UNDERSTANDING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE PERSISTENCE IN THE URBAN UNIVERSITY: THE STUDENT EXPERTISE MODEL

By

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING AFRICAN
AMERICAN MALE PERSISTENCE IN THE URBAN UNIVERSITY:
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Like its K-12 predecessor, higher education has presented a major stumbling block for many African American males and is great cause for concern (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). Black male completion rates are lowest among both genders and racial/ethnic groups in U.S. higher education (Harper, 2006a; Strayhorn, 2010). African American males are less likely to enroll in graduate programs at rates comparable to Whites or other persons of color (Harrell, Myers & Smedley, 1993), limiting access into certain professions altogether. Attrition is often not due to lack of ability, but to the failure of institutional systems to engage positively with and embrace African American male college students (Wright & McCreary, 1997).

Wood (2010) states that while similarities may exist among Black males in different institutional contexts, researchers should be cautious about assuming the uniformity of their experiences. African American male students confront myriad obstacles to their satisfaction with the college experience that may account for their high attrition rates in these institutions (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990). The literature is replete with unanswered questions about African American men's participation, student success and graduation from college (Cuyjet, 2006; Polite & Davis, 1999). In particular, there is a dearth of research on successful African American males attending urban research universities. The purpose of this study was to provide instructive insights from African American male students who did well academically, maximized their college experiences and successfully earned baccalaureate degrees. Study participants interpreted

their understandings of institutional barriers as they perceived and experienced them, and strategies they used to reduce or eliminate these barriers.

The research informing this study was conducted at Urban Research University a predominately White institution located in a Midwestern city with a significant history of racial conflict and economic decline. This study adds to the existing body of literature concerning non-cognitive strengths in regard to student success and the unique challenges faced by African American male students in urban research university environments. The study may provide policy makers, administrators, student affairs professionals, faculty members and others with an enhanced ability to develop policies and programs to increase African American male student success at urban universities.

This dissertation is dedicated to Raquel R. Robinson
Without her love and support it would not have been possible.

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I must give respect and praise to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

"I can do all things, through Him who strengthens me".

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The purpose of this inquiry is to add to the scholarship exploring strategies that may serve to increase student success and degree attainment among African American men in higher education.

Each year thousands of African American men attend institutions of higher education with aspirations of earning a college degree. Many work hard to achieve the dream, yet the majority of Black men fail to earn a baccalaureate. Although the numbers of African American men entering college increased substantially during the late 1960's and again during the 1980's and 1990's, African American men continue to lag behind their White and other minority male counterparts with respect to college participation, retention and degree completion rates (Cross & Slater, 2000; Noguera, 2003). Cuyjet (2006) suggests in his book, African American Men in College that the topic of African American male student success in college has received far less attention than research on African American males from a deficit perspective, prevalent in the K-12, mental health, unemployment and crime and deviance literature.

The enhancement of human capital is a key driver in the development of a robust economy, employment at a livable wage, and strong families and communities and a highly educated workforce are widely acknowledged as essential for the U.S. to remain competitive in the global economy (Lee, Rawls, McGuire, Rawls, Edward & Menson, 2011). In addition to improving U.S. competitiveness in the global economy, research indicates that multiple benefits accrue to individual citizens that earn bachelor's degrees. Based on 2011 data, African American male bachelor's degree recipients earn $18,100 more than African American male high school graduates ($45,300 and $27,200, respectively) in median annual earnings working full time

(Baum et al., 2013, p.14). The United States of America cannot afford to ignore the strengths, talents and intellectual capabilities of African American men.

In the following pages, the context for the problem are discussed in order to provide the reader with a foundation for understanding contemporary issues that shape the current state of education of African American males in America.

Statement of the Problem

The K-12 educational system must become more responsive to the needs of African American males if it is to serve as an engine of social, economic and cultural development. Traditionally African Americans have faced widespread underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs in our nation's schools (Bonner, 2010, p.10). The 2010 Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males states that research reports have indicated for years that Black male students are not given the same opportunities to participate in classes offering enriched educational opportunities. Advanced Placement classes only enroll token numbers of Black male students, despite the College Board urging that schools open these classes to all who may benefit (p.4). In districts with selective, college-preparatory high schools, it is not uncommon to find virtually no Black male students (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). In 2009-10, only 52% of Black male students graduated in four years from U.S. high schools, compared to 78% of White male students (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012, p.13).

Like its K-12 predecessor, higher education has presented a major stumbling block for many African American males and is great cause for concern (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). In 2002, African American men comprised only 4.3% of students enrolled in institutions of higher education, the exact same percentage as in 1976 (Harper, 2012a; Strayhorn, 2010). Black male

students are often comparatively less prepared than are others for the rigors of college level academic work in part because of lack of opportunity for many college preparatory and enhancement opportunities in high school, as noted above (Bonner II & Bailey, 2006; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011). They also tend to be less engaged than others in college classrooms, clubs, structured campus activities, and enriching educational experiences outside the classroom (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004).

Black male completion rates are lowest among both genders and racial/ethnic groups in U.S. higher education (Harper, 2006a; Strayhorn, 2010). Across four cohorts of undergraduates, the six-year graduation for Black male students attending public colleges and universities was 33.3%, compared to 48.1% for students overall (Harper, 2012a).

In addition, the gap in Bachelor's degree attainment between White males and Black males grew from 13 percentage points in 2002 to 19 percentage points in 2012 (National Student Clearinghouse (2013, p.10), and African American males are less likely to enroll in graduate programs at rates comparable to Whites or other persons of color (Harrell, Myers & Smedley, 1993), limiting access into certain professions altogether.

These problems are exacerbated at urban universities by the lack of critical social support systems that lead to low levels of student success. African American male students confront myriad obstacles to their satisfaction with the college experience that may account for their dismal retention rates (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990). African American male students need resources that recognize the uniqueness of their experience and needs, while offering potential solutions to their academic problems. Attrition is often not due to lack of ability, but to the failure of institutional systems to become accessible and knowledgeable regarding African American male college students (Wright & McCreary, 1997, p.48). African American males and

other minority populations tend to live in and around urban centers due to the need to be close to employment opportunities, and residential and geographical segregation. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011) the 10 locales with the largest number of African Americans living in them were also places with total populations of 100,000 or more persons. A higher proportion of the non-Hispanic Black population lived inside the largest principal cities in 15 out of the 20 largest metropolitan areas relative to other race populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Due to cost, poor K-12 educational experiences and inadequate preparation in underperforming school systems, urban African American males are likely to attend less selective urban colleges and universities close to where they live that may not always have the needed support structures to help students succeed. In the following section I discuss the significance of this problem.

Research by Baum et al., (2013, p.42) reveals that the percentage of African American males ages 25-29 who completed bachelor's degrees increased from 11% to 16% during a 30 year period from 1982 to 2012. This statistic supports the need for higher education institutions to implement effective retention policies that promote a culture of high degree attainment among African American men (Simmons, 2013, p.62). Despite the success of a few, critical concerns remain about low graduation rates that continue to limit career opportunities and prospects for success among the majority of African American men in higher education.

In another capacity the researcher serves as Coordinator for the African American Graduation Celebration at his place of employment. One stark observation made over several years is the major imbalance of female to male graduates. Participants in these events are overwhelmingly female. One upper level administrator (who happens to be a White female) participating as a guest speaker in this event for the first time, observed this phenomenon and stated, "I have heard about the male/female college graduation gap before, yet now I know what

it looks like". She continued, "the imbalance is astounding". This anecdotal reflection provides some insight into the relative absence of African American men successfully graduating from the nation's colleges and universities. The declining numbers of Black men in higher education is disconcerting for sociologists, administrators, policy makers and educators alike as they try to reconcile their inability to prepare, recruit and graduate them (Campbell, 2009). Higher education leaders, researchers, faculty, administrators and most of all African American male collegians must develop positive, proactive approaches to increasing student success and degree attainment.

Main Research Question and Overarching Themes

The main research question of this study is to discover the practices of African American males that lead to academic success and the practices of urban universities that serve to help or hinder student success. The goal of this study is to amplify the voices and the perspectives of African American males related to factors promoting their success. The following themes guiding this study and data analysis are:

1. Motivating factors influencing African American males to persist towards completion of the baccalaureate degree.
2. The role of prior academic preparation in elementary, middle or high school in the persistence of African American men to baccalaureate degree completion.
3. Non-Cognitive variables that contribute to African American male persistence to baccalaureate degree completion.
4. Campus supports that contribute to the persistence of African American males to degree completion.

5. Campus barriers that impede progress for African American men in their quest to earn a baccalaureate degree.

6. The impact of race on the persistence to baccalaureate degree completion for African American men.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following definitions are provided for clarity and consistency:

Attrition: cessation of individual student membership in an institution of higher education (Bean, 1980, p.157).

African American: The terms African American and Black are used interchangeably to refer to individuals who trace their ancestral origins to groups of the African Diaspora, including West Indians, Africans, Caribbean's and Haitians etc.

Dropout: a student who withdraws from college, regardless of his or her reasons for doing so (Tinto, 1993, p.139).

Persistence: continuous enrollment in higher education from one semester to the next (Nora, 2006).

Retention: the number of students who remain enrolled from one year to the next.

Successful student: a student who is doing satisfactorily in college and making progress towards his or her goals, which can include graduation or transfer (Padilla, 1999).

Significance of the Study

Black men's troubled status in higher education has garnered tremendous attention at national conferences, in the media and in published scholarship over the past 15 years. As researchers make the complexities of the problem increasingly clear, educators, administrators and policymakers alike have wrestled with the question of what must be done to improve Black

male student success (Harper, 2012). Issues defining and setting the context for understanding the relationship between African American men and colleges are quite complex.

This research is significant for several reasons. First, despite much work, the literature is replete with unanswered questions about African American men's participation, student success and graduation from college (Cuyjet, 2006; Polite & Davis, 1999). Wood (2010) states that while similarities may exist among Black males in different institutional contexts, researchers should be cautious assuming the uniformity of their experiences. In particular, there is a dearth of research on successful African American males attending urban universities; the majority of existing research relies on samples from suburban and rural universities and community colleges.

Second, there is a need to understand how African American males attending urban institutions determine what is student success. Padilla (1999) defines a successful student as one who is performing satisfactorily in college while making progress towards his or her goals, which can include graduation or transfer. Unfortunately, much of the existing literature focuses upon the non-cognitive abilities and attitudes toward learning of African American males that lead to poor academic performance and low persistence rates presenting a deficit model rather than success strategies (Schwartz & Washington, 2002),. This research departs from that trend and follows the lead of Shaun Harper (2012a) who in his landmark study of African American male college student success moved beyond "deficit perspectives" that mark a large number of research studies seeking to understand the experiences of African American males in American society and higher education in particular. Instead of adding to the now exhaustive body of literature and conversations about why Black male enrollments and degree attainments are so low, his study sought to provide instructive insights from engaged student leaders who did well and maximized their college experiences.

Third, this research is significant because it utilizes a theoretical framework provided by Padilla's Student Expertise Model of Success (1994) that can result in development of a local student success model (LSSM) specific to an urban institution. To date no similar study has been performed at an urban university with a focus on African American males. The LSSM can help administrators at an urban institution identify barriers that may prevent their African American male students from being successful (Myers, 2008). Once the barriers are identified through the LSSM, university officials can apply resources to reduce or eliminate barriers to student success, thereby potentially increasing the African American male student success rate (Myers, 2008).

Finally, this study adds to the existing body of literature concerning student success and the unique challenges faced by African American male students in urban universities. Therefore, the data collected and analyzed from this study will be an important contribution to research on this topic. The study may provide policy makers, administrators, student affairs professionals, faculty members and others with an enhanced ability to develop policies and programs to increase African American student success at urban universities.

Methodological Overview and Limitations

In order to better understand the academic experiences of African American males in higher education several researchers cite the need for additional studies that amplify the voices of African American male students. The focus of this qualitative study is on the lived experiences of African American males that successfully graduated from urban universities, who were asked to articulate their stories of success. The study identifies the barriers that hinder student success for African American males at this institution from the alumnus perspective. The study also addresses what alumni believe they have done to help themselves become successful in

overcoming barriers. In order to conduct the study this researcher utilized a qualitative single-site case study approach involving individual interviews and a semi-structured interview protocol.

Limitations of the study include the fact that data were collected from a single urban university located in the Midwest. Therefore, the findings were most applicable to the site of the study. As a result findings are not generalizable to other colleges and universities, which is also not the primary goal of the research. There may be lessons learned for students in similar circumstances. The goal of this research is to discover what specific educational practices and individual student actions lead to success for African American males at the research site. The number of years that passed since the participant's graduation from the focus institution was no greater than four. Therefore, the researcher studied African American males that have achieved some measure of academic success at the research site. This was done to obtain the most accurate reflections of study participant perspectives and experiences. The results reflected those who have "made it" and do not reflect the experiences of those who are persisting, have stopped out, dropped out or withdrawn from higher education.

As in every study, issues of researcher bias must be addressed (Jordan, 2008). The researcher is an African American male higher education administrator who has overcome many of the same obstacles as the study participants. In order to minimize the bias concern the researcher focused on perceptions of student success as triangulated through the use of multiple sources, such as individual interviews, member checking and a peer debriefer.

Overview of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter One included the Introduction, context of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose and research questions, definitions of terms,

methodological overview, limitations and significance of the study. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature that addresses issues of retention and persistence in relation to African American males. Chapter Three describes the conceptual framework, data collection methods, site and participant selection methods, procedures for data analysis and information about the history and context of this site institution. Chapter Four presents findings from the themes of summarized alumni interviews. Chapter Five includes the analysis and discussion of themes generated from participant interviews. Chapter Six presents conclusions from the study in addition to recommendations for future research and implications for policy and practice.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to obtain a greater understanding of factors that influence the success of African American males in higher education, this literature review includes four sections. The first covers the African American male experience in the United States. The second section presents an overview of the African American male experiences in K-12 and higher education. The third section presents an overview of the literature on the variables that influence African American male student success in higher education. The fourth section examines the theoretical frameworks utilized to guide this inquiry.

Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success is the theoretical framework guiding this qualitative study of the complex issue of African American male student success in urban universities. Padilla's (1991, 1994) Expertise Model of Student Success is rooted in the research on student success and Harmon and King's (1985) Expert Systems Theory. In this study the research questions generate data revealing perceived barriers to student success, as well as the body of knowledge and associated actions of African American male students used to overcome barriers to degree attainment (Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez & Trevino, 1997, p.131).

With the election of Barack Obama as the President of the United States, a great deal of interest has been generated around the following question: How can the nation produce greater numbers of African American men like him? We know that answers to this question begin with an honest assessment of African American male success in the K-12 and postsecondary educational systems. Over the past four decades, a great deal has been written about the experiences of African American college students (Harris, III, et al., 2011). Only recently have scholars begun to dissagregate the experiences and challenges of male students from the larger African American college student population (Harris, III, et al.). Several scholars have conducted

inquiries into African American men's academic achievement and outcomes. For example, Cuyjet (1997), and Harper and Harris III (2006a) addressed involvement in educationally purposeful programs and activities; Beamon (2008), and Comeaux and Harrison (2007) studied African American male involvement in college sports; Harper and Quaye (2007) and Howard-Hamilton (1997) examined racial and ethnic identity expression and peer interactions. Finally, Harper (2006b) and Strayhorn (2008b) have examined African American male peer interactions.

Even with increased research focusing on the experiences and issues confronting African American males in college, the educational and societal contexts also need appropriate examination. We cannot accurately study the myriad and complex persistence issues of African American collegians without significant historical insight into how African American people and men in particular experienced education in the United States. Howard, Flennaugh and Terry (2013) assert that part of the depathologizing of African American males lies in placing appropriate scrutiny on institutional practices, structural arrangements, social customs, legal precedents and ideologies which create conditions that may stifle the intellectual, academic and social development of African American males. Therefore, the next part of this review explores the historical context that shaped African American male student success over time.

Legacy of Slavery and Legalized Oppression

The average person could review the literature on African American male success in higher education and easily arrive at the conclusion that African American males are not successful due to some intellectual or character defect. The main argument presented in this section is that African American men have historically been conditioned by a variety of punitive economic, legal, social and cultural forces that have served to reinforce messages of individual and group inferiority. The institution of slavery produced legal, economic and cultural systems of

oppression that have limited African American male educational access and success since Colonial times. Finally, the legacy of slavery set a standard of oppression that lingered in the years following its abolition and continues to persist within today's society (Dancy, 2012; Schneider & Schneider, 2001).

The African American experience became a chaotic one beginning roughly during the year 1641, when a Virginia court first made the distinction between a White and Black indentured servant, sentencing the latter to a lifetime of servitude (Jenkins, 2006). In 1664, when the New Netherlands fell to the British, both New York and New Jersey in subsequent capitulation articles officially recognized slavery as a legal institution (Schneider & Schneider, 2001). A lifestyle of disenfranchisement did not just happen upon African American people, but was intentionally ingrained in the everyday commerce, custom and jurisprudence of American life for the next 400 years. Virtually every state in the Union passed "Black Codes" that regulated the economic, educational and social lives of African Americans (Jenkins). In the 1857 Dred Scott v. Sanford case the United States Supreme Court ruled that a slave, ex-slave or a descendant of slaves could not be citizen of the United States (Schneider & Schneider). The institution of slavery was eventually abolished by the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, however, the vast majority of American citizens retained and reinforced notions of African American inferiority through subsequent generations (Jenkins).

In many cases the end of slavery did not mean complete and total freedom from social and economic oppression. New forms of discrimination designed to keep African Americans as a subordinate and economically exploited group were implemented in federal courthouses, state legislatures and local jurisdictions. Blackmon's (2008), Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II painstakingly documents

the age of "neoslavery" in the United States. Under laws specifically enacted to intimidate Blacks, tens of thousands of African Americans were arbitrarily arrested, hit with outrageous fines and charged with the costs of their own arrests. With no means to repay these "debts", prisoners were sold as forced laborers to coal mines, lumber camps, brickyards, railroads, quarries and farm plantations. The collusion of agricultural interests, re-emergent Southern reconstruction era heavy industry, Jim Crow laws and local law enforcement created conditions under which millions of "newly freed men and women" were locked into positions of economic, political and social oppression. African American people suffered from the creation of new systems of segregation, exploitative labor opportunities, and persistent racial discrimination in education, housing, the military, employment, politics and medical care from one generation to the next. The cumulative effect of these legal, governmental and social policies created conditions that made it difficult or impossible for African American men to obtain equal access to, and success in higher education.

K-12 Experiences and Outcomes

Elementary and secondary schools operate within the context of the society of which they are a part. Therefore, it is not surprising to discover that funding decisions, curriculum and instruction, and disciplinary policies reflect the cultural and racial biases of the dominant group. Persons in positions of power use schooling to preserve advantages for themselves and consistently investigate ways to pass advantages on to their children (Dancy, 2012). Systemically, the economic, racial and social differences resulting in differential privileges and school outcomes lead to the practice of educational redlining documented in a Schott Foundation report, A Rotting Apple: Educational Redlining in New York City (2012b). According to Schott (2012a) the educational redlining process begins with segregating Black and Latino students in

schools with high poverty levels, then through budget and staff cuts reducing critical resources needed for high quality learning opportunities. These cuts eliminate the supports essential to retaining effective veteran teachers, leading to disproportionately high teacher turnover rates. The end result is that majority minority communities struggle with local schools that are staffed by novice teachers, labeled ineffective, or disproportionately closed or taken over by the state.

The Center for American Progress also documents redlining at the in-district level on a national basis. The report titled Unequal Education: Federal Loophole Enables Lower Spending on Students of Color (2012) documents ways in which in-district inequities between schools are magnified by directing more non-targeted funding to schools and students with less need. The unequal distribution of funding for schools populated with majority low income and minority children leads to conditions that predispose African American males to be left behind (Dancy, 2012). Numerous statistics explain the severity and persistence of academic underachievement and social challenges of African American males in K-12 schools (Davis, 2001; hooks, 2004a; Jenkins, 2006; Polite & Davis, 1999). Young Black males are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than any other group (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba et al., 2007). They also more likely to be placed in special education and remedial services (Noguera, 2003; Price, 2000; Skiba et al., 2007).

African American males continue to struggle academically throughout high school. Since 2004, the Schott Foundation for Public Education's Biennial Reports on Black Males in Public Education have documented that of all racial, ethnic and gender groups, Black males have been the least likely to secure a regular diploma four years after beginning high school. Unfortunately, the data in the publication, The Urgency of Now: The Schott Foundation 50 State Report on Black Males and Public Education, indicate very little has changed since 2004 (Holzman, 2012).

Holzman's analysis of the most recent state reported graduation rate data (2009-10) indicate that in 38 of 50 states and the District of Columbia, Black males have the lowest high school graduation rates among Black, Latino, and White non-Latino male and female students. The national graduation rate for Black male students increased by 10 percentage points from 42% in 2001-02 to 52% in 2009-10 (Holzman, 2012), making it the first year that more than half of the nation's Black males in 9th grade graduated with regular diplomas four years later. The national Black/White graduation gap however, has only decreased by 3 percentage points over the last decade to 26% percentage points (Holzman, 2012).

In sum, the nation's K-12 educational systems are not adequately preparing African American males for success in postsecondary education. The unequal distribution of funding for schools and other schooling experiences create conditions that leave many African American males vulnerable to being left behind (Dancy, 2012). In addition, Howard, Flennaugh and Terry (2013) argue that large numbers of African American males experience education in a manner unlike most groups in the United States and that these experiences are rooted in a historical construction of what it means to be Black and male. Moreover, these researchers contend that the aforementioned negative notions of Black males shape their schooling experiences, and may severely limit their life chances at a time when educational success is vital to competing in an increasingly global society.

African Americans and Higher Education

Historically, African Americans place a great deal of emphasis on educational attainment. Black leaders, activists and scholars have long advocated that the road to upward mobility, group competitiveness and liberation was paved with education (Smith, 1989). Even so, African Americans have often been excluded from higher education due to the crippling historical burden

and lack of confidence about the possibilities of intellectual and scientific achievement pursuant to earning a postsecondary education. The following chronology of race relations reflects the evolving degrees of access African Americans have experienced to higher education.

There is no record of colonial commitment to the collegiate education of Black students whether in the regular course of study or at special affiliated schools (Thelin, 2004). Occasionally, a few institutions such as Berea College in Kentucky and Oberlin College in Ohio admitted Blacks on a selective basis, and northern free Blacks and White missionaries who comprised the abolitionist movement established Wilberforce College (Bowles & Decosta, 1971). The majority of Black colleges founded during the Reconstruction period (1865-1877) were established by or with the assistance of White philanthropists who committed themselves to the educational advancement of four million newly freed slaves and about one and a half million free Blacks classified as "free men of color" prior to the Civil War (Blackwell, 1981). Protestant groups such as the American Missionary Association, associated with the founding of liberal arts colleges in the West, also displayed great commitment to the education of African Americans. The AMA was central to founding Hampton Institute, Fisk University, Howard University in Washington D.C., Atlanta University and Talledega College in Alabama (Curti & Nash, 1965). Although their contributions are often overlooked, Black church and community associations were deeply committed to founding and funding their own local colleges. Dennis (2001) found that these indigenous attempts at college building tended to insist that liberal education was crucial to the preparation of future Black leadership and that this primary commitment must not be subverted by industrial training.

A new economic and political approach was applied to separate but equal education following the ruling in the Plessy vs Ferguson U. S. Supreme Court case in 1896. This case

clearly established the principle of separate but equal in every facet of American life (Patterson, 1992). The 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education ruling invalidated the Plessy vs Ferguson ruling, yet by 1964, 60% of the Black students in college were still enrolled in Black colleges (Blackwell, 1981). As the courts ruled that segregation in public schools was illegal, Blacks began to apply and demand admission to White institutions in large numbers. The United States government mandated equal educational opportunity with passage of Title IV and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The desegregation efforts of state legislatures and universities during the 1960's were largely a matter of halfhearted, token compliance. By 1968, racial integration had only nominally been achieved at state flagship universities in the South through court challenges (Wallenstein, 1999). However, change in admissions policies at these institutions in the North and the South did not mean that Black students were accepted in campus life (Thelin, 2004). Segregation and exclusion often continued in residence halls, dining halls and classroom seating arrangements. The Black students who became pioneers in racial desegregation in the two decades between 1948-1968 often endured isolation, shunning and sabotage, along with exclusion from real college life (Thelin, 2004).

Unfortunately, significant gaps in educational achievement remain, particularly between African American males and other demographic groups in American society. The historic legacy of American racism and discrimination continue to fuel disparities in educational attainment. Scholars identified and investigated problems inherent in the functioning of present day colleges that contribute to the phenomenon of African American male underachievement (Dancy, 2011). These problems are aggravated by the lack of educational practices that provide African American males with friendly and welcoming institutional environments designed to increase

self-efficacy and reduce perceptions of alienation and invisibility (Cuyjet, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008a). Finally, stereotype threat and teacher neglect are also identified in the literature as contributing to the underrepresentation and low graduation rates of African American males in higher education (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Steele, 1997).

This brief historical record provides the reader with a critical understanding of the legal, structural, cultural and political barriers that created difficult conditions for African American men on college campuses. These issues provide important context for the discussion of African American male student success in urban higher education.

African American Male Success in Urban Higher Education

Urban universities play an increasingly significant role in post-secondary education; however, little attention has been directed at these institutions and the African American males that attend them (Riposa, 2003). Urban universities are typically defined as being located in the within U. S. Census calculated Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs) with populations of 450,000 people or more (Perry & Menendez, 2010). These universities are challenged by unique circumstances posed by their economic, racial, political and cultural environments that are different from those confronting non-metropolitan colleges and universities (Smith, Guald, Tubbs, & Correnti, 1997). Sugrue (2005) argues that major American cities were devastated following the Second World War by a combination of three major forces: the flight of well paying, secure and mostly unionized jobs from the urban economy that accompanied White residential flight to the suburbs; the persistence of workplace discrimination despite gains achieved by the Civil Rights Movement; and the intractable racial segregation in housing that led to major inequities in the distribution of power and resources in metropolitan areas. Sociologist Charles Tilly (1998) argues that "resource hoarding" by Whites who used the advantages of race

and residence to hoard political and economic resources, jobs, public services, education and other goods also led to the decline of major urban centers (Sugrue, 2005).

Predominately White urban institutions reflect the racial and class divisions and tensions that led to the development of major metropolitan areas following World War II (Rowley, 2000). In collaboration with other institutions in American society, urban institutions practiced and many would argue, continue to perpetuate racial inequities.

Historically, urban institutions were developed to meet the need for higher education for the "local urban populace", however African American males were more likely to be employed as janitors and cooks than be admitted as students. For many generations prior to the desegregation of higher education in the United States, Blacks worked at universities in spite of not being allowed to attend them (Rowley, 2000). Today's urban institutions serve a diverse student body and are inextricably tied to the local economic, political and cultural problems of the environments they inhabit (Seabury & Davis, 1997). Many urban institutions serve as "institutions of opportunity", with a commitment to local communities, acting as catalysts for economic growth and educational opportunities in geographic areas marked by inadequate education systems, sluggish innovation systems, population growth, aging infrastructure, and diminishing social equity and civic capacity (Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, 2012). Due to these factors, urban universities enroll a greater proportion of commuter, minority, non-traditional, and first generation college students (Smith, Guald, Tubbs, & Correnti, 1997). These students are more likely to have significant outside employment and strong family obligations such as children and aging parents. Students attending urban institutions are also place bound and desire higher education as an economic necessity (Riposa, 2003). They are more likely to

stop out and enroll in fewer classes, therefore taking longer to graduate than most undergraduates (Riposa, 2003).

Higher education institutions in urban settings often reflect the historical and current class and racial inequities in a given metropolitan area. Institutional racism can be defined as the negative consequences that accrue to a member of a given group because the way a system or subsystem operates in society regardless of any other attributes of the individual (Sedlacek, 2004). Continuing class and racial differences between predominately White urban university communities and African American urban residents contribute to campus climates under which African American male collegians are subjected to stereotyping, racial profiling, microaggressions, and hostility. Members of university communities (i.e., affluent, academically inclined faculty and students) have cultural experiences (i.e., academic degrees, institutional prestige, and research) that contrast sharply with residents of urban communities and those elements (crime, poverty, drug culture) that are often identified exclusively with inner-city life and culture (Rowley, 2000). Harper (2013, p.13) in the National Black Male Achievement Study documents how African American male collegians are subjected to attacks on their "sense of belonging" in university communities by professors, peers and others on predominately White campuses in urban settings:

- Picked last or not at all for collaborative learning projects and study groups by peers because they were perceived to be academically underprepared.
- Labeled as unqualified beneficiaries of affirmative action policies.
- Considered knowledgeable about Hip-Hop, latest slang and dance moves.
- Pressured to be "spokespersons" or ambassadors for people of color during in and out of class discussions.

- Met with skepticism and disbelief from professors regarding academic competence despite doing well on assignments.
- Considered "athletes" who played on sports teams.
- Labeled as coming from high poverty urban ghetto's and fatherless homes.
- Subjected to 'community policing' tactics by campus and municipal law enforcement agencies.

In large measure, a hostile racial campus climate can have a profound effect on a Black male collegians' self-concept. Campus involvement among Black males is often grossly diminished because of an oppressive and discriminatory campus climate influenced and perpetuated by significant members of the college community (Comeaux, 2013). African American male students that persist at urban institutions are less likely to be integrated and engaged in the academic, intellectual and social fabric of the campus (Harper & Kimbrough, 2006). Given the aforementioned circumstances, urban universities may have more difficulty retaining and graduating African American males. Scholars have conducted numerous studies on the success of African American males in higher education, yet few have examined the lived experiences of these students in predominately White urban institutions.

Theoretical Frameworks

At this point in the literature review, I transition to the theoretical constructs used to guide inquiry into the subject matter. Merriam (1998) informed researchers that a theoretical framework "is derived from the orientation or stance you bring to your study. It also serves as the structure, the scaffolding upon which your study is built" (p.45). This literature review examines two models of student success, Padilla's (1991, 1994) Expertise Model of Successful College Students and Sedlacek's (2004) Non-Cognitive Assessment Model. The literature review also

examines Critical Race Theory, which serves as an interpretive framework to examine the responses of study participants regarding race, and African American male student success at the focus institution.

Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success

Over time, most studies of retention and departure have been quantitative in design and viewed undergraduates from a "deficiency perspective" in terms of what characteristics or behaviors students are lacking, or institutional variables that cause students to dropout or withdraw (Braunstein, McGrath & Pescatrice, 2000). While student departure research has value in understanding the problem of African American male attrition, this discussion focuses on the alternative approach: student success from the student perspective. This follows a growing trend during the past ten years of researchers reviewing the issues of student persistence more qualitatively and from the perspective of successful students, rather than from a failure, problem or deficit perspective (Hernandez, 2000; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez & Trevino, 1997).

Harper (2012) argues that those interested in African American male student success in college have much to learn from Black men who have actually been successful. In addition student success research details how a specific institution can benefit from understanding what accounts for student success as well as what students can do to become more successful (Padilla, 1999). The end result of student success research is often the creation of a model relevant to a particular institution; student success models illustrate student success in the form of a "local student success model" or LSSM (Padilla, 1999, p.32). The LSSM emphasizes an overall path for student success within the confines of the focus institution (Myers, 2008). LSSMs also provide a clear picture for college administrators in terms of barriers students may encounter and how students can overcome those barriers. Finally, student success research can provide students

with critical information, which may help them become more successful in a given institution (Myers, 2008).

One of the first researchers to look at the problem of student departure from a proactive student success perspective is Raymond Padilla (Myers, 2008, p.34). Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success (1991, 1994) is rooted in qualitative research and Harmon and King's (1985) Expert Systems Theory, and is the theoretical framework guiding this study. The model seeks to identify the strategies successful college students employ to overcome barriers to academic success in college (Myers, 2008; Padilla, et al., 1997). The model also suggests that successful college students are "experts" at being successful at a particular college or university (Ford-Edwards, 2002, p.31). Harmon and King (1985) viewed expertise as compiled knowledge built upon two key components, theoretical knowledge and heuristic knowledge (Ford-Edwards, 2002, p.31).

The knowledge of expert systems consists of facts and heuristics. The facts constitute a body of knowledge that is widely shared, publicly available and generally agreed upon by experts in the field. The heuristics are mostly private, little discussed rules of good judgment. These rules of plausible reasoning and educated guessing characterize expert level decision making in the field. Theoretical knowledge includes principles and general theories of a particular system. Heuristic knowledge includes knowledge acquired experientially. Domain specific facts are learned first. Experience usually teaches the student to rely on rules of thumb to perform tasks and solve problems (Harmon & King, 1985). Padilla (1991) built upon these presuppositions in developing the Expertise Model of Student Success and extended the operational definitions to college environments. Theoretical knowledge is learned through

coursework and formal study. Heuristic knowledge is locally defined and acquired through experience (Ford-Edwards, 2002).

Padilla argues that all students arrive on campus with varying levels of theoretical and heuristic knowledge, which are influenced by the collegiate environment. Theoretical knowledge must be demonstrated through various assessments (exams, papers, portfolio etc.) to be awarded a degree. Heuristic knowledge is acquired experientially and informally. It is passed along from experienced students to new students on a one to one basis, or by student organizations to new groups of students (Ford-Edwards, 2002). Padilla (1994) argues that each is equally important in the educational experience. Padilla (1994) also maintains that heuristic knowledge is not acquired systemically, and therefore, such knowledge does not reach as many students effectively. Unsuccessful students are those who do not learn the heuristic knowledge critical for success (Ford-Edwards, 2002). Studies examining the efficacy of Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success have validated the importance of using student perspectives to address campus specific issues (Hernandez, 2000; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez & Trevino, 1997).

Padilla's studies seek to identify "strategies that most successful students employ to overcome barriers to academic success in college" (Padilla, et al., 1997, p. 125). A study conducted by Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez and Trevino (1997) of Hispanic students at a large research university in the Southwest identified four categories of barriers to student success. These barriers were: discontinuity; lack of nurturing; lack of presence; and (4) resource barriers. The 4 barriers identified in this study are displayed in Figure 1.

Once these barriers were identified, a local student success model (LSSM) was created based on the "heuristic knowledge" possessed by successful minority students (Myers, 2008). See Figure 2. The LSSM served as an invaluable tool for college administrators to reduce

barriers and improve programs and services. In a marked departure from many popular and student departure and retention studies, Padilla's model provides tangible solutions to assist institutions in reducing barriers to student academic success (Myers, 2008, p.34).

Figure 1: Barriers to Student Success

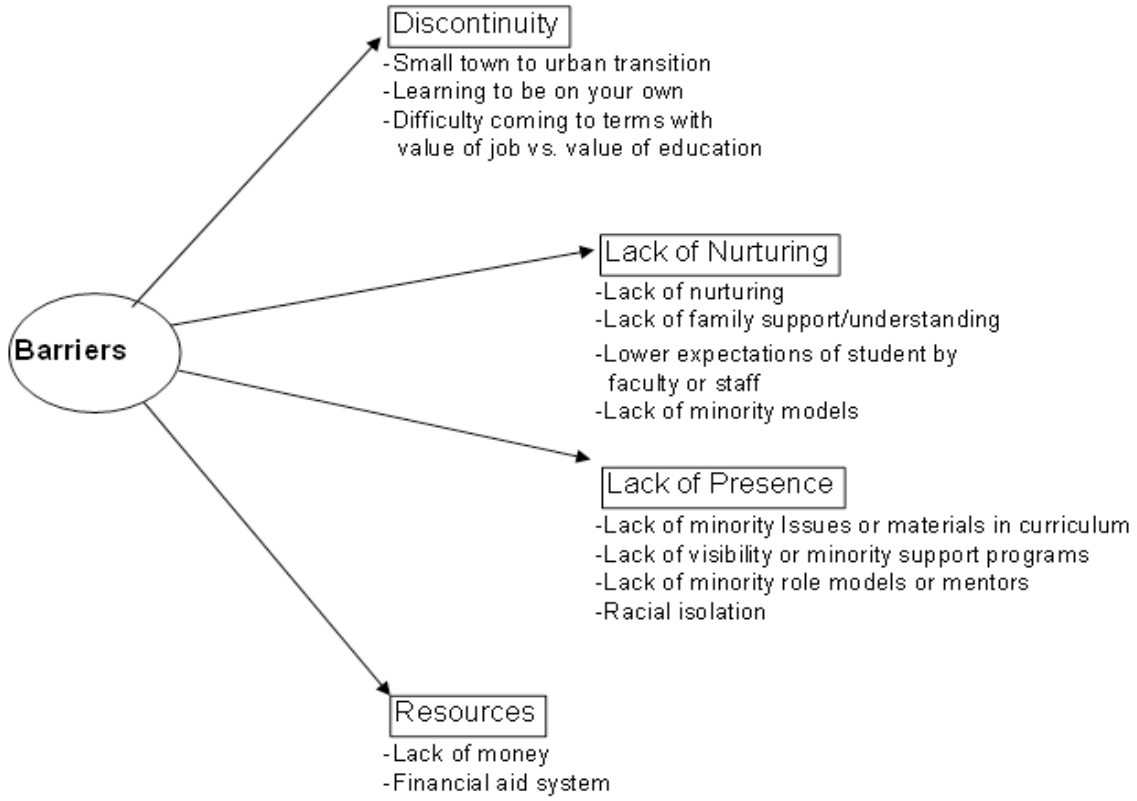

Figure1. Taxonomy of Barriers that Successful Students Must Overcome at a Large Public University in the Southwest from the Perspective of Ethnic Minority Students*
Source: Myers, 2008; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez & Trevino (1997, p. 130).

Bolge (1994), Ford-Edwards (2002), Hagedorn, Parrakis and Maxwell (2002), Rendon (1993, 1995), and Thompson-Felder (2005) conducted qualitative studies that applied Padilla's theoretical framework. Although none of these studies produced an LSSM, they provided invaluable information about institutional barriers to student success (Myers, 2008). Researchers discovered the following barriers when applying Padilla's theoretical framework: stigma on campus; financial aid policies; self-intimidation administration; social environment; faculty;

cultural barriers; and language barriers. The researchers suggest that their list of behaviors and barriers to student success could be used by administrators as "building blocks" for institutions for developing a blueprint for the future of their colleges and accelerating the pace of change (Hagedorn, et al., 2002b).

Figure 2. Local Concept Model of Student Success

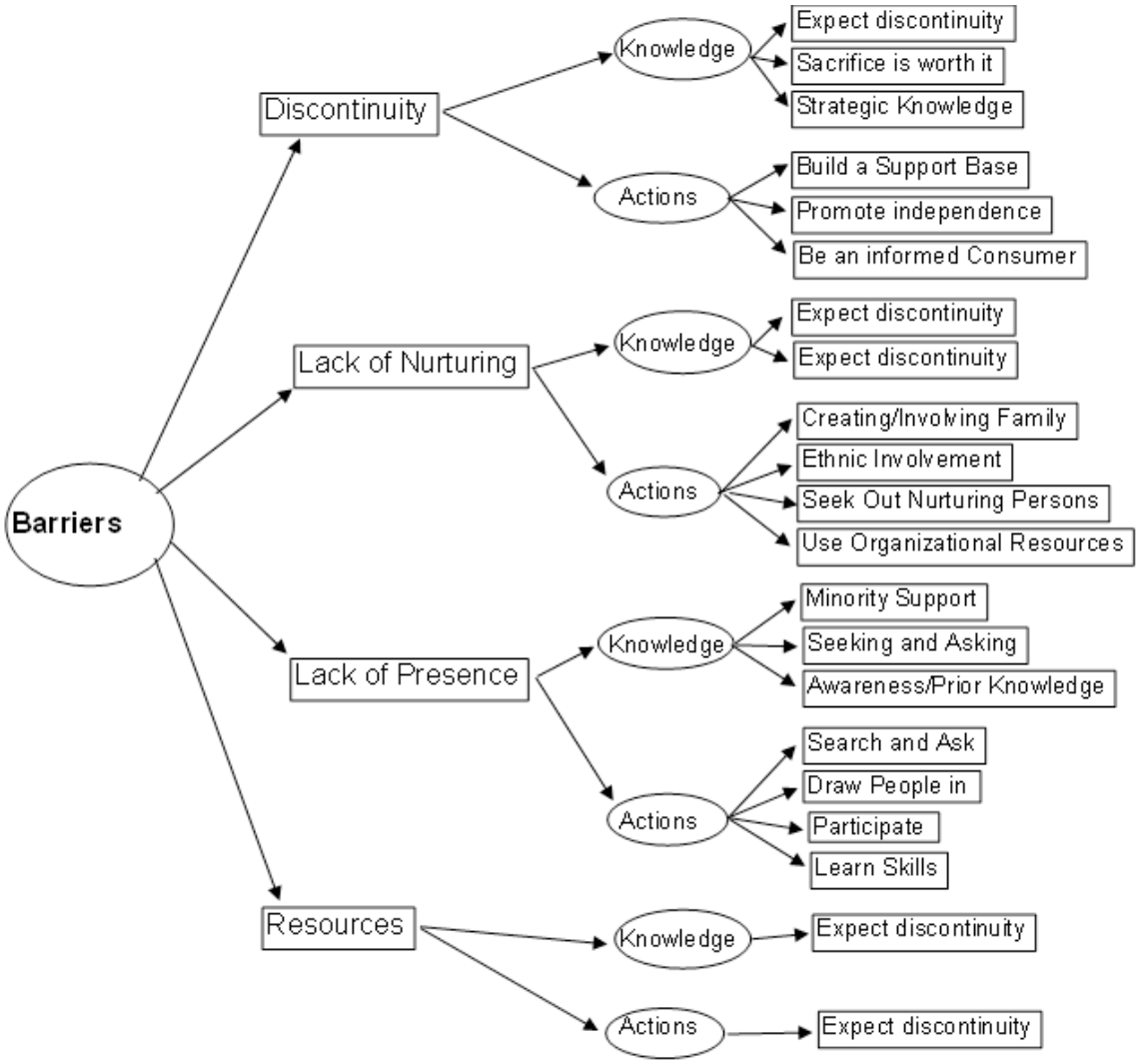

Figure 2. Local Concept Model of the Heuristic Knowledge that Successful Students (those completing their degrees) Possess at a Large Public University in the Southwest from the Perspective of Minority Students* Source: Myers, 2008; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino (1997), p. 130).

In sum, the previous discussion presented evidence of the factors that have hindered and promoted the success of African American males at every level in American educational systems. I identified exciting and relatively new research paradigms that shift the focus away from deficit or "what's wrong with these people" perspectives and towards "what's right and working for these people" perspectives. The advent of student success research has generated new questions and innovative approaches to examining student outcomes.

The majority of student success studies utilizing Padilla's (1997) theoretical model have been conducted at community colleges and urban universities focusing upon Hispanic students. Ford-Edwards (2002) and Thompson-Felder (2005) conducted studies at urban universities focused on African American undergraduate students and African American doctoral completers. These studies provide valuable insights into the types of institutional barriers that may hinder the academic success of these groups. To date there have been no studies utilizing Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success as a conceptual framework to assess the heuristic knowledge of African American male college students enrolled in urban universities. The purpose of this study is to utilize the perspectives of successful African American male baccalaureate recipients to understand their heuristic knowledge and how it was used to insure their persistence to degree completion at the focus institution. The findings from this study will be used to develop a local model of student success or LSSM (Padilla, 1991, 1994).

Non-Cognitive Variables

Non-cognitive variables have been defined a number of ways in the literature. Some see them as extracurricular or nonacademic activities, while others use the term to describe motivational and personality variables (Sackett et al., 2001). Sedlacek (2004) defines non-cognitive variables as those relating to adjustment, motivation and student perceptions. Non-

cognitive variables were seen as an alternative because many researchers have argued that traditional measures such as ACT and SAT scores in particular, were not valid predictors for minoritized students (Schwartz & Washington, 2002, p.356). Sedlacek argues that non-cognitive variables are useful for assessing all students but they are particularly critical for assessing minoritized students, since standardized tests and prior grades may only provide a limited view of their potential (Sedlacek, 2004).

Non-cognitive variables have been useful in improving predictions about both academic performance and retention for African American students. Schwartz and Washington (2002) identified the following non-cognitive variables as influential in persistence to degree attainment for African American students:

1. Availability of a strong support person.
2. Academic adjustment
3. Attachment to college
4. Personal emotional adjustment
5. Social adjustment

William Sedlacek (2004) expanded the work of previous scholars and developed a Non-cognitive Assessment Model identifying eight (8) variables found to be effective in predicting student success in higher education. Many institutions effectively use these non-cognitive variables to assess potential for student success in their admissions and retention programs. Sedlacek (2004) in his seminal work "Beyond the Big Test: Non-cognitive Assessment in Higher Education" provides a description (p.37) of each variable below:

1. Positive Self-Concept: Student demonstrates confidence, strength of character, determination and independence.

2. Realistic Self-Appraisal: Student recognizes and accepts any strengths and deficiencies, especially academic, and works hard at self-development; recognizes the need to broaden him or her individuality.
3. Successfully handling the system (racism): Exhibits a realistic view of the system on the basis of personal experience of racism; committed to improving the existing system; takes an assertive approach to dealing with existing wrongs, but is not hostile to society and is not a cop-out; able to handle racist system.
4. Preference for long-term goals: Able to respond to deferred gratification; plans ahead and sets goals.
5. Availability of strong support person: Seeks or takes advantage of a strong support network or has someone to turn to in a crisis or for encouragement.
6. Leadership Experience: Demonstrates strong leadership in any area of his/her background (church, sports, non-educational groups).
7. Community involvement: Participates and is involved in his/her community.
8. Knowledge acquired in a field: Acquires knowledge in a sustained or culturally related way in any field.

When some or all of these non-cognitive variables were examined in reference to African American male collegians, they became crucial to understanding the retention and persistence of these students in higher education (Hamilton, 2004).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used as an analytical framework and provides a lens through which to analyze the responses of participants relative to the impact of race on African American male student success in this study. Critical Race Theory questions, critiques and challenges the manner and methods in which race, white supremacy, supposed meritocracy and racist ideologies have shaped and undermined African American male success in higher education (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009, p.390).

Critical Race Theory emerged in the mid-1970's primarily from the criticisms of the critical legal studies movement and attempted to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in American law. CRT was developed to address social justice and the ways in which the judicial system has legitimized and legislated racial inequalities in US society (Comeaux, 2013, p.455). While no single definition for Critical Race Theory exists, Harper, Patton and Wooden (2009 p. 390-392) assert that many scholars agree on the centrality of seven tenets:

1. Racism is a normal part of American life, often lacking the ability to be distinctively recognized, eliminated or addressed. Racial microaggressions (verbal, non-verbal, and or visual insults directed toward people of color replace more overt acts of racism in most settings.
2. CRT rejects the notion of a "colorblind" society. The ideology of "colorblindness" hides the commonplace and covert forms of racism, allowing institutions to ignore the realities of race based inequalities while maintaining White privilege.
3. CRT gives voice to the unique perspectives and lived experiences of people of color. CRT acknowledges the validity of these lived experiences and uses counternarratives as a

way to highlight discrimination, offer racially different interpretations of policy and challenge the universality of assumptions made about people of color.

4. CRT recognizes interest convergence, the process whereby white power structures will "tolerate or encourage racial advances for people of color when they also promote the self-interests of Whites".
5. CRT promotes revisionist history whereby America's historical record is reexamined and comfortable majoritarian interpretations are replaced with ones that more accurately reflect the experiences of minoritized persons.
6. CRT relies on "racial realists" who recognize race as a social construct, but also realize that "racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status". Racial realists understand that racism is a permanent fixture in American institutions including colleges and universities.
7. CRT critiques claims of meritocracy that sustain White supremacy. Mainstream culture espouses three beliefs that are challenged by CRT: (a) blindness to race will eliminate racism; (b) racism is a matter of individuals, not systems; (c) one can fight racism while ignoring other forms of oppression or injustice.

Critical Race Theory has influenced scholars in various disciplines study the relationships between race, racism and power in the United States. This transdisciplinary perspective from the fields of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history and law represent a collective challenge to existing dominant ideologies and methods of conducting research on race and inequality (Comeaux, 2013, p.455). CRT serves as a useful tool to analyze the responses of African American male alumni of the focus institution because issues of race and racism in their micro-level forms are likely to exist in the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions,

discourses, policies, practices and structures of the collegiate environment (Comeaux, 2013, 456).

Conclusion

Chapter Two provided a review of the literature in regard to the history and experiences of African Americans in institutions of higher education from colonial times to the present. Brief explanations of the theoretical frameworks guiding this study were introduced to provide the reader with a conceptual lens through which the research findings would be interpreted. In the next chapter, the research design for this study will be presented. The research design will include a detailed description of the conceptual framework, and methods and procedures for data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to add to the scholarship exploring strategies that may serve to increase student success and degree attainment among African American men in higher education. I am interested in understanding the institutional barriers, as African American men perceive and experience them, and the strategies these students use to reduce or eliminate the barriers. The analysis of the data will be used to develop a local student success model (LSSM) for African American males (Padilla, 1991, 1994). The conceptual framework for the African American male student success study is described in this chapter. In addition, the following sections provide a detailed overview of the methodology including: conceptual framework; research design; sample characteristics; data collection procedures; data analysis procedures; data reliability and validity; and positionality.

Conceptual Framework

"A conceptual framework explains either graphically or in narrative form the main things to be studied, the key factors, constructs or variables, and the presumed relationships among them" (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p.18). The framework specifies for the researcher what will and will not be studied and assumes some relationship (causal), some purely logical and some mirroring empirical findings (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

The conceptual framework selected for this study is Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success (1999). Student success research encourages a qualitative perspective because it is grounded in the lived realities and perceptions of students. The basis of Padilla's EMSS is expert systems theory and qualitative research methods (Myers, 2008). The EMSS is a general model of student success that can be utilized to develop a local model of student success (LSSM)

and to determine components of student success at the campus level (Myers, 2008; Wirth & Padilla, 2006).

Expert systems theory has been applied within education, business, science and the military. In general expert systems theory suggests that "experts" have in-depth knowledge of a specific subject and therefore have the ability to solve a specific problem (Myers, 2008; Harmon & King, 1985). Padilla applied Harmon and King's expert systems theory to student success, and asserts that college students develop expertise at being successful as students at a specific college or university (Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997). Therefore, students who are successful in higher education develop expert knowledge through their experiences at an institution and engage in behaviors that facilitate continued success (Myers, 2008).

The Local Student Success Model (LSSM) is the cornerstone of Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success. A LSSM results from data that are collected from successful students at a college or university at a particular point in time. Through a graphical representation, the LSSM identifies: (1) institutional barriers to student success; (2) the frequency or number of instances those barriers are identified by students (3) student (heuristic) knowledge that helps them strategize solutions to overcome the barriers; and (4) behaviors and actions students engage in to overcome, navigate through or negotiate institutional barriers (Myers, 2008).

The basic components of Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success (EMSS) consist of the Black Box Assumption of Student Experiences on Campus, and methods for data collection and analysis. These components are presented below.

Black Box Assumption of Student Experiences on Campus

A black box is defined as the unknown processes in-between inputs and outputs (Bothamley, 1993). Padilla's (1999) black box is a general conceptualization of how students experience college (Myers, 2002). Derived from Astin's (1974) input-environment-output (I-E-O) model, Padilla conceptualizes incoming students as inputs while the graduates are expected outputs. What is unknown is the campus experience that leads to student success for some, and attrition for others (Padilla, 1999). Within the student black box experience, what is of particular interest is their heuristic knowledge (Myers, 2008). Students acquire heuristic knowledge as they experience the campus environment in formal and informal ways. This knowledge is confined to bounded spaces, situations or phenomena (Padilla, 1991). Unlike theoretical or book knowledge, heuristic knowledge is tied to who we are and our previous experiences (Myers, 2008). Expert systems theory suggests that "experts" have acquired in-depth theoretical and heuristic knowledge of a specific subject; therefore, they have the ability to solve specific problems (Harmon & King, 1985). Padilla (1991) asserts that students arrive on campus with differing levels of theoretical and heuristic knowledge, which are influenced by the college environment. Heuristic knowledge is acquired experientially and informally and is transmitted or communicated to new groups of students individually or through student organizations (Ford-Edwards, 2002). Padilla also argues that heuristic knowledge is not acquired systematically, and such knowledge does not reach as many students effectively. Therefore, unsuccessful students are those who do not learn the heuristic knowledge nor engage in behaviors critical to success in their institutional environment (Ford-Edwards, 2002).

Padilla's theory essentially argues that student success is inexorably linked to how students utilize heuristic knowledge gained through experience to confront, engage and

overcome structural, cultural and environmental barriers at a given institution. As these students matriculate through the system they develop "expertise" in mastering their institution. This expertise can then be used to help other students and the institution to improve processes, policies and procedures. I am attracted to this model due to its focus on the student experience and application to institutional improvement efforts

The Unfolding Matrix

Padilla (1994) recommends the utility of the unfolding matrix in capturing the participant's heuristic knowledge for initial data collection. The unfolding matrix is a display technique for qualitative data and is rooted in the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), Spradley (1979), Miles and Huberman (1994) and Padilla (1994). The unfolding matrix can be expanded both vertically and horizontally as needed (Myers, 2008; Padilla, 1994). Therefore, each matrix category or vector is pre-identified and is gradually filled in as the data are collected (Ford-Edwards, 2002). The same matrix categories used for accessing the heuristic knowledge of successful African American male college students are: barriers; frequency; knowledge; and (4) actions. These categories of cultural knowledge are identified as cover terms (Myers, 2008; Spradley, 1979). The barrier vector is the lead vector in this study because I sought to understand the meanings participants give to the barriers that negatively impact their retention (Ford-Edwards, 2002). The frequency vector includes the frequency of barrier experiences. The knowledge vector includes participant heuristic knowledge. The action vector includes the actions that participants take to reduce or eliminate the barriers they encounter (Ford-Edwards, 2002).

As Padilla, et al., (1997, p.127) note, "After data collection is completed, a filled matrix becomes a qualitative data set that is subjected to interpretive analysis to develop a concept

model for understanding the phenomenon under study". In this study the success of African American male college students on a particular campus was emphasized (Padilla, et al., 1997). I began the study with an examination of institutional barriers. This design supported effective content analysis because subsequent vectors (frequency, knowledge, actions), evolve, and unfold from student identified barriers and were dependent on them (Myers, 2008). See Table 1 below:

Table 1: The Unfolding Matrix

Barriers	Frequency	Knowledge	Actions

Source: Ford-Edwards (2002)

A central component of the unfolding matrix is the incorporation of an action research perspective that promotes information sharing by African American male college alumni as a dominant part of the research process (Myers, 2008). The process of information sharing promotes participant engagement in the collection of heuristic knowledge. "Action research not only contributes to the knowledge base of the researcher, but also simultaneously and immediately provides the participants of the study some of the heuristic knowledge that other successful students possess" (Padilla, et al., 1997, p.128). This technique may aid me in assessing participant heuristic knowledge. Padilla et al., (1997) assert that researchers can objectively and effectively assess heuristic knowledge by assembling a group of students who provide essential data through dialogue and interaction, stimulated by the researcher. The most important part of the process is the interpretive analysis of concepts and relationships that capture African American male experiences and the development of a local model of student success at the focus institution. Data provided by the participants were also analyzed through the

lens of non-cognitive success variables and Critical Race Theory. In the following pages I discuss the type of research involved in conducting this study.

Research Design

In this study I wanted to understand the perspectives of former successful African American male students. Therefore, I believed the best method for eliciting these perspectives in detail was directly from the utterances of study participants themselves. "For the qualitative researcher, the only reality is that constructed by the individuals involved in the research situation" (Creswell, 1994, p.4). Student success research and Critical Race Theory validate and support the use of qualitative research designs to add valuable layers of insight and knowledge to complicated educational issues. Qualitative research provides the best and most nuanced descriptions of how African American male alumni experienced the urban collegiate environment.

I conducted individual interviews to "obtain the essence of the undergraduate experience as described by the alumni" (McMillan, 2008, p.291). In order to collect and assess data through the unfolding matrix, I conducted multiple interviews in which recent African American male college graduates provided data for each matrix category. I asked study participants to discuss barriers to student success at their institution. Once the matrix category had been exhausted, participants were asked to discuss the knowledge and actions they took to overcome each of the identified barriers in sequential order. This semi-structured interview protocol assisted me in interpreting and analyzing the data as the study moved forward. The questions for the structured interview protocol were derived from the theoretical frameworks identified in the literature review and the constructive feedback of the guidance committee.

Data Collection

In the following pages, I discuss data collection, including site selection, study participants, and sampling and recruitment strategies.

I collected data at one four-year university located in an urban setting in the Midwestern United States. African American students comprised 15-25% of the student population to insure that research was conducted in an area with a sufficient population of information rich participants. In order to avoid the appearance of coercion on currently enrolled students, I specifically selected Alumni of the site institution to satisfy the Institutional Review Board's concern about any undue influence on potential participants due to my administrative position at the university. The URU Office of Alumni Affairs and Organization of African American Alumni submitted letters of support and cooperation for the study to the URU Institutional Review Committee. They were instrumental in the researcher obtaining "exempt status" from the case study site's Internal Review Board, Human Subject's Committee. Gaining their cooperation required communicating the purpose of the research, activities to take place and how the research would benefit their constituents. In addition both organizations were informed of how the results would be reported and any benefits the organization or individuals would obtain.

I used a "purposeful sampling" process to intentionally select 11 individuals based on membership in a subgroup with defining characteristics (Creswell, 2008), in this instance, recent African American male graduates of an urban university. I limited my target population to U.S. born African American men. This form of sampling facilitated the selection of information rich individuals. The sample group consisted of African American males that completed a baccalaureate degree and were enrolled during the six year 2008-2014 time period at the focus institution. Recent alumni are more likely to possess both "heuristic and theoretical knowledge"

that helped them persist until degree completion and they have compiled knowledge of what it takes to succeed because they have persisted through college graduation (Padilla, et al., 1997). I identified and recruited the sample group through the following process:

The URU African American Alumni Association was informed about the study and asked to refer African American male alums to participate. I utilized snowball sampling to recruit eligible participants referred to me from the African American Alumni Association t. Huberman and Miles (1994) identified snowball sampling as a technique where cases of interest are identified from people who know cases that are information rich. Individual referrals were the most effective recruitment method. I called potential study participants referred to me through their personal contacts. Some participants gave me cellular telephone numbers or enthusiastically called eligible graduates they knew and encouraged them to participate. There were difficulties scheduling interviews for some participants however I was able to minimize the burden on respondents, by meeting participants for individual interviews at times and places convenient to their homes or workplaces. The interview locations included the focus institution, local libraries, places of employment, coffee shops, recreation centers etc. Respondents received fifteen dollar gift certificates as a token of my appreciation for their participation.

I began each interview with a review of the purpose of the study to provide participants opportunity to understand the importance of their participation. In compliance with the Human Subjects protocol, I presented them with an information sheet that described the purpose, activities and benefits of the study. The information sheet communicated to participants that completion of the survey and interview authorized their informed consent. I strived to create a comfortable and safe setting for respondents to disclose any pertinent information they wished about their college experiences. I also collected data by asking participants to complete a

questionnaire that best described their college experience. The college experience questionnaire was intended to gather the following information: Institution of first choice; reasons for selecting focus institution; most important reason for attending focus institution; funding sources for undergraduate education; hours worked while in college; participation in student clubs and organizations; use of academic support services; commuter or campus residency; recommendations of focus institution to African American males considering postsecondary education. Upon completion of the college experiences questionnaire, participants began the interview process. I used an open-ended, semi-structured interview protocol to elicit information needed to fill vectors in the unfolding matrix, and to gather information that might fall outside the matrix. Each individual interview was conducted for a one (1) hour period, and I interviewed 11 participants. The individual interviews encouraged an in-depth discussion of the thoughts, feelings, perceptions and actions of each participant.

The individual interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. I utilized a peer debriefer to gather additional information I missed as a result of facilitating the interviews. The peer debriefer insured that I accurately linked respondents to their observations. I also maintained a journal where immediately following each interview I recorded impressions, reactions and other significant events. Participants were instructed to email me to add any relevant information not shared during the interview.

Data Analysis

Each participant interview was digitally recorded. These recordings were properly labeled with the location, dates, and times of the interviews. To insure confidentiality, all participants were provided a pseudonym to conceal their identities. All comments were coded anonymously. The interviews were transcribed verbatim in order to control for threats to

internal validity/credibility and to provide low-inference data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). All recordings were coded using Dedoose qualitative data analysis software. This software assisted me in organizing interview content into categories, sub-categories and themes. Themes were produced when the data were no longer reducible or able to be placed under alternative codes. Participant privacy and confidentiality were protected. Their identities and comments were not revealed and questionnaire data and interview testimony were coded and assigned a pseudonym. Participant information was kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law. Data, transcripts and digital recordings were stored on password protected files and computers were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. The only persons or entities with access to the data included appropriate College of Education officials and the Institutional Review Boards of Michigan State University and the focus institution.

Validity and Reliability

In order to increase the validity and reliability of the findings, I used two approaches for triangulating the data. The first was member checks (Huberman & Miles, 1994), which were conducted by sharing my interpretations of the interviews with participants. I sent a copy of the transcript to each member and requested feedback regarding their perception of whether I correctly understood and interpreted their comments. Note that triangulation can be achieved by researchers who conduct member checks and who maintain a constant awareness of the need to check, recheck and double check all findings (Wood, 2010). In addition, the peer debriefer read the transcripts and interpretations of the data to discuss how I developed the findings and inferences drawn from the data. In areas where study participants and the peer debriefer agreed with my interpretations then triangulation occurred. When there was disagreement about the

interpretations or results, that information was not included in the study.

My Role as the Researcher

Researchers engaging in qualitative research must endeavor to clarify their role in the study in order to insure credibility. As in every study, issues of researcher bias must be addressed (Jordan, 2008). While conducting this study I took on the roles of being both an insider and an outsider in regard to positionality. In many ways I am part of the group being studied. I am an African American man who has overcome many of the same obstacles as study participants in order to earn a baccalaureate degree. Throughout my life I have developed the skill and ability to "code switch" and transition seamlessly back and forth between multi-racial, predominately White, and African American cultural settings. I claim complete membership in the group being studied and therefore, consider myself an "insider-researcher" as an African-American man and higher education executive (Adler & Adler, 1994). In addition I have worked as an administrator at the focus institution for over a decade in various capacities tasked with improving the retention and graduation rates of undergraduate students. Unluer (2012) cites Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) who identified three key advantages to being an "insider-researcher" including: (1) having a greater understanding of the culture of the being studied; (2) not altering the flow of the social interaction unnaturally; and having an established intimacy which promotes which promotes the telling and the judging of truth. (3) further insider researchers generally know the politics of the institution, not only the formal hierarchy but also "how it really works". In this research I utilized my positionality and "prior knowledge" of institutional history and politics to access sensitive information, and to describe, analyze and interpret the impact of URU policies upon African American students with an emphasis upon study participants.

In other ways I also played the role of a researcher-outsider relative to this study. I have not lived for any significant period of time in URU's host city, nor experienced any of its schools as a student. I did not attend URU as an undergraduate student. I am also considerably older than the majority of study participants and therefore, have not experienced URU from a student perspective. My interactions with most faculty and administrators are different than those of the young African-American men in the study. I speak standard English and wear business suits on campus on a daily basis. Therefore, my speech and appearance combine to create an atmosphere wherein White faculty, staff and students are reasonably comfortable with my presence. I do not share the speech, economic status, nor tastes in fashion and music of most study participants. Due to the factors described above, I believe that I am less likely to be subject to the aggressive stereotyping and microaggressions than the African American men in my study. Therefore, my daily interactions with faculty, administrators and students may be qualitatively different than those of the young African men in the study.

My status as an African American male higher education administrator supports arguments in defense of the "native researcher" pointing to the "hermeneutic tradition". Brannick and Coghlan (2007) assert that this qualitative research tradition requires the researcher "to get close to the research subject" and operate in the role of "participant observer" (Jordan, 2008). The role of participant observer is also supported by Lincoln and Guba (1986), Merriam (1998), and Yin (2003). In order to minimize the bias concern, I focused on perceptions of student success as triangulated through the use of multiple data sources, such as individual interviews member checking and a peer debriefer.

I also used "bracketing" to set aside my preconceived notions and assumptions about the participants (Wood, 2010). My interest in this study evolved from professional experiences as a

full-time Student Affairs professional. In my line of work, I provided supportive services for low-income and first-generation students, and often encounter African American males who struggle to persist and successfully matriculate in urban university environments. I am also convinced there is more that colleges and universities can do to help these students succeed. In many cases the institutions attended by these students are not knowledgeable about the barriers to retention and persistence they create for all students. Nor are they aware of the disproportionate negative impact these barriers have on African American male students.

Through this study I hoped to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning how African American males can successfully navigate and overcome challenges they confront in higher education. The research site may also gain practical information that can be used to modify current policies or develop new initiatives to address the concerns of all students. Most importantly the study provided information that will assist African American males at urban universities to bloom where they are planted, and graduate from their respective institutions.

Institutional Review Board Approval

In order to gain access to the research site and participants, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board and other officials at the focus institution prior to conducting research. The IRB proposal conformed to the exempt research requirements of the focus institution and Michigan State University.

Background and Characteristics of the Focus Institution

The focus institution for this case study is a predominately white institution (PWI) located in a large city in the Midwestern United States. The institution is among the 3.5% of U.S. universities with the Carnegie Foundation classification of RU/VH Research University/Very High Research Activity and serves as the state's only urban research university.

For purposes of confidentiality the focus institution is referred to as Urban Research University or by the abbreviation "URU" throughout the rest of the study. Urban Research University offers over 400 academic programs including masters, and doctoral, certificate, specialist and professional programs including comprehensive law and medical schools. It is the state's most diverse institution with an enrollment of over 25,000 students. African American students makeup 20% of the undergraduate student body and low-income students comprise 50% of students attending Urban Research University. Over 90% of the undergraduate student body commutes to campus.

Institutional History and Culture: Race and Equity

In order to obtain a better understanding of African American male collegian experiences at Urban Research University it is useful to examine the history of the institution through the lens of racial equity. Making sense of contemporary problems pertaining to racial stratification and durable patterns of racial underrepresentation in higher education requires understanding ways in which various groups of people were excluded, the conditions under which they were eventually granted access, and myriad ways in which generations have been numerically and experientially marginalized (Chang, Milem, & antonio, 2011; Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012;).

The evolution of Urban Research University relative to racial climate cannot be divorced from the racial climate and history of its urban context. Urban Research University was founded in the late 1860's, and enabled small numbers of African Americans to enroll and earn degrees. These students were often isolated and treated in a discriminatory manner by faculty, staff and fellow students. In the late 1960's local African American citizens engaged in an off campus "urban rebellion" in response to years of poor educational opportunities, job and housing

discrimination and racist and oppressive law enforcement practices. Critical Race Theory argues that racism is a normal part of American life and is deeply embedded in social, cultural and political structures, thus making it difficult to recognize and address (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Racism is maintained in public and private institutions and continues to shape the distribution of society's opportunities, rights and privileges among racial lines (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1999). In the aftermath of the urban rebellion and election of the city's first African American mayor, the majority of White residents moved outside the city and created newly segregated communities in surrounding suburbs. Suburban sprawl took on epic proportions because land was plentiful, housing and schools were newly built and Whites could buy homes away from their Black neighbors in racially segregated communities. This process was encouraged by a culture of racism fostered in major financial institutions, real estate agencies, federal, state and local government policies (Eisenbrey, 2014). Within the secure confines of suburban municipalities, Whites created a world that looked remarkably like the world they left behind and found protection behind the visible and governmentally defended municipal boundaries of suburbia (Sugrue, 2005). When Whites left, they systematically took wealth and major employment opportunities with them, and stable and secure blue-collar manufacturing jobs grew scarce. Upon losing political control, White citizens cited "fear of crime" as justification for hostility and economic disinvestment from the city that lasted for decades.

Urban Research University was heavily reliant upon an enrollment driven state appropriations funding model. Similar to many predominately White urban institutions, URU had a history of providing higher education to White working, and middle class city residents. What separated URU from other predominately White urban serving research institutions was

the sudden and dramatic exodus of large numbers of White families and by extension, prospective students. Similar institutions located in cities dealing with White flight did not experience the sudden loss of prestige, political clout and financial support that accompanied significant White student enrollment. URU's host city lost almost 27% of White residents in the 1970's in comparison to Cleveland's 20.1% and Chicago's 15.5%. The 2010 Census showed that over 763,119 White residents moved away from the city from 1970-2010 (Eisenbrey, 2014).

The most enduring legacy of the racial conflict endemic to URU's host city has been the growing marginalization of the city in local, state and national politics. Elected officials in the state and national governments heavily influenced by a vocal, well organized and defensive White suburban constituency have reduced funding for urban K-12 education, antipoverty and development programs (Sugrue, 2005). As a result, residents of URU's host city suffer from a shrinking tax base that struggles to support quality K-12 education, health, criminal justice and other government services. City residents also suffer from extremely high rates of unemployment, poverty, crime and infant mortality. The majority African American city has been identified in many national publications as "America's Poorest Big City" according to the U.S. Census Bureau with over 39% of residents living below the poverty line (Sanburn, 2015). Due to the mass exodus of White residents, URU confronted the loss of a large segment of its traditional student demographic who refused to attend college in the city. Faced with a steep enrollment decline URU officials engaged in a process of interest convergence, a process whereby the White power structure "will tolerate or encourage racial advances by Blacks only when they promote White self-interests" (Harper, Patton and Wooden, 2009). In response to political pressures to increase access from the African American community, URU dramatically increased the enrollment of African American and low-income students through the creation of

"access" programs in the late 1960's. URU's interest conversion process allowed it to simultaneously stabilize enrollment, sustain university finances and present a positive public image to the African American community.

URU's response to the sudden admission of large numbers of African American students was to marginalize and restrict their progression through the university. The special programs were designed and implemented with several internal policies that served to re-segregate African Americans organizationally, academically and socially, and serve as barriers to baccalaureate degree attainment. Many of the special program admits were African Americans and low-income or first generation students educated in under resourced public schools. URU utilized traditional admissions criteria such as high school grades and standardized test scores as placement criteria and created a two-tier admissions and matriculation system. Most African Americans and low-income students were admitted under provisional status into an alternative college access program designed to serve disadvantaged students. Institutional policy required these students to complete thirty-six hours of non-credit courses. Upon completion of remedial courses African American students were expected to "transfer" within the university to "schools and colleges" where most struggled to make the transition. Access program participants were charged full tuition for remedial classes, but never fully integrated nor accepted into the academic and cultural fabric of URU. Access program enrollment generated substantial revenues and eventually played an important role in the university's budget process. As an insider I witnessed several university budgets that reflected cuts or flat funding for support programs serving predominately African American students. Vacant access program positions were not replaced as funding was diverted to create positions in the newly developed honors program. URU pushed enrollment in access programs as a "cash cow" to enhance revenues that were directed to fund

high quality learning experiences for “high achieving” students and to prevent mid-year budget shortfalls.

Very little of the revenue generated by access programs were reinvested in building a support structure to sustain African American student persistence beyond access program participation. A positive racial climate can facilitate and lead to important, positive academic outcomes for African American students (Solarzano et al., 2000). In contrast, a negative or non-supportive college climate is associated with poor academic performance and high dropout rates among African American students (Hurtado et al.,1998).

Although access programs served as a major entry portal for African Americans in the late1960’s, and 1970’s they were gradually overshadowed by the increasing admission of African American students through the regular admissions process as the city’s White population continued to decline by 1.5 million residents over the next fifty years (Eisenbrey, 2014). URU African American students admitted with high test scores, grade point averages and strong pre-college preparation also confronted stereotypes due to race and perceived economic status. The institutional climate at URU has historically been described as one of neglect, hostility and indifference toward African American students.

In response, over 100 African American students protested the lack of support by occupying a university building for eleven days. The protest led to the creation of the Africana Studies Department, a pledge to hire more faculty of color and a limited number of scholarships (Chicago Tribune, 1989).

Although student protests were incrementally successful, URU did not make substantial investments to create a positive racial climate nor major structural changes to increase African American student support. At one point African American students comprised over 25% of

URU's undergraduate enrollment. Nevertheless, African American students regardless of pre-college preparation and academic ability failed to graduate in large numbers. In 2009 a respected national publication disseminated a report highlighting single digit six-year African American graduation rates, thrusting URU into the national spotlight by documenting that 1 out of 10 African American students graduated within six years, and the graduation rate for Caucasian students was four times greater.

As an insider researcher I observed and analyzed the statements and responses of URU leadership, multiple media and African American community members to the report. The political fallout from this report and subsequent local, state and national coverage prompted a loud outcry from the African American community, state and local legislators, and alumni groups. I witnessed exposed and embarrassed URU administrators place blame for poor African American graduation rates upon African American staff and students in group and individual meetings. Despite decades of marginal investment and minimal institutional integration, access programs staffed by African Americans bore the brunt of the internal backlash to negative external criticism, despite the fact that by 2010, the vast majority of African American students were not enrolled through access programs. Urban Research University treated the issue as a public relations crisis and actively promoted a deficit narrative among faculty, staff and multiple media outlets that blamed African American students for the institution's failure to retain and graduate them.

Institutions that avoid tackling the realities of race use colorblind ideologies to create a lens through which the existence of race can be denied and White privileges can be maintained without any personal accountability (Harper & Patton, 2007). The 'color blind' philosophy camouflages socially constructed meanings of race and present it as an individualistic and

abstract idea instead of addressing how racial advantage propels the self-interests, power, and privileges of the dominant group (Solórzano, 1998).

Urban Research University officials utilized the crisis to raise the admissions criteria arguing that "better students" were the solution to the graduation problem. The term "better students' was broadly interpreted by URU as a racial code word or euphemism for "White suburban students". As a result URU African American enrollment dropped and a significant series of budget deficits ensued resulting in major reductions in staff further limiting URU's capacity to retain and graduate students.

This section was designed to familiarize the reader with the history of African American matriculation and climate of Urban Research University and the surrounding urban area. The participants interviewed for this study were enrolled in Urban Research University during from 2008-2014 and managed to overcome, personal, economic, social, cultural and racial barriers described above to earn their degrees. In the next section I provide an expansive view of the focus institution to provide the reader with additional context for understanding the findings in Chapter 4.

Graduation Rates

Urban Research University has significant difficulty graduating African American students within 6 years. Study participants entered URU as first time college students or as transfer students during the six year period from 2008-2014. African American women enrolled in 2008 as first-time, full-time degree seeking students graduated in 6 years at a slightly higher rate than their male counterparts (14% to 10.6%) respectively (NCES-IPEDS Data Center, 2016). Fewer than 1 in 30 African American men who were admitted to Urban Research

University graduated within a 6-year timeframe (URU Graduation, Retention, Advising and Diversity Report, 2013).

Characteristics of Study Participants

The participants in this study were 11 African American male alumni whom received baccalaureate degrees from Urban Research University between the years 2010-2014. African American male students are those persons who identified themselves as native born Americans of African descent. The demographic characteristics of study participants are described in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Name	GPA at Graduation	Field of Study	Entry Status	High School Type
Jalil	3.5-4.00	STEM	Freshman	Urban Public H.S.
Tyquan	3.00-3.49	Social Science	Freshman	Urban Public H.S.
Douglas	2.00-2.49	Social Science	Transfer 2yr College	Urban Public H.S.
Robert	3.50-4.00	STEM	Transfer 2yr College	Urban Public H.S.
Alex	3.00-3.49	Humanities	Freshman	Suburban Public H.S.
Bashir	2.00-2.49	Business	Freshman	Urban Public H.S.
Rahiem	3.00-3.49	Social Science	Non-Traditional Returning	Urban Public H.S.
Gene	3.00-3.49	STEM	Transfer 4yr College	Urban Public H.S.
Scott	3.00-3.49	STEM	Freshman	Urban Public H.S.
Victor	2.50-2.99	Education	Transfer 2yr College Non-Traditional, Returning	Urban Public H.S.
Brandon	3.00-3.49	Humanities	Freshman	Suburban Public H.S.

Conclusion

Chapter Three discussed the methods of data collection and analysis used in the study. With the assistance of the URU African American Alumni Association I was able to collect data from information rich individuals recruited through snowball sampling. I carefully selected methods that produced accurate, valid and reliable data. I also discussed the background, characteristics and history of the participants and focus institution, to provide context for the research findings described in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS

Chapter 4 describes in-depth explorations of African American male alumni through interviews that provided insight into their lived experiences as undergraduates at Urban Research University. This study explored participant differences in socio-economic status, pre-college preparation, college engagement, peer and faculty relationships and other factors highlighting the tremendous diversity that exists among African American male collegians. The individual interviews allowed participants opportunities to elaborate on issues and subjects of importance them. The interviews also revealed characteristics that were common to all the achievers despite major differences in other aspects of their backgrounds, academic preparation and college experiences.

The main research question seeks to discover the practices of African American males that lead to academic success and the practices of urban universities that serve to help or hinder student success. The goal of this study is to amplify the voices and the perspectives of African American males related to factors promoting their success. The concepts and themes guiding this study and data analysis are:

1. Motivating factors influencing African American males to persist towards completion of the baccalaureate degree.
2. The role of prior academic preparation in elementary, middle or high school in the persistence of African American men to baccalaureate degree completion.
3. Non-Cognitive variables that contribute to African American male persistence to baccalaureate degree completion.
4. Campus supports that contribute to the persistence of African American males to degree completion.

5. Campus barriers that impede progress for African American men in their quest to earn a baccalaureate degree.

6. The impact of race on the persistence to baccalaureate degree completion for African American men.

The theme of motivation is discussed in Section One and presents findings relative to participant definitions of college success and intrinsic motivating factors leading to persistence and graduation. It is followed by findings related to the theme of pre-college preparation and discusses the influence of parental engagement and high teacher expectations on the development of academic skills and social and cultural capital. The third section of this chapter addresses findings related to the theme of non-cognitive factors found in successful African American male collegians at Urban Research University. This is followed by findings regarding the themes of campus support services and student engagement on the persistence of URU African American male collegians.

Finally, the themes of campus support services and environmental racism address the impact of barriers to African American male persistence at Urban Research University. Both themes described aspects of the college experience for study participants. I first address findings relative to the role and impact of campus support services that served as a hindrance to their success. The section describes how the influences of faculty, staff and peers negatively impacted participants' college experiences and the heuristic knowledge gained from negative experiences to confront, engage and overcome structural, cultural and environmental barriers at the focus institution. The theme of race and climate examines findings related to the impact of race and campus climate as a barrier to or non-factor in the successful matriculation of African American male collegians at Urban Research University. In the next section I provide an expansive

description of study participants to familiarize the reader with their personal and educational backgrounds. These individual profiles provide the reader with a greater understanding of the findings presented in this chapter.

Individual Profiles of Study Participants

Jalil

Jalil was a 23 year old alumnus in a STEM field. He worked full-time for one of the major automotive companies as an engineer and enrolled part-time as a graduate student at the focus institution. Jalil was an only child and lived with his Father and Mother in a middle-income predominately African American neighborhood. He stated that his Mother is a registered nurse with a four-year degree and his Father has an associate's degree.

While an undergraduate at URU Jalil lived with his parents and commuted from home to campus for classes. He described his neighborhood as "good" with block parties, neighborhood watches and people patrols. His high school was one of the "elite" public high schools in the city due to its college preparation curriculum. Jalil gave a great deal of credit for his success to the fact that his parents are still together, and played a major role in emphasizing the importance of education in his life. Each day his parents and particularly his Mother kept him focused on academics and systematically structured his study time after school. Jalil also mentioned how instrumental they were in getting him into a good high school and believed that the aforementioned experiences effectively prepared him for success at Urban Research University. Jalil was admitted to URU with a Presidential Scholarship (full tuition/room/board).

Tyquan

Tyquan was a 24 year old alumnus in the Social Sciences. At the time of our interview, Tyquan worked in the office of a former URU President and contemplated graduate school options. He grew up in a segregated, low-income predominately African American neighborhood. Tyquan described his interactions with other African American youth in his neighborhood as "kind of rough" because he was trying to get good grades and did not get hooked up with the crowd all the time. He proudly stated that he was able to overcome those things by being involved in leadership and mentoring experiences. From first to third grade Tyquan attended schools in the South; in fourth grade, he moved back to the state to live with his Father while his Mother remained in the South. In fifth grade Tyquan reunited with his Mother when she moved back to town and remained with her until graduation from high school. Tyquan indicated football and basketball at his high school were a "big deal" and that his community and school had a strong reputation for success in athletics. He focused on playing football in high school, and this kept him in line.

Tyquan described his family life as "good" in that his Mother was very nurturing and supported him in everything he did. He said that living with his Father exposed him to the responsibilities of a man and that his Father was also nurturing. Both parents insured that he was not following the wrong crowd and emphasized that he was "different" from other people. His older brother had a history of drug offenses and was "in and out" of jail. Due to his parent's upbringing and support, Tyquan felt mentally stable and prepared to be successful in college. However, he also stated that despite being ranked number four in his high school class with a 3.7 grade point average and ACT composite of 18, his high school education did not prepare him for success at Urban Research University.

Douglas

Douglas was a 26 year old alumnus with a degree in the Social Sciences. At the time of our interview he worked as an aid in a nursing home and was very involved in his labor union's local political activities. He grew up in a segregated, low-income segregated African-American community. Douglas attended two predominately African American public high schools. The first he described as a typical high school and the second as more of an advanced technical school that emphasized careers in aviation.

Douglas grew up in a home with his Mother, Father and six siblings; he is sixth in the line of seven children. He proudly mentioned that his parents are still together, and all of the children have the same parents. Douglas emphasized that most people his age have parents that are separated or one parent is absent.

Douglas felt that his home life did not do much to prepare him for college and his high school had a small role in helping him. His parents and an older sister encouraged him to attend college, however, they did not know how nor could they provide advice on how to apply and pay for it. Douglas engaged the college application process through trial and error. He started his college career at an institution in [another city in the state] studying mechanical engineering. Following a brief stay there, he returned home and enrolled in a local community college where he earned an Associate's in Science Degree. His next step took him to the local-branch campus of a prestigious university. He left that campus due to an inability to obtain reliable transportation from his home to the campus. Transportation difficulties led him to transfer to Urban Research University. Douglas did not think he was prepared for the workload he encountered at Urban Research University. He fared poorly in his first term, had low grades, and dropped a course.

Robert

Robert was a 22 year old alumnus with a degree in a STEM field. At the time of our interview he was enrolled as a full-time graduate student at Urban Research University. He grew up in a segregated, low-income neighborhood in a segregated predominately African American inner ring suburb.

Robert described his high school as "terrible" and "bad" relative to academic preparation. The school had a basic curriculum and did not offer Advanced Placement and other college preparation classes like calculus. Yet, from a social perspective he loved meeting new people at the school and believed it was a fun place to be. An affinity for mathematics placed him in a dual enrollment program that allowed him to take classes at a local community college during school hours. He earned an Associate of Science Degree while still in high school.

Robert described his family life as good. He was raised in a two-parent home, and is the youngest child with two older sisters enrolled in college. His Mother holds a college degree and is employed as a registered nurse. His Father works on an assembly line for a major automobile company. Robert credits his Mother with taking him to the Learning Center as a child in order to improve his reading speed. To this day he stated that while Mathematics has always come easy, reading is a struggle.

Robert was always talented in Mathematics and easily tested out of most middle and high school courses; his Math ACT score was 32 out of 36. He proudly stated that he has the ability to perform complex calculations in his head. Robert was admitted to URU with a Presidential Scholarship (pays full tuition/room/board).

Alex

Alex was a 23 year old alumnus with a degree in Behavioral Sciences. At the time of our interview he and a friend operated a video production and social media startup company. He lived in a rough section of the inner ring suburb of a major city in a neighboring state as a small child. Years later his Mother moved to an outer ring suburban community and Alex transitioned to an integrated middle-income setting. Alex was a good student and accomplished athlete. He was admitted to URU with a full athletic scholarship.

Alex described his suburban neighborhood as okay, with friendly neighbors and culture that made it easy to "borrow sugar from the neighbors". His high school was literally located behind his home. He mentioned that the neighborhood, high school and community were good and he had a good upbringing. His family life was very supportive. He grew up in a single parent home, yet received encouragement and guidance from extended family. His Father has continued to be involved in his life and helped him out with college. Alex describes his Mother as his "backbone" for getting through school and gave her credit for his success.

Alex stated that the transition from a segregated predominately African American inner ring suburb to segregated predominately Caucasian suburban community prepared him to speak and interact with persons from all ethnic groups, races and income strata. He felt his schooling in the suburban high school really developed his language and writing skills to a level that prepared him to be successful at Urban Research University.

Bashir

Bashir was a 25 year old alumnus with a degree in Business. He was employed as a website developer and operated a social media startup company in his spare time. He grew up in a segregated African American neighborhood, and described life in the area as a "survival thing" that he had to negotiate on a daily basis. Despite all the gang activity surrounding him, Bashir stated that he managed to avoid "getting caught up" and never engaged in those activities.

Bashir attended a public high school near his home. Many gang members he avoided on the street could not be avoided in school. Still a very guarded and quiet individual, Bashir managed to avoid major confrontations with peers by not drawing much attention to himself and "flying under the radar" in high school. Bashir was the oldest of three children living with a single Mother. His Mother worked all the time and left him to assume major responsibility for the welfare of his siblings. His Father has never been in his life.

Bashir thought his high school did not prepare him to be successful in college. He applied to college on his own and completed the admissions and financial aid forms as best he could. He considered attending Urban Research University and an HBCU in the South. Reflecting upon his circumstances, Bashir decided the HBCU was not a feasible choice; therefore, URU was the only institution he applied to. Bashir said he really just wanted to get accepted into any college. He viewed getting into college as an opportunity to leave his neighborhood and rise to the next level. Ironically the survival skills Bashir utilized so effectively in his [city] neighborhood and high school served to hinder his matriculation at Urban Research University.

Rahiem

Rahiem was a 51 year old alumnus of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the time of our interview. He was a husband, a father and very active in his church. Rahiem grew up in a segregated area near the central business district. He "loved growing up in that area because back then (1970's) because [he] had good friends, the neighborhood was safe and kids could ride bikes, play sports etc."

Raised by a single mother, Rahiem and his sister grew up in a loving and nurturing home. However, he felt that the absence of a male role model left him at a disadvantage during his teen years. He said that a "mother can't teach you how to be a man. She can help you be an adult, but it takes a male to raise a male." Rahiem graduated from a public high school in 1981 and thought he had a lot of good and caring teachers that had an impact on him. He went on to say that at the age of 18 he made a number of mistakes including not going to college right away. Rahiem initially enrolled in URU in 1988, stopped out and did not return until 2011. He was motivated to return to college when his daughter started her college career as a freshman at URU. He promised her that he would complete his degree if she completed hers and the pair graduated from Urban Research University the same year.

Gene

Gene was a 24 year old alumnus with a degree in a STEM field at the time of our interview. He had recently graduated and was employed as a professional in his hometown. Gene was raised in a small city two hours away from URU, and described his childhood as growing up living in a series of apartment complexes with his Mother. Gene's Mother moved into a house during his freshman year in high school in a neighborhood he described as a family community. He also described a loving extended family that offered him support and nurturing. Gene mentioned memorable Thanksgiving gatherings as a child that included several members of his extended family; as he became older, the family grew distant. Gene mentioned that his family contained a mix of successful people, some in jail and others working their way through school.

Gene described the environment of the public high school he attended as violent. The school was a place that consistently earned low scores on statewide assessment tests. Students were passed through metal detectors and had bags searched for weapons on a daily basis. Gene made it a point to emphasize that it was a school that would not be the first choice to send your child. His experience was one of just rolling with whatever he had and using all the resources at his disposal. Gene emphasized that while enrolled in that school, he often went other places to get extra knowledge.

Gene's high school did not have a large college preparatory program therefore, his counselor enrolled him in college classes during his sophomore year. Gifted in Mathematics, Gene was 15 years of age when he started taking college level Trigonometry and English classes. Upon high school graduation, he attended an HBCU in a southern state where he made lots of friends and did well academically. Gene planned to return to the HBCU but did not due to the

objections of his Mother and Grandmother. He transferred to Urban Research University during his sophomore year in college.

Scott

Scott was a 25 year old alumnus with a degree in a STEM field, and was enrolled as a full-time graduate student at the time of our interview. Scott was raised in a two-parent home in a segregated community. His Mother was a social worker and his Father was a lawyer. During our discussion he noted how "lucky" he was when compared to friends to have been raised in a stable home environment with two parents that loved each other and with an annual income above $50,000. Scott's parents hold post-baccalaureate degrees. He described how his Father would teach him "everything he knew" while driving him to school, and how he cut off the television so they could play chess on a daily basis. He contrasted his Father's involvement in his intellectual development with that of his friends, stating, "my friends, they didn't get that". Scott described his neighborhood as a collection of churches and liquor stores. In contrast, he was quick to point out that his community lacked good grocery stores and businesses where one could buy specialized electronic goods like in the suburbs.

Scott's intellectual development was enhanced from the age of seven by his participation in a highly effective Mathematics pre-college program hosted by Urban Research University. Scott attended an elite high school in the public school system and excelled academically. He clearly recognized the fact that he grew up relatively privileged compared to his peers and credits the influence of his parents with the fact that he did not struggle as much as others did.

Scott was accepted at several elite institutions however, he decided to attend Urban Research University due to receiving the Presidential Scholarship. The financial aid package from URU was far superior to those offered by more prestigious institutions.

Victor

Victor was a 51 year old alumnus with a degree in the Social Sciences when I interviewed him. He was employed as an instructional aid at his former high school. Victor was raised in a two parent home of twelve children in an impoverished neighborhood. Victor's Father and Mother held physically demanding jobs and developed a strong work ethic they passed on to him. Victor gives them credit for the impact they had on his life. He described his family life as very organized due to the number of children, and stated that they had to "line up" to eat and take baths, so he learned to be patient in everything. He described his Father as a "man who worked all the time", and his Mother as a "prayin mother".

Victor described his neighborhood and the public high school he attended as drug infested during the crack cocaine epidemic of the early 1980's. Organized drug operations like Young Boys Incorporated, the Chambers Brothers and 2020 Crew fought for control of the local drug markets, making many areas of the city dangerous places to live. Despite being good in science and mathematics, Victor dropped out of high school during his senior year and "spilled into the streets just hanging out". He said that "I got shot, when I wasn't doing the right thing" and was paralyzed for over three years. During the recovery period he learned to walk again and attended adult general education classes. Despite being confined to a wheelchair, and later using crutches, Victor caught the city bus in all types of weather to earn his high school diploma. Victor was highly motivated and went on to earn an Associate's Degree in Social Science at a local community college. He transferred to Urban Research University in 2002, stopped out in 2005 and graduated in 2014. Victor is very passionate and open about his experiences and willing to share his story with others. During the interview and without provocation he raised his

shirt and left pant leg up to display the scars left behind by gunshots and multiple surgeries that personify his resilience in the face of major challenges.

Brandon

Brandon was a recent 23 year old alumnus in a Humanities field. He was unemployed and searching for a job at the time of our interview. He was an only child and lived with his Mother in an upper income, predominately Caucasian suburb. Brandon spent his early years in the inner city and stated that his neighborhood was not bad, however his Mother did not feel it was safe for him to attend the public schools. Therefore, he attended a private elementary school. Brandon made a smooth social and academic transition to his suburban high school by participating in the marching band and working hard as student. He made a lot of friends in the marching band and believed that his high school experience prepared him well for success at Urban Research University.

Brandon described his family life as nurturing and supportive. His Mother worked a great deal, so he was co-parented at various points in time by his Aunt and Grandparents to whom he was particularly close. Brandon's Father lives out of state and he has two half-brothers and a half-sister. He has a close relationship with his half-sister, who recently had a baby. Brandon is very proud of his nephew and is happy to be an uncle.

Due to his strong academic performance in high school, Brandon had multiple college options to choose from. Location played a large factor in his decision, and he enrolled in the Honors College at URU with a Presidential Scholarship.

In the next section I discuss findings generated by participant responses to the interview questions.

Motivating Factors in College Success

During interviews participants were asked to define success in college. Study participants had multiple responses to the question and most did not define success in college the same way. Participants expressed a need to be successful not only for themselves, but for their immediate and extended families and communities. Three themes emerged from participant responses: Opportunities and choices; skill development for career success; and personal and professional growth. Examples of participant responses supporting the themes are provided in the next section.

One way study participants defined academic success in college was as a process facilitating the expansion of opportunities and life choices that allowed them to escape their current circumstances. Victor stated, "Well it (college success) means to me that I'm proud that I have a lot of opportunity. A degree doesn't give you opportunities, but it adds to your choices. I wanted other choices." Bashir stated: "I felt like it was an opportunity that could take me out of my neighborhood. Take me to the next level, so to speak."

Some participants defined college success as developing the skills necessary for marketability and advancement in their career field. Scott graduated in a STEM discipline and described college success this way:

> I mean you can have really excellent grades and still not really be able to get a job because what you do in course work is not as important as the skills you gain. So I have developed skills using certain equipment and that's really the most important and valuable skill that I've learned. Uh, problem solving in classes is a good thing, but it's not what's gonna make me money. What's gonna make me money is how well can I fabricate nanostructure and extrapolate it's fundamentals.

Participants also defined college success as a means to personal and professional growth, combining personal and vocational perspectives when defining success in college. They viewed the college experience as one of personal discovery closely related to identity development. Gene framed college success in this way:

> In the context of being a student, I think my definition of success wasn't just necessarily to go to school, get good grades, finish and get your degree. My definition of success in school was based on how much experience, how much growth I'd be able to attain, not just, in my career, but also as a person. During my college experience I was working in my profession while I was in school. I'm a much better person than I was even one year, 2, 3 years ago. I used college as something to try and gain professional experience."

Tyquan defined college success and personal and professional growth through positions of leadership on campus, saying,

> I see myself as a leader. I wanted to make a difference. I had to be more responsible and just develop to figure out who I was. I didn't have mom and dad, like I did back home and I got involved in Hall Council. That was the first leadership position I took at Urban Research University. That is what helped me develop who I was and what I could do, and all the possibilities and leadership options.

The next theme discusses the influence of participant perceptions of their pre-college academic preparation relative to access and success at Urban Research University.

Pre-College Academic Preparation

The majority of my study participants were educated in poorly resourced, underperforming public high schools. Many reported succeeding against the odds through a confluence of the following factors in their K-12 experiences such as parental engagement, mentoring, leadership experiences, community involvement and athletics accompanied by high expectations from school personnel.

The parents of Scott and Jalil advocated for their sons to take advantage of academic development activities. In many ways they positioned their sons for success by placing them in environments that developed their academic skills and social and cultural capital. Despite being college educated and middle class, Scott and Jalil's parents lived in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty. They were aggressive about accessing and enrolling their sons in high quality educational experiences. For example, Scott was an only child in a two parent middle class household where his parents were engaged in his academic development from elementary through high school. Scott described parental engagement in his academic development:

> Both of my parents are professionals. My mother is a social worker and my dad's a lawyer. My dad drove me to elementary school everyday and we would have these conversations where he would teach me everything he knew. At home he'd come downstairs and turn off the TV, then we'd have to play chess. I certainly don't want to give the impression that I grew up hard or anything because that's definitely not true. I came up relatively privileged if you compare me to all the people I went to school with. I mean the average person I went to school with did not come from a two-parent household. The average person I went to school with did not come from a household with over $50,000 in yearly income and I did.

Although he grew up in a segregated economically distressed community Scott tested into a selective magnet high school with a reputation as academically elite in comparison to other high schools in his urban district. He described the quality of his high school experience as follows: "Comparatively my high school was very, very good relative to more typical local public schools. All things considered, I would say that my high school gave me enough of a decent education to survive in college."

At seven years of age, Scott's parents advocated for him to attend STEM focused pre-college program hosted by URU. This program provided supplemental academic support in mathematics and science that prepared Scott for success in college by immersing him in a collegiate learning environment from an early age. He described his engagement with this program from the time of initial enrollment through college graduation.

> Being in this pre-college program, I knew URU very well before I came as an undergraduate. I had already spent many years on campus so I was more familiar with URU than most freshmen and transfers when they start college here. I knew the student union, and I knew the libraries. So that helped a lot and they paid my tuition in full. That was really my main reason for coming to URU. They also gave me a lot of support like help in my mathematics courses and a general support system and network. So being in the STEM pre-college program was a very large contributing factor to how I was able to succeed at URU.

Jalil was another second generation college student whose lived experience and academic preparation for college were similar to Scott's. He was raised in a distressed urban community and his Mother intentionally structured after school activities to enhance academic growth and

development. Jalil described his parent's structured supervision of after school activities and how they shaped his academic development:

> My parents, if it weren't for them I wouldn't be where I'm at now. They kind of molded me when I was young. That's one thing. They got me into a good middle school, and a good high school and they kept me on that systematic studying. So I used that system throughout high school and college. So when I got to high school I was pretty much independent in studying. I didn't ask them for help for anything. Oh, they were key in me being' successful. They were major factors I will have to say.

Jalil also tested into a selective urban magnet high school with a reputation in the city for high quality academics. He believed that high school adequately prepared him for college: "My high school was one of two elite high schools in the city. That pretty much was my foundation for going to college. It had a major college preparation curriculum, so I was ready for college before I got there."

Like Scott, Jalil participated in a different STEM focused Summer Bridge program and enrolled in URU on a merit scholarship that completely paid for tuition and books. When talking about his experience in the Summer Bridge program, Jalil said,

> Before I got to college I was in the pre-college summer program, and they gave me one basic chemistry course and a math course just to see what college was like. I guess it was helpful. It was like the most basic of basic chemistry. So I guess it helped a little bit.

Up to this point I have presented findings from Scott and Jalil. Both participants experienced significant parental engagement in their academic preparation and were provided the social and cultural capital necessary for success in academe. In the following passages I discuss

the experiences of young men that did not enjoy these advantages during their K-12 educational experience.

Bashir exhibited several risk factors for attrition. He was raised in a low-income, single parent household in an economically depressed area of the city. The oldest of three children, he was frequently left in charge of his younger siblings due to the circumstances of his Mother's employment. Bashir attended a failing high school with a reputation as one of the worst in the local public school system. He described the quality of the academic preparation he received as follows:

> I would say from a scale of 1 to 10, I would say maybe a 2, yeah. I would say that just because they didn't teach us to actually apply to colleges when I was in high school. So, I had to go through that process on my own and try to find the best way to fill it out. As a result URU was my only choice of going to school. I figured that someone shoulda showed me all this stuff. I hadda figure it out on my own. I did the whole college experience on my own 'cause I was the only person who wanted to be a college student.

Douglas shared a similar experience. The youngest of seven children raised by elderly parents with blue collar occupations, Douglas attended public high schools near his neighborhood and described his school experiences this way:

> Uh, well I attended two high schools. The first high school was a large one and not really diverse. It was like a typical high school in the city system. Then my last years of high school I attended the vocational tech school. The academics had a higher standard. They would teach you how to work on airplanes and they even teach you how to fly planes. So I guess my second high school prepared me for college.

Despite being a good student Douglas's family did not possess the social and cultural capital that would have facilitated his college application process. Douglas stated the following about the college application experience:

> I don't feel like home had much to do with me attending school. Uh, my sister encouraged me to go. Uh, my parents did too, but didn't do much to make it happen. I don't think they knew how to help me. They didn't tell me about and couldn't really give me advice on how to pay for school or how to apply. I had to figure all that outon my own. I found out pretty much through trial and error how to pay for school and applying. I found myself being a guinea pig for a lot of people because I would do it first and then I'd help my friends apply for school and loans and stuff like that.

For many academically talented African American males, having strong supportive relationships with K-12 staff can make a critical difference. Robert reported that he received the benefits of supportive relationships with his teachers saying,

> My high school teachers were caring and supportive. You could talk to them. They'd give you a recommendation. They might help you out with other stuff as well." With his teacher's support and encouragement, he enrolled in a dual enrollment program that allowed him to earn a high school diploma and an Associate's of Arts degree simultaneously.

Robert described the dual enrollment experience:

> Every fifth and sixth hour I would go to the community college and take classes there. I got an associate's degree in art from that. So that was pretty good. It didn't really help me much in going to URU because I did the STEM degree. It just helped me get early preparedness for what college expects. It was pretty good from that aspect.

Still, Robert felt his high school experience did not prepare him for college. In describing his high school experience Robert stated:

> I came from a terrible school academically. I had an easy transition going there, but in terms of academic preparedness, it was pretty bad. We didn't even have like AP classes, no calc classes, none of that. Um, it was just pretty much basic subjects. I barely did a lot of ACT prep. I think our school's average ACT score was like a 13 or 14. I mean it just wasn't the best environment. I got a 28 or 29, total score or something like that on the ACT. I ended up getting like a 32 in Math.

The role of prior academic preparation played a significant role in the success of African American males at Urban Research University. First generation status, parental engagement, socioeconomic status, high school quality and supportive relationships with K-12 staff account for some differences among study participants.

Non-Cognitive Factors and Persistence

One prominent theme in this study is the impact of non-cognitive variables on the persistence of African American men until degree attainment. In this section I share findings relative to characteristics that reflect the traits, attitudes and behaviors of study participants. The following sub-themes emerged from participant responses: self-efficacy, growth mindset and work ethic; each sub-theme is described below.

Self-Efficacy

Based on participant responses, I defined self-efficacy in part as self-reliance. Participants depended on themselves to overcome obstacles to degree attainment. Rahiem stated:

> I took responsibility for asking questions and getting help when I needed it. I took classes seriously and used my instructors as resources. A student has to want to graduate. African American male students need to keep their eyes on the prize of graduation instead of being caught up in "I'm here that's enough".

Several participants expressed a growth mindset or the belief they were responsible for the level of success they achieved and stated that with hard work all obstacles could be overcome. They possessed a strong locus of control and high levels of academic self-confidence. These characteristics are closely related to grit and growth mindset. In the following passage, Robert a graduate student in STEM said,

> Like it was never a time I thought that I can't succeed here. Like I always think I can succeed anywhere, really like Harvard, anywhere. You put me in there, I'm gonna be successful whatever level it is. So I know I belonged there. If I didn't belong then I would never get there. I think if you get there, then you can succeed as long as you put forth the dedication to succeed. I think anywhere I got accepted for school, I belonged there in terms of education and educational readiness, but in terms of financial, it might not have been possible. So, yeah, like I was at Urban Research University, I belonged at URU. If I was at another university, I belonged at that university.

Participants often utilized time outside of class to maximize their studies and develop a strong work ethic. They mentioned the need to go above and beyond what was expected of them by professors and peers. Jalil explained how his "crazy work ethic" powered academic success in a challenging STEM field: "My work ethic. Numerous people have told me that I work harder than anybody they ever met. So I realize that I probably put in more work than is needed."

Several participants also demonstrated resilience in the face of traumatic experiences, low expectations or lack of support and nurturing. They persevered to earn degrees in spite of the obstacles. Resilience is closely related to the non-cognitive variables of self-efficacy and growth mindset. Participants clearly defined resilience as being able to bounce back from setbacks and disappointments. In discussing challenges participants spoke of health, financial struggles, academic difficulty or conflicts with faculty, staff or peers that strongly influenced them to abandon pursuit of their degrees. They also described how they kept moving forward to work through obstacles and difficulties on the way to goal attainment. Victor made the following statement regarding his journey to degree attainment:

> I come from a family of 12 kids. Going to college, I was paranoid because I was really from the streets. You know I could argue and fight. Lived in a drug infested neighborhood where nobody's really educated and I had never worked a clean job. When it came time for me to do a class presentation I was scared to death, because I wasn't used to that culture.

Alex overcame physical complications and emotional difficulties following a traumatic injury in order to complete his degree. He asserted that he did not receive adequate support from the URU Athletic Department in making the transition from healthy college athlete to physically disabled college student. Alex described his experience in this passage:

> I was not able to play sports anymore because I had to get surgery. I would say that the transition from playing sports with an undiagnosed injury was really difficult. Everything was going wrong at the same time. My Mom was sick, Dad wasn't where he needed to be at the time. I never had been seriously injured before. I did not know how to deal with it and since I didn't have family here, I didn't have the support I needed to continue on with

classes. All I knew was that I was on scholarship, and needed to continue because finances weren't the best. So it was a trying experience. It helped mold and shape me today. To overcome something like that was such a blessing.

Victor also discussed the conflicts he had with old friends who doubted his resolve and commitment and how he utilized the "prove them wrong syndrome" to fuel success in spite of friends low expectations for his success.

My boys at home. They was sayin to me, you chasin women, you aint doing nothing but wasting your time. You just taking and collecting student loan money. You ain't gonna graduate, you need to quit man. Hang out with the real fellas, man you ain't gonna do nothing. I said, well we'll see.

Scott demonstrated mental toughness to succeed when there were doubts about his ability to be successful in a rigorous STEM major. In the following quote he described how adopting the prove them wrong syndrome helped him demonstrate subject mastery in confronting a faculty member's skepticism about his academic ability:

I mean I had to be extremely patient. In my case, it angered me, and it always angers me when somebody is being condescending or patronizing towards me. So it angered me that he thought he had my number. Like, he thought that whatever he threw at me, I was gonna fail. So literally, my hatred of him was the fuel that I used to study for his final exam. It just inspired me to get an A on it because I despised him that much.

Other participants reported that delayed gratification played a major role in academic persistence at URU. They cited the need to delay the pursuit and acquisition of personal, material and financial rewards in order to focus upon successfully completing degree programs. For

example, Douglas shared the experience of observing the behavior of many of his peers and the impact their behavior had upon degree attainment:

> I wasn't really caught up into social life, like parties and stuff and I didn't work much. I wasn't materialistic. I feel that all of that affects my success or made me successful here because I wasn't distracted. I know people will work and work and work just to have nice things. A lot of black friends that I do have, they was working a lot and I graduated before many of them. They work, work, work, came to school, didn't come to school much or they took two classes a semester. They didn't go to summer school so they were here for a longer period of time. I decided to just, just accept being broke. I accepted being a broke student just go to school. That has something to do with it.

Participants sacrificed material things, such as additional income earned through work, and personal relationships in the present, to provide the time and energy necessary to focus on academic goals. For example, Victor and Douglas transferred to URU from urban community colleges with Associate's degrees. Although their individual paths to URU were different, each subscribed to the idea of delayed gratification. Victor mentioned experiences with temptations and challenges he confronted when given the choice between making quick and easy money, versus the life he selected and devoted to academics:

> I used to put in work in the streets. When my friends was buyin' Mercedes Benz and Cadillacs and cars, I wanted to get in greedy too, but I didn't take no money, no cars, none of that material stuff. You gotta want this man, you gotta eat and breathe school.

Robert cited the need for African American male collegians to sacrifice material things in order to focus their time and energy on academic success:

> So just know when to sacrifice. Maybe you've got to pass on those shoes, the new jeans you wanted or something like that. Sacrifice three years or four years to get that degree before you actually start splurging on stuff that you may not need. In high school I was always into new jeans, that type of stuff. I got to college and realized it was just stupid and a waste of money. I think a lot of black students think that it means something because they're working for a pair of jeans or shoes. I mean honestly it's dumb. Our people put so much emphasis on what you're wearing instead of what's actually going on inside your head. So I think that's definitely something that derails people when they get to school.

Participant identified delayed gratification as an important factor in their academic success. The belief that they were working towards a better tomorrow or brighter future kept some participants from pursuing full-time employment at the expense of their academic goals. Unfortunately, most of their African American male peers departed Urban Research University prior to degree attainment when confronted by similar circumstances.

Family Support During the College Years

Most study participants felt that family support was a key factor in their success. Some participants reported that the most significant actor in providing family support and encouragement was their mother. For example, Victor explained how his mother assisted him in returning to college after he stopped out of URU:

> Well, it was my mother. I said "Mom I can't do this." She said, "No son, you gotta go back and finish. You hang around these streets with all these hoodlum guys, they ain't doin' nothin' for you. You're goin' back to school so someone can help you out man. You're gettin' older now, you want things to get easier not harder. What do you think

about Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X? These guys fought for our people for you to get that. You can take it. You gotta get it." So that was one of the reasons that I hung in there. Because I was like man, she's right.

Other participants cited support from multiple family or significant others. Rahiem stated,

> As far as support system, my family and my wife, my sister, they were pretty much my support systems. I didn't join student groups or organizations. When they would do things on campus, per se, I'm at work or spending time with the family.

On and Off Campus Leadership Experiences

The findings of this study indicated that participants also utilized on and off campus leadership experiences and networks for support and to develop professional skills and competencies. Tyquan was an active student and community youth leader prior to matriculating at URU, and continued his involvement in leadership at Urban Research University. Tyquan attributed much of his college success to campus leadership experiences gained as a Residential Advisor and student organization leader. He described the impact campus involvement had on his persistence, saying, "What changed everything for me, was becoming a Residential Advisor, because then I was looked at as a leader by younger students on campus." A few other participants were active in academic and social organizations sponsored by Urban Research University. Participants living in campus residence halls were most likely to report active engagement in established student organizations. They were also more likely to participate in organizations connected directly to academic majors and sponsored by their departments instead of socially oriented student or residence life sponsored organizations.

Study participants often elected to join organizations comprised of African Americans such as the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), Student African American

Brotherhood (SAAB), or similar organizations. Tyquan's experience as president of a student organization influenced his personal and academic behavior in profound ways. He described the impact campus involvement had on his persistence, saying, "To learn how I could work and make an impact in leadership on campus for African-American males was amazing. I learned to lead and take initiative. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience." Robert made the following statement about the value of his participation in NSBE:

> I was part of NSBE a great organization, because we had like night activities. It was a good support group, where you met people, shared books, stuff like that. So I guess that was a good experience because you really don't see too many like black engineers for that matter. We went to a good conference where we met black Ph.D's. You really don't see too many black Ph.D's. Especially when in my major, I was around all international students.

Commuting participants received support for persistence from family or significant others off campus and did not feel a need to engage in campus activities or groups. Brandon and other commuting students often formed close friendships with a small number of fellow students. Brandon shared,

> I wasn't part of the academic organization for minority students in my major. I didn't really do a lot of organization stuff. When I was in college, I really didn't focus a lot on that stuff. I really wasn't into the group study thing because I did find one close friend and my girlfriend who I met on campus.

Commuters reported having neither the time nor inclination to join established student groups. These decisions provided them with a different academic and social college experience than that

experienced by their more actively engaged peers. For example, Douglas was engaged in volunteer activities related to his job and shared,

> I was aware of the student organizations. It's just that I didn't have much time working and going to school. I feel like a lot of the organizations didn't fit my interests, which is why I volunteered at the union hall because that fit my interest more. There were no activities here that I liked."

Spirituality

Some participants were involved in church, off campus mentoring programs, or work activities. Each man involved in leadership activities mentioned a desire to give back to their communities of origin and spirituality emerged as guiding principal for this important value. Participants also mentioned spirituality as one of the key themes for support and motivation in overcoming difficulties. For example, Scott credits the spiritual practices of Zen Buddhism with developing his ability to focus, concentrate and study for long periods of time:

> I practiced Zen Buddhism when I was in high school and I spent the majority of my time, going on retreats in a Zen monastery and just kind of undergoing the practices of discipline. That helped my focus like learning how to meditate for 10 to 15 hours a day. I was able to focus on my studies and I was never like distracted, because I knew how to concentrate on something for a long period of time. So when it came to studying for exams and stuff like that I could do that. I could go in and study for a test for ten hours straight. I have no idea how other people do it. I just know that for me it was because of uh, my training in Zen monasteries, you know, that obviously that's, a bit atypical.

As a Christian, Victor stated that his "story" is a testimony he is willing to share wherever he goes. He expressed his spirituality through a strong belief that "God was on my side". This belief

helped shape a sense of purpose and gave him strength to continue. His belief in God and the promise he made to complete the degree "if God gave me one more chance" motivated Victor despite the multiple struggles he overcame prior to and during his college years.

> So again, it goes back to 1984, when I got shot as a youngster. I had a lot of reflection; I asked God to give me one more chance and if he did, I'll make the best of it. I promised him I wouldn't let him down. Couldn't discourage me 'cause I had been through a lot. I was already prepared. I had been shot, I had been crippled, had been in a wheelchair, braces on my leg, and I suffered from chronic leg pain one particular time, so I had been through all that.

Victor went on to state that God never left him and actively guided him through his college years at URU as a mechanism to overcome obstacles:

> There was really nothing you could say to me because I had God in front of me. He led me through this. He was my pilot. So I wasn't gonna be denied. I don't care how long it took me to get the degree. God helped me finish. I had God on my side, still on my side.

Role Model: First in the Family to Earn College Degree

Other participants mentioned that being the first in their families to earn a college degree was a major source of stress, pride and motivation. Most men in the study were first generation college students, and some were older than many first-time students. For example, Victor and Rahiem earned their degrees at nearly fifty years of age. During our interview, Victor became very emotional when stating what degree attainment meant to him and how he wanted to honor his parents through the accomplishment.

> My mom is 70 now, my dad's 83, come on, ain't gonna have another 20, 30 years. But they was able to witness this, so in front of me at graduation I seen a young lady with a

> sign on her hat sayin' Mom I wish you was here'. Kinda put me in tears with my parents in the stands. So now they can leave this world, or she can go brag, hey I got a son that got out of college. To let my parents see. I was the first one in my family able to finish going to a major college out of five, six, seven generations. So it was big, not only for me, but for the people that are behind; my nieces and nephews. Because it's very rare for people to be able to say that where I'm from.

Rahiem was motivated to complete his degree to serve as an example for his daughter:

> Yes, with me being an older student one of the motivating factors for me was my daughter. She was the reason I went back, and so for me to fail, it couldn't be an option. How could I tell her that she would graduate from college and then I go back and couldn't finish what I started? I had to graduate, not so much for me but to show her that a college degree is attainable. When success happens it's contagious and my degree can be a reference point for other young people in my family."

Conclusion

In this section I discussed themes and findings expressed by study participants relative to non-cognitive factors that enabled academic success at URU. The endemic traits, attitudes and behaviors of study participants have been cited in the research literature as major contributors and predictors of success for African American males in higher education. Participants felt personally responsible for their education, which was a vital factor in academic success. They also expressed the need to believe in themselves, bounce back from setbacks, take charge of time, realistically evaluate strengths and weaknesses, confront racism through demonstrating competence; delay gratification; seek support when needed, obtain leadership positions, engage

the campus community, utilize spirituality to overcome and serve as role models and trailblazers for their families, friends and communities.

In the next section I discuss themes and findings relative to campus support services and participant perceptions of the positive impact these had on persistence and graduation at Urban Research University.

Campus Supports Contributing to Persistence

Campus support services constitute institutionally sponsored offices, activities, or personnel that provide academic, personal or social growth experiences on behalf of students. These institutional experiences include academic support (e.g., tutoring, advising & counseling, undergraduate research and instruction) or personal development (e.g., mentoring, career counseling, recreation, student activities, leadership development, student organizations, co-op and internships). In this section I provide participant responses tied to the research question regarding campus support services. The findings focus upon campus support services participants believed contributed most to their persistence and degree completion. Themes focused on campus support services participants felt were most critical in supporting their success. Participants identified financial aid, faculty and staff mentoring, assistance with coursework and peer relationships as factors that were most critical to their success at Urban Research University.

Financial Aid

Participants with strong high school grades and test scores received large amounts of merit aid from Urban Research University. The amount of merit aid awarded served as a strong incentive for them to attend URU as Jalil attests:

> Coming out of high school, I was thinking about tuition and the quality of education. It was basically costs and if I could get any scholarships. When I first got here I had a few scholarships that paid for my books and brought the tuition down. So that's one of the main reasons I came here.

Participants receiving merit aid had the advantage of being able to focus upon academics with less concern about paying for school. Brandon, Scott, Jalil and Robert were admitted to URU with merit scholarships. They came from middle class backgrounds, attended academically strong high schools (with the exception of Robert) and were well prepared due to rigorous K-12 curriculums, parenting practices and, or quality mentoring experiences. These participants indicated that they were able to focus exclusively upon being good students and most decided to commute from home in order to save money.

In contrast, low-income and first-generation participants such as Tyquan and Bashir enrolled without substantial institutional aid. They supplemented federal and state need-based financial aid (grants, loans, work-study) with on-campus employment. Due to financial hardship, and desire to fund their educations, Bashir and Tyquan built social and cultural capital through campus employment. Their employment increased their ability to navigate the institutional bureaucracy and strengthened commitments to degree completion.

Gene, Douglas and Victor transferred to URU and financed educational expenses with off-campus employment in addition to grants and loans. Socioeconomic backgrounds and K-12 preparation had a major influence on the types and amounts of aid each participant received at URU. Those who were socially and academically advantaged during their pre-college years maintained those advantages during their matriculation.

Faculty Mentoring Relationships

Participants with positive faculty relationships expressed greater satisfaction with their college experiences. Some study participants cited positive relationships with faculty as major components of their success at Urban Research University. Professors of all races and genders, orientations, and disabilities can serve as effective mentors for any student as illustrated by Scott's experience. In the quote below he raves about a quality relationship with a White faculty member who served as a mentor for him.

> Well, I have one professor who I'm close friends with. I would say that we might even almost be too close. We have such a casual blended kind of relationship that I sometimes forget like he's my professor. Naturally, like you know, this guy was like, my Facebook friend. So, you know, he's a very prestigious and accomplished professor in my STEM field who publishes and consults on an international level. He's just a guy that I enjoy hanging out with, so in that respect, I always look forward to having his class. I consider him a mentor. I mean he's helped me in a variety of ways. Like, he helped me to get into a graduate program. He's been my guy for recommendations and advice on getting through the program. Yeah. It's important to have that professor who just really likes you on a personal level. Not so much that professor who's just, like, oh, you're somebody who's easy to teach because you understand everything I say. Like, that's important, but it's even more important to just have a professor who is legitimately your friend, because they help you do everything personal, professional and everything in between.

For example, Douglas enjoyed interactions with faculty in his department. He expressed positive memories of the time when faculty members provided additional time to complete assignments

and gave him special attention outside the confines of the classroom. Douglas described his relationship with some URU faculty this way:

> Some of the professors are really nice. They'd give a lot of their time. Most of my professors would give me the opportunity to make up assignments or stuff like that. I had two professors that allowed me to meet them outside of class or off campus at a restaurant. They just made themselves available for me to ask questions, address my concerns and point out specific issues that I had as a student.

Rahiem was particularly inspired through interactions with African American male faculty and described their influence upon him:

> I had a couple instructors that were African-American males and really, that was the first time that I ever had an instructor that looked like me in my college career. You know, who talked to me, who could relate to where I'm coming from. So I loved that, you know, to where I could interact with them based on personal experiences. The things they were talking about as far as the era they came from was for the most part my era too. So I liked that part. Being a mature student enabled me to relate more to the instructors.

As a follow up, I asked Rahiem what he liked most about the instructors and he told me:

> The courses were about race and ethnicity and I was surprised the university would allow classes to be taught like that. The faculty taught with no restrictions. That's kind of taboo stuff in a lot of places. Or they would let faculty teach it, but then there were certain subjects they couldn't talk about. I never felt that way with these instructors. They were able to teach their courses the way they wanted to. The instructors were African American men and they were raw and uncut. Matter of fact it was kind of a shock to me, because I never had instructors that were so candid. So I enjoyed both classes and

> instructors immensely. They were excellent instructors and hard and fair graders. You never had to guess what they were thinking and there were no misunderstandings. I knew if I put the work in, I would get the grades I deserved.

Rahiem placed a great deal of value on his relationship with the African American male faculty he encountered at URU. Rahiem's message about the value of his relationship with African American male faculty cannot be underestimated. However, for some African American males the opportunity to be taught by an African American male faculty member can be a rare and special occasion.

Staff Mentoring Relationships

Support staff provides academic, personal or social growth experiences for students. These institutional experiences may include academic support (e.g., tutoring, advising and counseling, undergraduate research and instruction) or personal development (e.g., mentoring, career counseling, recreation, student activities, leadership development, student organizations, co-op and internships). In this section I present findings regarding campus supports with an emphasis upon participant relationships with support staff.

Study participants reporting little contact with White faculty outside the classroom were more likely to form close mentoring relationships with staff members of color. For example, Bashir developed a key relationship with an African American female student services counselor. He expressed his gratitude for her support and influence in the following statement:

> So one of my resources would be going into the administration building to the Career Services office for different jobs and opportunities. A lady there was one of my great resources then. She really helped me along the way. So I just thank God for her cause

she was always in my corner. She would try to find a way to direct me to other resources, even though it was outside of her job description.

Bashir received the benefits of student centered mentoring. Participants reported that staff of all races can and do provide meaningful mentoring, and supportive relationships with African American males. However, the paucity of these relationships at URU may underlie the poor retention and graduation rates of the study population.

Peer Relationships

Commuter and community college transfer participants were more likely to report supportive relationships with multi-ethnic peers. These participants relied on informal yet close relationships with peers. Douglas, a commuting transfer student, described positive experiences with multi-ethnic peers:

> So the students here make you feel welcome. My experience has been studying with males of different races. I didn't really study with black males often. That's one reason. I didn't know too many blacks that were in my major. So I didn't really have a choice but to talk to other people. It was mostly people from Middle Eastern countries.

In addition to individual supportive cross-racial peer relationships, a few participants were active in predominately White academic and social student organizations. Participants living in campus residence halls were more likely to participate in majority Caucasian or multicultural organizations sponsored by their departments and connected directly to academic majors. Gene described his involvement with a majority Caucasian student group that he joined for academic and professional development purposes.

> I was with the American Society of STEM organization. I was the Vice President in my final year. That was a huge resource group for me, because, a lot of us studied together.

> My involvement with that group resulted in my being recognized nationally as an outstanding student leader.

Others did not value participation in African American social, cultural or politically oriented organizations, and joined organizations with an academic or professional development focus, such as the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB). Robert made the following statement about the value of his participation in NSBE:

> I was part of NSBE, a great organization, because we had like night activities. It was a good support group, where you met people, shared books, stuff like that. So I guess that was a good experience because you really don't see too many black engineers for that matter. We went to a good conference where we met black Ph.D's. You really don't see too many black engineering Ph.D's. Especially in my major where I was around all international students.

Despite being involved in several campus organizations, Gene described how SAAB supported his persistence in the following passage:

> I felt like I belonged at URU when I got involved with the Student African-American Brotherhood. I found multiple people that I was able to relate to and we could share stories about our experiences. Not just the experience at Urban Research University, but share our experiences in our childhood and talk about some of the things that were happening in today's America. When I got around them, I saw they were working for the same goals and interests. Even though it was a few isolated African-American males, I was like okay this is it. I felt like URU wasn't just a place for me to go because home is

an hour away. So that was the time where I believed like this is why I'm at Urban Research University.

Study participants that commuted to campus were least likely to report having joined and participated in campus academic or social groups. These participants received support for persistence from family or significant others off campus and did not develop strong campus based peer networks.

Campus Barriers to Student Success

To understand institutional barriers having a negative impact upon the persistence and graduation of study participants, it is important to share more information about the context, culture and politics at Urban Research University during the period they were enrolled.

I preface this section by acknowledging my positionality as a researcher with "insider knowledge" relative to the history, politics and disparate outcomes resulting from URU policies during my tenure. As an administrator who served on multiple institutional committees, and prepared reports and "white papers" regarding African American student retention, I have seen and heard the resistance of senior administrators and tenured faculty to recommendations for changes in academic policies that may have increased persistence and graduation rates for all students. Many of the recommendations if enacted had great potential to increase persistence and graduation rates for substantial numbers of African American students as well.

Academic Policies, Administration and Politics

URU openly aspires to become the top research university in the United States. In keeping with this goal, institutional culture has historically valued and promoted faculty research productivity at the expense of the undergraduate student experience. The urban mission of the university was also marginalized by a newly implemented state funding formula that rewarded

URU for producing STEM graduates, and serving as a research and development hub for economic revitalization. As a result the university's urban mission and commitment to serve students from the city's troubled school system waned and was undercut by new admissions and merit based financial aid policies that favored small numbers of economically privileged students. These policies combined to effectively bar admission and accelerate attrition among low-income, first generation students, and had a disproportionately negative impact upon African-American students.

URU also vigorously enforced an internal mandate for all students to pass Mathematics and English examinations (proficiency tests) as a requirement to graduate from the university. First year students that earned a certain score on the Mathematics and or English sections of standardized entrance examinations were exempt from the requirement. Students testing well in these areas were automatically placed in college level Mathematics and English courses. Students that did not score well were required to take non-credit courses that were in theory designed to prepare them for success on proficiency tests. This barrier to matriculation and graduation had a disproportionately negative impact upon low-income and minority students, persons with disabilities and persons that did not test well. The courses had high failure rates and were taught by poorly paid and supported adjunct instructors. Despite having successfully passed every course (including high level Mathematics and English courses) many students failed proficiency tests multiple times and were prevented from graduating despite having earned well over the one hundred-twenty credit hours required to earn a degree. Many upper division students left without a degree, frustrated and in debt despite investing a great deal of time and money in URU.

A “sink or swim” culture dominated the university. When challenged about high proficiency test failure rates, senior faculty and high level administrators consistently denied responsibility and complained about the lack of “quality students” attending URU. Others would declare that “they shouldn’t be here anyway” in reference to underprepared students. In addition much of the resistance to eliminating the test requirement came from the fact that non-credit proficiency courses served as a “cash cow” for the university and generated substantial tuition and fee revenue from a “captive population” of URU’s least advantaged students. These issues in turn exacerbated the problem of poor retention and graduation rates for all URU students, with the greatest negative impact falling upon African American male students.

During the time period study participants were enrolled, URU suffered significant turnover in senior management and several major reductions in state aid due to poor graduation rates. The administrative environment was dominated by poorly negotiated collective bargaining agreements with faculty and staff unions. Labor and management conflicts contributed to a culture of poor customer service where politics and personalities overshadowed student needs for accessible, meaningful and quality service. In addition, inefficient and outdated policies and business processes contributed to a widespread reputation for impersonal treatment, angry and frustrated students, and acrimonious relationships among students, faculty and staff.

Due to the issues described above, it is important to keep in mind that study participants represent individual success stories within the larger and tragic context of African American male failure at Urban Research University. Unfortunately, only 3.3% of African American undergraduate males from the 2008-2014 cohort graduated from the university. Participants articulated various barriers to their persistence and graduation, with six overarching barriers

emerging from their comments: campus support services; financial distress; faculty relationships; majority group peer relationships; student life; and racial climate.

Campus Support Services

Multiple participants cited Campus Support Services as barriers to persistence and graduation. Participant responses revealed major institutional problems with enrollment and transition practices, management, impersonal treatment, campus racial climate and financial distress as barriers to persistence.

URU enrollment and first year experience policies maximized liberal late registration strategies to maximize revenue. Several study participants did not describe their interactions with Urban Research University faculty or staff as warm or personally fulfilling. Due to negative experiences with faculty and staff regardless of race, many participants developed a general sense of mistrust. They made conscious decisions to approach interactions with faculty and staff with a "business" attitude. Tyquan explained how he utilized the business attitude in his interactions with URU representatives to obtain the help he needed to succeed.

> You know faculty and staff. They come in contact with thousands of students on a yearly basis. I knew I had to carry myself with an open mind when going to see them. Even if I did not understand them or there was something about them that I didn't like. I knew I had to be professional at all times.

In instances where students complained of the treatment received at the hands of clerical, administrative staff or faculty many of their concerns were dismissed by administrators and no one followed up to resolve their complaints.

Financial Distress

Participants in this study with the greatest level of financial distress primarily came from first generation and low-income backgrounds and commuted to URU. Although most were enrolled on a full-time basis, they worked off campus minimizing the time and energy available to engage in campus communities. These participants were also the most sensitive to tuition and fee increases and had the fewest resources from which to absorb increasing costs. Policies governing tuition and fee payments also played a critical role in creating financial distress among participants. The availability of financial aid was critical in the persistence and graduation of these African American male students. Even with merit scholarships, participant financial aid packages were not sufficient to cover the cost of attendance and many accrued loan debt or worked full-time to cover the gap between their aid and educational expenses.

Bashir described an experience that almost led him to leave URU due to financial hardship:

> In 2008, I didn't have money to pay my balance off. I figured like this is the closest I got to being successful so I'm gonna stay in this environment. So when I got that letter, I got really discouraged and then I just kept emailing this one lady in financial aid. I would tell her "I'm $100 short from paying my bill is there any way you could help me stay." I constantly contacted her and weeks would go by. That's when I just started doin' a lot of prayin' like, Lord, is there anyway you could help me pay for this? I really don't wanna go back home. There's nothin' there for me in my neighborhood. The week before classes started, I got an email saying' that my balance was cleared. I was beyond disappointed. I felt like I failed myself.

Bashir's hopes and dreams for earning a college education rested upon his ability to obtain $100 to remain in the residence hall for the following semester. During Bashir's response, the emotions of stress and anxiety resonated in his demeanor and tone of his voice. Although the experience occurred several years ago, it still had a negative visceral impact upon him in the present.

Faculty Relationships

Some faculty members engaged in behaviors that negatively impacted participants' sense of belonging in the classroom and university environment. Relationships with faculty are critical components of the student experience in higher education. The campus racial climate at predominately White colleges and universities also influences the climate in the classrooms. Some participants reported instances where faculty members stereotyped and treated them as if they did not belong in class or tried to distance themselves through class seating arrangements. Victor a mature transfer student, described classroom confrontations with two faculty members at URU this way:

"I had a professor say hey man, what're you doin' in here. I'm like huh? I say I'm a student. He questioned my presence in the classroom like I didn't belong there."

Victor also described a negative experience with a different faculty member when confronted with demeaning treatment in class:

> I had a professor say "man why don't you sit in the back." I said "no, I'm not Rosa Parks, I'm gonna sit where I wanna sit." "Yeah", he said, "well you need to sit here". I said, "no, I'm sittin' where I want to. I'm sitting in the front, I'm sittin' where I wanna sit. I paid my money, I'm sittin' where I'm going to learn."

On two separate occasions, Urban Research University faculty members initiated conflict by challenging Victor in front of classmates and used their power in attempts to control his presence and physical location in the classroom. Victor was treated like he was "out of place" or fit the description of an "illegitimate member" of the campus community.

Caucasian Peer Relationships

In addition to stereotyping and demeaning treatment from faculty, participants described how the behaviors and deliberate actions of classmates, sowed seeds of self-doubt and academic disengagement from the learning environment. The men also reported enduring microaggressions from peers due to doubts about their intellectual ability. Robert was acutely aware of the preconceived notions of his peers, describing the reluctance of his peers to choose him for group assignments.

> I'd be just standing there waiting like "you know I'm a black student". I would be wearing blue jeans or a hat on my head. They didn't think I was smart. They probably had not seen me in another class. I'm pretty sure they were hesitant. I'm almost positive they were. I'm pretty sure they had their little stereotypes and all different stuff like that. They could, you know, think whatever.

Other participants reported racial microaggressions from peers outside the classroom environment. Tyquan described his experience during a volunteer service project in an inner city neighborhood that brought large numbers of URU Caucasian students to a low-income African American neighborhood.

> They would start asking me questions. Others would make' little jokes, tryin' to be black. People sayin' things from hip hop or urban culture, things that African-Americans might say on television. Trying to use the same language or lingo or even crackin' jokes on, or,

> about black people. Which, you know, they laugh and giggle, ha, ha, ha, ha, man, but, in reality, I mean, I'm not used to another person of a different race being able to do that and then try to laugh it off.

Tyquan was clearly disturbed by the content of the comments directed at him. He chose to educate the offenders and provide a "learning experience" for his attackers.

Some participants did well academically and were invited to join majority group organizations that rewarded high academic achievement. However, these opportunities were not always favorably viewed by the participants. For example, Robert was invited to join the academic honor fraternity in his major, yet declined the invitation because it would add to the sense of isolation he already experienced in his department.

> Alpha Alpha Alpha is like the academic fraternity in my field of study. They're supposed to be like for the honor roll students. I mean I got invited to be there, but I never joined it. The only reason I'm not a member is because I'd probably be the only black student in the room.

Robert communicated microaggressions perpetrated from faculty and peers both within and outside the classroom. He also struggled with the isolation of being the "only one" in many of his classes. Robert made the strategic decision to limit his involvement with White dominated groups in his major to minimize the likelihood of further victimization.

African American Student Life

Negative in and out of class experiences were compounded by the lack of organized student life programming and culturally sensitive support systems. One critical barrier to persistence involved the absence or lack of a multicultural affairs office or "institutional home" to support African American student and particularly male needs for cultural integration and

sense of community, belonging, and engagement. Major White student organizations occupied dedicated office and meeting space on campus. In contrast, African American organizations did not have the benefit of physical "safe spaces" to organize, congregate, make friends, validate each other's experiences or provide peer support.

Despite the enrollment of a relatively high number of African American students, the campus environment was perceived by some study participants as prejudicial and socially marginalized. In response to the negligence and inattention to African American student needs and issues, students created their own enclaves and social communities and race specific student organizations such as the Black Student Union, Student African American Brotherhood, and Black Greek Letter Organizations.

African American male students reported that they experienced student organizations and by extension engagement in the URU African American subculture as a collection of disparate socially oriented friendship cliques. These student organizations primarily hosted campus parties, and promoted poorly implemented cultural events. Socially engaged African American males congregated in the Student Union, which served as a hub for African American student social activity. African American males also typically congregated and socialized at the basketball courts in the Recreation Center or weekend parties hosted by student organizations at off campus venues.

When African American student organizations hosted campus events (Greek Step Shows, parties etc.), they were required to provide security with armed and uniformed law enforcement officers. In addition, participants pointed out that only URU students with campus identification cards were allowed into on-campus parties thereby discouraging African American students from inviting friends from other colleges and universities. As a result of these policies and the lack of

culturally appealing on-campus social and cultural events, some participants engaged in the off-campus party scene, which actively competed with campus sponsored events and catered to URU African American cultural preferences for entertainment. Tyquan explained the difficulty he experienced as a residential assistant and member of the student senate in encouraging and increasing African American male participation in university sponsored activities:

> Events such as the parties we threw, like Halloween, Valentine's Day parties, they definitely felt welcome. We had some game nights and things like that. I feel like they thought they were welcome, but didn't for some reason, engage in them as much as other people did. Maybe it was a matter of compatibility or we just have other interests. The brothers would rather be at the gym hooping and stuff or playing video games. I tried real hard to market activities to my friends and it'd be hard to get 'em there. This is not initially where they see themselves, like going to campus events, or activities in the dorms.

Due to some of the issues identified above, many study participants reported limited engagement with the African American social scene, which they viewed as dysfunctional and a waste of time. The intersection of race and gender often shape the stereotypical images by which African American male collegians are judged and the conflicts they negotiate within majority group settings and among same race campus peers. Negative university environments and feelings of isolation diminish the experience of African American male collegians. Some African American males manage these conflicts through disengaging from the university and work in isolation. Some participants reported struggling with the combination of feeling isolated due to a lack of same race peers with similar interests in the social arena and negative treatment on the basis of racial stereotypes in their academic programs.

Other participants negotiated the conflicting expectations of masculinity by developing individualized expanded definitions of manhood, recognizing group affiliation, and forming close friendships with a small number of African American or multiracial friends. Douglas, Gene and Brandon engaged in this coping behavior because they wanted to protect their "African American or black identity", while simultaneously rejecting demands for conformity to rigid masculine norms that undermined academic success. These participants often regarded socializing with most of their African American peers as a waste of time. They spoke of students who gravitated to the social aspects of campus life as "not serious" about their academics and strategically avoided contact with them. Gene described how he managed these relationships:

> I guess one big complaint I have is just the African American male culture at URU in regards to how the males are using their college experience. I've met a lot of them that are using the experience for loan money. Some people are just there trying to find women. I ran into students that you just have to ask like, "Why are you here?" I tried to stay away from them. I really didn't want to work with or talk to them. If they were not motivated, I didn't want to be around them.

Other participants struggled to be understood as culturally African American by their same race peers and battled negative labels and stereotypes because they did not fit neatly into African American masculine stereotypes. Scott described how he came to terms with same race peer doubts relative to the authenticity of his "blackness" this way:

> Now I don't have trouble with other black students because they know that I represent the race well. When I go into my very competitive STEM department, they know that I am respected. To a certain extent, they are as proud of me, as they are weirded out by me. They are very proud of the fact that there is a black man who goes in this department and

shows that black people can do high level STEM. By the same token, they're like, he just does and believes strange things that we can't understand, and that's just something we accept about him. So now I don't feel ostracized. There was a definitely a time in my life that I felt ostracized at URU. The rest of the average black population now recognizes me as black. They don't see me as a black person who wants to be white. It's more like I'm off color. They know that my blackness is very essential to my identity, even if I listen to classical music. Even if I was once a flutist for 5 years it's still very essential to my identity. Being an African American still defines who I am.

Scott's description of where he perceived his fit in the African American student subculture evolved over time. He was the only African American student in his major and therefore struggled to find same race peers for validation and support academically while struggling to find acceptance in the larger African American campus social community.

Gene described the struggles he endured with peers who dismissed and questioned his individuality, authenticity and masculinity by attacking his musical preferences and hairstyle.

There's definitely a stereotype amongst African-American males but sometimes as a black male you get tired of it. You get tired of being lumped into a category of what I like and what I don't like, and what I should be doing and what I shouldn't be doing. What I'm studying and what I shouldn't be studying. I have long hair, but black people think it should be dreds or it should be braided. I listen to other types of music. Some people have actually heard me listen to rock music, and they're like, "You must not be black." I have no idea what that means. I'm not black if I'm not listening to rap music? In all honesty, I don't know who they wanted me to be. My peers thought I should not be who I was, but who they said I should be. They said I should behave like Li'l Wayne."

Gene reported experiencing cultural sanctions in the form of teasing and ridicule from other African American male students because he did not openly embrace their perceptions of masculine speech, behavior, dress and musical taste.

Conversely, Tyquan reported that he did not have trouble fitting into the URU African American community. Living in the residence hall created opportunities for him to develop multiple networks and leadership skills. He was actively involved in multiple organizations and his popularity transcended student, faculty and staff subcultures.

> The best thing that happened to me while I was here was getting involved. I see myself as a leader and I wanted to make a difference. In my dorm, and I got involved in Hall Council. That position helped me develop who I was and what I could do. It opened me up to all the possibilities and options to leadership on campus. It exposed me to other individuals who were doing good things and put me in front of students who were of a different background and race. It was good to interact with them and for them to be nice and work with me. Then other African-American students started looking up to what I was doing. I was the only African-American male really stepping up at that time. I wanted to do this to represent my people, I wanted to do this to make things better.

In addition to Tyquan's leadership activities, he actively participated in social and athletic activities that validated his masculine "credentials" in the African American male subculture. Embracing these activities created friendships that cemented connections and acceptance within the greater African American student community. He attributed much of his college success to campus involvement. In contrast participants that were not athletic, did not participate in African American social activities or worked full-time off-campus struggled to develop friendships and

connections with other African American students. They reported developing friendships outside the subculture with a diverse array of peers in their classes as Douglas explains:

> I didn't have relationships with staff. I didn't participate in fraternities. I don't like sports. That's something that a lot of the black males participate in. I didn't know too many blacks in my major, so that's another reason I had to talk to other students. The only thing I liked about Urban Research University, was that I was able to meet a lot of people from other places. I met a guy from Russia. I met a guy from Saudi Arabia. They became my friends.

Participant observations varied relative to challenges forming meaningful connections with peers and Urban Research University. Major barriers to campus student engagement such as age, personality, transfer status and commuter status all played a significant role in the extent to which campus life was a barrier to persistence. The degree to which participants adhered to unwritten rules of African American male masculinity also had significant impact upon peer group acceptance, validation and belonging in the URU African American student subculture.

Similar to many campuses, URU Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) provided leadership in meeting African American social and entertainment needs in the absence of university support for culturally affirming programs. Therefore, fraternities could be viewed as a viable option for academically successful African American males due to the leadership, scholarship and community service opportunities they provide. Unfortunately, study participants shared misgivings about URU fraternities; none were members of African American fraternal organizations. Instead most participants involved in campus life made strategic decisions to join organizations they believed were more likely to help them achieve career or professional goals. Others stated that the predominately social orientation and public activities of the fraternities

conflicted with their academic priorities. Participants often elected to join groups with an academic and or professional development focus, like the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) or Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB). Gene explains why he decided not to pledge a BGLO in the following passage:

> I didn't really see them committed to having a college experience that prepared you for the outside world. I didn't feel like the fraternities matched what I was looking for. I needed to be on track with my professional goals and what I wanted to do. When I walked on campus, I would see a bunch of step shows and fashion shows, which, I'm not opposed to. The problem is African American males and females don't have high graduation rates at URU. We're at the bottom of the list, the absolute bottom of the list. So, I think we really need to be focusing on trying to get good grades in school.

Participants also cited hazing behavior as a major deterrent. Tyquan pledged a multicultural fraternity instead of a BGLO for the following reasons:

> I was looking for, and still trying to find myself. As a leader I was getting involved in many different things. The fraternity I chose was not predominantly African-American. It was a diverse social fraternity. The reason I did that was because the fraternity was made up of people who were already leaders on campus. My resident advisor was a part of it, and a couple other RA's were a part of it. There were people from leadership positions, and it was very diverse and that's why I joined. That's what appealed to me. It was different from the African-American fraternities. I wasn't looking to get whooped on and beat up. I wanted to join something that would add value to who I was, and that's the only fraternity that I saw that would possibly add value.

Socially engaged on-campus resident participants reported the greatest satisfaction with campus life and higher levels of integration in the university through academic and professional service student organizations. Commuting participants were likely to obtain on-campus support through a more limited number of fellow students. Members of both groups experienced conflicting emotions about their relationships with socially oriented and engaged African American male peers, student organizations and fraternal organizations.

The Impact of Race

The impact of race in the daily lives of African American people and in this study of male collegians at a predominately White institution cannot be underestimated. Despite the progress our society has made in race relations over the past century, race continues to limit and negatively impact experiences in higher education for African American men. In this section I discuss the impact of race as a factor in the successful graduation of African American male collegians at Urban Research University. Scott was acutely aware of how URU has used African American enrollment as a commodity to be exchanged for external validation and financial gain, he stated,

> I think that's just a thing they say for more funding and grant money. When it comes to politics, what you say and what you do are always two different things. I still feel like there's sort of this hypocrisy. URU can't say on the one hand, we want minorities to succeed, we want more minorities to get degrees, we want these people to be reflected in our overall scholarly makeup, and then purposely make things hard for them as a matter of policy. Saying that they want minorities to succeed but then making it hard for them to do so. Urban Research University could definitely lead the way in being an equitable

> school. We are not an equitable school. It's easier for privileged people to get ahead and get out here.

Scott's comments reflect the perception that Urban Research University actively exploits African American students in externally proclaiming support for diversity and student success to attract external funding and support, while deliberately ignoring student needs internally.

Participant responses to questions about their experiences as African American men at Urban Research University varied widely. Some reported experiencing little or no difficulty at Urban Research University relative to their race and gender characteristics. For example Douglas stated,

> I didn't feel any discrimination or anything like that. When I study it's really diverse. I didn't feel like an outcast or anything. I don't know how to answer that. I guess it wasn't important. I was comfortable. Its something you don't have to worry about being discriminated against or anything like that. That's not Urban Research University.

Brandon made a similar statement regarding experiences of racial prejudice at URU saying, "I'm thankful that I didn't experience no kind of racial prejudice or nothing like that."

Findings indicated that participant responses to the question were tempered by their status as commuter students, level of campus engagement and ability to relate positively with faculty members. Douglas and Brandon were traditional age commuting students neither of whom reported experiencing adverse racial events. In addition both participants perceived the URU racial climate positively. Neither participant was engaged in campus life beyond attending classes and reported one or two friendships with peers of diverse backgrounds. Neither sought to become part of the African American student subculture. Both were marginally connected to aspects of campus life that would have exposed them to microaggressions or other racially

charged incidents. Brandon and Douglas were both mild mannered, soft spoken individuals with quiet dispositions and appropriate grammar, so personality may also play a role in their perceptions. Their style of dress did not reflect the latest urban or hip hop fashion trends wildly popular among young people their age. These characteristics may have rendered them more acceptable, or less of a perceived threat to White faculty and students. It is very possible that Brandon and Douglas managed to persist and graduate from URU without even recognizing the invisible forces of institutional and structural racism because their personal characteristics served to minimize the discomfort of Whites around them. Therefore, they did not experience direct or indirect microaggressions directed at their race and gender. Brandon and Douglas viewed the URU environment as a comfortable and racially safe place to be.

Due to societal disapproval of targeted acts of racial discrimination, the nature of racism has shifted from perpetrators engaging in overt racially discriminatory behaviors to those that are structural, aversive and aggressive in indirect ways. In contrast to Brandon and Douglas, Scott was direct and outspoken, with a strong African American identity coupled with a keen political awareness that allowed him to detect and analyze individual and systemic racism in personal interactions and institutional behavior. Older non-traditional commuting participants, traditional age students living in campus residence halls and those with higher levels of campus involvement reported greater numbers of perceived racial incidents on campus. These experiences could be categorized as microaggressions from faculty members, peers or staff that challenged or sought to undermine their academic self confidence. As Victor stated,

> I had a teacher in there that wouldn't help me with my papers because like I said man, I came in off the streets. I didn't know what I didn't know. It was all foreign to me. I'm asking this dude, hey man, help me out with this paper. So I did the paper, he said it was

> wrong but it wasn't. Then he said hey you plagiarized this paper. I'm getting you out of here. I said to him, hey man I was asking you for help, because I didn't know. We worked it out down the line, but it was a really bad experience. At that point I was gonna quit, but decided to go back and finish because I was in an environment where I could learn.

Robert described an experience with a faculty member that captures the essence of many faculty interactions with African American males at URU.

> In high school the highest level Math they taught was Algebra, so that was as far as I got. I ended up getting a mathematics score of 32 on the ACT test. I tested into calculus at URU, but I had never taken it before. I did bad on the first two tests. The instructor told me, 'you may want to think about dropping the class if you don't do real well on the next exam.' He was trying to discourage me from going forward based on the first two exams. I decided to stay in the class and go back to the basics. I knew I was getting the right answers, but I never showed my work. The instructor eventually told me that I had to show how I calculated answers to the problems. I was like okay, now I got it. I went on to exceed his expectations and earn the highest grade in the class. Then he changed his tune, and started to give me praise and stuff like that.

Bashir also expressed frustration with URU support services staff in an earlier quote about receiving that 'broad answer' to inquiries about navigating the university bureaucracy. Due to the intentional or unintentional omission of information, Bashir did not receive the detailed information and understanding needed to make important decisions regarding his college experience. Bashir perceived this treatment as "blowing him off" because of his cornrows

hairstyle and affinity for urban wear and hip-hop fashion. In other words he felt that his culturally authentic appearance was held against him in addition to poor grades.

Campus Racial Climate

Study findings indicate that poor campus climate is a major factor in the attrition of African American men. From the 1960's through 2014, Urban Research University did not make investments in creating a supportive campus infrastructure and climate for African American students (e.g., Minority Affairs, Multicultural Affairs etc). Nor had major investments been made in training and preparing the predominately suburban Caucasian, middle and upper class faculty and staff to teach, mentor and serve urban, working class African American students. Scott's statements describe his frustration with the racial climate of URU:

> I mean Urban Research University takes black people for granted in general. You know there's so many of us who go here because it's right in the heart of the city. URU has this feeling that if 8 or 9 percent of them actually graduate. That's enough. There's enough black students here, so that if 8 or 9 percent of them graduate it's adequate representation in their minds. They don't really give minority students support because I don't really think they want to."

Bashir describes similar feelings of rejection and lack of connection and support from URU and the impact of these experiences on his emotional well being.

> Anyone can go in the student advising system, look your name up, see your grades, make an easy comparison then say, he's gonna fail just like all the other black kids, so why even bother. I don't think people at Urban Research University believed in me. Not at all and especially with me being here by myself. I really felt alone a whole lot. I was just trying to figure it out the best way I could. Some of the people I reached out to would just

> give me that 'broad answer'. I got the broad answer so much I felt like I wasn't going to be successful anyway.

Many themes emanating from Scott's critique and Bashir's statement intersect in multiple ways to discourage persistence for all students, however the lack of sound structural support for academic success and cultural integration have particularly greater salience for African American males due to their membership in a socially marginalized caste.

In the immediate aftermath of raising admissions standards, Urban Research University aggressively marketed itself to White, middle class suburbanites as the most "diverse institution" in the state and a place where diversity served as a major strength in the undergraduate experience. Most participants expressed positive experiences relative to the overall diversity of the campus citing exposure to people, customs and religions from throughout the world. For example, Brandon mentioned the diversity of Urban Research University as a positive feature of his college experience, expressing it this way:

> The diversity here was another thing that interested me. So I felt comfortable to be honest with you. I felt there were a lot of other religions and races. That felt good and it was fine for me. I loved it.

Conclusion

The first theme presented findings relative to participant definitions of college success and intrinsic motivating factors leading to persistence and graduation. Participants defined college success as the development of opportunities and choices generated from earning the degree; increased marketability and potential for financial success and finally, the acquisition of skills to further their personal and professional growth.

The second section presented findings regarding pre-college preparation. Parental engagement in the K-12 learning process played a large role in the success of second-generation participants. Parent advocacy and placement in summer bridge and other academic skill building activities created strong academic profiles for some participants. Conversely, low parental involvement in the K-12 learning experiences had an overall negative effect on most participants as they were not well prepared to take advantage of academically strong high schools, compete for merit-based financial aid nor participate in a comprehensive college selection process. High teacher expectations and mentoring played a large role in the development of extra curricular learning opportunities for participants with a demonstrated talent in Mathematics.

Non-cognitive factors affecting successful African American male collegians at Urban Research University were the focus of findings for the next theme. Self-efficacy, growth mindset and work ethic were the primary motivational determinants of individual participant success. In addition, family support, particularly the emotional and motivational support of Mothers played a huge role in participant success. Leadership experiences, spirituality, delayed gratification and first generation status, also played major roles in providing motivation for participant success.

The impact of campus support services and student engagement on the persistence of URU African American male collegians. The most salient factor in the success of participants was the availability of financial aid, particularly merit scholarships and campus employment opportunities. Those working off campus did not utilize campus support services as much as those who worked at the university. Most participants obtained financial aid through a combination of scholarships, on and off-campus employment, and grants and loans. Faculty and staff served as both mentors and referral agents to assist participants in navigating the URU bureaucracy. Proactive behaviors powered by persistence and intentionality enabled participants

to advocate for themselves with faculty and staff members. Others utilized perseverance, assertiveness and summer school attendance strategies to reduce the time to degree attainment and manage the rigor of their programs.

The findings of the next theme addressed the impact of barriers on African American male persistence at Urban Research University and described some aspects of the college experience for study participants. Lack of institutional support for students of color in the form of a multicultural affairs or a diversity and inclusion office left African American students with a chaotic and dysfunctional social, cultural and academic eco-system.

In sum, the observations of study participants varied relative to their challenges in forming meaningful connections with peers and the institution. Major barriers to campus student engagement such as poorly resourced and institution-centered campus support services, faculty and peer microaggressions, campus climate and pressure to conform to conflicting gender expectations were often mediated by the following factors: age, personal interests, commitment to academic goals, admission as a first year or transfer student, career goals, residential living, commuter status, financial aid status and personality. Each of these factors impacted the depth and intensity of connection to campus personnel, peers and the institution. The degree to which participants adhered to the unwritten rules of American male masculinity, the greater was same race peer acceptance and validation. The lack of meaningful connections to the URU majority community, African American campus community and faculty and staff may have served to further exacerbate the intensity of isolation and alienation experienced by academically successful African American male collegians at URU.

Significant turnover in senior institutional leadership, inefficient and outdated administrative and management practices, and poor labor and management relationships

contributed to impersonal and dehumanizing student interactions with faculty and staff members. Institutional culture and funding priorities reflected a clear preference for the research mission above student success. These environmental characteristics created problems for students forced to rely on the campus bureaucracy to resolve financial aid and advising problems.

Findings for the theme of impact of racial climate indicated that study participants that were soft spoken, mild mannered or dressed in ways that were not reflective of the current African American youth culture appeared non-threatening or "unraced." These participants did not report negative encounters with faculty, staff or peers relative to race. In contrast, findings also showed study participants that presented themselves as "stereotypically African American" in fashion, speech or other mannerisms, experienced microaggressions linked to stereotypes about African American men as being less intelligent from faculty, staff and other students. Victor, Robert and Bashir's experiences with faculty members also reflected societal stereotypes and beliefs of African American inferiority. They were subjected to demeaning speech or behaviors designed to discourage them from participation and exclude them from academic activities. They also reported being ignored for participation in group academic projects when peers were given authority to select team members, and were perceived and treated as academically deficient once selected. The negative attitudes possessed by faculty and peers were reflected in their low expectations for success, and microaggressions directed towards African American male students based upon negative stereotypes and perceptions.

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION

The primary research question in my study was designed to learn the behaviors and characteristics of African American male collegians that lead to academic success, and the practices of urban universities that serve to help or hinder their success. The overarching goal of the study was to amplify and project the perspectives of African American males in relation to factors promoting their success, and add to the research literature exploring strategies that serve to increase student success and degree attainment among African American men in higher education. Based upon responses of study participants and supporting literature, I argue that grit and resilience are greater indicators of African American male success at URU than cultural capital because smaller numbers of African American men grow up with the advantages of a middle class lifestyle. Most study participants grew up in the "poorest big city in the U.S." and did not have the advantages possessed by Scott and Jalil. Despite Scott's cultural capital, as an African American male in highly competitive STEM field, he still encountered and overcame stereotyping and microaggressions from faculty members. I submit that "grit and resilience" supported his persistence in the face of barriers to success and degree attainment.

Chapter 5 summarizes and reviews findings from Chapter 4 that are connected to the existing literature. The findings of my study are analyzed and discussed as major themes.

The first half is divided into several subsections that contain an analysis of themes derived from participant responses to interview questions and connections to the research literature.

Motivating Factors in College Success

The first theme addressed participant definitions of college success and intrinsic motivating factors leading to persistence and graduation. Study participants had multiple definitions for success in college. The findings of this study revealed participant constructions of opportunities and choices, skill development for career success, and personal and professional growth played a major role in the success of African American males at Urban Research University. This finding is consistent with Harper (2004) who found that successful African American collegians held a strong belief that leadership, community advancement and resilience were key elements in constructions of self and their actual behavior. Participants also held definitions of masculinity that included holding positions of campus leadership, succeeding in the classroom and developing skills and competencies that would secure their future (Harper, 2004).

Participants defined academic success in college as a process to expand their opportunities and life choices. Alex stated, "College success for me was basically maintaining consistency with my grades to be able to make income off of something I love to do, something I'm passionate about. What I'm passionate about is film." Alex's response indicates that he viewed success in college as a vehicle to make money through participation in a chosen occupation. Film production was something he was committed to and passionate about. As a result his interpretation of a successful college experience was one that gave him freedom, choices, opportunities to direct his future in ways that held significant meaning for him.

This is consistent with research conducted by Wood, Adriel and Hicks (2014) who found that creating a better future for oneself and one's family was a major motivating factor in the persistence of African American male collegians. College success as an escape mechanism to

better opportunities and quality of life was important and is similar to the ways in which Hunter and Davis (1994) and others defined African American men's views of manhood closely tied to identity construction, development of self and sense of direction. This finding is also consistent with Palmer and Strayhorn's (2008) work that identified passion and an affinity for one's academic major as an important factor in successful college experience for African American males.

Some participants defined college success as developing the skills necessary to earn an income and make life easier. They also viewed college success from the perspective of developing hard and soft skills that could be applied outside of the classroom in everyday life. Rahiem described college success this way:

> Being able to understand the material that the teacher has given you. It's not so much a letter grade, but being able to take the information the instructor gives you and apply it, whether as a prerequisite for another class or helping you achieve your degree, or just being able to apply it outside the classroom into life.

Wood, Hilton and Hicks (2014) found that career goals emerged as a major motivational factor for African American male college students, and the research of Hunter and Davis (1994) revealed that African American men believed that economic viability, particularly the ability to support one's self was necessary for independence.

Participants combined personal and vocational perspectives when defining success in college. They viewed the college experience as one of personal discovery, identity formation and resilience. Brandon framed college success in this way:

> My first semester was tough and the campus was big. It was tough getting adjusted. So I define success by commitment and hard work, because without those two things you

can't get anywhere. That's with any college you go to in general, I mean anything in life. You gotta put your mind to it. Just keep going at it and you will get there."

Each description of college success was strongly related to participant conceptions of manhood and masculinity

Pre-College Preparation

The second theme of the chapter addresses pre-college preparation including the influence of parental engagement and high teacher expectations, on the development of academic skills, and on social and cultural capital. I identify a few pre-college preparation success factors and ways they contributed positively to the motivation of study participants. I also discuss how the absence or lack of certain pre-college academic preparation experiences served to disadvantage or negatively impact the motivation and college experiences of others.

Most study participants grew up in one of the most racially segregated urban areas of the United States, and lived in areas of concentrated poverty. Despite their relative disadvantages many engaged in particular strategies to minimize or circumvent the impact of negative socioeconomic and educational conditions on pre-college preparation. A few study participants attended selective magnet high schools and achieved academically due to a confluence of factors that included parental engagement in their learning, high expectations held for them by teachers, pre-college programs and summer camps, supportive adult figures, and community and leadership activities. I found these factors to be important in the participants' preparation for success at Urban Research University.

Participants Scott and Jalil were raised in two-parent middle class homes that prioritized academic skills development and college preparation experiences that positioned them for success at Urban Research University. Both participants had parents that were very engaged in

promoting academic experiences to the point of structuring their son's after school activities to emphasize learning as a core value. Both young men attended well-resourced magnet high schools focused on college preparation and STEM focused enrichment camps and Summer Bridge programs prior to college enrollment. Wood and Palmer (2015) identified Summer Bridge Programs as one of the best practices supporting the success of underrepresented students in higher education.

The parents of Scott and Jalil used their college backgrounds, personal networks and control over their time and attention to insure their sons developed strong study habits, maintained high academic performance and engaged in academic growth experiences. Their active involvement and advocacy insured that both young men developed the social and cultural capital for success prior to entering higher education. Both participants performed well enough in high school to earn merit scholarships to URU that paid full tuition and books.

The findings are consistent with the work of Palmer et al. (2014) who cited parent-child interactions and parental involvement as one of the most robust predictors of African American male success in school. Mandara (2006) asserted that when black parents are actively involved in their son's academic efforts by monitoring homework as well as other academic pursuits, and creating constant and positive dialogue with teachers and counselors, they increase the odds of their son's success. My findings are also consistent with those of Harper (2012), in his landmark national study on Black male achievement in higher education. One of the key findings in Harper's study revealed that high achieving African American males were beneficiaries of educational resources aggressively sought out by family members and parents to ensure their success such as tutoring and academic support programs, college preparatory initiatives and summer camps and academies. This was the case in my study, as well.

Up to this point I provided perspectives from study participants that were relatively economically privileged and had significant parental involvement to provide the social and cultural capital necessary for success in academe. Not all the participants enjoyed these advantages during their pre-college educational experience. For example, Bashir and Douglas exhibited several risk factors for leaving high school without a diploma. As they were growing up, neither participants' pre-college education nor their home life provided the social and cultural capital necessary to assist them with the college application and success process. For many academically talented African American males, having strong supportive relationships with K-12 staff can make a critical difference if parents are not supportive of their academic success. Polite and Davis (1999) found that far too few African American males are directed to college preparatory opportunities such as summer camps, advanced mathematics classes and AP courses. Unlike his economically advantaged counterparts, Bashir applied to and was accepted at just one postsecondary institution. In contrast, to Bashir, Douglas bounced around three postsecondary institutions before arriving at URU as a transfer student with an Associate's of Science degree from a local community college. Without adequate guidance and direction, Douglas wasted a great deal of time and thousands of dollars in tuition and fees. Bashir and Douglas used a combination of grants, loans and employment to finance their undergraduate degrees. They managed to graduate from high school and a top tier research university with little pre-college assistance from their schools or families. As low-income and first-generation African American males, both endured significant hardship on their path to degree completion. Bashir struggled academically to gain a foothold at Urban Research University, and Douglas due to poor pre-college counseling, attended several institutions. Both young men suffered from the lack of

adequate academic preparation, at home and at school in addition to poor pre-college counseling and financial difficulties.

Palmer et al. (2014) contend that the achievement gap for black males in poverty begins early in childhood and actually increases as they move from grade to grade. Noguera (2001) and Guiffrida (2004) noted that many young black males who drop out of high school and college respectively do not have much support from parents at home or teachers and guidance counselors at school. The young men in my study are clearly exceptional and defied odds that were notably stacked against them.

Ross and Jackson (1991) and Strayhorn (2008e) assert that teacher expectations play a key role in influencing African American male experiences in K-12 urban schools. This finding was true in both positive and negative ways for study participants. For example, Robert was raised in a two parent, working class family and attended a failing urban high school. He exhibited a talent for Mathematics and enjoyed special attention from teachers who encouraged him to participate in advanced academic programs at a local community college. Robert's referral to the dual enrollment program enhanced his pre-college academic preparation by placing him in a better learning environment than his high school provided. The mentoring and nurturing provided by high school teachers and the academic rigor of community college classes prepared Robert to earn a merit scholarship to Urban Research University that paid full tuition and books.

My findings showed the impact of pre-college academic preparation on the success of African American males attending Urban Research University. Strong parental engagement in the K-12 learning process, and parental knowledge and wherewithal (social and cultural capital) to promote access to advanced educational opportunities made a huge impact on the pre-college

experience of study participants. Two-parent, middle class families were able to provide the most advanced academic growth experiences.

In contrast, participants from low income and working class families often did not have parents that possessed the knowledge and information to enable access to similar opportunities. These men attended failing high schools that did not provide many advanced opportunities for the development of strong academic skills and social and cultural capital. The opportunity gap becomes clear when examining the process and outcomes of the participants' college access activities. This is consistent with the research of Polite and Davis (1999) who found that teachers and school counselors do not regularly refer African American male high school students to college preparation opportunities such as summer camps, advanced mathematics classes or advanced placement courses. These "college knowledge" programs often feature sessions that discuss finding the right college match, admissions requirements, financial aid application procedures and the links between college courses and career opportunities.

Scott and Jalil accrued considerable advantages by attending quality high schools and pre-college programs. They applied and were accepted to multiple colleges and attracted considerable amounts of financial aid through merit scholarships. Low-income and first generation study participants such as Bashir and Douglas lacked access to quality high schools and pre-college programs. Their pre-college experiences left them unprepared for college and subsequently, they were left to fend for themselves in the college application and financial aid process. Both applied to fewer institutions, struggled academically and utilized grants, loans and employment as the primary means by which they financed their educations. Working class and low income participants with above average academic ability such as Robert and Gene, or leadership qualities like Tyquan exhibited were recognized, mentored and provided with unique

educational opportunities not afforded to the general student populations of their struggling high schools. Despite low socioeconomic status, they developed the social and cultural capital to obtain the resources necessary for success in secondary and higher education.

Pre-college academic preparation plays a significant role in the success of African American males at Urban Research University. Parental engagement, first generation, socioeconomic status, high school quality and personal characteristics of some participants mediate this finding. Due to the residential segregation of African American people in areas of concentrated poverty more African American males are educated in schools that are underfunded, lack modern technology, have high turnover rates of superintendents, principals and teachers and greater numbers of inexperienced and uncertified teachers in mathematics and science. These educational environments mitigate the development of strong academic skills and the requisite cultural capital prior to college matriculation (Toldson & Lewis, 2012). Those that eventually enroll on the campuses of urban universities often reflect strivers such as Bashir and Douglas versus well prepared achievers like Scott and Jalil. Diamonds in the rough such as Robert, Gene, Rahiem, Victor and Tyquan used alternative strategies such as caring school staff and non-traditional academic and personal development programs (dual enrollment, mentoring programs or community colleges and leadership) to overcome disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and poor educational preparation.

Non-Cognitive Variables Leading to Persistence

The third theme addresses non-cognitive factors present in successful African American male collegians, and the impact of certain non-cognitive variables on persistence as perceived by the participants, including: self-efficacy; growth mindset; work ethic; resilience, prove them

wrong; delayed gratification; family support; leadership experience; spirituality and first generation status. Each theme is discussed below.

Non-cognitive variables are defined in the literature as nonacademic activities and descriptions of motivational and personality variables (Sackett et al., 2001). For the purposes of this study I used Sedlacek's (2004) definition of non-cognitive variables as those relating to adjustment, motivation and student perceptions. Students have to want to persist and expend the effort to do so, even when faced with challenges, and a strong sense of self-efficacy promotes goal attainment. Individuals with high self-efficacy engage more readily in a task, expend more effort, and persist longer to completion of that task, despite obstacles to success (Tinto, 2016). Several participants in this study expressed the importance of never giving up despite obstacles to degree attainment. They described the behaviors and strategies used including taking very intentional responsibility for their learning, engaging a strong work ethic, and utilizing proactive behaviors to negotiate bureaucratic and academic obstacles at URU. For instance, Victor said, "Well my thing is, you just can't quit. I mean I never gave up. Because if I failed then what? You can't let those things in front of you destroy you. Because life is a storm and you gotta get through it."

And Rahiem stated:

> I came in willing to work. I managed my time correctly and prepared, because a lot of times it's perceived or set up that we're gonna fail anyway. So when I came in, I wanted to do everything I could to destroy their myth towards the next African-American male that's coming behind me.

The findings of this study are consistent with those of Wood, Newman and Harris III (2015), who argue that extensive research shows an integral relationship between self-efficacy

and student success in college. In addition, Wood (2001) found that self-efficacy is a critical facilitator in the persistence and achievement of African American males in college. Victor and Rahiem approached their collegiate experiences with a strong belief that they had the tools or could successfully learn the essential tools necessary for college success. Their stories are especially poignant because both men dropped out of school (Victor, in 12th grade of high school, Raheim, as an 18 year old freshmen at URU) and reenrolled as non-traditional adult students decades later.

Other participants said that their actions and behaviors were critical drivers in how much success they achieved. Robert clearly recognized that he does not control all of the circumstances concerning access to opportunity. Money or the lack thereof clearly serves as a real barrier to access. However, Robert's comment reveals that he recognized his power to control the level of commitment and degree of intensity directed towards goal attainment. Therefore, his self-confidence never wavered, proudly stating that he belonged and could effectively compete in whatever institutional environment he was in. This is consistent with Strayhorn's (2013) finding that grittier African American males earned higher grades in college than their less gritty same race peers, even after controlling for differences in age, year in school, transfer status engagement activities, degree aspirations and prior achievement. Strong academic self-confidence undergirds grit and provides a base from which African American male collegians can operate to overcome obstacles to success in higher education.

Several participants cited work ethic and strong study habits as key success factors. Essentially, they refused to be "outworked" by their peers and leaned on this attitude and concomitant behaviors to overcome academic challenges and difficulties. Pace (1990), Harper (2012), and Palmer and Strayhorn (2008) argue that it is the institution's responsibility to provide

resources for student success. However, it is the students' responsibility to do the hard work necessary to succeed academically. Similar to Harper's research, my findings revealed that many participants initially struggled with the concept of "studying outside of class" and confused the completion of class assignments with "studying". Unlike high school where they often completed homework in class or while at school, success in college meant devoting significant time outside the classroom environment to reading textbooks and reviewing coursework to "master concepts". Participants often utilized time outside of class to maximize their studies and develop a strong work ethic.

Resilience was a characteristic displayed by each study participant. For example as a former athlete, Alex was conditioned to overcome obstacles to success and his coping skills assisted him through multiple challenges. He overcame the physical pain, academic, emotional, social and psychological transitions that accompanied being suddenly removed from the team atmosphere. Alex demonstrated resilience in order to recover from major setbacks on the way to degree attainment. While there is no consensus in the literature about how to define resilience (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), Masten (2001, p.228) describes it as the "process in which individuals display good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation and development". Resilience is closely related to the non-cognitive variables of self-efficacy and growth mindset. I found that study participants clearly identified resilience as a key attribute in their sense of self and they emphasized the idea of "never giving up" despite setbacks and negative experiences.

Other participants used negative experiences in the university as fuel to succeed and silence individuals that held low expectations for their success. The prove them wrong syndrome (Moore, et al., 2003) played a key role in overcoming the low expectations of others. In an earlier passage, Scott stated that despite Zen training his African American identity is central to

who he is and how he views the world around him. Scott's ability to transform negative emotional energy into positive academic outcomes was a critical component of his success in a highly competitive STEM field with few role models. Scott described this behavior in the face of a faculty member's skepticism about his academic ability. He was particularly angry about how a faculty member related to him in a patronizing manner sharing, "The faculty member would talk to you like a child and call you stupid if you didn't get the grade. He felt it was perfectly acceptable to disrespect you to your face."

In this particular situation Scott deliberately set out to prove the faculty member wrong and his anger drove him to excel when unfounded doubts about his ability to be successful were expressed. Men demonstrating the prove them wrong syndrome illustrate a high internal locus of causality and their aim is to prove naysayers wrong, particularly those who doubt their abilities (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Prior research asserts that an individual's beliefs about the significance of race influence his or her behavior during specific events in a specific context (Moore, et al., 2003). A black student with strong racial pride and heightened sensitivity to negative intellectual stereotypes about his racial group may adopt a prove them wrong attitude in the classroom where those stereotypes exist (Carter, 2005). Several study participants exhibited the non-cognitive variable Sedlacek (2004) described as successfully handling the system (racism), meaning that one exhibits a realistic view of the system based on personal experience(s) with racism. According to Sedlacek (2004), a person exhibiting this non-cognitive factor is committed to improving the existing system, and takes an assertive approach to dealing with existing wrongs, but is not hostile to society and is not a cop-out; he is able to handle the racist system.

The second non-cognitive variable identified by all participants was the concept of delayed gratification. Participants felt they were sacrificing things in the present to devote time

and energy towards achieving short-term academic goals that would eventually lead to career advancement. Some participants made very clear decisions to prioritize academics above campus engagement and employment opportunities. They minimized the desire to obtain readily available yet expensive consumer items as a critical aspect of their commitment to being successful students. Due to poor financial decisions or a need to keep up with the fashion or technology preferences of peers, many African American students take on excessive student loan, auto loan or credit card debt while in college. Attempts to maintain an image of wealth and prosperity often requires students to work full-time jobs to maintain a lifestyle beyond their financial means (Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). Participant identified delayed gratification as an important factor in their academic success similar to Sedlacek (2004) who found delayed gratification and preference for achieving long term goals as major factors in the success of African American and other non-traditional students in higher education. The belief that participants were working towards a better tomorrow or brighter future kept them from pursuing full-time employment at the expense of their academic goals. Participants also did not feel a need to possess expensive material items to impress their peers and resisted adopting attitudes and behaviors that jeopardized academic success. Although several participants were employed during their undergraduate years, they prioritized academics over employment.

Participants frequently cited family support as a motivating factor in graduating from Urban Research University. Due to low incomes or major financial obligations, many parents could not give tangible financial support but often provided students with advice and encouragement in resolving academic, financial or emotional crisis. Mothers played the major and influential role in supporting the undergraduate success of participants, a theme that was prevalent regardless of whether the participant was from a single or two-parent home. Others

cited support from multiple family or significant others. My findings are consistent with research on African American students on predominately White campuses that finds African American students seek support from beyond the campus community, and particularly from family members (Guiffrida, 2004; Herndon & Hirt, 2004). Some parents of successful African American collegians lacked formal education, yet provided inspirational and encouraging messages that had a significant impact on student success (Wood & Palmer 2015; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002). Sedlacek (2004) identified availability of a strong support person or a person who seeks or takes advantage of a strong support network or has someone to turn to in a crisis or for encouragement as a prominent non-cognitive variable in the retention and graduation of African American and other underserved students. This was born out for my study participants, as well.

Several participants were involved in leadership activities at Urban Research University, their church, place of employment or family, and a few were active in academic and social organizations sponsored by URU. They believed that these organizations fostered a sense of belonging and connection with peers, faculty and staff and facilitated their growth and development. They were also more likely to participate in organizations connected directly to academic majors and sponsored by their departments instead of socially oriented student or residence life sponsored organizations. These findings are consistent with Harper's (2012) National Black Male College Achievement Study wherein high achieving African American male collegians displayed a record of leadership in multiple student organizations, developed meaningful relationships with campus administrators and faculty outside the classroom, and participated in enriching educational experiences for example study abroad programs, internships, service learning, and summer research programs. More generally, researchers have

documented the relationship between African American male leadership experiences and positive persistence rates for African American collegians (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Study participants that commuted to campus were least likely to report having joined and participated in campus academic or social groups. Over 80% of URU students commute to campus due to its urban location. The campus does not provide programming or services designed to connect these students to others on campus. Therefore, it is not surprising that commuting participants were not actively engaged in campus life, and maintained significant off-campus support systems. Commuting status served to further isolate and minimize the engagement of African American male collegians at URU.

Several participants cited their spiritual beliefs as the motivational foundation that enabled them to bear the ups and downs of college life. Spirituality served as a springboard to push through obstacles to build the characteristics of grit and resilience. For example, Scott and Victor, although demonstrating vastly different belief systems, expressed how spirituality had a positive impact on their persistence and graduation from URU. Spirituality is mentioned often in the literature as a key factor in the retention of African American male students at PWI's and HBCU's (Watson, 2006). Herndon (2003) found that African American male collegians often viewed spirituality as a key element in building resilience; providing a sense of purpose; and as a support network tied to the African American community.

Many participants were first generation college students and a few mentioned that their drive to succeed came from being the first in their family to earn a college degree. First generation participants perceived their accomplishments with greater esteem. Their desire to serve as role models and trailblazers carried significant meaning, particularly for the non-traditional students. First generation status was motivation for many participants to persevere

through difficult times. They saw themselves carrying the hopes and dreams of their families with them throughout their collegiate experiences. Dancy (2012) asserts that African American male achievers feel pressure to be "good" sons and that their enrollment in college placed unique attention on them as family torchbearers, while simultaneously serving as a source of motivation and resilience in the face of obstacles.

Conclusion

In this section I discussed the theme of non-cognitive variables and how they served as motivating factors in the persistence and graduation of study participants. Many of the views elicited from participant interviews mirrored non-cognitive variables cited by Sedlacek and Tracy (2004). I also addressed non-cognitive variables they did not include such as spirituality, and first generation status that evolved from participant interviews and the research literature. Based upon responses of study participants and supporting literature, I argue that grit and resilience are far greater indicators of African American male success than cultural capital at URU. Grit and resilience also serve as greater indicators of success than spirituality in that most study participants did not make specific references to a deity or higher power in their responses. Participants that mentioned spirituality often combined their faith with motivational factors associated with grit and resilience such as taking responsibility for their educational success. Based upon participant interviews, I argue that non-cognitive variables are the most important of all the themes generated by study participants in the persistence of African American male collegians at Urban Research University.

Campus Supports Contributing to Persistence

This section addresses the positive impact of campus support services and student engagement on African American male persistence at Urban Research University. Participants identified financial aid, faculty and staff mentoring relationships, assistance with coursework (e.g., writing and mathematics labs), and peer relationships as factors that most likely encouraged them to re-enroll at Urban Research University.

Some participants had limited financial concerns relative to many of their peers, citing eligibility for merit scholarships, employment and grants and loans as their main sources of education funding. Brandon, Scott and Jalil were admitted as first year students with full merit scholarships. They came from middle class backgrounds, attended academically strong high schools and were well prepared academically. These participants had the advantage of being able to focus upon academics without concerns about persistence due to financial issues. Brandon described his experience with merit based scholarships:

> I was admitted to the Honors where we had to maintain a 3.3 grade point average. I actually did pretty well my first semester as far as grades. I had done so well in classes that I had extra money my first couple years. That was really good, cause I didn't start using financial aid (loans, grants) until I was a Junior."

In contrast, Tyquan and Bashir were admitted as first year students from low-income and working class backgrounds. They supplemented need-based aid such as Pell Grants with on-campus employment and student loans. Tyquan and Bashir lived in residence halls that aided their persistence by providing access to a network of on-campus employment opportunities. Due to financial hardship and desire to fund their educations, Bashir and Tyquan built social and cultural capital through campus-based employment in ways that increased their engagement and

knowledge of the university. Bashir described the benefit of his on-campus work experience in the following statement:

> Yes, sir, and I do believe I have a lot of wisdom because of the many different jobs I had on campus. I worked with the scholars program, worked' in the admissions program doing recruiting for the university, worked with' the equipment manager for the football team, academic success center, and the marketing department. I just been so involved in the university that I know how different organizations work 'cause I spent time with them.

Participants that transferred to URU financed educational expenses with off-campus employment. Gene, Douglas and Victor worked off-campus jobs to supplement the grants and loans they received. None of the participants in this group reported financial distress as a barrier to persistence although they did not like the idea of having to take out loans. Douglas talked about the need for education loans versus working to pay tuition in the following statement:

> Uh, with financial aid I just did what I guess what every other student was doing. I was taking out loans because I didn't have a scholarship or financial assistance from home. Wished I could've paid for school a different way than taking out loans. I mean some students were working, going to school and trying to pay tuition out of pocket. They were working 40 hours and stuff like that. A lot of black friends I had were working a lot and I graduated before many of them. They work, work, work, came to school, didn't come to school much, or they took two classes a semester. They did not going to summer school so they were here for a longer period of time. I wasn't willing to do that. I'd just take out a loan.

The socioeconomic backgrounds and K-12 preparation of participants had a major influence on the types and amounts of aid each participant received to finance their educations. To varying degrees the most advantaged individuals did not report financial stress as a major barrier to persistence. In contrast participants with less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and K-12 preparation had to effectively manage financial stress through a variety of proactive strategies in addition to doing well in the classroom. Some strategies really helped participants living on campus to engage and bond with the institution in multiple ways. Transfer or commuting students often worked off-campus and maintained jobs held prior to attending URU. These students balanced the demands of their jobs with academic work and effectively succeeded in both arenas.

Financial aid plays a significant role in African American male collegian's persistence and academic success (Harper & Griffin, 2011). Participants that were socially and academically advantaged during their pre-college years maintained those advantages during their matriculation at URU. This is consistent with research showing African American students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds experience high levels of academic achievement at predominately white institutions compared to students from more meager backgrounds (Furr & Elling, 2002).

A few participants cited positive relationships with faculty and staff as major components of their success at Urban Research University. They exercised the ability to form positive relationships with institutional actors who in turn demonstrated an active interest in promoting their academic, career and personal success. For example, Tyquan expressed positive memories of the moments when faculty members responded to the hard work he put into assignments. He described the relationships he developed with faculty:

> The faculty related to me well that first year, it went very well. With the faculty the harder I tried, the more they would help. So they were nice, I seen a bunch of people that I could approach if I had issues or problems. I got good feedback on my work, but the thing is it seemed like if I put an effort into it, I believe they were open to helping me out. Faculty would see the sincerity in my effort and they responded positively to that."

Similarly, Victor expressed positive relationships with many of the faculty he encountered.

> Now I had instructors that could understand and relate to me even though I was from the streets. Yeah, they was really biting on my personality. They was like hey I like this guy. Because I could talk to anybody, they were like okay, he's a good guy.

Harper (2006) and Strayhorn (2008) argue that African American male collegians who develop ongoing, supportive, relationships with faculty, staff and fellow students have higher retention rates and satisfaction with their college experiences. Participants in my study demonstrate the importance of African American male collegians having faculty and staff role models on campus upon whom they can rely for support, empowerment and advice. Study participants indicated that some faculty and staff behaved as advocates and supporters sincerely interested in them, and who went "above and beyond" formal job duties to understand who they were. Participants also indicated that some faculty and staff asked about their classes, family members, jobs, and relationships, which indicated a degree of concern about their well-being beyond school related issues.

During our interviews, other participants described how faculty and staff provided encouragement and motivation for them to persevere and succeed through difficult courses. Robert described a relationship with an Academic Advisor that was similar to the one he had with his mother:

> Like I could talk to my advisor, and I'm like man, that physics, I'm about to drop it. She's like no, just stick with it. She actually pushed me through a lot of things I did not want to do. I would complain, it's terrible or it's time consuming. She would say just do it, when I would've dropped it or whatever. She was there all the time like pressuring me to keep going and stick it out. So I got like a little motivation. I guess my mom would be telling me the same thing. Her advice was like a little motivator to decide that I'm just not gonna fail.

These findings are supported by the research on student centered relationships between successful African American collegians and faculty and staff by Foster's (1993) concept of "othermothering" (Collins, 2000; Guiffrida, 2005). Black feminist literature defined othermothers as women who assisted biological mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities in order to effectively educate and socialize African American children in their own ways and traditions to uplift the African American community and assist them in resisting White domination (Collins, 2000, Guiffrida, 2005). Othermothering and student centered behaviors are practiced by women and men mentoring students in higher education. Lomotey (1990) and Guiffrida (2005) found that successful African American educators were viewed as "mother or father figures" to students because of the holistic approach they took to education. I would argue that othermothering and student centered behaviors are not limited to particular ethnicities or genders and can be practiced by any person with an ethic of care and concern for students. For example, Scott benefitted from the student centered relationship he enjoyed with a Caucasian male professor. Urban Research University faculty and staff provided varying levels of support to study participants to facilitate persistence and degree completion. Staff engaged in

othermothering or holistic mentoring provided the most intensive and effective support for African American males at the institution.

Participants that commuted to campus or transferred from community colleges were more likely to report very strong relationships with small numbers of multi-ethnic peers. These participants relied on informal yet close relationships with students they met and interacted with in classes. Small peer groups provided a sense of belonging, support and motivation for students who did not have the time due to work, off-campus commitments, or interest in joining established African American and multi-ethnic social and academic student organizations. Douglas described positive experiences with multi-ethnic peers:

> My friend from Saudi Arabia helped me study. If there's something I didn't understand I could ask him 'cause he was working on his master's degree and I was working on my bachelor's. So he had been through all of this already. I guess you could say he was my mentor. He would give advice for classes we were studying for together. He was able to explain the graphs in greater detail than I could follow from the professors. So the students here make you feel welcome. So my experience has been studying with males of different races.

Commuting participants reported having neither the time nor inclination to join established student groups. These decisions provided them with a different academic and social college experience than that experienced by their more actively engaged peers. Brandon was a full-time commuting student who did not have a job or family commitments. He expressed reasons for not joining established social and academic student organizations with this sentiment:

> I wasn't part of the academic organization for minority students in my major. I didn't really do a lot of organization stuff. I probably sometimes wish I did. When I was in

> college, I really didn't focus a lot on that stuff. I really wasn't into the group study thing because I felt it was distracting. Sometimes your focus can get off a little bit if you study in groups. So that's why I never did group study a lot. I did find one close friend and my girlfriend who I met on campus.

In contrast, participants living in campus residence halls were most likely to report active engagement in established student organizations. They engaged in organizations comprised of African American peers such as the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), or similar organizations.

The Student African American Brotherhood is an academic and professional development organization focused on developing the academic, professional and spiritual lives of its members (Bledsoe & Rome, 2006). Although open to all students it was comprised of African American male collegians from all schools, colleges and majors at URU. Unlike many other campus groups, SAAB sponsored weekly study tables and cultural events designed to appeal to African American male college students. For example, Gene transferred from a historically black college in the South and despite being a good student, had trouble transitioning to the larger, predominately Caucasian and impersonal nature of Urban Research University. Gene did not want to transfer from the HBCU, but did so at the insistence of his mother. The Student African American Brotherhood provided a comfortable space where he could manage the stresses underlying his transition, as illustrated in this comment about his involvement with it:

> The SAAB National Conference alone was a great experience. We were a group of African American males really trying to change a culture, or a way of thinking about

certain things. Even though we shared a lot of differences we were able to hear, relate, communicate and work with each other.

SAAB and other ethnic student organizations serve as enclaves and safe havens that help facilitate African American male social and academic integration and persistence (Bledsoe & Rome, 2006; Sidanius et al., 2004). In addition to participating in African American student groups, some participants engaged in majority Caucasian and multi-ethnic student organizations. For example, Bashir joined his academic department's student organization for professional development purposes. He described involvement with student groups linked to his academic major:

> I joined an organization called the American Business Federation and this is a national organization where they cater to business students. We did things like go to different businesses and agencies to check them out and see if wanted to work in that field.

Both African American and non-African American student organizations met needs of study participants. Regardless of peer group affiliation some participants successfully practiced the concept of accommodation without assimilation. Some students of color who believe education can be a vehicle for upward mobility strive to do well in school by acquiring the cultural codes necessary for school success, while also recognizing the value of their own culture and navigating effectively between the two (Gibson, 1988). Carter (2006) defines these types of students as "cultural straddlers" who have bicultural perspectives and who move strategically across cultural spheres. Carter characterizes these students as those "who play the game" of schooling and embrace the cultural codes of both home community and school or verbally critique the mainstream culture of schooling while simultaneously performing well academically. Although cultural straddlers are acutely aware of racism and limited opportunity structures, they

do not allow these barriers to limit their academic and life pursuits, and develop adaptive strategies for navigating these barriers (Carter, 2005). All the study participants were aware of URU's reputation in the local African American community as a difficult and in some characterizations, racist institution, successfully earned their baccalaureate degrees.

Campus Barriers to Student Success

In this section I address the impact of race upon the study participants at Urban Research University and how it functioned as a barrier to success. Tuit and Carter (2008) argue that Critical Race Theory is an appropriate framework for examining the experiences of African American achievers at PWI's because it furthers an understanding of how race and racism interact to shape the social context in which these students must learn and the behaviors they employ to maintain high academic performance.

Institutional discrimination is often reflected in the structures, staffing and operations of programs and services. Pincus (2000) argues that structural discrimination is more difficult to identify than other forms of discrimination because the individual practices that implement it appear to be neutral in intent; however, structural discrimination reinforces the disadvantaged status of African American male students. As a researcher with "insider knowledge" gleaned from over a decade of experience working with URU faculty, staff and students on issues concerning the retention and graduation of African American students I have obtained personal experience with URU behaviors, policies and practices that served to hinder the success of African American students. Consistent with much of the education establishment, Urban Research University historically viewed African Americans, their schools and communities of origin through a deficit lens and labeled most students underprepared, at risk or in need of remediation. In effect African American male students were treated as problems in need of fixing

instead of assets to be developed (Davies, Safarik, & Banning, 2003). Racial microagressions in academic spaces are filtered through layers of racial stereotypes. Any negative actions by or deficiencies noted among one or more African American students are used to justify pejorative perceptions about 'all' African American students, while the positive actions of a few are viewed as rare cases. (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000).

The development and design of access programs in the late 1960's and lack of investment in URU African American student success throughout subsequent decades provide a strong rationale for this perspective. Enrolling large numbers of African American students enabled URU to collect millions of dollars in state appropriation, federal and state grants, and private scholarship support on an annual basis. In addition URU successfully projected an image of "representational diversity" while investing minimal resources into supporting the success of African American students. Finally, providing access without taking responsibility for African American success did not disturb the underlying racial caste system and maintained existing power structures supporting racial and class privilege. Despite multiple task forces, faculty committees and university reports about poor African American persistence and graduation the situation has not improved (URU Report, 2013).

It is important to keep in mind that study participants represent individual success stories within the larger and tragic context of African American male failure to persist at Urban Research University where only 10.6% of African American men admitted from 2008-2014 graduated within a six-year period (NCES-IPEDS Data Center, 2016). Participant interviews revealed five major barriers believed to have the most potential to hinder their persistence at Urban Research University: campus support services; financial distress; faculty relationships; Caucasian peer relationships; and African American peer relationships. The last barrier, campus

racial climate, is intertwined in several of the categories above as well as discussed from a critical race perspective.

I begin with an analysis of themes participants described as barriers to persistence using the conceptual framework of Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success (1994). The major components of this model include the Black Box Assumption of Student Experiences on Campus, participant theoretical and heuristic knowledge and the unfolding matrix to enabling data collection and analysis, which are presented below. Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success (1994) consists of four key vectors with the first being "barriers". Barriers are defined as student experiences created by institutional actions, behaviors, policies, or cultures that negatively impact student persistence and retention. The second is frequency or number of times those barriers are identified by students. The third is student (heuristic) knowledge that helps them strategize solutions to overcome the barriers, and the fourth is behaviors and actions students engage in to overcome, navigate through or negotiate institutional barriers (Myers, 2008).

Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez and Trevino (1997) found that discontinuity, lack of nurturing, lack of presence and resources served as the main barriers to ethnic minority students at a large university in the Southwest. In applying Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success to a large urban community college in the Southwest, Myers (2008) found that students faced financial, institutional, personal and student isolation barriers. My study found that campus support, financial distress, faculty relationships, majority group peer relationships, and student life institutional barriers existed for participants attending Urban Research University.

The first barrier identified by study participants was campus support services. Similar to Padilla et al.'s (1994) findings of discontinuity (e.g., transition experiences) and lack of

nurturing, participants reported that during their first year of enrollment, interactions with campus support services resulted in significant frustration as they attempted to negotiate the environment. Several participants felt staff interactions were not warm or personally fulfilling, and experienced poor and impersonal treatment. As discussed in the introduction to Chapter 4, Urban Research University historically had not invested sufficient resources in the development of effective and student centered campus support services such as financial aid, orientation, advising, academic bridge programs, learning support services, student organizations, and multicultural supports for students of color. These issues also contributed to feelings of isolation and alienation. For example, Bashir stated:

> I don't think people at Urban Research University believed in me. Not at all and especially with me being here by myself. I really felt alone a whole lot. I was just trying to figure it out the best way I could. Some of the people I reached out to would just give me that 'broad answer'. I got the broad answer so much I felt like I wasn't going to be successful anyway.

As a first generation student from a low-income background, Bashir struggled with understanding the "hidden curriculum" or the nuances, complexity and unwritten rules for successfully navigating the bureaucratic structure of the university (Romero & Margolis, 1998). Black students are dissatisfied in their interactions with staff if they feel that nothing has been gained (Hecht et al., 1989). Black male students, reflecting their cultural background, often desire clear and concise instructions and direction. When this is not forthcoming, the student leaves the exchange angry, confused and not knowing what is expected of them (Hecht, et al., 1989). Therefore, when Bashir mentions that he received that "broad answer", in effect he is saying that support staff did not give him specific instructions or direction. This "cultural

disconnect" often results when staff operate from a middle class cultural perspective and take an indirect, facilitative approach where they hope to guide the student toward making their own decisions (Delpit, 1995). Bashir's experience also suggests he was given ambiguous recommendations as "suggestions" that placed the burden on him to decide the best course of action.

The second barrier identified by my participants was financial distress, which Padilla et al. (1994) referred to as lack of resources. Participants with the greatest levels of financial distress primarily came from first generation and low-income backgrounds. Although most were enrolled on a full-time basis, they worked off campus minimizing the time and energy available to integrate into the campus community. They were also the most sensitive to tuition and fee increases and had the fewest resources from which to absorb increasing costs. Following the trend at many institutions Urban Research University made significant changes in the allocation of financial aid and shifted large amounts of institutional funding away from need based aid to fund merit scholarships. The shift in aid distribution effectively discounted tuition for merit scholarship recipients and increased out of pocket costs for low-income and working class students. Urban Research University's financial aid allocation policy served to reinforce race and class inequities. The financial aid packages of low-income students were not sufficient to cover the cost of attendance whereas middle class participants reaped the benefits of substantial aid packages.

The third barrier identified by study participants was faculty relationships. Padilla et al. (1997) described this as lack of nurturing that included lack of minority role models and perceived low expectations by faculty. Padilla et al. (1997) also identified the lack of presence as a barrier that included racial isolation. My participants experienced a lack of presence in their

classroom experiences, meaning few if any African American males or faculty. In addition African American male collegians with a strong track record of academic success at Urban Research University were not immune from faculty microaggressions in the form of verbal attacks on their intellectual abilities and low expectations for their success. Racial microagressions are defined as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs' of African Americans by offenders" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez & Wills, 1978, p.66). Scott described a negative experience with a tenured professor in his department as follows:

> One class at Urban Research University was literally the worst class I've ever taken in life. The professor would just be condescending to me like you would not believe. He was so incredibly patronizing and would just belittle all of my effort. He asked me whom I took the prerequisite course with. I responded and he says, "oh, well, that's very interesting because he's a very good professor in our department, and you don't seem to reflect that at all." Therefore the professor would talk to me like a child, call me stupid and just be as cantankerous and unpleasant as possible. If I didn't get the grade, he did not care, and it was totally okay to disrespect me to my face.

When Scott complained, his concerns were dismissed. The department chair said she was powerless to discipline the faculty member because he was a tenured professor.

My findings are similar to research of Bonner and Bailey (2006) who suggest that the low teacher expectations experienced by African American males in K-12 education also appear to describe their experiences in institutions of higher education. Faculty members in higher education may exhibit behaviors that communicate fear, distrust, low expectations for

intellectual competence and success, and in some cases outright hostility towards African American male students.

Another barrier reported by study participants was relationships with majority group peers. They reported having few if any African American students, males or faculty) in their upper division courses. Some participants reported experiencing microaggressions from undergraduate peers questioning their intellectual ability. These subtle and sometimes intentional microaggressions often occurred during group projects when African American males had to demonstrate intellectual competence in collaboration with their Caucasian peers. Bashir described poor treatment received from White peers who went behind his back to complain to his professor, without expressing their concerns to him:

> I believe many shied away from me because there were certain students that I would take certain classes with. It may have been that I might be the only black male in the group or only black person. I noticed that they were expecting me to fail. I kinda felt like they showed it without sayin' it. Like through nonverbal communication. I even noticed that they would email the professors saying that I had a lack of certain things in the classroom, even though we all met and completed assignments together.

This finding is consistent with the work of Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) whose concept of a "proving process" called attention to the struggles of racial and ethnic minority students in predominately White classrooms. As with the findings of this study and the "prove them wrong syndrome" relative to low faculty expectations, Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) found African American male collegians felt they had to prove their intellectual capabilities to White classmates to dispel negative racial stereotypes.

The final barrier to persistence identified by participants was the absence of campus vision for an "institutional home" or "counterspaces" to support African American student needs for community, support, belonging, and engagement. In addition participants identified the lack of resources including money, space and organizational capacity that all play a major role in the absence of African American male social and cultural integration at URU. During his tenure as a student leader, Tyquan observed what other institutions were doing to enhance academic success among African American students. He made this observation about the lack of culturally relevant support services at Urban Research University:

> Before I graduated, I was able to go to student affairs conferences and learned about other universities that have diversity centers, centers for African-American student success. It doesn't make sense for Urban Research University to have such a low graduation rate.

According to Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) campus life plays a major role in engaging ethnic and racial minority students. University staff and administrators, consciously or not, help create and maintain racial barriers at predominately White universities (Feagin et al., 1996). Responding to the inattention to African American student needs and issues, URU students created their own enclaves, social communities and student organizations. Without adequate institutional support, most African American student organizations maintained a tenuous presence on the campus. White student organizations occupied dedicated office and meeting space on the URU campus. In contrast, African American organizations did not have the benefit of physical "safe spaces" in which students could organize, congregate, make friends, validate each other's experiences or provide peer support. Based on perspectives of study participants it is clear that many African American students did not experience a strong sense of belonging or connection in part due to the lack of organizational structure and resources to support their

academic and social success. Lack of institutional commitment and culturally appropriate venues for developing supportive relationships contributed to disproportionately high attrition rates among African American students and particularly males at Urban Research University. A negative perception of the in- and out-of-classroom environments and racialized interactions with faculty, staff and peers create conditions under which African American males disengaged and detached from Urban Research University. The findings of this study reinforce those of Feagin (2007) who found that victims of racial microaggressions often manage to resolve these unfortunate incidents through various strategies including deflecting hostility by laughing or disregarding offenders, educating and confronting offenders, limiting interactions with groups of White persons where microaggressions were likely to occur, withdrawing, or struggling with the pain of these indignities in silence.

Strategies Participants Used to Negotiate the Campus Racial Climate

In considering Padilla's (1991, 1994) Expertise Model of Student Success "frequency" vector, which examines the frequency of barrier experiences, the barriers participants experienced varied in frequency and intensity. Many barriers were embedded in the academic culture, institutional structure, beliefs and behaviors of administrators, faculty, staff and fellow students. Tuition increases, poorly communicated policy changes, cancelled classes or racial microaggressions were unpredictable realities of life affecting the persistence of African American males at Urban Research University. There were no particular times or places when barriers were more likely to be experienced than others, but participants experienced barriers frequently enough to develop the heuristic knowledge necessary to persist until degree attainment. The next section discusses Padilla's knowledge vector. Padilla's (1991, 1994) knowledge vector includes participant heuristic knowledge or information learned from

experiencing the barrier(s) to persistence. Ford-Edwards (2002) expanded upon Padilla's model and identified three categories of heuristic knowledge that organized the meanings participants gave to persistence barriers: general knowledge; situational knowledge and survival knowledge. General knowledge is defined as heuristic knowledge that describes common information about a campus barrier (Ford-Edwards, 2002). Douglas' statement describes general knowledge about a perceived campus support barrier:

> With Advising I learned that I had to plan ahead if I had to speak with an academic advisor. I would have to address problems right then and there, cause I know with them there's a waiting period. So you have to go see them as soon you have a problem because it a prolonged process.

Douglas used general knowledge to minimize the rigor of his academic program through enrollment in Summer Term courses:

> I went to summer school. I enrolled in more classes. I learned that by talking to other students. I like summer school because the semester was shorter and the workload was smaller. Summer school was a way to get through some of the harder classes. Faculty would cut out some of the lessons just to fit it into the summer. Faculty had to cut a sixteen week class down to a seven week class so they cut a lot of material. Summer school was like a shortcut. I used it to take advantage of what URU offered and make the system work for me. A lot of people don't know how to do that.

Situational knowledge is defined as heuristic knowledge that describes how specific barriers affect a student's experience. Bashir discussed how he overcame the impact of low expectations and avoidance behavior from his Caucasian peers due to his ethnic hairstyle, race and gender, saying:

> When I came to URU I had a 'cornrows' hairstyle and didn't fit in with the non-African-American students because I didn't look like them. I didn't look like a successful student trying to make it to the next level. So I just realized that this is one of the things that will always exist, but I can control it by how well I do. The more someone sees you do well the better the opportunities, no matter what color you are."

Finally, survival knowledge is defined as heuristic knowledge about barriers which if not known, can get a student removed from school for academic, financial or disciplinary reasons (Ford-Edwards, 2002). It is information students must know to overcome the barrier. Tyquan's example of survival knowledge was about faculty relationships that described how persistence and assertiveness enabled him to pass a required Mathematics course with a reputation for high failure rates:

> I would go to the professor or get tutoring like everyday and still did horrible. I would be in her office hours every time I got a chance. That's the reason I passed. I passed on the effort I was putting into it. One day she asked me if I needed the course for my career. I told her no. She was like oh good, and gave me a C-minus in the course, which was good enough for me to pass. That's when I learned that effort will get you favor, because I did not pass that class.

Ford-Edwards (2002) defined the action vector as those actions participants take to reduce or eliminate the barriers they encountered. Action vectors can be classified as self-directional, explorative or supportive. Self-directional actions need to originate from within the individual and are closely related to the concept of taking responsibility for learning and the non-cognitive variable of self-efficacy. Alex described his perspective on self-directional actions:

> I took my academics seriously. I didn't mind speaking with someone or asking for help.

> Speaking with people that were in my classes that may have known how to solve problems or how to study for things." I would say my decisions determined my destination.

Explorative actions require that a student find or seek assistance on-or off-campus with an office, person, or scholarship. Tyquan described explorative actions he took to obtain assistance at URU:

> I was successful because I came in with an open mind, about getting involved on campus. I was open to positive opportunities to step outside my comfort zone. I was open to other people of other cultures, and races and what they had going on. By getting involved I found a support system for help with leadership experiences, classes and finances.

Supportive actions required that students use on-campus or off-campus support services. Bashir described supportive actions he took to overcome academic deficiencies in Mathematics through the use of academic support services, saying, "I actually started utilizing some of the tutoring resources. I would go to the tutoring sessions for math classes and I noticed I had better results."

Another factor identified by participants is that successful students of color develop or maintain relationships with a strong support person or network of persons that provide them with guidance and support. The ability and willingness to form these relationships enhanced their undergraduate experience and contributed to their persistence. Students commuting to campus often relied on off-campus support persons for encouragement. However, they also developed supportive relationships with faculty, staff and peers. These findings suggest that students are successful because they acquired the heuristic knowledge about a barrier and used that knowledge to engage in behaviors or actions that allowed them to overcome the barrier (Ford-Edwards, 2002). Study participants created their own success by taking control of their time

(e.g., limiting distractions), working above and beyond the expectations of their professors, and exhibiting proactive behaviors to resolve bureaucratic and academic problems that would impact their persistence at Urban Research University.

I have included the unfolding matrix in chart form, which is a display technique for qualitative data and is rooted in the work of Padilla (1994). The unfolding matrix can be expanded both vertically and horizontally as needed (Myers, 2008; Padilla, 1994), therefore, each matrix category or vector is pre-identified and gradually filled in as data are collected (Ford-Edwards, 2002). Matrix categories used for accessing the heuristic knowledge of successful African American male college students are barriers, frequency, knowledge, and actions. The unfolding matrix summarizes the responses of study participants within the Padilla Expertise Model of Student Success framework in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Study Participant Responses: EMSS Framework

Barriers to Persistence	Frequency	Heuristic Knowledge	Action to Overcome Barriers
Campus Support Services	Occasionally	Persistence, develop key relationships, join clubs, organizations, plan ahead, make appointments early, don't spend refund checks, work on campus.	Plan for success, lean on friends and family for support. Aggressively use academic tutoring, supplemental instruction.
Impersonal Treatment	Daily	Don't take slights personally, take good notes, get staff names and phone#s, get what you need and get out. Get information from friends, develop key relationships with supportive staff.	Be assertive, ask for what you need and want. Network with knowledgeable people. Be friendly and polite. Be patient to an extent. Write down who and what they tell you. Be professional. Form personal connections.

Table 3 (cont'd)

Negative Racial Climate	Daily	Keep an open mind. Don't self-segregate, Don't personalize or internalize microaggressions. Don't become a retention statistic.	Laugh off, ignore, educate or confront microaggressions. Lean on family, friends or peers to vent anger. Never quit.
Faculty Relationships	Daily	Maintain self-confidence, don't personalize conflict, ask questions, visit office hours, take summer classes. Do the reading/homework. Always be prepared.	Be professional and friendly to develop relationships. Speak up in class. Work hard and be prepared, seek help during office hours. Put in visible effort even when struggling.
Negative Relationships with African American Peers	Daily	Maintain self-confidence, don't personalize conflict, don't get caught up in socializing. Join African American organizations tied to academic majors or professional development. Join majority group and African American organizations. Be your own man. Give back when you have time.	Be professional and friendly to develop relationships, speak up in class. Work hard and be prepared. Study together, join academic clubs and organizations. Lean on family, friends or peers to vent anger, frustration. Minimize time spent with "non-serious" people. Don't let the crowd define you. Do You!
Negative Peer Relationships Majority group members.	Daily	Maintain self-confidence, don't personalize conflict. Do the reading/homework. Always be prepared for group projects and assignments. Reinforce idea that you belong and can compete with anyone.	Disarm peers, be professional and friendly to develop relationships. Confront micro-aggressors and check offenders. Speak up in class. Work hard and be prepared, seek help during office hours, join academic clubs and organizations. Lean on family, friends or peers for support and to vent anger, frustration.

Table 3 (cont'd)

Financial stress	Term by Term	Plan ahead, develop network for information about job opportunities, apply for scholarships, manage work and school schedules. Apply for loans, live at home to save money. Take public transportation. Only borrow what you need. Sacrifice today, so you can make it tomorrow.	Apply early for financial aid and scholarships, work part-time. Don't get credit cards, pass on latest fashions and trendy items. Work to pay education expenses only. Take Summer classes.

Although the theoretical framework I employed in this study was not specifically tailored to address the success of African American collegians, I believe it had value in examining and analyzing participant experiences within the confines of the focus institution. More importantly the theory provided a rich framework upon which to build a local school success model (LSSM) (Padilla, 1994) that can be used to design culturally appropriate interventions at URU in an effort to increase African American male engagement, persistence and graduation.

The remainder of this discussion is guided by strategies and behaviors participants used to minimize, deflect, and manage the negative racial impacts of campus barriers upon academic success. Harper (2011) coined the concept "onlyness", defining it as the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models and guardians of one's same racial or ethnic group. Many participants began classes at URU with other African American males and females. However, their representation declined as they advanced to upper division courses and often found themselves the only African American male in most of their courses. As Jalil stated earlier in the study, "It's common knowledge that a lot of African Americans start at URU but they don't finish." Participants were impacted in varying degrees by stereotype threat, onlyness and the lack of an adequate institutional support network.

However, they managed to persist to degree attainment in ways most of their African American male peers did not.

Consistent with Harper's (2012) research, Tyquan's status as an accomplished student leader and high achieving student did not exempt him from racism, stereotypes and racial insults as evidenced by his experience with Caucasian peers during a volunteer project. Despite being surprised and offended by his peers, he decided not to respond in anger, but to educate them about his life and upbringing. In this and other contexts, Tyquan experienced onlyness as being placed in the position of being spokesperson and ambassador for people of color and African American men in particular (Harper, 2012).

Tyquan's perception of self as a leader and role model for other African American male students enabled him to develop a strong network among highly ranked campus administrators. He successfully leveraged these contacts into several professional development and employment opportunities. For example, Tyquan engaged in two study abroad experiences at no cost. He also enjoyed financial support through employment in the office of a former URU president who served as a mentor and role model for him. Study findings indicate that some participants minimized the negative individual impacts of racism by taking the initiative to develop their own positive and supportive relationships. These relationships provided a sense of belonging and support.

In contrast Robert engaged in a self defense strategy of strategic disengagement to minimize the likelihood of being the target of racial microaggressions. As a STEM major he was often the only African American male or person in most of his classes. On multiple occasions he was selected last for group projects. By reading his peers' non-verbal cues, avoidance behaviors and overhearing their comments, Robert concluded that their reluctance was based on

stereotypical notions about his academic ability. He eventually won his classmates over and dispelled their myths about his competence. However, when invited to join his major's prestigious honor society Robert stated why he rejected their invitation, "The only reason I never joined is because I'd probably be like the only black student in the room."

Robert's response to the onlyness and stereotype-based behavior he experienced was to disengage from the academic environment. He clearly recognized being one of the few African American males his Caucasian classmates ever had contact with. Joining the honor society would serve to increase his exposure to additional microaggressions.

Tuit and Carter (2008) assert that when some African American students believe instructors or peers view or treat them in stereotypical ways they seek refuge from the learning environment hoping not to be seen, heard, noticed or detected. Robert's decision to disengage reduced opportunities available to interact with peers, yet served as an effective defense against the impact of their racist behaviors. When African American students experience racial microaggressions they often feel academically and socially alienated in spaces where such oppression occurs and as a defense mechanism create their own academic and social counterspaces. These spaces offer shelter from the psychoemotional harm of microaggressions (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). Robert was also very active in the African American Students in STEM Association, although he did not mention the negative treatment of majority group peers as motivation for participating in the group.

Some participants when aware of how faculty and peers view them, assertively confronted microagressive behaviors. For example, Victor's presence was questioned in front of classmates in two separate incidents by faculty members. The first incident involved him merely being present in the classroom, and the second, his decision to sit near an instructor. In response

he decided to address the behavior immediately. Tuit and Carter (2008) define this as a challenging response when black students choose to confront the individual(s) who commit the racist act against them. In both events Victor immediately verbally confronted the faculty members in response. Students who respond in this manner represent an act of resistance against microaggressions and do not allow them to continue (Tuit & Carter, 2008).

Gene's approach involved strategically avoiding peers he determined as "not serious" or negative whatever their race or ethnicity. As a consequence, he eschewed joining socially oriented campus organizations such as the Black Student Union or Black Greek Letter Organizations and participated in a multi-ethnic organization linked to his academic major and a group supporting academically focused African American males. Both organizations provided important sources of leadership experience, friendship, guidance and support. This is consistent with Harper (2012) who found that high achieving African American males often gravitated toward career oriented groups and discussion groups held by academically focused black men. Finally as outlined in more detail in Chapter 4, Scott engaged in the proving them wrong strategy. Moore, et al. (2003) and Carter (2005) define this as a psychological resistance strategy of maintaining high academic performance to disprove racial stereotypes of intellectual inferiority.

I have identified a few of the psychological resistance strategies utilized by participants in response to URU campus barriers and treatment based on stereotypes. The defensive behaviors and strategies described by participants provided psychoemotional protection and allowed them to maintain a strong sense of self, dignity and respect as men. The behavioral responses of participants are consistent with those of African American men in larger

environmental and cultural contexts in which they are marginalized and viewed as inferior (Harris III, Palmer & Struve, 2012).

Conclusion

In the previous section I identified factors participants reported as major influences on managing racist campus barriers and learning relationships with faculty, staff and peers. Critical Race Theory was a useful tool to analyze the responses of study participants, because issues of race and racism in their micro-level forms existed in the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals in the collegiate environment (Comeaux, 2013). Urban Research University's legacy of structural discrimination and implicit bias has resulted in mass African American attrition. This system of African American exploitation is maintained and supported by a socially constructed deficit narrative that justifies marginalizing people of color at Urban Research University (Morfin et al., 2006). In the next chapter I present what has been learned, recommendations for institutions, policy makers, African American men, student affairs practitioners and areas of future research that may add to the literature.

CHAPTER SIX IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the findings and implications of the study. I begin with a review of the purpose and findings of the study. Next, the chapter provides plausible reasons Urban Research University failed to retain the majority of African American collegians from enrollment to degree completion. Finally the chapter provides implications, recommendations for policymakers and leaders in higher education and suggestions for future research. Limitations of the study are also presented. The recommendations put forth in this study derive from the collective voices of study participants. The men in this study were no different than the 89.4% of those who departed URU without earning degrees from 2008-2014. They experienced many of the same academic, personal, financial, and race and gender challenges to degree completion as their less fortunate counterparts. Therefore, their voices and recommendations for change must matter. Policy makers, institutional leaders, faculty, student services professionals and others must pay attention to their insights and voices and use them to guide institutional change. Their collective voices and concomitant changes in institutional structures, policies, resource allocations and practices may lead to better results. The findings and results of this study are consistent with the literature on African American male collegians and should be utilized to inform practice, continued research and most importantly, to create positive persistence to degree attainment, and better life outcomes for African American males in higher education.

The major research question of the study was to determine what factors are positively related to African American male persistence and graduation in a urban commuter research university setting. This study was informed by Harper's Anti-Deficit Achievement (2012a) framework, which focuses upon questions that address why, how, and under what conditions African American male collegians achieve academic success in predominately white colleges

and universities. The focus institution is located in a major city with a predominately African American population and high levels of racial segregation, unemployment, struggling K-12 schools, poverty and crime. Within education circles, African American achievement gaps are often researched and discussed as though they are intractable problems rooted in individual choices, while we ignore the ominous racial dimensions of institutional policymaking and politics (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009). Instead of asking "what's wrong with the African American collegians on our campuses", we should be asking "what's wrong with our institutional cultures, resource allocations, policies and procedures?" Why are our institutional environments and the people teaching, working and learning within them so toxic for African American students and particularly men? In addition, we must also determine how to minimize, and eliminate barriers to the success of African American male collegians, while simultaneously maximizing institutional capacity to affirm and graduate these students. To recount I summarize what successful graduates of the focus institution reported as key factors in persisting to degree attainment.

Why Did The Participants Stay?

Participants in this study indicated that they persisted to graduation because they believed earning the degree would enable an expansion of their future opportunities and life choices, develop essential skills for career success; and provide personal and professional growth experiences. Participants stated that the following campus supports were most critical in supporting their success at Urban Research University; financial aid, faculty and staff mentoring, assistance with coursework and peer relationships.

Due to the issues described above, it is important to keep in mind that study participants represent individual success stories within the larger context of African American male failure at

Urban Research University. Six Year Graduation Rate data indicate that almost 11 % of African American men admitted to URU in 2008 earned baccalaureate degrees by 2014 (NCES-IPEDS Data Center, 2016). Participants articulated a variety of factors that served as barriers to their persistence and graduation. Six overarching barriers emerged from participant comments that hindered or discouraged study participants from persisting and graduating: campus support services; financial distress; faculty relationships; majority group peer relationships; student life and racial climate.

Membership in gender and racially marginalized group had a major impact upon participants. Most were subject to microaggressions and racially based stereotypical speech and behavior by faculty, staff or their peers. Structural elements in the campus environment also impacted the level of support in and socialization to the university. Participants reported receiving poor service in critical areas such as financial aid, poor orientation services and the need to figure out college on their own, lack of clarity in advising and counseling services, and the discrepancy between actions of university officials and their behavior relative to diversity and minority students. Others commented on the lack of focus and direction exhibited by African American social student organizations.

In examining and analyzing participant comments several themes emerged. The first is that Urban Research University adopted the ethos of the surrounding metropolitan area in matters of race and inclusivity. The systematic exclusion, segregation and marginalization of African American women and men were institutionalized within the culture, structure, policies and procedures of the university. This marginalization was cemented by the lack of institutional responsiveness to the needs of African American students from the time large numbers first enrolled in the late 1960's to the time period study participants were enrolled from 2008-2014.

Secondly, participants engaged in a number of strategies that allowed them to withstand microaggressions and lack of institutional support for inclusion that accompanied their persistence to degree attainment. Most developed significant relationships with a faculty, staff or peer(s) that provided advice, guidance, friendship and encouragement. Commuter students also relied heavily upon family support and employment on and off-campus. Residential participants engaged in social and academic student groups but gradually shifted their time and attention to academic organizations and small friendship groups with multi-ethnic peers. Connecting with people of differing racial, ethnic and gendered backgrounds facilitated access to opportunities for support. These supports were essential elements in the development of a sense of belonging among successful African American males at the university.

I observed one characteristic common among the participants. All were bicultural or successful cultural straddlers despite differences in income, family background, first generation status or college preparation. Cultural straddlers recognize racism in the environment, yet become academically successful by effectively negotiating the boundaries and points of overlap between their own gendered and racial identities and the dominant middle class academic culture (Carter, 2005). Participants were successful in managing and negotiating the negative racial climate without completely assimilating into the dominant culture (Carter, 2005). The findings of this study are supported by Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon (2004), Palmer and Strayhorn (2008), and others who argue that successful African American collegians attending commuter institutions tend to exhibit personality and other non-cognitive traits such as motivation, passion, delayed gratification, time management skills, and high levels of self-efficacy. Participants from racially segregated and low-income communities initially struggled with the transition to URU's academic and social culture in part because it was their first encounter with large numbers of

people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, the initial culture shock subsided as they persevered towards degree attainment, and participants effectively utilized both cognitive and non-cognitive skills to get what they wanted and needed from Urban Research University. The findings of this study also are similar to Strayhorn's (2008; 2016) observation that successful African American males at urban public universities attributed their success to the availability of strong supportive relationships with family, faculty, staff and peers.

How Did The Participants Stay?

Participants persisted in URU by effectively engaging in the academic and social life of the university while simultaneously managing onlyness, racial microaggressions, and the marginalized and fragmented African American student community. Participants with greater levels of social capital derived from upper income, college educated and academically engaged parents, and strong high school preparation retained these advantages throughout their tenure at URU. These participants were heavily recruited in high school due to their strong academic records and had multiple postsecondary options to choose from. They valued staying close to home and finances had a tremendous impact upon their ability to persist to degree attainment (Strayhorn, 2008c; St. John, Hu, & Tuttle, 2000). URU offered generous scholarship aid that far exceeded what the state flagship offered. Therefore, each of these participants decided to live with their parents and commute to URU. In comparison to their less advantaged peers these men received the most attractive financial aid packages, and did not have to work long hours to pay for school related expenses. With the exception of race and gender, these participants possessed characteristics that were more congruent with URU's research mission, and academic and cultural values. They were a better fit for the institutional environment and were provided with tangible institutional support.

In contrast, the majority of participants were first generation and low income students. They commuted from violent neighborhoods and faced many more health and safety risks in their communities than those who lived on campus. Some took on the roles of breadwinner, and had to stop in and out of school. Others attended multiple schools prior to attending URU. They entered the university with comparatively lower high school grades and test scores. A few transferred from community colleges or returned after long absences. This particular group endured a precarious term by term existence characterized by financial hardship, and often worked one or more jobs to stay enrolled. In spite of the obstacles, they persevered and coped with sub-optimum conditions by utilizing the non-cognitive variables of self-efficacy, grit, strong work ethic, resiliency, spirituality and family support to forge ahead. Self-efficacy, grit and resilience were the dominant non-cognitive factors present among study participants. In my analysis these factors weighed more heavily in the success of these men than either spirituality or family support.

Participants living in the residence halls reported engaging in campus life through student organization leadership, academic pursuits, athletics and campus employment. Their engagement led to developing networks of advisors and mentors who provided jobs, steered them to scholarships, study abroad experiences, undergraduate research and other benefits. Commuting participants worked off-campus jobs, yet formed close supportive relationships with an individual faculty or staff person or with small groups of multi-ethnic peers who were a source of guidance, emotional strength and friendship. Other participants formed close relationships with same race peers in African American academic and professional development organizations advised by African American faculty and staff such as the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) or Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB). Museus (2008) found that ethnic

organizations served as spaces for cultural familiarity, cultural expression, advocacy and cultural validation. Consistent with the findings of Bledsoe and Rome (2006), Bonner and Bailey (2006), and Harper and Harris (2012), these organizations provided social and academic support that allowed participants to endure racial microaggressions both on and off-campus.

Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon (2004) argue that student perceptions of their degree of integration into the social and academic spheres of a commuter institution shape and positively impact their subsequent level of commitment to the institution and likelihood of degree completion. Each factor mentioned above facilitated participant sense of belonging and commitment to persist despite their membership in a marginalized racial and gendered group. More importantly these protective factors facilitated avenues for success as participants forged ahead in a racialized institutional culture rife with negative stereotypes of African American men within and outside the classroom. Irrespective of academic background, income or academic competence most of the participants reported being subjected to racial microaggressions from faculty, staff or students at Urban Research University.

Why Did Others Leave?

It is important to remember that my study focused on the experiences of African American men who negotiated multiple barriers to successful degree attainment. It is also important to explore why the majority of African American males leave an institution in order to obtain a complete picture of the student experience. Knowing how students were successful is useful, but tells part of the story. Knowing why others left may provide a complete picture of the student experience and institutions armed with both perspectives are better prepared to improve policies and practices that are working for students, and to eliminate those campus barriers to success. My goal in the next section is to summarize for the reader some factors that may have

encouraged 89.4% of African American males to depart URU without baccalaureate degrees from 2008-2014. The intersection of membership in a minoritized racial and gender group in combination with commuter status presents significant barriers for African American collegians in developing a supportive campus network. A major factor in the departure of marginalized African American male students is the lack of structured, evidence based supportive services for both African American and commuter students.

Commuter students are those who do not live on campus but attend the university from local and surrounding areas. They are more likely to be less academically prepared, and be low-income and first generation college attendees (Schibrowsky & Peltier, 1993). Commuter students of color are more likely to work full-time jobs, play multiple life roles where they care for others and leave school without a degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). The lack of well defined and structured social communities characterizes the campus environment of Urban Research University and other commuter campuses (Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2004). The time that commuter students spend on campus primarily focuses on classes to the exclusion of other campus involvement and without meaningful interactions with other students they feel isolated and disconnected (Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon). In addition, many commuter students are likely to stop in and out of college and may delay continuous enrollment in order to work more hours to pay next semester's tuition (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011). Due to their complex lifestyles, commuter students struggle to integrate into college social and academic circles. Their limited time on campus results in being less familiar with administrative rules and support services, having less interaction and fewer if any significant relationships with peers, advisors or faculty. Therefore, commuters spend a lot of time "out of the loop" and are unaware

of campus events or unable to attend. Many commuters also tend to lack a sense of belonging and connection to the university (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus).

Slightly less than 90% of Urban Research University's undergraduate student body commutes to campus (URU Enrollment Report, 2016). Although Urban Research University recently built several residence halls, it has not made comparable investments in developing the organizational capacity essential to addressing the unique needs and challenges of commuters. Organizational capacity can be defined as the administrative foundation essential for establishing and sustaining initiatives intended to realize institutional vision (Toma, 2010). As a result commuter issues and concerns are neither adequately understood nor appropriately incorporated into campus policies, programs or practices at Urban Research University. Current commuter services are limited to providing printed bus schedules, parking garages and surface lots. In effect commuter students do not have dedicated services (e.g., offices of commuter/off-campus services) provided to recognize and affirm their identities nor assist with the unique problems or challenges they face. These students must demystify and "figure out the campus culture and develop support networks with little assistance from the university.

Although African American males constitute a smaller proportion of the undergraduate enrollment at Urban Research University, this demographic may be a significant share of commuters due to URU's location in a majority African American city with a substantial poverty rate. One factor among many potential indicators of African American male attrition may be commuter status, coupled with the lack of institutional attention and investments in capacity to address the needs of the majority (90%) of students. A major disconnect currently exists between how URU views it students and who many actually are. URU historically served a non-traditional commuter population, yet significant elements of its academic culture, student

services programs, policies and procedures are structured in ways that best serve elite, economically privileged, traditional age, residential college students. URU collegians with marginalized identities are less likely to persist in an environment that lack basic services designed meet the needs of the vast majority of the overall student population.

It is beyond the scope of this study to determine how African American male commuter status may directly impact student engagement, sense of belonging, persistence and graduation from Urban Research University. However dual status as a commuter student and membership in a negatively stereotyped racial and gendered group may serve to exclude African American male collegians from the full range of close and supportive relationships with faculty, staff and peers essential for persistence to graduation. The presence of stable trusting relationships is a key factor in student persistence and stable relationships with non-family adults in particular play a big role (Center for Promise, 2015).

Higher education institutions are rooted in and affected by larger structural-environmental contexts. URU's neglect and indifference to the campus racial climate and African American male student success is symptomatic of white entitlement and privilege. Lindsey, Robins and Terrell (2009) define entitlement as a system of unearned advantages that benefits individuals, solely because they are members of the dominant group. Historically the dominant society used demeaning terminology to label and stigmatize groups with less power, implying that they are the cause of their own marginalization (Lindsey, et al., 2009). Most White Americans growing up in the United States have been racially socialized with stereotypical messages regarding the cognitive abilities, behaviors, and life expectations for African American men. These messages are received from family, teachers, peers and most often the media, and depict African American men as aggressive, nefarious, ignorant and brutish (Palmer et al., 2014).

Unless restricted to portrayals as athletes or entertainers, African American male images are projected as individuals to be feared and treated as though they are intellectually and morally deficient (Wood & Hilton, 2013).

Higher education leaders, faculty, staff and students are not immune to the effects of racial socialization despite the egalitarian culture and values academe espouses. Participant responses revealed that Urban Research University faculty, staff and students used deficit narratives and stereotypical language to objectify and marginalize them in academic and extracurricular settings. Modern bias has evolved into a new form and the evolution of egalitarian conscious values does not mean that stereotypes traditionally associated with African Americans have been eliminated; rather they continue to exist and express themselves in a variety of real world ways constituting what is now defined as "implicit bias" (Staats, et al., 2015). Implicit bias encompasses both favorable and unfavorable assessments, and is an automatic and unconscious process (Blair, 2002; Rudman, 2004a). Most people who engage in this type of discrimination are not aware of the fact that they do it (Wilkerson, 2013).

Many barriers participants identified in this study have their origins in the marginalized status of African Americans at Urban Research University. The racially stratified campus milieu reflects a history of systemic dominant group preference and structural racism. URU's neglect of African American students and indifference to the campus racial climate contributed to the lack of organizational capacity relative to student success. Urban Research University admitted African American males it knew were underprepared and provided access to educational opportunity while simultaneously using the revenues generated to subsidize the success of elite students.

Racial microaggressions are just one symptom of the larger generational transmission of implicit bias towards African American males at Urban Research University. Implicit bias can also manifest itself as a comparatively positive preference for one or more groups versus others (Godsil & Johnson, 2013). Social scientists refer to this behavior and decision making as reflecting in group bias in which dominant group members treat a favored racial group better than disfavored racial groups. The end result is that one racial group benefits and the other is harmed because of their race.

URU's enriched learning and leadership experiences may not have been shared with many African American males and reserved for favored individuals or groups through a series of closed informal networks. Racial inequities in employment and education are maintained by the practice of "opportunity hoarding" by Whites who use positions of influence in organizational structures to obtain information about opportunities (DiTomaso, 2013; Royster, 2015). Hypothetically the positions are open to all however, when viewed stereotypically, African Americans males regardless of qualifications are excluded from these networks and never learn about jobs, study abroad, undergraduate research, scholarships and other experiences shown to develop a strong sense of connection and belonging to Urban Research University. Implicit bias both in and outside of the classroom may have had cumulative effects on the exclusion of these men from supportive faculty, staff and peer networks

URU leadership also made several decisions that resemble in-group implicit bias relative to creating an inequitable campus environment. It is important to consider how campus environments reported to be unsupportive and racially hostile lead to alienation, dissatisfaction, academic disidentification, disengagement, and blocked academic aspirations for many African American males (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007). White privilege and power are not often

addressed in campus ecology decisions; and are embedded in color-blind ideologies that guide university policy and space allocations (Cabrera, Watson & Franklin, 2016). Three main components of inclusion exist in the campus ecology literature, described as: physical inclusion; organizational inclusion; and inclusion relative to perceptions of safety (Strange and Banning (2001). The physical dimension includes space allocation and the composition of students occupying that space (Cabrera, et al., 2016). At the time this study was conducted, African American student clubs and organizations did not have officially or widely recognized office or event spaces for meetings, programs and support services. In contrast White student organizations enjoyed dedicated space to operate throughout the Student Union and other areas of campus.

The second important campus ecology variable relative to campus inclusion is organization (Stage & Banning, 2001). At the time of this study, URU did not have a diversity office designed to support persistence of African American students. When campus services do not match the needs of African American students, they feel excluded or unwelcome (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). The historic neglect of URU leadership in developing organizational capacity in support of African American student success resembles conditions under which implicit bias impacts resource allocation decisions. For example, Caucasian and Asian males served in the vast majority of administrative leadership and faculty positions at Urban Research University. In order to attract and retain small numbers of high achieving students, URU invested millions of dollars in the creation of an honors college and international student programs. These offices were given renovated space in desirable campus buildings and were designed to enhance social and academic success of these students. With few exceptions, the vast majority of students served in the honors college and international programs office reflected the backgrounds of

tenured faculty. In contrast, URU leadership and faculty did not have a commitment to developing the organizational capacity essential for supporting African American student success. These practices were justified by the application of a color-blind achievement and merit-based narrative applied to White and international students. When juxtaposed against the deficit narrative applied to African American students campus leaders determine that African American students do not deserve support, and in contrast, White and international students have earned their investment of URU resources.

The third campus ecology construct relative to inclusion is the perception of safety. What is a safe space for White students can become a very hostile environment for African American students (Leonard & Porter, 2010). The demand for White students to feel safe and comfortable at Urban Research University frequently leads to microaggressions upon African American male collegians (Smith et al., 2007). Urban Research University is a predominately white institution surrounded by a city with an 80% African American population. Due to mass media stereotypes of these men as criminals, African American male collegians are subject to hyper-surveillance and negative encounters with campus law enforcement. They are also subject to interrogation and questioning about their legitimacy to exist in academic spaces by faculty, staff and students (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007). For example, Victor reported experiencing hostile questioning from a faculty member in the presence of his peers because of the mistaken assumption that he was a homeless person sitting in a college classroom.

The neglect of African American student academic and social integration, and their commuter status, in combination with race and gender based microaggressions may be strongly related to the six year 89.4% African American male attrition rate when this study was conducted. African American males may leave Urban Research University for a number of

reasons, however the most salient may be commuter identity or status, marginalization by race or gender, and campus climate and ecology. None of these factors works in isolation and the cumulative effect of each may impact students differently in relation to the level of social and cultural capital, self-efficacy, grit, bi-culturalism, spirituality, income, family support, ability to access and apply heuristic knowledge and significant relationships to one or more persons in the collegiate environment.

Limitations

Every effort was made to insure that the data collected and analyzed in this study were trustworthy. In addition, a few limitations relative to transferability need to be referenced. One, the participant sample of African American male alumni may not be representative of URU African American male graduates as a whole. The sample of eleven participants was selected using the snowball method in which participants assisted the researcher in recruiting other participants. For example, no participants were members of Black Greek Letter Organizations, most were between the ages of 23-27 and were traditional age college students. Two participants were gentlemen in their early fifties. Although most struggled academically in high school, the majority graduated with grade point averages above 3.0 despite challenges to degree completion. These men were extraordinarily gritty and dedicated to degree attainment. Therefore, caution is advised when applying the findings to other URU African American males. Second, data were collected from a large, moderately selective research university located in a major city rife with a history of racial conflict, and dense urban poverty concentrated among the African American populace. As such transferability across institutional settings may be limited to those with similar characteristics, institutional size, public vs private, geographic region and history of urban race relations.

Recommendations

This study generated a number of implications that should be of interest to policy makers, institutional leaders, student services professionals, African American parents and last but not least, African American male collegians. Several implications are discussed below and by no means cover the full range of potential ways to improve African American male persistence rates in urban research institutions. They are designed to stimulate thinking on how insights from this study might improve successful persistence to degree attainment for African American male collegians.

Policy Makers

Funding policies and practices that perpetuate subtle forms of racism disadvantage African American males and other students concentrated in poor communities. Racial and economically segregated schools must be eliminated and replaced with those that adequately prepare students for college success. Systematic budget reductions at the state and federal levels for urban education have reduced the numbers of guidance counselors and other social support services desperately needed by students to overcome a lack of knowledge about the college selection and application process. These students are the least likely to find the best fit for success in postsecondary education.

For example, students like Douglas would not have had to bounce around several institutions if he was given adequate guidance in selecting the "best fit" higher education institution while in high school. Douglas reported engaging the college application process through trial and error. He started his college career at a rural institution studying mechanical engineering. Following a brief stay there, he returned home and enrolled in a local community college where he earned an Associate's in Science Degree. His next step took him to the local-

branch campus of a prestigious university. He left that campus due to an inability to obtain reliable transportation to the campus. If policy makers adopted this recommendation it is possible that more African American males will be adequately prepared for college success regardless of family income or K-12 educational system.

Institutional Leaders

Boards of trustees, presidents, and senior academic and student affairs officers must take responsibility for African American male student success and outcomes (Wood & Palmer, 2015). It is the responsibility of institutional leadership to insure that every student admitted is provided an equitable opportunity for success. Institutional leaders at urban research universities must be committed to the success of all, not just the few whom tenured faculty deem worthy of support. It is critically important that the institution devote sufficient leadership to support the success of African American students and commuters through provision of targeted services. Scott made the following critique and recommendation for URU:

> I think the university should be providing avenues for students to find black excellence, because right now we don't have a formal structure in place to route people in that direction. I think one of the things that really helps African-Americans succeed in college is just being a part of the entire notion of black excellence. To find a group of black people who are all doing their excellent thing, and being part of that collective to encourage one another. To a certain extent, we need to be in black settings that help us understand the context in which black scholastic achievement occurs. Every scholastic achievement of a black person in America is proof that the system is wrong; that what they say about us is just wrong.

One of many ways to assist institutions with this task is to implement the Context, Actions and Outcomes Model of Institutional Responsibility (Wood & Palmer, 2015). This model provides a framework from which institutional leaders take the onus to address and resolve eight key domains of institutional responsibility for African American male student outcomes, including programs, practices, policies, resources, structures, climates, partnerships, and inquiry (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Institutional leaders must have evidence-based strategies in place with strong assessment components in order to definitively demonstrate what is and is not working for African American males at their institutions. These strategies should include the development of an African American Male Initiative that provides intentional networking opportunities for students with institutional leaders, faculty and staff. Initiative components should include a Summer Bridge and First Year Academic and Social Integration Program, and be guided by the principals outlined in Harper and Kuykendall's (2012) Eight Standards for Black Male Campus Initiatives and other research based strategies and interventions. In the following comments, Gene talked about developing a sense of belonging and the importance of being engaged with academically focused African American male peers;

> I felt like I belonged when I got involved with the Student African-American Brotherhood, just because I found multiple people that I was able to relate to. You know, we could all share stories about our experiences and not just the experience at Urban Research University, but our experiences in our childhood. We would all talk about some of the things that were happening in today's America. So, when I got around them, and I saw they were working for the same goals and interests, I was like, okay, this is it! I feel like, this is why I'm at Urban Research University.

The university must be a welcoming and inclusive environment for all who enter, which means communicating messages of acceptance and inclusion to African American male collegians. Due to socialization or previous negative experiences with racism, many enter PWI's with a healthy and rational sense of cultural mistrust. To provide a safe and welcoming environment for African American male students the university must be intentional about exposing them to opportunities for belonging, social and academic integration (Strayhorn, 2015). One way to do this is through learning communities where they can be introduced to multi-ethnic faculty, alumni, student leaders and peers in classroom and informal settings. Learning communities can be structured to provide opportunities to develop friendships, and exposure to study abroad, internship, and undergraduate research experiences.

Study participants indicated that the availability of financial aid in the form of grants, scholarships and campus employment played a decisive role in their ability to matriculate successfully. Institutional leaders should direct their fundraising and development offices to court individual and corporate donors and garner funds to support African American male students. In states with laws prohibiting affirmative action, separate non-profit foundations should be developed in partnership with students and parents to disseminate scholarship funds to pay tuition thereby releasing other forms of aid to meet student needs for housing, transportation, books, study abroad and other educational expenses. In addition participants engaged in campus employment reported high levels of institutional contact, access to additional jobs and educational experiences they would not have had access to without campus employment. Institutional leaders should implement Work Study programs to disseminate grant and scholarship funding to provide incentives for commuter African American males to increase campus engagement and contacts with supportive networks through employment. Research

suggests that working on campus has a positive effect upon student success (Kuh, et al., 2007). African American males actively involved in campus life gain more, and are more satisfied with the college experience (Hague-Palmer, 2014). Bashir described the impact of campus employment on his ability to integrate into the life and culture of URU:

> Everything has a foundation, and if you don't understand how the foundation works, you'll have trouble. I learned how the university works, from working all those jobs. Just havin' that information makes you more powerful because I started seeing resources. It just really helped me a whole lot.

Institutional leaders can assess the effectiveness of African American male support in multiple areas through the Equity Scorecard. The Equity Scorecard can be used to tracks and monitor the progress of African American men compared with groups that have higher rates of persistence (Bensimon & Malcolm, 2012).

Institutional leaders should also engage African American alumni to serve as mentors and guides to African American male collegians. These alums can supplement student services staff in providing advice, supportive networks and tangible opportunities to develop personally and professionally. In order to proactively respond to faculty and staff, peers and police, alumni can provide guidance to African American male collegians on how to appropriately and assertively respond to racial microaggressions while maintaining a sense of dignity and self-respect. During our interview, Rahiem addressed the importance of this recommendation in the following comments:

> As an 18-year-old, I ran into the wall a lot of times and made mistakes. Especially being in a single parent home for the most part and not having a male in the household.

> Unfortunately, a lot of our African-American young men don't have male role models in the home as a source. This can be a huge disadvantage for them.

Multiple study participants indicated they would have liked to pledge one of the Black Greek Organizations in order to obtain leadership skills, join a community of supportive peers and experience a stronger sense of belonging but elected not to pledge these organizations due to hazing behaviors. Institutional leaders and alumni should assist Black Greek Letter Organizations in developing proactive behaviors to encourage potential African American male leaders to pledge.

Faculty

Diversity and inclusion training, including strategies for supporting the active learning styles of African American male students should be incorporated into faculty development programs. In addition to teaching academic content faculty must educate African American male collegians on the concepts of grit, self-efficacy, resilience and growth mindset. These ideas and the research behind them must be presented to students to reduce beliefs and emotions associated with stereotype threat, feelings of inadequacy and the imposter syndrome. Participants cited "crazy work ethic" and study time as major factors on their journey to degree attainment. Many African American males are not familiar with the concepts of grit and fixed mindsets (Dweck; 2006; Duckworth, 2011). Like many Americans they have been educated to believe in the concept of fixed mindsets. When struggling in classes that do not reflect a natural strength, they may accept the idea that they are not good at the subject and reduce learning effort, thereby creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. In addition diversity and inclusion training including strategies for supporting the active learning styles of African American male students should be incorporated into faculty development programs. Dweck (2011) argues that with enough

commitment and practice a person can learn to do anything well. African American male academic performance may then increase as these men begin to utilize this knowledge to study with peers and associates.

Student Services Professionals

Student services professionals must be intentional about providing paid positions or academic credit via internships to encourage African American students to mentor and support students. These opportunities provide commuter African American males with a sense of purpose, a sense of belonging and emotional connection to the university through their active service (Strayhorn, 2015). It is also important to actively promote and encourage African American male collegians to serve in positions of campus leadership, providing leadership training and development to assist these students in their roles. Engagement in student organizations with diverse peers supports the development of a wide range of academic and social gains among African American male collegians (Harper 2006b, 2013). Tyquan references the value of campus leadership in his experience and how being open to new cultures and opportunities can help other African American male collegians:

> I would give this advice to incoming black male students. Come in with an open mind about getting involved on campus. Step outside your comfort zone. Be open to people of other cultures, and races and what they have going on. You have to find a support system, and one of the ways to do that is to get involved. Become more aware of what college is about, and what makes a successful college student. Just that extra relationship with either faculty or students will get you through.

Student services professionals must partner with faculty in implementing monitoring systems to insure African American male collegians stay focused and on the right track. Should a student

begin to exhibit withdrawal behaviors such as missing classes and counseling appointments, support staff must intervene immediately, particularly in the case of commuting students. They must also actively practice the cultural concept of 'othermothering' asking questions about a student's self-concept and sense of self to hold him accountable, while simultaneously encouraging and affirming the student. Bashir's recommendation to incoming African American male collegians may be adopted by institutions in order for these students to reach their social and academic potential at Urban Research University;

> If I can give advice to any African-American males comin' to Urban Research University, I would tell them to find a mentor or an advisor that can guide them through. That would be my advice, 'cause once you get a mentor to guide you every step of the way. I don't see no one who can't be successful in that type of environment.

To address multiple challenges faced by African American male commuter students, student services professionals should provide a one-stop shop for support and referral services such as clothing, child care, supplemental nutritional benefits, transportation, emergency loans, etc. When these services are located in the organizational structure of the university, the institution sends a strong message to its African American male collegians that they actually care about the welfare and well-being of students beyond their tuition payments. In addition, providing these services enables African American males to develop a stronger sense of trust in the institution, perhaps leading to a greater sense of belonging and persistence to degree completion. Student services staff must also partner with commuter students to involve their families in the life and culture of the university. To do this the institution must develop organizational capacity to support activities and programs for commuter families that introduce the university as a special place where every student and family member is welcome to participate in the life and culture of

the university. The importance of this recommendation cannot be understated as Bashir's comments reflect below:

> As a black male student at the university, I felt like that there was a lot of things that were against me. I wasn't as polished with my urban wear, communication or the way I carried myself, as I am now. I did not always wear a suit and tie every day. I didn't get the support I needed because I looked like another troubled kid tryin' to go to school. People were expecting me to fail by default. Bein' here by myself, I really felt alone a whole lot. I just was tryin' to figure it out the best way that I could.

Programs supporting family involvement could have reduced feelings of isolation Bashir reported to due to the support of his family. Partnering with student families may have the potential to create additional sources of support for commuting African American male students transitioning to URU.

Theoretical Frameworks

To my knowledge this study is the first attempt to apply Padilla's Model of Student Expertise exclusively to African American males in a higher education context. While conducting the study, I discovered that other theoretical frameworks derived from previous research on African American male collegians may have given richer insights into the intersections between participant backgrounds, their higher education experiences and the campus environment. Wood and Palmer (2015) argue that scholarship on African American men should employ theoretical constructs that pay close attention to the unique, yet non-homogenous realities of black men in combination with frameworks that place responsibility for student persistence on the institutions that cash their tuition checks.

Padilla's (1994) Model of Student Expertise served as the central theoretical framework in this study. It is a student success framework focused on the institutional barriers confronted by African American males, the frequency of their occurrence, the heuristic knowledge (rules of thumb or street knowledge) and specific actions they used to overcome campus barriers. I found the theoretical construct useful in organizing and conceptualizing the campus environment. The theory was also helpful in understanding what participants learned and the strategies and actions they took to minimize the impact or overcome barriers in the campus environment.

Padilla's theory has largely been utilized to provide analysis of student success in predominately Latino K-12 and higher education contexts (Myers, 2008). Padilla's model was suitable for analyzing campus barriers relative to the treatment of racism and historical marginalization. The model's power comes from the emphasis on how students overcome barriers. It also provides a great framework for the development of an LMSS (local model of student success). However a major weakness of the model is that it doesn't provide a strong rationale for institutions to eliminate implicit bias and structural racism.

I also examined institutional actions and behaviors regarding African American male collegians from a Critical Race or CRT perspective (Patton et al., 2007). CRT was a great theory for analyzing and critiquing behaviors and decisions negatively impacting African American males both on campus and in the local community. I found CRT limited to an analysis of historical community and institutional behavior relative to race, but did not find much applicability to the individual struggles and difficulties African American males endured on the path to degree completion. The CRT framework illuminated problems and difficulties that produced marginalized student subcultures, but it did not provide tangible solutions for developing inclusive organizational structures to resolve the issues.

Areas for Future Research

Many findings in this study are consistent with research on persistence and retention of African American male collegians. The following areas for new research were identified from the study with potential to increase the understanding of success strategies employed by successful African American male collegians in a variety of institutional contexts. Additional research needs to be conducted into developing organizational capacity through institutional resource allocations, policies, practices and procedures to optimize environments supportive of African American male success. One area in need of further research is to identify strategies successful commuter African American male collegians use to connect and develop a sense of belonging at their institutions that led to degree attainment. It is important to determine what institutional supports commuters with a marginalized status require to develop positive relationships with faculty, staff and supportive peers. Institutions should become intentional about creating an environment where African American male collegians believe they matter (Strayhorn, 2015; Wood & Palmer, 2015). A second area for new research involves the impact of providing not only sufficient amounts of financial aid, but more importantly aid that provides incentives for meaningful connections between African American male collegians and faculty and staff. This aid may take the form of undergraduate research or campus based work-study in lieu of scholarship or grant assistance. Much of the retention literature suggests that the more time undergraduates spend on campus the greater their academic and social integration and persistence (Tinto, 2012). Major gaps exist in knowledge about how to leverage private, institutional and federal sources of aid to provide incentives designed to positively create connections with faculty and staff beyond mentoring programs.

A third area for new research involves how institutions actively engage and involve the parents and family members of African American males in the education of their sons (Pruitt, 2013). Campus athletic departments and coaches specialize in engaging parents of African American male athletes during the recruitment and retention process. Researchers should identify, examine and modify smart and effective practices from athletic programs to interact with and engage the support of families of regular African American collegians. Finally there is a need for research on how best to inform, educate and assess effective strategies successful African American male collegians in predominately white environments use to maintain their dignity and respect to minimize the damaging effects of microaggressions. How can these strategies be effectively shared and utilized to build resilience among African American male collegians (Strayhorn, 2014).

Conclusion

With the election of Barack Obama as the President of the United States, a great deal of interest has been generated asking: How can the nation produce greater numbers of African American men like him? We know that answers to this question begin with an honest assessment of African American male success in the K-12 and postsecondary educational systems. Harper (2012) argued that those interested in African American male student success in college have much to learn from Black men who have actually been successful. This study sought to provide instructive insights from African American male graduates of an institution with a poor track record of graduating African American male students. The primary purpose of this study was to discover the practices of African American males that lead to degree attainment, and barriers of urban universities that served to help or hinder student success. The goal was to provide a space

and platform where successful African American males could share factors promoting their success.

This research is significant for several reasons. First, it attempted to answer questions in the literature about the success of African American male collegian's persistence to degree attainment (Cuyjet, 2006). While similarities may exist among Black males in different institutional contexts, researchers should be cautious about assuming uniformity in their experiences (Wood, 2010). In particular, there is a dearth of research on successful African American males attending urban intensive research universities. The majority of existing research relies on samples from colleges of liberal arts, regional suburban and rural universities and community colleges. This research is also significant because it used a theoretical framework provided by Padilla's Expertise Model of Student Success (1994). To date no similar study has been performed at an urban university with a focus on African American males. Self-efficacy, grit and resilience were the dominant non-cognitive factors present among study participants. In my analysis these factors weighed more heavily in the success of these men than either spirituality or family support.

Finally, this study adds to the existing body of literature concerning student success and the unique challenges faced by African American male students commuting to urban universities. I made recommendations for policy makers, institutional leaders, faculty, and student affairs professionals that may increase African American student success.

Urban Research University must make a culture shift in order to increase persistence and graduation rates among African American males. Resource allocations must be tied to the needs and identities of the student body. Over 90% of URU student hold commuter status and increased funding must be provided to meet the needs of African American male and commuter

students to increase graduation rates among these populations. Despite their popularity, more residence halls will not address the needs of the majority of URU undergraduates. In addition African American male students must be supported through a combination of targeted research based interventions and financial aid strategies.

In conclusion, I must agree with Strayhorn (2015) who persuasively argues that promoting college student sense of belonging does not need to be cost prohibitive or resource draining. Institutions do not lack the human or financial resources to increase African American male sense of belonging and connection. What they tend to lack is the will to do what is needed to help the students most in need.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Study Interview Protocol

Definitions of Success

How do you define success?

How did you define and measure your success at (focal institution)?

What does being a successful student mean to you?

Pre-College Variables

Tell me about your educational experiences prior to coming to (site institution)?

- What was your high school like: (public, private, urban, suburban, rural)?
- Was the ethnicity of the students diverse?

Do you feel your educational experiences prepared you to come to (site institution)?

Tell me about where you lived?

- Where is your hometown (urban, suburban, rural)?
- Was the ethnicity in your neighborhood diverse?

Tell me about you parents and family?

- Do you have any brothers and sisters? Are you the oldest, youngest?
- How many years of schooling did your parent complete?

Did your parents help prepare you for what college life was going to be about?

- In what ways did their intervention help you?
- Was the (site institution) your first choice?

Did you have any fears about coming to the (site institution)?

- How did you or what helped you overcome those fears?

Personal and Normative Adjustment

How would you describe your first two years at focus institution?

How would you describe your last two years at focus institution?

Commitment to the Goal of Completing the Degree/Institution

What does commitment mean to you? What does being committed mean?

How would you describe your commitment to the (site institution) before getting here?

- What helped you feel this way?

Institutional Experiences

Tell me what it means to be a Black male student at (site institution)?

- Describe your interactions with faculty and other students in the classroom?
- Describe your interactions with administrative offices and staff on campus?
- Describe your interactions with other Black students outside the classroom?
- Was there a faculty or staff member you could go to with questions or problems?
- Describe your study habits?
- Who did you study with? (groups, alone, etc)

Sense of Belonging

Was there something or someone on this campus that made you feel like you belonged?

- What was it? Why?
- If not, why not?
- Has your race and/or gender had an effect on your educational experience at the focus institution?

Institutional Barriers

Were there institutional barriers in your personal experience that almost made you want to leave the university? What I mean by barrier is anything in (site institution) that negatively affected you and made you think about leaving.

- Had you ever considered leaving?
- Why? Tell me more.

- What kept you from making the decision to leave?

What is it about (site institution) that made you want to stay?

- Was it the academic experience or what happened in the classroom?
- Was it the social life or the people you hung out with or got to know?
- What had been the most significant factor in your staying to complete the degree?

Commitment to the Goal of Getting the Degree/Institution

How would you describe your commitment to (the site institution) since you have graduated?

- Why do you feel this way?

How would you describe your commitment to getting your degree now?

- Why do you feel this way?

What information would you like to share with incoming Black male students to help them be successful at (focal institution)?

APPENDIX B: Sample Questionnaire

Understanding African American Male Student Persistence in the Urban University:
The Student Expertise Model

College Experience Questionnaire

Instructions: Please provide an answer for all questions. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions. Questions are: multiple choice single or multiple answer and open-ended survey questions. Follow instructions associated with each question. Please provide the answer that best describes your situation.

1. Was Wayne State University your first choice to attend college?
(Check all that apply)

   A. No
   B. Yes
   C. Transferred from 4yr institution
   D. Transferred from 2yr institution

2. Why did you choose to attend Wayne State University?
(Check all that apply)

   A. Academic programs, including degree and majors
   B. Special Admission program
   C. Location
   D. Costs
   E. Financial Support

3. What was the most important reason for attending Wayne State University?
(Check one answer only)

   A. Academic programs, including degree and majors
   B. Special Admission program
   C. Location
   D. Costs
   E. Financial Support

4. How did you finance your undergraduate education?
(Check all that apply)

   A. Grants
   B. Student Loans
   C. On-campus job
   D. Off-campus job

E. Scholarships
F. Parents/Guardians

5. If you worked while attending college how many hours per week? (Check all that apply)

   A. 10 hours or less per week
   B. 11-20 per week
   C. 21-40 hour per week
   D. 40+ hour per week

6. Describe your involvement in clubs & organizations as a student? (Check one only)

   A. None
   B. Minimal
   C. Average
   D. Heavy

7. Did you take advantage of academic support services? (Ex: Tutoring, Advising, Learning Communities, Study Skills etc) (Check only one)

   A. Yes
   B. No

8. Were you a campus resident or commuter? (Check one only)

   A. Campus Resident
   B. Commuter
   C. Both Resident and Commuter

9. Would you recommend Wayne State University to African American males considering a college or university? (Check one only)

   A. Yes
   B. No

APPENDIX C: Phone Script-Participants

Dear NAME:

My name is Henry Robinson. I am calling to invite you to participate in a research study about the factors that help or hinder African American male student success at Wayne State University. I work at Wayne State University, but this research study is not a part of my job. The study is a requirement to complete my doctoral dissertation at Michigan State University.

You are being asked to join this study because you are a recent African American male graduate and know what it takes to earn a degree from Wayne State University. The goal of the study is to draw on your experience to help build a student success model for African American male students. If you agree to be in the study, you will need to complete a short survey and give an hour of your time for an interview.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision at any time not to participate or withdraw from this study will not affect your current or future relations with Wayne State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable, or to withdraw at any time without fear.

Should you decide to participate in the study, you will receive a $15.00 Barnes & Noble Gift Card upon completion of the individual interview.

Please contact me by phone or email to let me know if you would like to participate. I will answer any questions you have about the study or interview, review important information about your consent, and confirm your participation. You may call me at (248) 330-1232 or respond via email at robin697@msu.edu.

I hope you will choose to participate.

Thank you.

APPENDIX D: Research Participant Information and Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: Understanding African American Male Student Persistence: The Student Expertise Model
Researcher and Title: Henry L. Robinson, Doctoral Candidate
Department and Institution: Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education (HALE) Michigan State University
Address and Contact Information:
Sponsor:

1. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH
You are being asked to participate in a research study of the forces that help or hinder African American male student's success at Wayne State University. You have been selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a recent African American male graduate of Wayne State University. Therefore you have a perspective that may shed light on this subject. The objective of the study is to draw on your insights, feelings, observations and experiences to identify common themes and ideas that will add to the construction of a local student success model for African American male students at Wayne State University. This research is being conducted as part of a dissertation requirement.

From this study, the researchers hope to learn about the experiences of African American males that lead to academic success and the practices of urban universities that serve to help or hinder their success. The goal of this study is to give voice to the perspectives of African American males as it relates to factors promoting student success.in urban colleges and universities. The findings from this study will be used to develop a local student success model that can be used as a guide for African American male success at WSU.

Your participation in this study will take about one hour and fifteen minutes You were identified from a list of African Americans who graduated during the 2010-2014 period from Wayne State University, or were referred to the researcher from the Office of Alumni Affairs, Organization of Black Alumni or other study participants. Over 30 people are being asked to participate in the entire study

2. WHAT YOU WILL DO
Please understand that the following things will be done. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire that best describes your background and demographic characteristics. You will be asked to respond to a series of questions by relating your experiences in an individual interview. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be digitally recorded. You will also be instructed to email the researcher to add any relevant information not shared during the interview. The researcher will send a transcript of the interview to you in order for you to correct and check the accuracy of the thoughts recorded during the interview. The interview transcript check will take approximately fifteen minutes. The digital recordings will be in the possession of the researcher only and will be kept for three years. After the three year period all questionnaire data, transcripts and digital recordings will be destroyed and deleted. I will share a copy of the local African American male student success model based on the findings of the study with you upon completion.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS
You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to the understanding of African American male student success in urban colleges

and universities in the United States. Administrators may use the findings to develop programs or services to improve student success among African American males at Wayne State University.

4. POTENTIAL RISKS
You may be asked to share personal accounts of frustration, disappointment or embarrassment as they relate to your undergraduate experience. This may cause emotional distress or discomfort. Please know that every effort will be made to make you feel comfortable, supported and at ease. All discussions will be kept strictly confidential.

5. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY
Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected. Your identity and comments will not be revealed and your questionnaire data and interview testimony will be coded and assigned a pseudonym. Information about you will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law. Survey results, interview transcripts and digital recordings will be kept on password protected files on flash drives and digital recorders stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. All data and digital recordings will be kept for a three year period. After the three years the data, transcripts and digital recordings will be destroyed and deleted. The only persons or entities who will have access to the data include: Dr. Marilyn Amey, Principal Investigator and Professor-Michigan State University and the Institutional Review Boards of Michigan State University and Wayne State University.

6. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW
Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- You have the right to say no.
- You may change your mind at any time and withdraw.
- You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.
- Choosing not to participate or withdrawing from this study will not make any difference in the quality of any services you may receive.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will have no affect on your relationship with Wayne State University.

7. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY
You will receive a $15.00 Gift Card from the Barnes & Noble Bookstore upon completion of the individual interview.

8. CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher:

Henry L. Robinson

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at Olds Hall, 408 West Circle Drive #207, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

9. DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____

_____

Signature Date

_____

_____

Signature of Researcher Date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

A signature is a required element of consent – if not included, a waiver of documentation must be applied for.

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