organizations that reflect their demographics and values. More explicitly, these groups allow the students to personally identify with their institutions and see themselves as part of the broader institutional environment. They ultimately encourage and enable the students to engage on campus and persist until graduation.

Black males usually thrive when they establish personal and social relationships that help develop their identity (Brooms & Goodman, 2019). These relationships allow students to navigate their college experiences with the assistance of others they identify with. Traditionally, these are individuals whom students consider emissaries, such as peers, mentors, family, and spiritual representatives they can turn to for assistance and guidance (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Support from individuals or collective groups often provides Black males opportunities to tell their narratives as they matriculate through academia.

Kim and Hargrove's (2013) research also expresses that Black male college students do not fit within one homogenous group of individuals. These individuals are emissaries or unique to each individual, and their path to college completion is also unique to each person. Therefore,

universities should develop specific and extraordinary opportunities and programs to improve the institution's African American male retention rate. Programs demonstrate African American male achievements, diversity and similarities amongst African American male students, and opportunities to connect within the broader university community.

Because retention is a complex and challenging area to comprehend, particularly for African American males, administrators need to rethink and examine this issue much more closely. It should not be an isolated campus area where only a specific component is responsible. The involvement and implementation of retention efforts should be a campus-wide approach, including support usually not considered academic. Systemic initiatives that provide aid in retention must be a comprehensive campus effort. Every department, program, or service should improve retention for African American men.

Stereotype Threats

One of the biggest obstacles for African American men in higher education is overcoming stereotypes often placed on the entire population based on the negative association that others may have about a particular group of people. Stereotypes can cause Black male students to experience physiological trauma when faced with undesirable stereotypes on college campuses. Thus, it negatively affects their academic performance and success (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). Aronson et al. (2013) define stereotype threats as an “unpleasant psychological experience of confronting negative stereotypes about race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or social status” (p. 50). Depending on their intersection of identities, Black male students can experience stereotypes in one or more of these areas.

Furthermore, Claude Steele, a social psychologist and higher education academician, provides the theory that a stereotype threat usually occurs when people are faced with situations

where they are judged by other groups based on a negative stereotype about one or more of their identities (Cultures, n.d.). Steel (2018) also argues that African American students are constantly aware that any missed steps during their educational process could cause them to be viewed negatively based on stereotypes about their race. Additionally, he offers the example that stereotype threats do not necessarily affect the weakest student. His research demonstrates that even the most motivated and achievement-orientated students are affected by stereotype threats (Steel, 2013).

According to Harper (2015), Black males' emotions are challenged by ongoing stereotype threats that often leave them dealing with feelings of shock, anxiety, anger, vulnerability, and others because of certain situations connected to stereotypes about their population. Spencer et al. (2015) imply that Black men have become accustomed to being aware of the various stereotypes they may be judged on and have become skilled in recognizing when they are being stereotyped in certain situations.

African American Male Achievement

National attention for African American male college achievement, or lack thereof, was highlighted after President Obama announced the My Brother's Keeper program in February of 2014. His announcement also came with pledges from philanthropists for \$200 million to support Black student achievement (White House, 2014). Furthermore, according to Naylor et al. (n.d.), if the United States will mirror the country's representative makeup, Black males need to be employed as public administrators, business professionals, teachers, or college faculty. Concentrated efforts must advocate for and support Black men having access to affordable, quality college education resulting in degree completion to obtain positions in such areas.

Studies on Black male success in college are on the increase. However, most research is conducted from a deficit model and only examines why African American males are not succeeding in college. Shaun Harper (2012) believes that those interested in Black male student success have much to learn from successful Black men. Researchers should challenge the traditional one-sided theory on failure or low performance of the Black male academic success with meaningful, insightful narratives from those who have managed to navigate their way through higher education.

Cooper and Cooper (2015) continue with Harper's research by researching Black male athletes at Historical Black College and Universities (HBCUs); they propose that researchers should implement an *Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework* when providing data on African American male academic achievement—affirming that this framework offers an alternative perspective related to understanding the Black male academic achievement. They explicitly suggest that this framework shifts the research focus "from deficits, shortcomings, limitations, and negative outcomes to successes, facilitators, strengths, and positive outcomes" (p. 149). By reviewing the research of Kinzie and Kuh (2017), they infer that "student success" is the process of reaping the benefits of their postsecondary experience in combination with desired institutional outcomes.

It is essential for researchers and scholars not to lose sight of the vital issues with Black male achievement in higher education. A one-sided effort of knowledge in the area does not truly articulate the actions of Black collegians overall (ASHE Eric Higher Education Report, 2014). Goings and Bonner (2017) provide insights that Black male academic achievement is widespread across the Black male diaspora. Therefore, research and other scholarly work should provide an array of innovative initiatives for promoting high-achieving Black males in higher education.

Goings (2016) continues by explaining that research focusing on Black males' academic achievement challenges that narrative and often disrupts the cynical perspective placed on Black males in society.

One area of increase for promoting African American male achievement is utilizing Black Male Initiative (or Enrichment) programs. These programs connect African American males to the broader university community through purposeful and intentional engagement opportunities. Druery and Brooms (2019) are two scholars known for their research in exploring the experiences of Black male students participating in enrichment programs and how these initiatives impacted the students' achievement. Brooms (2019) most recent work explicitly highlights how Black Male Initiative programs allow comprehensive opportunities to focus on race and gender identity for African American male students.

Moreover, researchers note that an increase in the perception of Black males who participate in enrichment programs have high expectations of their achievement. For instance, Griffin, et al. (2010) cites that Black men are more likely to rate themselves favorably than other students' academic abilities. They show a promising result in their self-confidence by participating in targeted enrichment programs that support their intellectual skills. Scott and Sharp (2019) even propose that participation in similar programs and other university opportunities promotes Black males to pursue advanced graduate degrees.

Three emerging themes that support academic achievement for African American males are having "(a) supportive social networks, (b) aspects of cultural identity, and (c) self-beliefs" (p. 50) emerged from their data in connection. One of the oldest programs of this type is located at Ohio State University in the Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male. Opened in September of 2005, the program focuses on addressing issues that

impact African American males' quality of life over their lifespan (About the Bell National Resource Center, n.d.). The center works with cohorts of young male students to focus on skills necessary to succeed in college. Concentrating on soft skills such as networking, communication, leadership development, time management, and study habits allows the participants to practice and utilize the techniques they learn daily with other students, faculty, and staff.

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCA&A) – a public Historically Black University in Greensboro, North Carolina – is refocusing its undergraduate Student Success Policies to improve student success and achievement. The essential portion of this module allows the university to redesign and implement a more holistic advising model in terms of academic advising. The sole intent is to promote lifelong learning that enables students to make accurate decisions about their academic, professional, and personal life, emphasizing utilizing a team of advisors and other support personnel (Fernandez et al., 2017).

Another example, but more of a system-wide initiative, is being conducted by the University System of Georgia (USGA), emphasizing research and policies focused on public intervention for Black male achievement at all the state's public higher education institutions. The programs emphasize that providing additional opportunities for African American men to complete their degrees also has long-term, positive social and economic health for the state. Georgia is also providing funding and public service announcements as an incentive to advocate and boost Black male academic success within the state's public institutions (Roach, 2003).

Patterson and Dorwart (2019) also associate participating in leisure and recreational activities with improving Black male achievement. Their research demonstrates that engaging in these activities fosters individual and collective growth for African American men in college. These programs minimize stress and develop new relationships outside the classroom that are

beneficial to the student's overall well-being. Furthermore, this type of involvement also contributes to the growth of "communication skills, respect for others, sense of accomplishment, leadership, and self-confidence" (p. 95). All of these contribute to the overall achievement of African American male students on a college campus.

Patterson and Dorwart support Harper's (2012) argument that engagement is critical to the success of Black males in college. They gather data from Black male participants from various universities and colleges. More importantly, this information ties back to an original concept from Harper and supports the importance of asking the Black male precisely what contributes to their success in higher education. He suggests that numerical data or statistics cannot provide information of this nature. Instead, precise qualitative data allow the researchers and administrators to understand the Black male better.

One aspect of the enrichment programs that is principal to the African American males' academic success is their experiences and interaction with faculty on campus. Beasley (2020) emphasizes the value of educational and social engagement for Black collegians. More specifically, he defines academic engagement as the "level of students' identification with and behavioral involvement in the academic aspect of school" (p. 1), articulating that the level and quality of students' involvement in academic activities outside the classroom with faculty, staff, and other university administrators is directly related to positive outcomes on their academic success.

Beasley's research continues with some of the earlier studies by Hu and Kuh (2002), which outline the importance of college students academically engaging on campus. Most importantly, his research demonstrates that academically engaged students tend to have higher grade point averages (GPAs) when more robust relationships with faculty, administrators, and

peers are present. For African American men, establishing and maintaining solid student-faculty relationships is significant in their academic achievement.

Davis (1994) also supports maintaining a positive student-faculty relationship as significant in academic achievement. Constructive and engaging relationships with faculty provide for several valuable outcomes mentioned earlier and give the students the skill to tackle rigorous work at the college level. Additionally, Strayhorn's (2008) research proves that solid supportive relationships with faculty also provide students with the necessary skill to face challenges they may encounter. Overall, to support African American achievement in higher education, there need to be opportunities that provide a holistic array of support facilitated formally and informally as students matriculate through college.

Critical Race Theory

To help shed light on and counter the dominant narrative for African American success in higher education requires researchers to critically examine the students' experiences. Thus, allowing more research from a critical race theory (CRT) framework. CRT is an academic concept emerging from late 1960 to the mid-1970 and is a product of Derrick Bell's and Alan Freeman's criticism of the legal system within the United States (Ladson - Billings, 1998). They argue that racism is deeply embedded in American society and is normal. Therefore, resulting in slow racial reform within the legal system and other aspects of the country. Specifically, the theoretical framework of CRT comprises several overarching tenets - 1) racism is endemic in American society; 2) CRT challenges dominant ideology; 3) CRT recognizes and acknowledges the experience of people of color; 4) CRT is utilized within an interdisciplinary perspective; and 5) CRT seek to eliminate racial oppression and injustice, consequently ending all injustice (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

Additionally, CRT scholars like Crenshaw (1995), Decuir and Dixson (2004), and Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) identify disadvantages that people often face because of their identities (e.g., race, gender, orientation, and others). By receiving information through lived experiences of particularly marginalized groups will help rectify a problem. Therefore, to challenge the norm, individuals must provide a counter-narrative to what is perceived or believed by a particular group of people or individuals.

As such, CRT is one of the significant systematic approaches for scholars to advance and enhance research within fields by including, empowering, and understanding people of color's experiences. CRT comfort and engages racism, not just a simple act of discrimination. However, it analyzes the standard form of "racial microaggressions" that African American males face in higher educational institutions (Marrun et al., 2019).

Unfortunatually, CRT is currently under attack as America enters a period of social unrest due to events that have brought people, races, politicians, and others against each other. The subject is now a dominant target among some political officials implementing policies to restrict the topic from being used in public classrooms (Sawchuk, 2021).

Why Critical Race Theory

This research examines African American male experiences in higher education regarding race and gender. Utilizing CRT provides a side of the narrative that is usually not heard or addressed in education. More so, it gives a "counter-narrative" or story that is not readily available about African American males in higher education, who are often the marginalized group within our institutions.

As an African American man who successfully navigated through two higher educational institutions and enrolled in a third, I know a different story than African American men

struggling in higher education. I do not negate that much work still needs to be done to help this particular population's success. However, we must capture the experiences of those who have had success and provide a counter-narrative to the current most popular theory.

Understanding that not all African American men have identical backgrounds is essential. Utilizing CRT as a theoretical framework also allows for a more sophisticated understanding of African American men in higher education and the other variables contributing to their success. Malagon et al. (2009) remind us that CRT allows researchers to understand the intersection of race and other variables (i.e., gender, sexuality, social class, and others) that impact students' experiences.

Scott and Sharp (2019) explain that although higher education institutions are making strides to "promote equality among race and other ethnic groups, Black males experience discrimination to a greater extent" (p. 46). Moreso, the Black male seems to experience a higher micro-aggression and degradation than any other ethnic group. They often face challenging encounters with university policies that cause setbacks within their educational process.

Lichman (2013) suggests that "the researcher is the conduit through information gathered and filtered. It is imperative, then, that the researcher has experience and understanding of the problem, the issues, and the procedures" (p. 25). As the researcher for this area, I bring personal insights to this unique approach of examining African American male success through my background, culture, and professional experiences.

Denzin and Lincoln (2013) suggest that critical theorists challenge and unsettle the norm (p. 208). This research challenge society's conventional way of thinking about African American males' success in higher education institutions. Instead of concentrating on failure in higher

education, this research focus on those who have succeeded and provides knowledge to advocate for change in support of African American male students.

Misawa (2014) recommends that it is essential to reflect on the students' views critically, which will allow the educator to see how the students' beliefs, practices, and experiences affect their outcomes. An accurate understanding of the student experience will confirm or challenge the student's relationship with the institution. For instance, Perrakis (2008) explains that once an African American male students realize that he has to define his identity as opposed to the views of the campus's dominant culture, there is a more substantial possibility that that student will not remain and graduate.

Therefore, the campus climate must demonstrate its support for Black male students. Administrators must know and understand the perception of the African American male on campus, and an accurate representation of this information can come from Black male students' experiences.

Furthermore, Toldson (2019) proposes that educators and policymakers should not put all their beliefs in information obtained from negative statistics or insufficient data about African American male academic achievement. This type of information can generate implicit biases and explicit racism; instead, she suggests that African American male students are allowed to prove their intellectual abilities individually without the preconceived perception that arrives before them. Faculty and administrators should examine and utilize data effectively to understand an individual's ability to improve educational outcomes.

Summary

Present research about African American men in higher education informs readers that this population of students will have numerous challenges or fail to pursue higher education.

Most importantly, the literature perpetuates a deficit narrative that describes African American men as incapable of succeeding in higher education (Goings & Bonner, 2017). Despite the limited advancements toward African American males' success in higher education, there are still limitations regarding Black college men.

More research on Black male success in higher education needs to be conducted from a counter-narrative approach. These studies should examine the lived experiences of African American men who have completed college to deconstruct the current narrative about their success in higher education. Research of this nature can provide a constructive approach to existing literature and provide a blueprint for those who work with African American males in higher educational institutions.

Additionally, this type of research helps fill the gap in the literature regarding the success of African American males in their pursuit of degree attainment by continuing with the work of scholars such as Drs. Shaun Harper, Derrick Brooms, Terrell Strayhorn, Robert L. Palmer, and others on African American male success. The success of African American males within higher education institutions is a commitment that must be undertaken and shared by all on campus with direct programs targeting specific achievement goals and success.

Examining African American men's experiences in college will help alleviate the extent to which the perception of the Black males' experience on the college campus affects expectations and outcomes. In its place, the emphasis should be on allowing the students to demonstrate their abilities instead of relying on preconceived perceptions about a specific population. I suggest that college administrators take a close look at the climate of their campuses concerning Black male students' actual experiences. Suppose these environments are not conducive to learning and success for the African American male student. In that case, the

institution may need to discuss serious and candid ways to improve student retention and persistence rates. A re-envisioned student success framework is required grounded in evidence of success for the African American male.

Finally, and maybe the most important, additional research may need to be developed on the efforts of K-12 systems to help Black male students fight against the barriers to enrolling in college. Bold actions may need to focus on college preparedness programs at the high school level (Jaschik S., 2006).

Chapter Three: Methodology

As a public research institution employee, I often see Black male students enrolling and pursuing undergraduate degrees decreasing. I often wonder if this is true for higher education overall. As mentioned in chapter 1, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<https://nces.ed.gov/FastFacts/display.asp?id=72>) indicates that from 2018 to 2019, there were 803,184 male students awarded bachelor's degrees. These numbers include data from higher educational institutions within 50 states and the District of Columbia. The information is also gathered from postsecondary institutions that receive Title IV funding. The demographic breakdown of degrees conferred by race/ethnicity according to NCES is White 64.3%, African Americans 10.3%, and Hispanics 13.9%. See Table 1 for specific numbers and percentages. It is important to note that other racial and ethnic demographics are not included in this case but are highlighted in the information provided by NCES.

While the numbers may be low, African American males graduate from this public, research-based, predominantly white institution (PWI). This study identified African American men who completed their college education at a particular PWI and acknowledged the factors, strategies, and support areas contributing to their success.

Scholars have noted that current research on African American males' college success has typically been examined from the deficit model, often utilizing quantitative and qualitative research. Their studies often report poor cognitive skills and structural or cultural influences for their lack of success (Hargrove, 2014). This research provides a different narrative of African

American males at a higher educational institution. The goal was to develop a more complete and detailed description of recent data and approach the research from a non-deficit stance.

Building upon the suggestion by Dr. Shaun Harper (2012), if you want to know how African American men succeed in college, you have to ask those individuals who have completed their college degrees. The study design help eliminate the negative dialogue that seems to be the theme of African American males' success in higher education. Furthermore, the qualitative research method allows this study to view the participants' authentic experiences while maintaining the ability to interpret the meaning of their experiences through the individuals' lens (Creswell, 2009).

Respectively, this study views the factors that African American male graduates credit to their success in the public, research-based institution by answering the overarching questions: What factors do African American males perceive contributed to their academic success in higher education? The following chapter will discuss the processes and procedures of the research design and methods. It also provides potential research sites and approaches for participants' selections. Furthermore, this research also includes the process of protecting human subjects. Finally, it provides brief information on this study's potential limitations and trustworthiness.

Methodological Approach

This qualitative research design allowed the participants to provide narrative information on their experiences while obtaining their degrees (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2014; Creswell, 2009). The goal is that the qualitative approach would provide data on what services the participants utilized, the experiences they endured, and how they feel about their experiences not traditionally gathered through quantitative methods. This approach is vital for this study by

allowing data collection through multiple sources such as interviews, surveys, and observations that are overlooked through quantitative methods (Creswell, Qualitative Procedures, 2009).

Additionally, it is imperative to mention that as the researcher, I had a large amount of involvement with the participants due to the interpretative style of qualitative research. Therefore, my past experiences, such as background, values, identity, and others, may vary in interpreting the data during the study (Creswell, Qualitative Procedures, 2009). Understandably, I may have a theoretical view and develop relationships during the research process. However, as the researcher, I served as a critical instrument in the data collection. Therefore, I remained as *neutral* as possible when collecting data (Best & Kahn, Research in Education, 2003). I did not allow my experience, thoughts, or beliefs to affect the experiences shared by the participants. My goal was to listen and observe while interacting with the participants actively.

Epistemological Position

Creswell (2009) further explains that a researcher's "worldview is their belief that guides action about the situation studied" (p.6.). Usually, their views are shaped by the knowledge already acquired. They may be influenced by several aspects of the researcher's past, including previous examination or study of the field, interaction with other students or faculty, or cultural experiences and background. Hence, as an African American male who has had a degree of success in completing his education at a PWI institution and currently works within the institution, it is my view that the study of African American males' perceptions of what contributes to their success is better examined through a social constructionist philosophy that incorporates a critical race theory as the framework. Therefore, collecting narratives through semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to tell "*their stories*," which were later transcribed to reveal the data and information presented in this research.

Additionally, Creswell (2009) identifies that social constructivists' role is to better understand the participants' world by developing the meaning of their experiences. Therefore, this research utilized the social constructionist model as the epistemological position. The objective was to recapitulate those factors that African American men feel contribute to their success in completing their degrees at the institution. Creswell's support for social constructivism is built upon Crotty's (1998) identifications of how a researcher should undertake their research in that they 1) must find meaning by engaging the world they are researching; 2) seek to have a better understanding by personally interacting and gathering information from the participants, and 3) ensure that the data collection process allows for multiple interpretations of the narrative presented.

The approach to researching factors contributing to African American male success at this particular public PWI involved collecting the story of African American men who completed their degrees from the institution, which involved the researcher communicating with potential participants to gain information about their experiences while maintaining a particular worldview.

Theoretical Lens

Best and Kahn (2003) proposed several ways to view the theoretical perspective of qualitative research. The objective was to ensure that a “holistic, broader view of complex phenomenal facing education be examined” (p. 260). This study used CRT as the theoretical lens to provide a different narrative for African American male success at the identified institution. According to Ladson-Billings (2016), CRT began in the mid-1970s from the advanced work of an African American, Derrick Bell, and a White colleague, Alan Freeman, after being outraged at the rate of introduction for racial and social reform into America, particularly within the legal

systems of the county. In the mid-1990s, the focus moved beyond a legal aspect of racial injustices to inequalities in education, and critical race theory emerged in the educational disparities fight.

Solorzano and Yosso (2016) further emphasize that CRT as a grounded approach in educational research (a) includes race and racism as a valuable part of the research process; (b) challenges the traditional models of theories; (c) offers a different narrative to solutions in regards to race, gender, and class inferiority; and (d) bring attention to the racialized, gender and class experience of a student of color. Their description is based on the six guiding principles or tenets of the theory: 1) the presence of race and racism; 2) whiteness as property; 3) the challenge of the dominant ideology (counter-narrative); 4) the commitment to social justice; 5) the centrality of experience knowledge; and 6) the interdisciplinary perspective (Ali Meghji, 2019). This research utilized three of the six tenets - the presence of race and racism, counter-narrative, and commitment to social justice as its foundation.

Explicitly, by utilizing CRT, the attempt was to provide a counter-narrative that is usually not heard or addressed in education. More so, the design was to provide a story that is not readily available about African American males in higher education, who are often the marginalized group within our institutions. Particularly those institutions that classify as high intensive, research-based PWIs.

Most of the research available about African American men in higher education informs you about the numerous challenges or failures they face during their academic pursuits. Most importantly, the literature perpetuates a deficit narrative that describes African American men as incapable of succeeding in higher education (Goings & Bonner, II, 2017). Higher education institutions need to understand African American men's experiences while pursuing a college

education. These experiences will allow for a better understanding of their challenges and circumstances before, during, and after obtaining their college degrees. More so, the research from this marginalized group provides a broader perspective of their intersectional identities as African American male college students.

Additionally, it allowed African American men who have succeeded in completing their higher education to argue against the deficit model regarding their academic pursuits. Utilizing CRT enabled the participants to offer their counter-narratives and continue a dialogue not currently presented in the present literature. Sharing how they succeed in higher education provides examples for others to follow.

One central tenet of CRT is to promote social justice in all areas. Especially within the scope of education. When engaged in racial injustices, CRT provides roadmaps for scholars and others to follow as solutions (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017). The goal was to purposely provide avenues to assist in dismantling the theory of African American men as deficient in higher education by utilizing the participants' information while emphasizing CRT as a developing strategy (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017). In this case, the research demonstrates that African American men can succeed while attending public, high intense, research-based PWIs. However, there have been avenues established to assist African American male students.

Understanding that not all African American men have identical backgrounds is also essential. Utilizing CRT as a theoretical framework allows for a more complex understanding of African American men in higher education and the other variables contributing to their success. Malagon, Perez Huber, and Velez (2009) remind us that CRT allows researchers to understand race and other variables (i.e., gender, sexuality, social class, and others) factors that impact students' experiences.

Methodological Platform

Conventional research on African American male success in higher education is often approached from a deficit perspective. The literature cites various reasons African American males are not succeeding in higher education. It does not provide a thorough view on African American men who have successfully obtained their degrees and the process they undertook in their pursuit. Consequently, an area of the literature about African American male academic success is missing and worth highlighting. Therefore, this research looks at African American males' success in higher education from an anti-deficit approach by understanding the process they utilize. The information obtained from the participants was conducted through a narrative form of inquiry.

Narrative Inquiry

The narrative research process involves looking into the lives of the individual(s) you are studying. This process consists in exploring a research problem to understand the individuals' authentic experiences (Creswell, 2009). It is an opportunity to gather stories told by the participants within a sociocultural aspect and look at the broader meaning of situations (Grbich, 2013).

The narrative inquiry method allowed the researcher to listen to the individual's stories as they immersed themselves in the participants' lived experiences. The research was obtained by going into the field and maintaining accurate notes and records during the process (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Explicitly, utilizing critical incidents (or events) of narrative inquiry allowed the researcher to capture the participants' lived experiences and provide a holistic view during data collection (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative research methods allow for a profound effect on whoever experienced an event resulting from data collection. Webster and Mertova (2007)

also share that this approach enables the researcher to understand complex information received from participants. Additionally, Clandinin and Caine (2012) indicate that it is essential to note that “researchers also need to reflect on their own lived experiences before, during, and after each inquiry to ensure that they are maintaining ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology” (p.3).

As mentioned in chapter one, this research aimed to identify those perceptions that African American males feel contributed to their success while attending a public, research-based PWI. Sociocultural narrative analysis was the recognized method of gathering information and allowed the researcher to collect specific, concise data related to the situation (Grbich, 2013).

Research Design

Usually, there is no key prescribed method of gathering information with narrative research. However, the intent was to ensure that a summary of the data collected tells the participants' personal experiences (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative inquiry strategies were utilized to provide that data collection, analysis, and results writing originates from the information obtained from the participants.

First, general background data to identify potential participants as African American males were collected through a survey. Additional information such as the number of years to complete a degree, status after graduation; grade point average upon graduation; if failed or retaken a class; and enrollment status while in college was also gathered for a specific classification of participants.

Most of the data were collected through interviews to obtain in-depth information from the participants to understand their viewpoints and lived experiences (Daniel W. Turner, 2010).

The goal was to make the interviewees comfortable during the process to express their true feelings about their collegiate experiences. Roulston (2010) emphasizes that the intent of the interview process during narrative data collection is to obtain "spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant answers from the interviewee" (p.202). Additionally, the intent was to keep the semistructured interviews within one hour. This consist of fifty minutes for going over interview questions and allowing the last ten minutes for the interviewees to ask any questions related to their higher education experience. Again, the goal was to identify those factors that African American male students feel contributed to their overall academic pursuit of higher education.

Participant Selection

Securing participants for this research required connecting with the university's Alumni Association and establishing close relationships to help identify potential participants. In addition, the Alumni Association operates an affiliate group where Black alumni can remain connected to the university and interact with each other through various forms of communication, including social media. The overall alumni association was utilized as a point of entry to connect to the Black alumni to provide access to potential participants either to the general association or networking opportunities for the Black alumni association.

Because narrative research aims to gather and experience individuals' lives as told through their stories, this research aimed to collect and utilize several experiences of African American men who completed their undergraduate degrees at the university. Therefore, initial communications [Appendix B] were made to the overall alumni association to explain the research rationale and purpose while communicating the desire for active support from the general alumni association (Creswell, Qualitative Procedures, 2009). Direct communication was also sent to the leadership of the Black Alumni Group [Appendix C], demonstrating that this

research project was working with the alumni association and petitioning for their support in identifying potential participants. Ideally, the objective was to connect with the gatekeepers to gain access and general approval (Creswell, *Qualitative Procedures*, 2009) of the research.

A demographic questionnaire [Appendix D] was provided to the institution's Black Alumni Association to help identify individuals categorized as (a) African American/Black males and (b) who completed an undergraduate degree at the PWI to participate. Additional information such as (a) graduate status; (b) year graduated; (c) the number of years to complete degree; (e) grade point average (GPA); (f) if failed or had to retake a class, and (d) enrollment status while in college to help determine the intersectional characteristics of the participants.

Other professional or personal networks, such as reaching out to groups with large African American participants and alumni, were also used to help identify potential participants for the research (Dobbie et al., 2017). For example, campus departments and academic programs were contacted to help identify potential participants who fit the target population and graduated from the university as part of their networks.

In many occurrences, the participants also recommended other people they knew through connections between different individuals or groups to help identify possible candidates for research participants (Crossley, 2010). In reality, the recommendations from the participants become more successful in identifying participants than emails from the alumni association. I assume that once participants validate the research's authenticity from someone they know and trust, they are more willing to participate. Creswell (2005) identifies this as an example of the researcher's collaboration with the research participants to not only tell their stories but also to have input into the research.

Data Collection

Electronic communication (via e-mail) [Appendix E] was sent to those individuals who fit within the two overall categories from the demographic questionnaire. Again, this communication described the research and purpose and sought volunteers to participate in the study. The goal was to select five (5), no more than seven (7) participants, to volunteer for the research study to have an adequate sample size. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that a proper sampling size in qualitative research is usually smaller and more purposive. Fortunately, I secured ten potential participants, with seven completing the entire interview process.

Individuals interested in participating in the research were contacted and communicated with the researcher to arrange individual interviews. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted whenever possible. However, other technical methods were provided for interviews due to the participants' distance, availability, and communication options. The semi-structured interviews were scheduled for one hour. They consisted of 45 minutes of informal conversation with questions from the overall general hypothesis and the identified open-end follow-up questions [Appendix F]. Additional questions were asked for clarification, and general observation by the researcher was also utilized during the interview process (Creswell, 2009).

The remaining fifteen (15) minutes provided the participants with opportunities to ask questions or make any clarification in their statements. This process was done for a fluid and honest conversation between the researcher and participant(s). Fontana and Frey (1994) explain that conducting unstructured interviews in conjunction with ethnographic interviewing should be done during one-on-one observations with the participants and researcher. Keep in mind that the purpose of the interview process was to determine what the participants thought contributed to their success in completing their degrees at the public, research-based PWI, not to put

perceptions in the participants' minds (Best & Kahn, Research in Education, 2003). More importantly, the participants were assured that the interviewer had no preconceived notions about the study's outcome (Best & Kahn, Research in Education, 2003).

Overall, the research goal was to obtain the participants' lived experiences, share their voices about completing their degrees at a PWI and tell their stories about African American male success in higher education.

Interview Guide

Before the sessions began, notifications were given to all participants about the interview protocol, which discussed the length of the interviews and that all sessions would be recorded with notes taken [Appendix G]. This was to ensure that accurate information was documented during the transcribing process. The interview protocol was also instrumental in establishing rapport with the participants, and they were not surprised during the process (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Each interview was scheduled for 45-50 minutes, providing about 15-10 minutes for the participants to ask questions or clarify any statements that may have been unclear during the allotted interview time. Verbal consent was also obtained before each interview to ensure the participants understood their options about the interviews [Appendix G] and that they could discontinue their participation at any time if they became uncomfortable during the process.

The goal was to have a fluid conversation during the interview and to ensure that the participants did most of the talking. The researcher avoided sharing personal thoughts, opinions, and experiences during the process. However, rapport was established and maintained during the duration of the interview (Knight, 2013). The researcher's role was mainly as an active listener or facilitator.

If a participant became uncomfortable or a memory triggered emotional distress during the interview, the researcher relied upon his counseling training to display compassion, concern, and humanity to help reduce the discomfort and continue the discussion. For instance, one of the participants, Jason, became extremely emotional as he shared his experience of losing his grandfather during his freshmen year and that he did not have anyone to turn to for emotional support. His grandfather was his sole parental support, and talking about his collegiate experience triggered those memories. The interview was paused to allow him time to recover his composure before resuming. However, it should be noted that the researcher utilized empathy with Jason during these moments and allowed him all the time he needed to express his feelings and share the grief he felt while in school. As a result, member-checking was also conducted throughout each interview to measure the participant's comfort level and ensure authenticity within the data collected.

It is equally important to express that the interviews were guided by the overall research questions highlighted earlier. The main focus was to find the perceptions that African American males who graduate from the public, research-based PWI feel contribute to obtaining their undergraduate degrees. In some situations, it was unnecessary to pose all the questions during the interview process. This was done because the participants already provided the answer to specific questions during their general conversation, which made it unnecessary to ask all the questions and kept the participants from repeating themselves.

However, in some situations, it was necessary to probe for more in-depth information from the participants in particular areas. For instance, Matthew was one of the more reserved participants. It was absolutely necessary to dig more into his answers for detailed information while maintaining open discussion between the interviewer and participant and not just a simple

question-answer or read-aloud survey questions process (Knight, 2013). He eventually became more at ease during the process of the interview and began to expound more on his answers.

Data Analysis

Through narrative inquiry, this research was designed to understand better how African American men complete their education at a PWI. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data is a source of well-grounded descriptive explanations of processes. To a greater extent, the narrative approach involves collecting participants' stories about themselves.

This research was conducted through an inductive approach to collect information from the participants. More specifically, it involved an ongoing process that began with the raw data collected during the demographic questionnaire, transcripts of the interviews, field notes, and follow-up meetings for clarification if needed. This method allowed for discovering reality without relying on preconceived theoretical perspectives before conducting the research. Best and Kahn (2003) highlight that the idea of openness during research data gathering is to find whatever there is to find that is unique about the situation.

Additionally, gathering data from the participants were approached from a holistic perspective to understand the complex nature of each participant while allowing the participants to be their authentic selves during the process. The flexibility of data collection is also essential to accommodate any changes during the process (Best & Kahn, 2003).

The data was then analyzed to determine mutual themes and categorized into initial codes that emerged [Appendix I]. Saldana (2016) describes coding in qualitative research as a "researcher-generated construct that translates data," which will eventually provide meaning for each data entry (p3). This research identified a broad view of codes by the various patterns that

arose from the first step of data collection and utilizing the participants' own words through in vivo coding. Note that emphasis was placed on what the participants said during their interviews.

Subsequently, the data was then categorized into themes that emerged from the data related to the participant's perceptions of their higher educational experience. Various colors were utilized to help identify and group the themes and develop major theme categories.

This manual process utilized the researcher's field notes typed into Microsoft Word and a basic Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to keep track of all information. Information was also taken from the transcription of the recording sessions held with each participant. Because the number of participants was maintained to a small working group, it is assumed that this method of record-keeping was adequate. Categorizing information obtained during the first coding cycle allows the researcher to acquire a broad view of the data.

This first cycle of narrative coding examines the data collected and assigns identified meaning to the specific information. This process allowed the researcher to make sense of the information received and place the data into sections or groups as patterns emerged. This process involves looking for similarities, differences, frequencies, or other practices within the data. In Addition, any information that did not fit within a particular pattern was also noted. Saldana (2016) suggests that these fragments within the codes help stimulate more profound reflections on the data. However, be mindful that the overall objective of the coding process was to arrange information from the data in systematic order.

This process allowed the researcher to divide, group, or link data into developing meanings. Saldana (2016) also implies that it is vital to place data into categories of "families" because of similar characteristics identified with the specific data group.

Once the first level of coding was conducted, the researcher studied the data and determined if the second level of coding was warranted. This process involves the researcher examining the data to identify interrelating themes or descriptions from the initial codes (Creswell, 2009). During the second phase of the coding process, the goal was to immerse more profound into the data and refine the data into more focused categories or codes. Saldana (2016) suggests during this process that, the researcher develops "a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, or theoretical organization" from the first cycle of codes (p. 207). During this phase, specific codes were identified to help construct a final narrative for the research.

The researcher then began identifying patterns that stood out in the data, which appeared to be an overarching theme that the participants shared. It's important to note that the researchers followed the data's directions and highlighted the final research observation. The researcher also began to generate his central core theory from the study, data collection, and coding during the process. However, similar to coding, a thesis may not appear initially and, in some situations, may not appear at all.

Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness within this research depends mainly on the ability of the research finding to be transferable, confirmable, and dependable (Statistics Solutions, 2019). It was also imperative that the findings be maintained in confidence and information presented be true and accurate as offered by the participants. Triangulation was utilized to develop a comprehensive understanding of the data since the information was obtained from different sources.

It is crucial to demonstrate that the finding from this research applies to other contexts. Explicitly, the evidence from this research is applicable in other areas of higher education.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Statistics Solutions 2019) inform researchers that it is their "responsibility to provide the database that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers." The information provided should connect the cultural and social contexts of the data collected from the participants.

Another aspect of testing the research's trustworthiness is to ensure that findings are based on the participant's responses and not the researcher's viewpoint. For example, the analysis must maintain a degree of conformability and neutrality and be free of potential bias or influences from the researcher (Statistics Solutions, 2019). Member checking with the participants was utilized throughout this data-collection process to ensure that participants were understood entirely. Participants were allowed to verify or validate the information provided and review the accuracy of their experience report. Final copies of official transcripts were provided to the participants to verify what was stated during their interview and ensure that there was no additional information they wanted to share. Additionally, research participants were allowed to review the entire research finding to ensure confidence in the researcher's presentation of their participation and finding.

Finally, this research contains a dependability level to be repeated by others who may want to repeat this study or continue where the research concluded. The information provided is consistent enough to allow others to have a degree of dependability in repeating or reviewing the research.

Protection of Human Subjects

All avenues for the protection of participants were followed as outlined in Section 4: The Scope of Human Subjects Research as stipulated by my home institution's Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) Policy and Procedure Manual (University of South Florida Research

& Innovation, 2019). Policies include (but are not limited to) protecting participants' 1) data collected through interaction; 2) identifiable private information about the subjects in the research; 3) information on informed consent of human subjects for the research (pp 32-33). This researcher has also completed several Responsible Conduct of Research modules required by the Institutional Review Board. These modules covered research involving human subjects, Conflicts of Interest, Data Management, and Research Misconduct. A copy of the Certificate of Completion Report is attached in the appendix.

Additionally, several protection measures to protect all information, such as an initial survey questionnaire to include demographic and other personal information, audio recording, and transcripts. Data is stored on a password-protected external hard drive kept under lock and key with the audiotapes recorded during the process.

Researcher Positionality

As the researcher for this study, I fully understand that my role involved being utilized as an instrument. Therefore, while ongoing this process, I acknowledge my past and current experience, background, and other ontological or epistemological positions. Creswell (2009) explains that researchers must recognize situations that could interfere when interpreting the data during the process.

As I began this research, I acknowledged that I am an African American male who has completed one undergraduate and two graduate degrees. While my undergraduate degree was earned from a Historical Black College and University (HBCU), I obtained two graduate degrees at a mid-level public PWI. As a first-generation college student, I found avenues to assist my undergraduate and graduate studies. This usually involved me making connections with numerous resources on campus and in the community.

Additionally, I have worked in higher education for over twenty years at an HBCU and PWI institutions. I have always considered myself an advocate for African American males' success in higher education. Even before I realized that this was an area of interest, I wanted to specialize as I continued as a higher education professional.

Furthermore, as an employee of a higher educational institution, I am fully aware that the institution where this research was conducted may have some hesitation about the nature of this research being conducted at their institution. Questions can arise on how this research finding will represent the institutions' overall reputation and the success rate for African American male students. This may have caused some alarm in the institution's Office of Alumni Affairs, which serves as the gatekeeper for connecting with African American male students who received their undergraduate degrees. However, I was able to ensure the institution that I was representing my current role in higher education while conducting this research.

Furthermore, as an African American male who has completed his undergraduate and graduate degrees, I understand a different narrative about African American males' success in higher education. Most of the literature depicts African American males as deficient in effectively completing higher education, formulated from an anti-deficit achievement framework of African American males (Harper, 2012).

Summary

This chapter aimed to outline the research process in explaining the factors that African American men feel contribute to their success while attending a public, research-based PWI. This qualitative research utilized narrative research practices while interviewing institution alumni to examine their stories through the CRT theoretical lens. Ideally, the goal was to hear the

stories of successful graduates and identify a counter-narrative of the deficit model of African American male success in higher education.

Approval to conduct this research was granted by the institution's IRB process, supervised by the Office of Research Integrity & Innovation. The approved submission was assigned as [STUDY003948](#) and is listed on file with the IRB office. Additionally, all forms, electronic communication, protocol scripts, and interview questions were reviewed and approved by the institution's IRB process. Copies of such documents can be found in the appendix of this dissertation, along with a copy of the approval letter from the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance.

Chapter Four: Results

The primary purpose of this preliminary research was to examine the factors African American/Black males who graduated from a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) perceived to be the contributing factors to academic success in their higher education pursuits.

Additionally, this study sought to identify any challenges to college completion they may have encountered and the solutions they utilized to overcome them. Each participant had the opportunity to discuss their perceptions and experiences through semi-structured interviews grounded within the overarching question: What are the contributing factors of success for African American males in higher education institutions? Additional supporting questions [Appendix E] were utilized to identify the lived experiences of those participating in the research and allowed the participants to share any other conditions that may have contributed to or hindered their academic success.

Eventually, the data from this research could be utilized to provide an educational blueprint or roadmap that other institutions can implement for success within the specified demographic.

Participants

Initial demographic data were collected from a questionnaire [Appendix D] that potential participants completed and returned before scheduling their interviews. Once scheduled, individual interviews were conducted with the participants over a three-week time frame, and all interviews were conducted virtually (except one) due to geographic locations and the availability of the participants. The researcher took extreme caution in presenting the data to accurately

demonstrate the responses from the participants that were collected through the completed questionnaires and interviews.

A total of ten potential candidates agreed to participate in the research and completed the demographic questionnaire. However, only seven participants participated in the interviews, and the others did not due to scheduling conflicts, cancelations, or other unidentified reasons. Therefore, the data for this research is based on the information gathered from the seven participants who completed the entire interview process.

Even though each of the participants are African American/Black male and graduated from the university, they come from unique and diverse backgrounds and offer different perspectives on their undergraduate experiences. The participants were identified by a randomly assigned pseudonym as their completed demographic questionnaire was received. It must be noted that the participants who did not complete the interview process are still listed in the “demographic profile” below. This was done to provide continuity and better track the data collected.

Out of the seven who completed the interviews, five enrolled in the university as first-year freshmen, and two were transfer students. Furthermore, one identified as a non-traditional student and was older than average college-age students when he attended the university. Five of the seven were first-generation college students, and two had parents who obtained some higher education or completed at least a bachelor’s degree. The overall grade-point average of the participants upon completing their degrees is 3.1. It is important to note that the grade-point averages are self-reported information provided on their completed questionnaire and not reported by the institution. Below is a brief demographic profile about the enrollment status,

grade-point average, and personal insight about each participant. Table 2 illustrates a visual concept of the research participants, which is followed by their individual written profiles.

Table 2: *Participants' Profile*

Participant	Enrollment Classification	First Generation	Non-Traditional	Graduation GPA
Micah	Transfer	Yes	No	3.3
Reginald	1st Year	Yes	No	3.0
Xavier	1 st Year	No	No	3.2
Mathew	1 st Year	Yes	No	3.1
John	Transfer	Yes	Yes	3.0
Jason	1 st Year	Yes	No	2.7
Justin	1 st Year	No	No	3.5

Demographic Profiles

Participant #1 – Micah

Micah transferred to the university as a third-year student; he attended a junior college before enrolling and completed an associate degree first. He was a first-generation college student who majored in the social science area and became the first person in his immediate family to obtain a college degree. Overall, he enjoyed his university experience and defined academic success as “learning something and being able to utilize what you learn in your chosen profession.” He maintained a grade point average of 3.3 while enrolled, and it only took him one and a half years to complete his bachelor’s degree after transferring to the university. His rationale for completing this degree shortly after enrolling is that he felt that he had a mission to accomplish, and the sooner he did it, the better off he would have been. This participant maintained full-time enrollment while enrolled and worked several part-time jobs on and off

campus. He has been out of college for three years and is currently employed full-time in his academic field.

Participant #2 – Reginald

Reginald was a first-generation college student enrolled in the university as a freshman who graduated with a 3.0 grade-point average majoring in business. He completed his degree within four (4) years and indicated that he did fail or had to retake one class related to his academic major. He would define his experience as a good experience overall with occasional ups and downs, and at times “I felt out of place as if I did not belong.” He was from a small town, and attending a large university allowed him to be exposed to other people and opportunities. He also worked several part-time jobs to support himself financially while enrolled. Over the past four years since graduating from the university, he has relocated to another state and is employed within his field of studies.

Participant #3 -A.J.

A.J. did not complete the interview process due to scheduling conflicts.

Participant #4 -Xavier

Xavier entered the university as a first-year, second-generation college student. He completed his degree within four years and graduated with a grade point average of 3.2 and majoring in social sciences. He did have some academic challenges at the beginning of his college career, which resulted in the loss of his academic scholarship. He also indicated that he retook some classes because he could not comprehend the materials as he would have preferred and not due to failure. However, he was able to rebound academically and also completed a masters degree and is currently working for a public school system within another state. His definition of academic success revolves around students understanding the materials taught

rather than obtaining a high grade-point average. “Success to me depends on what people want to be able to complete their degree with. Are they looking for an understanding and comprehension of the materials or a high GPA?”

Participant #5 - Matthew

Mathew was one of the more reserved participants who was somewhat uneasy when talking about himself. He entered the university as a freshman (or first-year student) and completed his degree within four years. He majored in engineering while maintaining a grade-point average of 3.11. He shared that he had to retake or fail at least one course and took an extra semester to make up for the failed class. This participant’s most challenging time in college was during his final semesters when he faced issues concerning graduation, and his financial scholarship was about to end. He identifies academic success as “outlining a plan and staying the course until completing that plan.” He is currently employed full-time within his major field of concentration and enrolled in a master’s degree program.

Participant #6 - John

John identified himself as a non-traditional transfer student who took classes part-time while working full-time. He attended a community college and obtained an associate degree several years before enrolling in the university. He finished his undergraduate degree within one and one-half years after enrolling and maintained a 3.0 grade-point average upon completion. He is currently enrolled in a master’s degree program and working within his field. He identifies academic success as “utilizing what you learn while meeting academic requirements.” Something he tried to put into practice while working full-time in college in a job related to his major. Additionally, he felt he brought a unique and different perspective to his classes and other students around him because of his age and experiences.

Participant #7 - Jason

Jason was one of the more talkative candidates interviewed during the process. He entered the university during his first year through an academic support program for first-generation college students. He majored in political science and completed his undergraduate degree within five years with a 2.7 grade-point average. He faced numerous challenges as a student, which particularly altered the course of his educational career. However, he credits the “experiences for helping mold me into the man I am today” as a thriving community organizer. Initially, he was doing well academically; however, due to personal and university circumstances he had to overcome, his collegiate experience encountered many highs and lows. He also defines academic success as accomplishing your goals no matter what circumstances you may have to face and overcome.

Participant #8 – Justin

Justin appeared to be highly open and perceptive during his interview. He entered the university as a first-year, second-generation college student and completed his bachelor’s degree within four years with a grade point average of 3.5 majoring in the science areas. He did not fail or have to retake any classes. However, he does emphasize the importance of beginning with an end in mind by “hitting the ground running and targetting what you want to accomplish.” This participant has done well for himself upon completing his undergraduate degree. He as optained a advance degree within the medical field and has a thriving practice. He also has several entrepreneurial ventures where he utilizes his personality's creative side.

Participant #9 – D.J.

D.J. did not participate in an interview due to scheduling conflicts.

Participant #10 – Calvin

Kalvin did not respond further after the initial communication showing interest in participating in the research.

Defining Academic Success

Overall, the participants associate academic success at the collegiate level with completing their college degrees while obtaining the knowledge and skillset to use for their chosen professions and daily lives. For some, it meant getting a grade-point average and graduating within a certain period. While others, the grade-point averages were not their primary concern; instead, they concentrated on their ability to comprehend the information taught within the classes. Micah indicated that academic success is “the foundation for which you will start your career and that you should be able to utilize what you learned daily.” While Mathew expounded that “academic success is having a plan while completing a course or understanding that course.”

Equally important is the participants’ associated academic success with utilizing their classroom knowledge daily as they become involved on campus. For example, John shared that academic success means “utilizing what you learned in class as you interact with other students and faculty outside the classroom.” He associates this as an opportunity to demonstrate their academic achievements before going into the “real world” and displaying the capability of African American men across campus. When asked to elaborate further on his statement, he replied, “We, as Black males, had to constantly prove or demonstrate that we belonged in an academic setting and were not there because of an athletic or some type of equality scholarship.” In general, the participants felt that it was essential to demonstrate the capability of African

American males to succeed within their academic environment and was willing to undertake the necessary steps to do so.

Defining Institutional Academic Success

When asked to share how the institution's definition of academic success aligned with their definitions of success, none of the participants could articulate their understanding of the institution's definition while enrolled at the university. Even more so, they were unaware of any policy or program specifically identified to support African American male students at the university. Jason indicated that he participated in a summer institute designed for newly enrolled minority students, and the program provided support during his first and second years at the university. Unfortunately, he could not continue in the program after his second year and lost the support system he had developed.

During my first and second years, I was part of a summer institute for "minority" students, and they supported me in all areas of my academic pursuit. I think it was called Freshmen Summer Institute (FSI), and we had to meet with a counselor weekly during the semester, or we could walk in and meet with them if we had situations where we needed help. I maintained a 4.0 grade-point average then. However, when I was no longer in the program, I didn't have that support anymore and no one else to go to when I needed help; I suffered academically.

Several participants tried to articulate that they assumed that the institution's definition of academic success involves students completing their college degree within a certain period while maintaining a good grade point average. However, they found it difficult to do so because they do not recall that information ever being shared with them

or that they knew of any area on campus that provided the information widely across the student population, particularly the African American male students.

Strategies for Success

Because the participants were diverse and had different experiences while enrolled at the university, they each had different and unique strategies to complete their college degrees. However, after systematically examining the data, four major themes emerged as overall strategies from the participants.

Theme 1: Find the Community

The participants overwhelmingly felt it was important for African American males to connect to or find “their” community within the university. Essentially, they view a community as instrumental for support inside and outside the classroom. However, the concept of the community takes a different meaning for several participants. For some, it meant connecting with other African American students who had similar experiences while enrolled at the university. For instance, Micah indicated that,

finding a small group of African American male students who
could challenge me to do my best was important as I started my
studies at the university.

This provided the necessary accountability needed in his efforts to complete his degrees while associating with like-minded individuals he could rely upon in different situations. John, however, was more interested in connecting with African America students from more diverse backgrounds. He demonstrated this by indicating that,

I was more interested in being involved in groups that targeted the
Black population from all over and would allow me to be myself

when I'm around them. I was able to grow and develop my leadership skills within these groups.

For John that it was essential to find the community within the larger community, and it was the second most important item on his agenda after attending two PWI institutions. Xavier shared that it was necessary for him to associate with similar individuals who were “serious about their educational pursuits.” Again, this displayed the participants’ desires to be challenged academically while having a support group that understood their experiences.

Meanwhile, others felt that their community did not necessarily have to be individuals of the same race but groups or people who would provide the academic challenges and support needed within the classroom. Mathew shared that he needed to find a “sound support system within his major” and associate with people serious about their academic success within that major. He often created or participated in study groups to help prepare for exams, complete assignments, or better comprehend the subject matter. This allowed him to see the materials from different perspectives and demonstrated his abilities related to the topic.

Culturally, the participants indicated they took advantage of various opportunities to connect with diverse groups on campus. They looked at this as gaining diverse perspectives and knowledge about different people, situations, and circumstances they may encounter once they complete their degrees. Reginald indicated, “as a college student, you should be around different cultures to be able to grow and learn.” Jason shared that he looked for a “cultural, social connection outside of class to be able to connect with people,” and Justin shared that he was able to make friends with students from different cultural backgrounds. Overall, the participants believed that having diverse views allowed them to become more well-rounded as they developed in their professions. Additionally, they felt this was an excellent opportunity to

demonstrate that African Americans or Black males were not the stereotypes that may have been perpetuated about them.

A large part of their community included being connected to or involved in campus organizations. The type of organizations the participants engaged in varies based on their interests. They associated involvement in some organizations as another way to connect with similar groups of individuals who could assist in their collegiate development. Several also joined organizations related to their academic endeavors or provided leadership development. Micah shared that he made sure to connect with “some type of African American organization that provided opportunities to be around like-minded individuals.” Again, this provided additional resources outside the classroom with whom they could go for support or help. Some were connected with fraternal or other campus organizations affiliated with a national organization. These groups allow the participants to connect with the broader local community. Micha indicated,

My campus organization allowed me to connect with the local chapter of that organization. I work beside them in the local community, attend conferences with them, and they even awarded me a scholarship for my involvement, academic progress, and leadership within the organization.

Jason shared that his fraternal organization,

Provided me the opportunity to develop my leadership skills while being engaged in service projects within the local community. This also allowed me to bond with the other members of the organization with whom I’m still connected even to this day. Without them, I would not have completed college.

Affiliation with these types of organizations allowed their members to bond and support each other as they dealt with the daily task of completing their education. Some organizations provided role models or mentors outside the university, which brings us to the second strategy highlighted.

Theme 2: Find a Mentor

Mentoring is often looked upon as an opportunity for two or more individuals to make a connection while providing the necessary support for individuals who may have experienced similar experiences. The individuals serving as mentors often became critical to helping provide opportunities and navigate engagement on campus, usually by allowing the male students a chance to be themselves without prejudgment and being comfortable around the person and people serving as mentors.

Several participants shared that finding a mentor or someone they could look up to was vital to their success. These individuals became that additional support with whom they could have a personal connection and could turn for advice. In most situations, the relationship with their mentors provided positive influences and helped the participants overcome any barriers they may have faced, either personally or academically. John shared, “I took advantage of having a mentor and sought help from him when I needed advice.”

Micah indicated:

If it had not been for my mentor, I probably would not have made it through the university. It was great to have someone who looked like me, and I knew I could turn to for support when I needed to talk.

Most of the mentor connections were not made formally by the university but through association with a class, organization, or introduction from other people. In some cases, the

participants personally sought out individuals to serve as their mentors for various reasons.

Xavier shared:

I intentionally looked for a mentor who was a Black male faculty member in my major. Because my major was so difficult, I knew I needed someone to be my inspiration and who could remind me that I could do the work just by him simply being on faculty there. Not only did he support me academically, but he was that mental inspiration for me to do my best.

Micah shared:

I was fortunate to have the advisor of an organization that I was a member serve as a mentor. He helped guide me through the process of completing my degree and assisted me with numerous personal issues. If it were not for him, I probably would not have made it through the university. I'm just sorry that not many other Black male students had someone like him to take a personal interest in them.

John shared:

I was introduced to my mentor by a female staff member on campus. She knew I was having academic and personal issues and called someone she thought could help me with my situation. The match was not through an official university function but by reaching out to someone who worked in the field if he was interested in assisting me, and he agreed. We became close friends, and I still connect with him professionally for mentorship.

The participants expressed that the relationship with their mentors positively affected their collegiate experiences and had a long-lasting effect on their professional careers. The results overwhelmingly proved to be positive, and as Micah shared, “all male students should want to seek out individuals to serve as mentors.” Some even indicated that the relationship with their mentors also became opportunities to network within their major or area of concentration. Justin highlighted the networking opportunities he received with his mentoring by indicating that “networking is your net worth.”

Theme 3: Networking

Networking appeared in the data as a subunit strategy utilized by the participants. However, it appeared sufficiently enough that it should be highlighted as one of the participants’ strategies for success. The data revealed that participating in community connections and mentoring opportunities allowed the participants to network with similar and diverse groups that ultimately contributed to their achievement. Micah shared that an African American male student should “be open, network, get to know a lot of people, and put themselves in situations where they can learn.” He felt that the various networking opportunities he made while in college gave him the necessary skills for success.

Several participants were provided opportunities to network through membership within their organizations. As mentioned, some participants were members of campus organizations associated with regional or national organizations for their majors, particular interest, or fraternal involvement. However, these organizations provide additional opportunities for the participants to network within the national organizations through conferences, conventions, presentations, or public events organized for networking for their organization. Reginald shared that

my fraternity provided an opportunity to network with members who were professionals in the area I was studying. Because of that, I obtained an internship that helped me start my career.

Theme 4: Utilize Campus Resources

Colleges and universities provide many resources for students to take advantage of while attending their institutions. However, for some African American/Black male students, campus resources are often underutilized, and the rationale for not using them varies depending on the individuals. For several participants, utilizing campus resources meant asking for “help.” In contrast, African American males are taught to resolve issues themselves. Thus, this required the participants to self-evaluate themselves, overcome their concept of masculine identity and determine what was necessary for their college careers.

The data from the interviews with the participants indicated that at some point in their college career, they had to overcome the “stigma” of not utilizing campus resources and seek assistance when needed. This usually occurred when the individuals were at their breaking point either academically, socially, or emotionally and were faced with having to decide between giving up on their desire to obtain a college degree or seeking assistance on campus who could help them continue to strive toward their goals. The mention of using resources often came up within the conversations, and below are a few examples of statements received from participants.

Micah - “Do not be afraid to utilize your resources – mentors, library, tutors, counselors, academic support centers, and others to help you navigate spaces that we typically do not on campus.”

Reginald - “Take advantage of office hours of your professors and other staff who are there to support students at the university. That’s one thing I had to

force myself to do because I had to put aside my ego, know when I needed help, and be willing to receive it.”

Xavier - “Know when you need help and utilize the resources provided by the institution and even find some off-campus. They are there for a reason, but students must take advantage of them.”

Mathew - “I had mixed perspectives about seeking help and did not want to do it often. I was reserved and didn’t want to feel like a bother, and I had to rely on myself. However, once I found myself in a challenging situation, I sought help from a tutor who was able to help me pass my class.”

Personal Traits for Success

In addition to the strategies mentioned above, the data also provided insights into personal traits that the participants identified as instrumental to their success. An individual personal trait is a way of thinking that ultimately affects their behavior or have some circumstance on their behavior. Two unique behavior traits appeared most in the data and became emerging themes during participant interviews.

Confidence

The first personal trait that appeared the most in the data was to make sure that you know who you are and have some type of self-confidence about yourself. As African American/Black males in higher education, the students were often overlooked or mistaken for being incapable of maintaining academically. They felt that by just being a Black male on a PWI campus, there was a constant feeling of being preconceived or alienated. This is where Black male students must have confidence in themselves and the ability to be in uncomfortable situations. However, utilize those situations to learn from and thrive. Justin so eloquently elaborated during his

interview by sharing that African American male students should “become comfortable with being uncomfortable and use it as an opportunity to grow.”

Data from the participant interviews shows that having confidence in themselves was vital to their success. Justin also shared that,

It is essential for us as African American male students not to doubt ourselves and have confidence in who we are and in our capabilities.

Where Reginald reaffirmed that,

I knew the type of person I was and remained organized with self-discipline to make sure that I made it to my ultimate goal – graduation.

Admittedly, the participants all felt that the concept of self-confidence was something they had to work toward as they progressed through their education. This intrinsic trait had to develop and mature over time as they reaffirmed their academic capabilities while becoming comfortable within the academic setting. It was not an easy task, given the feeling that some had of being alienated, overlooked, and sometimes misjudged about their academic achievements.

Persistence

Persistence is another intrinsic behavior trait that often appeared in the data. Many participants shared the various academic, personal, or social challenges they had to overcome while pursuing their degrees. Despite their circumstances, they all remained firm in their course of action. They often acknowledged that persistence was a state of mind that allowed them to pursue their goals, and by working with mentors or other professional staff, they were able to develop this trait further. Reginald emotionally shared:

I had some challenges every year. I recalled being pulled over and profiled by the police one night when I was in the city. This took a toll on my mental makeup for a while. However, I was able to find balance in my life and persist until I graduated.

Xavier passionately shared how the social climate that occurred when he was enrolled affected his mental state of being. He was so preoccupied with situations that affected people who looked like him that he lost focus on school and assignments. He often found himself fearful and untrusting of others and would spend hours alone thinking about different situations. However, he was able to seek help, remain persistent and overcome the level of uncertainties he felt. Below is a statement he made during his interview:

My emotional state began to unravel during the time of social climate we faced a few years ago. Fortunately, I was able to get help and continue with my classwork. It took a lot of hard work and effort. However, I'm glad I was able to persevere and be persistent in my actions.

The participants' refusal to give up on their educational goals is evidence of the level of persistence they possessed which ultimately made a difference in the outcome of their education. They remained on course and did not allow the challenges they faced to be obstacles that hindered them from obtaining their degrees.

Summary

Chapter four is designed to provide some background context of the participants while articulating the findings that emerged from the data collected from African American males who graduated from the University of South Florida. Through individual interviews, identified perceptions that the graduates felt contributed to their success while enrolled at the university and obtaining their undergraduate degrees emerged in the data.

The findings in this research highlight themes that emerged as patterns of perceptions for academic success provided by African American male graduates of the institution. Their perceptions include African American males being able to find and connect to a community, identify and connect with a mentor, and utilize campus resources for assistance. The data also provide insight into personality traits that African American males who complete their degrees usually possess. These traits embody the students' consistency in their confidence and continue to persist until they reach their goals. This is especially true when students face challenges while pursuing their education.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Innovation and Conclusion

This qualitative research aimed to identify the factors African American males perceived contributed to success in higher education. A qualitative, narrative inquiry research method was utilized to identify and report on the overarching research question: What factors do African American males perceive contributed to their academic success in higher education while matriculating at the University of South Florida? Individual semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with graduates to identify themes within the data. Additional supporting questions [Appendix E] were utilized within the discussion to allow participants to voice any personal attributes they possess or developed while sharing their lived experiences and provide information on their understanding of academic success from a personal and institutional perspective.

Defining Academic Success

Although not the primary purpose, this research also sought insights into how African American male students define academic success in their efforts toward college completion. It is believed that a better understanding of their definition from the beginning will also provide additional insights into the strategies they utilized to obtain that success.

Overall, the participants identify academic success as being able to complete their college education while maintaining an average to above-average grade point average in the process. They understood that completing their degrees and having decent grades meant they could position themselves to enter graduate school or into respectable careers after college. Academic success also involved engaging on campus and utilizing what they learned in various situations or settings. It was a way to demonstrate that the knowledge obtained in the classroom was

beneficial to everyday life. Furthermore, it meant the ability to deal with the various challenges that life may present, all while pursuing the final result – a college degree.

Their success also involved demonstrating that they were enrolled within the university due to their academic capabilities and were not given any type of preferential admission because of athletic scholarships or diversity quotas. They felt that it was their responsibility to validate the academic standing of African American men within the university setting.

Strategies for Success

Four major themes emerged from the participants' data to complete their college degrees –finding a community, finding a mentor, networking, and utilizing campus resources. These themes could be divided into subunits or groups specifically used by separate participants. However, overall, they were identified as the primary channels for the participants to become college graduates that lead productive, successful lives.

Theme 1: Finding the Community

As mentioned in chapter four, finding a community has different meanings for several participants. It meant an opportunity for the participants to connect to a more extensive support system where they could be their authentic selves without prejudgment or misconceptions about their academic abilities. In some situations, it also provides outlets where they could be around like-minded individuals who would challenge them academically while providing social support outside the classrooms. The ideal community usually includes opportunities where African American males' identities, talents, and intellect are accepted and valued for what they can contribute to the educational environment and the community (Best Colleges, 2020). In most situations, this meant identifying and connecting to other African American students individually through one-on-one connections or in student organizations to build their social community.

The most significant portion of social communities includes being in or connecting to student organizations. The type of organizations varied; however, their primary purpose is to provide an outlet for African American males to have a sense of belonging and acceptance on campus. The organizations provided opportunities for bonding and training in leadership development while allowing the participants to develop what Pascarella and Terenzine (2005) identified as part of the overall student development theory, which emphasizes their racial identity.

Individual racial identity is their understanding of who they are as a racial being which is an ongoing process within various environments (Psychology, n.d.). African American or Black males in higher education usually try to navigate their institutions while maintaining their Black identity as they move between different environments on campus. The connection to their communities allows them to enter different campus environments while maintaining a positive, healthy Black identity. Studies show a direct correlation between maintaining a positive racial identity and doing well in school (Wood & Palmer, 2015).

Students' academic communities operate parallel to their social communities. Some argue that this community usually happens naturally on college campuses or universities. However, data from the participants shows that in some situations, these types of communities must be intentionally made as an approach to their academic success. African American students tend to persist longer to succeed when there is educational support within the institution (Bonner, 2010). However, African American males are usually the last to be approached to form study groups and are selected as lab partners. Therefore, intentional communities for academic success typically fell upon the African American males stepping outside their comfort zone to initiate semi-structured communities to support their academic progress.

Additionally, African American male students' academic communities allow them to demonstrate their intellectual capabilities while developing a sense of belonging within their select majors or programs. Studies have shown that student learning increases when they invest time and effort in their learning process (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Therefore, by associating within communities that focus on their academic pursuits, African American males find creative ways to become invested in their learning process. This was true for the study participants, who all invested time in their academic and social communities.

Cultural acceptance was also essential for the participants to experience within their community environments. The participants not only wanted to be around individuals and groups who accepted them culturally but also wanted their communities to validate being a Black or African American male on campus. Wood and Palmer (2015) explain that it is essential for African American male students to feel that they are accepted and welcome within our higher educational institutions. Particularly for institutions that are identified as PWIs. By associating within a community that understood or may have experienced the same experiences on campus, the participants could find support from and provide support to other individuals who could relate to and benefit from their experiences.

Acceptance culturally did not necessarily mean that the participants only associated with other African American students within their community. They also connect and engage with individuals and organizations from different cultures, races, or identities for understanding and growth. They utilized those opportunities to develop as individuals while learning from various backgrounds. It was critical for the participants to know that the organizations and people they interacted with were accepting and open and viewed this as an investment in their future. They

knew they had to be able to get an understanding of people's differences when starting their professional careers.

Theme 2: Find a Mentor

Mentoring is often looked upon as a collaboration between two or more individuals where there are opportunities for learning, personal and professional development, and growth on the part of the participants. It usually involves a multifaceted level of supportive engagement of experiences and knowledge between the participants (University of Cambridge, 2020). If implemented correctly, mentoring can have a long-lasting and profound effect on students in higher education, particularly African American males.

Successful mentor relationships in higher education allow African American male students to navigate their educational environment with support. Usually, mentors provide an avenue to assist the student in (a) learning about the campus community, (b) providing information on career opportunities, and (c) serving as a guide to continue through college (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Mentors also provide an understanding for African American male students that is often not found within our colleges and universities. They empower the students and allow them to work through and resolve any issues they may face while pursuing their education.

In addition to helping the students set personal and professional goals, mentors also provide feedback on situations the students may encounter and help the student develop interpersonal skills such as effective listening and communication and interacting with others within the university setting (University of Cambridge, 2020). Mentors often take a vested interest in the student they work with and serve as role models for success. They share their lived

experiences and assist in building a supportive networking system inside and outside the university environment.

The mentor-mentee relationship can be established through formal or informal settings. However, in most cases, these relationships often occur through informal connections for African American males in higher education. They happen once the student interacts with a faculty or staff member in a class or other social settings, such as a student organization or a general introduction by another faculty or staff member.

Based on the experiences of the participants, a general introduction was often used to make a match with African American males in higher education to serve as mentors. The student is recommended to a particular African American male faculty and staff for support and guidance in certain situations. Unfortunately, this happens when the student is amidst a problem instead of beforehand to help prevent or alleviate the challenging predicament. Also, the number of African American male professionals or staff members on campus was often low, making it difficult for African American male students to identify a mentor. As a result, Wood and Palmer (2015) suggest that PWI institutions should be intentional in developing a process where mentors are identified for African American male students.

Several students found mentors within their areas of study and intentionally identified individuals who could serve in this capacity. In most situations, these mentors were not African American male faculty members. This was due to the low number of African American male faculty available in specific departments. However, the selected mentors benefited the students by providing additional support, information, and connections within the profession or academic field the students were studying.

Cuyjet (2006) recommends that successful mentoring relationships empower students and provide avenues for students to succeed in college. He also implies that African American males are often preferred when working with African American male students. However, in situations when there are not enough available, then the African American male student should be connected to “a suitable mentor- professional or nonprofessional, Black or White, male or female - who not only provides guidance but also assists the students in setting their priorities and developing relationships that are likely to contribute positively to their success” (Cuyjet, 2006, p, 104).

Theme 3: Networking

Networking is usually defined differently by different people. However, the opportunity to connect with individuals through professional and social engagements is generally how the participants identify networking. It provides opportunities to build mutual, supporting relationships beneficial to all involved. For African American males in higher education, networking is a tool that allows them to make friends and broaden their prospects for career leads while exchanging ideas and knowledge. It also provides a source for students to build a diverse community of colleagues with whom they will interact during college and begin their professional careers (SJSU School of Information, n.d.). Additionally, it allows the students to step outside their comfort zone and put themselves within a social network of friends and colleagues.

Although there is no set method for networking, it is an excellent resource for African American male students to get noticed on campus, building upon their communication and interpersonal skills and enhancing their overall collegiate experience (Gleim Exam Prep, n.d.). Several participants found social and professional networking opportunities through their student

organizations or relationships they built with their mentors. Some participants took advantage and found opportunities to network with professors outside the classroom during programs, meetings, receptions, or other university-sponsored events. African American male students are encouraged to start networking early in their college career and should begin as soon as the student walks on campus. It should be built into their daily routine while engaging with professors and classmates who can become valuable assets. This allows them time to evaluate their accomplishments through networking and make any adjustments to set particular goals moving forward.

Overall, networking connects students with different constituents and provides avenues for continued learning and growth. It helps the students get noticed on campus and by potential employers. Most importantly, it adds value to the student's perception of themselves for what they can accomplish during their time in college.

Theme 4: Utilize Campus Resources

The final theme that emerged from the data is that successful African American male students identified and utilized campus resources as one of their strategies for success. Campus resources, in general, are designed to help students matriculate through college easily and succeed. They are established to allow students to have healthy and happy lives while enrolled in an institution of higher learning. Overall, campus resources contribute to students' quality of learning experiences, provide avenues for academic success, and are one of the most critical factors that institutions can offer their students during the educational process (Ciobanu, 2013) and (Hill et al., 2003). Moreso, research suggests that institutions should identify one or more core resource areas to concentrate on improving students' learning outcomes for underserved populations (Wood & Palmer, 2015).

While there is no universal model for campus resources in higher education, most institutions usually offer resources to assist students within four functional areas – academic affairs, business affairs, institutional advancement, and student affairs (Wilson, 2016). Individual institutions usually divide these functional areas into specific departments, offices, or programs to assist students, depending on their size and available financial resources.

No matter the size of a support program available at an institution, students will not benefit from the services if they do not take full advantage of the resources and utilize them before they are in a crisis. This is especially true for African American males in higher education because they often encounter situations such as a “sense of belonging, racial stereotypes, microaggression, and low expectations from professors and others that undermine their academic outcomes” (Harper, 2013, p. 3). It is imperative that they seek and utilize assistance from campus resources to help them through college.

Unfortunately, in most cases, African American males often view seeking assistance as a sign of weakness or a reduction of their manhood. Brooms (2017) suggests that understanding “Blackmaleness” is essential to understanding African American males' social structure. He further shares that black men’s masculine identities are associated with their strengths, competition, and control. Therefore, if African American males openly and willingly seek assistance from campus resources or services, they admit they are weak and not in control of their circumstances. Which ultimately leaves the student not completing their college education.

Mincey et al. (2013) further explain that traditional African American male masculinity place undergraduate college students under higher mental distress. In most situations may cause the students to display low self-esteem or have depression issues. Their research also suggests

that for Black men to try to fit within the characteristics of traditional Euro-American masculinity traits is unhealthy because it does not identify with their community values.

Fortunately, the participants in this study have looked beyond the typical stereotype of Black male masculinity and decided to provide a counternarrative of African American male masculinity. They have displayed great confidence by being willing to show their vulnerability and recognize the importance of seeking assistance when needed. Black men displaying vulnerability is often rare and difficult to do within the African American community. For the participants to have the mindset and willpower to do so speaks volumes about who they are as individuals.

Taking advantage of the various resources available at the institution provided positive outcomes and assurance of completing their college education. Even though this demonstrates good information from the participants, we must continue encouraging higher education institutions to identify available campus resources that serve African American males as their primary focus.

Personal Traits

The initial purpose of this research was to identify the strategies that African American males utilized to become successful in higher education. The study also allowed the opportunity to identify a few personal traits or ways of thinking that the participants possessed or developed during college. Generally speaking, individuals' personal or personality traits are unique characteristics that make them who they are. Their traits are usually developed throughout life and within certain situations that can remain consistent during particular circumstances (Psychology Today, n.d.). The participants in this study all possessed two unique personal traits that appeared in the data and were instrumental in completing their college degrees.

Confidence

Overall, the participants shared that confidence in themselves was necessary to complete their degrees, especially when faced with obstacles and challenges during their college tenure. To them, self-confidence meant believing in their abilities to meet various challenges and obstacles to succeed. It also meant having a solid sense of their academic skills while interacting with other students, faculty, or staff who may believe differently in their abilities. The literature demonstrates that African American male students often face difficulties dealing with a sense of belonging, disbelief about their academic abilities, and other forms of microaggression on campus (Harper, 2013). Therefore, a strong sense of confidence was necessary for self-motivation and self-esteem on the part of the participants. It gave them an essential way of thinking when and if they faced any pressures that may have arisen.

Strayhorn (2010) also suggests that students set educational goals and pursue to obtain them based on their confidence in their abilities. When African American male students have the confidence and support necessary to succeed, their motivation to thrive on campus increases as they actively participate in the learning environment. The participants demonstrated that having and maintaining confidence in their abilities to succeed academically provided them with internal factors to contradict those against them. Brooms (2017) also suggests that students' internal factors were important for African American students. It provided them with key stakeholders for whom they wanted to be successful – i.e., family, peers, faculty, or the thought of potential careers. This was also deemed valid for the participants, who often indicated that they were not only providing to themselves that they could finish their degrees. They were also motivated to make family members and others proud. Most participants were the first in their families to attend college and wanted to be an example for other siblings or family members coming behind

them. They provided a path for others to follow, which gave them the confidence to continue working toward their ultimate goals.

Persistence

The participants associated persistence with their ability to be confident in themselves. They understood that to have or maintain a level of confidence that their perseverance would not falter. Nevertheless, for them, persistence meant being able to continue on a course for college completion despite any opposition they encountered. Brooms (2017) shares that African American male persistence efforts increase when they have confidence in themselves and the results of their efforts are usually favorable when they engage in a high level of persistence. Several participants shared examples of the challenges they faced during their academic careers. Some struggled emotionally due to political and social issues, dealt with family and financial losses, and had their intellectual capabilities questioned. However, no matter the circumstance, they persevered and continued striving until college completion. It tested their endurance, determination, and diligence to achieve their goals. Some indicated that they were born with a level of persistence. While others shared that they learned to make adaptations in their educational process

Additionally, students have been known to persist in college completion based on their connections and involvement in the university. Cuyjet (2006) shared that African American men usually have a higher level of persistence because they are more engaged in student organizations or with other individuals within the university setting. This was also true for the participants. They all indicated that they were part of campus organizations with members who supported, challenged, and encouraged them to complete their education. A few shared that their mentors were instrumental in their persistence. These individuals gave them the support and

guidance they needed when they faced obstacles or just wanted to have a sounding board to help talk through situations.

Brother 2 Brother Initiative (B2i)

Based on this research's findings and utilization of current and past experiences in higher education, the innovative approach recommended for supporting African American males includes creating a support group for the university entitled the Brother to Brother Initiative (B2i). This grassroots approach is designed to provide avenues for contributing to African American males' success as they matriculate through college and begin their life journey. The group is intended to be a safe space where participants can define who they are and want to be as African American men and address the current narrative that is perpetuated by society. As a result, the program will provide social and academic support for participants while encouraging them to remain consistent in their pursuit of an education.

Furthermore, B2i is intended to assist the institution's retention and success rate of African American males by providing programmatic approaches to issues that impede their academic success. Using campus and other resources will be instrumental in identifying, addressing, and providing a holistic approach to the development of participants while utilizing student development theory as a guided framework for implementation.

Objective

The objective of B2i is to build an alliance of African American males within the institution working together by engaging students, faculty, staff, and administrators to address common issues and shared experiences. B2i groundwork will be centered around four pillars of support identified as strategies of success for African American males - 1) building community, 2) mentoring, 3) networking and 4) assisting with identifying and utilizing campus resources.

Institutional partners and stakeholders will also help develop policies and innovative approaches to create a supportive environment for African American males on campus.

PI: Building Community

The sense of belonging is instrumental to an individual concept of self and feeling valued within their environment (Brooms, 2017). Intentional, identified communities in higher educational institutions provide opportunities for African American males to interact with individuals of common interests, characteristics, and values. The B2i initiative will allow African American male students, faculty, staff, and administrators to unite to support the student's educational efforts by exchanging ideas, experiences, and understanding. African American male students will be able to identify themselves within the larger B2i community as they interact within the group through various programming efforts designed to promote academic success.

Additionally, B2i is designed to encourage participants to expand their educational experiences by becoming connected to and involved within the larger university environment while maintaining a support system as they engage on campus. Participants will have an established community they can turn to and rely upon for emotional, mental, or any other practical support in any situation that may be needed. Furthermore, the B2i community will encourage students to identify and connect with diverse communities to engage with other students from various backgrounds, cultures, or academic disciplines, which will eventually help in their ability to build alliances with diverse groups.

PII: Mentoring

Student participants within the B2i initiative will have an opportunity to be mentored by faculty, staff, and volunteers connected with the community. Students are matched with mentors based on individual interests, academic majors, or organizational involvement. Opportunities are

available for students and mentors to meet in group sessions, either in person or virtually, with the entire B2i community or during individual one-on-one meetings. The mentors and mentees determine the frequency they will meet and the areas of interest to be discussed during their sessions.

There are mutual benefits of a mentor/mentee relationship when working with African American male students. The students are encouraged to persist through college by their mentors and often gain information about careers, personal support, and general knowledge. The mentors usually gain new information when working with younger students and personal fulfillment from helping a student succeed academically (Saddler, 2010).

Ultimately, the primary goal of mentoring for the B2i initiative is to aid in the retention efforts of African American males in higher education by creating environments where they can learn from faculty, staff, and community volunteers vested in their educational process. The participants can continue developing to enhance their academic and personal success with the assistance of like-minded individuals.

PIII: Networking

Participants within the B2i initiative will have an opportunity to network within the group and with established connections made on and off campus. Students are not only exposed to other students, faculty, staff, and volunteers within the group; they are also given a chance to connect to other individuals, organizations, or potential career prospects that the members are connected to outside of B2i. These connections are made in formal or informal settings established through B2i to expose participants to many opportunities for advancement in their academics and professional careers.

Networking will allow the participants to begin to build long relationships that are beneficial to their careers. It will also enable the participants to start making a reputation for themselves and start getting their names out in their chosen career fields.

PIV: Utilizing Resources

If utilized when needed, campus resources can be a vital source of support for students who matriculate through college. However, the most critical aspect is admitting when you need help and being willing to seek assistance. This is fundamentally true for African American male students. Often African American male students are faced with the fear of seeming weak or not wanting to show their vulnerability and not seeking assistance when in college. The B2i will provide information on campus resources for participants to utilize and avenues to connect the participants to various resources needed during any particular time.

In addition, B2i serves as a source that will allow African American males to discuss utilizing campus resources openly. It will be an opportunity to demonstrate that male masculinity is not tested by seeking assistance. Furthermore, the program will allow participants to share their experiences with the various campus constitutes and provide advice for navigating campus systems.

Goals

The fundamental goal of B2i is to provide initiatives that support an environment for African American male achievement with programs that promote the educational process's sociocultural development (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Group activities are implemented through student-centered virtual and in-person approaches that allow participants multiple levels of connection to impact collective advancement.

The goals of B2i are implemented through a collection of programs and activities that addresses collegiate transition, academic progress, personal and professional development, and mentoring for African American male students. Participants are provided opportunities to take advantage of B2i programs and activities while receiving collaborative support from institutions professionals, university departments, alumni, and external volunteers.

Conclusion

Higher educational institutions have been dealing with the issues of addressing and improving African American male academic success for decades. Most of their approaches have concentrated on the lack of success and identifying strategies to improve rates. Unfortunately, this approach has yielded low success in solving the disproportion of college completion between African American males and males from other racial or ethnic groups.

A relatively new approach and one that was first introduced in the Black Male Student Success in Higher Education is to look outside the deficit model of achievement and identify individuals who have completed their college degree to begin observing what perceptions and strategies they utilized to obtain success. The rationale is that by documenting those strategies and introducing them to current African American male students early in their higher educational pursuits, they will have the tools and techniques to utilize toward success available to them early.

This research attempted to identify those perceptions African American males used to obtain academic success in their undergraduate studies and to provide an innovative approach to addressing African American males' success in higher education. As a result, the data identified four themes: 1) finding the community, 2) finding a mentor, 3) networking and 4) utilizing campus resources. All with varying levels of involvement to produce avenues for the research participants to become successful in their academic pursuits. Furthermore, the data provide

personal traits of confidence and persistence that were either intrinsic or developed by the participants that aided their efforts.

The innovative approach identified includes implementing a support group that allows the participants to utilize four levels of engagement branded as pillars which focus on implementing and providing community, mentoring, networking, and using campus resources for African American male students. The implementation includes bringing together African American male students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community volunteers in engagement opportunities that will encourage and support the students while they pursue their degrees. Programs and activities are implemented through virtual and in-person approaches, giving participants several options to engage and connect while enrolled.

Overall, the main objective of providing an initiative of this nature is to assist African American males in pursuing a college education. As a result, this initiative will benefit higher education institutions in their efforts to retain and support students as they matriculate toward their degrees. Furthermore, it will assist in creating a different narrative currently perpetuated about African American males in higher educational institutions.

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Appendices

Appendix (A): My Interest in African American Male Success in Higher Education

African American male success in higher education has been a topic of discussion for over a decade. Most of the literature will make you think or believe that African American males who complete their higher education efforts are endangered species. However, a new theory or train of thought has begun to be introduced into the literature to explain that there are successful African American males who have had success in higher education. Therefore, to assist others, we need to understand and identify the strategies or techniques of those who have been successful in providing opportunities for success for future African American male students in higher education.

As an African American male who has completed a bachelor's, master's, and specialist and currently working toward completing a doctoral degree; I consider myself to have had moderate success in higher education. Further, as a higher education administrator for over twenty years and being directly or indirectly involved with serving African American male students at five institutions throughout my career, I've seen different methods and approaches to identifying ways to assist African American males to succeed, all with varying levels of participation and success at each institution.

However, the most profound situation occurred when I received an e-mail at my current institution desperately seeking assistance from a campus colleague to work with an African American male student who reached out for support. This student feared that because he was the only African American male in his departmental major and saw few African American students

in general within his academic department, he was misunderstood and lacked the support to complete his degree successfully.

As I reflected on ways to assist this student, I also thought about what Shaun Harper suggested in his 2012 National Black Male College Achievement Study that if higher education administrators or anyone interested in how African American males achieve in higher education, they should ask those who have succeeded. He further emphasizes that colleges and universities should look beyond the deficit approach to college completion and identify what has benefited those who have gained academic success. As a result, I embarked on this research study to identify perceptions of the factors that African American males who completed their college education viewed as essential to their level of achievement in college. Ultimately, this information will inform the development and implementation of innovative approaches that would guide the way higher education institutions view and work toward academic success for African American males.

Appendix (B): Letter to Alumni Association

April 27, 2022

Ms. XXXX XXXXX
Assistant Director of Communication
Alumni Association
Research University Location
XXX Research University Avenue
Southeastern, USA XXXXX

Dear Ms. XXXX,

My name is Gary D. Oliver. I am a current doctoral student in the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) Innovation Education program with the USF College of Education. I am currently working towards completing my research on African American Males' Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to Success in Higher Education (**STUDY003948**) to complete my degree. I am interested in utilizing African American/Black male graduates from the University of South Florida who have completed their degrees within one to five years before today's date to participate in the study.

Current literature would suggest that African American men usually face significant challenges in higher education and are usually less successful in completing their degrees than men from other ethnic or racial groups. However, an avenue not conventionally examined is a study of African American men who accomplished their higher education pursuits and what resources and techniques they utilized to succeed while enrolled in college.

My research intention is to compare success factors in higher education by African American men and ultimately create a blueprint that current students and higher education institutions can utilize to aid in student retention, persistence, and overall success. Participation is voluntary; however, by way of this communication, I am seeking the assistance of the USF Alumni Association to reach men who fit within the specified demographics. I ask that you please forward the enclosed letter and demographic questionnaire (electronic copies also provided) to potential candidates so that they may contact me at oliverg@usf.edu and complete the questionnaire if interested in participating.

Please note that if selected, participants will be assigned a pseudonym so that no identifying information is shared throughout the research and the final dissertation. All content from the questionnaire will only be utilized to give the research participants context characteristics (i.e., enrollment status, years enrolled, and completion grade point average) during the final dissertation. Furthermore, all data collected during the research will be utilized only by the PI and secured in a locked file cabinet within the PI's office. Once the research project has concluded, the data will be maintained for a minimum of five years and shredded by a

professional shredding company upon the completion of the storage period. Information from those individuals not selected will be professionally shredded immediately.

Thank you in advance for your support, and if you have any questions or concerns about the intended research, please feel free to contact me at oliverg@usf.edu or 912.484.2809; I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Gary D. Oliver, M.Ed., Ed.S.
Ed.D., Doctoral Candidate
USF College of Education
Enclosure:

Participants Invitation Letter STUDY003948
Demographic Questionnaire STUDY003948

Appendix (C): Letter to Black Alumni Society

April 27, 2022

Organization Leadership
Black Alumni Organization
Research University Alumni Association
Research University Location
Southeastern, USA XXXXX

Dear XXXXX,

My name is Gary D. Oliver, and I am a current doctoral student in the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) Innovation Education program with the USF College of Education. I am currently working towards completing my research on African American Males' Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to Success in Higher Education (STUDY003948) to complete my degree. I am interested in utilizing African American/Black male graduates from the University of South Florida who have completed their degrees within one to five years before today's date to participate in the study.

Current literature would suggest that African American men usually face significant challenges in higher education and are usually less successful in completing their degrees than men from other ethnic or racial groups. However, an avenue not conventionally examined is the study of African American men who accomplished their higher education pursuits and what resources and techniques they utilized to succeed while enrolled in college.

My research intention is to compare success factors in higher education by African American men and ultimately create a blueprint that current students and higher education institutions can utilize to aid in student retention, persistence, and overall success. Participation is voluntary; however, by way of this communication, I am seeking the assistance of the Black Alumni Society to reach men who fit within the specified demographics. I ask that you please forward the enclosed letter and demographic questionnaire (electronic copies also provided) to potential candidates so that they may contact me at oliverg@usf.edu and complete the questionnaire if interested in participating.

Please note that if selected, participants will be assigned a pseudonym so that no identifying information is shared throughout the research and the final dissertation. All content from the questionnaire will only be utilized to give the research participants context characteristics (i.e., enrollment status, years enrolled, and completion grade point average) during the final dissertation. Furthermore, all data collected during the research will be utilized only by the PI and secured in a locked file cabinet within the PI's office. Once the research project has concluded, the data will be maintained for a minimum of five years and shredded by a

professional shredding company upon the completion of the storage period. Information from those individuals not selected will be professionally shredded immediately.

Thank you in advance for your support, and if you have any questions or concerns about the intended research, please feel free to contact me at oliverg@usf.edu or 912.484.2809; I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Gary D. Oliver, M.Ed, Ed.S.
Ed.D., Doctoral Candidate
USF College of Education

Enclosure:

Participants Invitation Letter STUDY003948
Demographic Questionnaire STUDY003948

Appendix (D): Demographic Questions for Study Participants

African American Males' Perception of Factors that Contribute to Success in Higher Education (STUDY003948) Demographic Questionnaire for Study Participants

If you are interested in participating in the African American (Black) Males' Perception of Success in Higher Education, please complete the below questionnaire and return it to Gary Oliver at oliverg@usf.edu. If selected, you will be forwarded consent information for review and contacted to arrange an interview.

Name: _____ Email address: _____

Date of Birth: _____
Month Day Year

Racial/Ethnic Background (check one)

African American/Black ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander ☐ Caucasian ☐ Hispanic ☐
Native American ☐ Other ☐

1. Did you graduate from the Predominantly White Institution (PWI)? Yes ☐ No ☐

If not, why not? _____

2. What year did you graduate? _____

3. How many years did it take you to complete your undergraduate degree? _____

4. Years enrolled at your university (e.g., 2010-2015). _____

5. What was your grade point average (GPA) when you completed your degree? _____

6. Did you fail or have to retake any classes? Yes ☐ No ☐

7. If you failed or had to retake a class, what resource(s) did you utilize to assist for success when retaking the class? _____

8. What was your student status while enrolled in the PWI?

Full Time ☐ Part Time ☐ Other _____

Appendix (E): Participation Invitation Letter

Dear Invitee,

My name is Gary D. Oliver. I am a current doctoral student in the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) Innovation Education program with the USF College of Education. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: African American Males' Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to Success in Higher Education (STUDY003948). The intention is to identify the perceptions African American/Black males feel have been beneficial to their success in completing their undergraduate degrees.

Current literature would suggest that African American men usually face significant challenges in higher education and are usually less successful in completing their degrees than men from other ethnic or racial groups. However, an avenue not conventionally examined is the study of African American men who had success in higher education and provides sources of best practices that could be advantageous to higher educational institutions and African American male students specifically. My research aims to compare success factors in higher education by African American men and ultimately create a blueprint that current students and higher education institutions can utilize to aid student retention, persistence, and overall success.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and there is minimal risk to participation. You may withdraw from the study if you feel uncomfortable proceeding. I will schedule individual one-hour interviews with all participants, consisting of 45 minutes of informal conversation and 15 minutes of providing you an opportunity to ask any questions. Interviews will be in person or virtually, depending on your preference or location. All in-person interviews will also follow standard CDC and university policies related to COVID-19 to ensure the safety and health of the participants and PI as outlined by my home institution ([Spring 2022 COVID-19 Protocols | Coronavirus Updates | University of South Florida \(usf.edu\)](#)). Also, participants' identities will remain anonymous and not be shared during or after the study.

Your participation in this research will be meaningful in adding additional knowledge about African American/Black men in higher education. If you are interested in participating, please do not hesitate to contact me at oliverg@usf.edu to schedule an interview.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Gary D. Oliver, M.Ed., Ed.S.
Ed.D., Doctoral Candidate
USF College of Education

Appendix (F): Interview Questions

African American Males' Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to Success in Higher Education (STUDY003948) Interview Questions

Overarching Question: What factors do African American males perceive to contribute to their academic success in higher education?

Supporting Questions:

1. *Can you tell me about your overall college experience?*
2. *What is your definition of academic success? Tell me about a time you felt most successful in college, and what do you think defined your success at that moment?*
3. *What kinds of strategies did you use to become successful? Why do you think they were helpful?*
4. *What are your thoughts about seeking assistance from instructors or other staff outside your class?*
5. *To what degree does the institution's definition of academic success align with your understanding of student success?*
6. *Can you tell me of a time when you experienced significant challenges while enrolled at the university? Were any of them related to your race? If so, explain.*
7. *What department, program, or individual(s) do you think was most influential in African-American males' success at the university, and how has their influence helped your academic progression?*
8. *What experiences on campus do you think you had the most significant impact on African American males' academic progress, either positively or negatively?*
9. *How has the institution's social culture affected your experience toward completing your degree as an African American male student?*
10. *To what degree are African American male students willing to seek support in completing their degree at this institution?*
11. *What support did you seek as an African American male to help complete your education at this institution?*

12. *What advice would you give other African American male students about being successful at the university?*
13. *What barriers to African American males' success do you think to exist at this institution?*

Appendix (G): Interview Protocol

Opening Script:

*Hello, and thank you for your participation. My name is Gary Oliver, and I am working on a research project to learn more about academic success for African American (Black) males who completed their degrees from a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). I appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to speak with me today. Is it okay with you if I record this session? It will help me ensure I do not miss anything important we discuss during the session. The recording will not be done through the meeting platform (**if done through a platform such as Skype, FaceTime, Teams Meeting, etc.**).*

However, all recordings will be done utilizing a separate recording device that will not be stored on a media cloud. This is done to protect your privacy. Additionally, I have placed mechanisms in place to keep your personal information and identity confidential during this interview, and throughout the research, you will be identified by a pseudonym.

I have several established questions about your experience as a student at a PWI. I believe this interview will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. There may be a few follow-up questions based on your responses and an opportunity for you to ask questions about the research or clarify any concerns you may have at the end of the interview.

As stated in the participant consent form and other information, this research study examines the African American (Black) male students' perceptions of academic success at a public, research-based institution of higher learning. I hope it will lead to a better understanding and perception of success for black males in higher education and identify mechanisms to assist their success.

Would you mind reviewing this consent form I emailed as I read it aloud? If you agree, please give your verbal consent.

Do you have any questions for me before we proceed?

Appendix (H): Research Study Consent to Participate Form

Research Study Title: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION (STUDY003948)

Purpose: This qualitative methods research study examines the African American male students' perceptions of academic success at a public, research-based institution of higher learning. This study will compare graduates' factors contributing to the academic success of completing an undergraduate degree after a standard definition for success outlined by the university and review university processes and scholarly articles.

Process: A researcher will interview participants to examine African American male perceptions of success during individual interviews. The interviews will take roughly one hour, either in person or virtually, over Microsoft Teams, Facetime, or Zoom. Depending on the virtual accessibility of participants. Please note that NO recording will take place over the virtual meeting outlet. A separate recording device will record all meetings to protect the participant's identity.

Confidentiality: All participants' identities will remain confidential throughout the study. Additional comments may include comments in the final report. However, we will make every effort to keep all records confidential. Participants will be identified by pseudonyms assigned at the beginning of the study.

Benefits: The participants have no known benefits from participating in the study.

Risks: Discussing past experiences may cause some distress. If a participant should happen to experience distress, the researcher will refer the participants to consider connecting with a mental health professional who can assist. In the interim, the PI will utilize his training as a counselor to reduce immediate distress during the interview until further help is secured. There is also a risk of novel coronavirus transmission from these procedures for in-person interviews. All in-person interviews will follow standard CDC and university policies related to COVID-19 as outlined by my home institution ([Spring 2022 COVID-19 Protocols | Coronavirus Updates | University of South Florida \(usf.edu\)](#)) to ensure the safety and health of the participants and PI. While precautions will be taken, the PI cannot guarantee that the participant will not be exposed to the virus.

Contact information: The researcher for this study is Gary D. Oliver and can be contacted at 912.484.2809 or oliverg@usf.edu.

Verbal Consent:

You give verbal consent to participate in this research by proceeding with this interview and are 18 years or older.

Appendix (I): Descriptive Code(s)

Participant Interview ID_____

Participant Statement	Code

Appendix (J): IRB Approval Letter



EXEMPT DETERMINATION

May 4, 2022

Gary Oliver
4121 Busch Blvd
Apt 222
Tampa , FL 33617

Dear Mr. Gary Oliver:

On 4/30/2022, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY003948
Review Type:	Exempt 2
Title:	African American Males' Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to Success in Higher Education
Funding:	Individual Personal Funding
Protocol:	• African American Males' Perceptions in Higher Education;

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Please note, as per USF policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in BullsIRB. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant a modification or new application.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance

FWA No. 00001669

University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638

Page 1 of 2



Sincerely,

Jennifer Walker
IRB Research Compliance Administrator

Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance

FWA No. 00001669

University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638

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