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The Experiences of African American Men at Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education, After Successfully Transferring From a Community College

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THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, AFTER SUCCESSFULLY
TRANSFERRING FROM A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Keenan King

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Keenan King, Ph.D.

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African American men complete post-secondary education among the lowest rates of any other subgroup in higher education (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014; Warde, 2008). This study focuses on addressing this problem by attempting to understand the experiences of African American men who successfully navigate a higher education pipeline from community college to a four-year, predominantly White institution (PWI). Half of all African American men enter higher education at the community college level (Villavicencio, Bhattacharya, & Guidry, 2013); therefore, community college plays a key role in shaping their experiences in higher education moving forward. Also, educational data has shown that an African American man, who is also a transfer student, has a small chance of transferring to a four-year PWI and completing a degree.

To address this issue, this study is designed to understand how African American men in PWIs of higher education, after successfully transferring from community college, describe and make meaning of their experiences. The design for this qualitative study is phenomenology and is applied to discover the deep interconnectedness shared by this study's participants. Additionally, Critical Race Theory's five educational tenets by Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) were used to understand the contributions that race had on the experiences of participants.

I engaged semi-structured interviews with 10 African American men at midwestern PWIs who successfully transferred from a community college. Initial analysis of the data yielded four emergent themes. These themes highlight the participants' experiences with the invisibility of race while at their PWI, how participants' community college experiences shaped their experiences at the PWI, how participants remained determined to achieve their goals through higher education while facing adversity, and how participants ultimately did not express any regrets about attending a PWI. The findings from this research suggest how important it is for practitioners and researchers, whose primary focus is African American men, to continue to design initiatives and research highlighting their stories of success. This positive realignment in practice and research is essential to combating the deficit perspective that dominates the conversation regarding African American men in higher education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Took my heart away from money, ain't interested in fame, and I pray that never change, ambition is priceless, it's something that in your veins, and I pray that never change" -Wale

I would like to wholeheartedly thank my family, friends, dissertation committee, classmates, colleagues, and the participants of this study. Words cannot describe how much your support has meant to me during the process of completing this dissertation. In the absence of everyone's positive energy, I would not have made it through.

This dissertation is dedicated to all the **Queens** and **Kings** who lost their lives in the fight for equality, equity, inclusion and social justice.

Keenan King

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Interactions with a diverse student body, intriguing research agendas to discover, and advanced preparation for future careers are all examples of why higher education can be a great system for all people. Today, the American higher education system enrolls an incredibly diverse student body of approximately 16 million students, with enrollment expected to continue to rise to 20.5 million students by 2027 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This study focuses on a subgroup of these students which has statistically proven to be difficult for colleges and universities to retain and graduate: African American men (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020a).

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2020a) reports that of all students entering college in 2010, by 2017, African American men had the lowest graduation rate and the highest attrition rate of any racial subgroup reported. These datasets are problematic in that these rates only communicate low achievement for African American men and do not account for the voices of those who are successful. In addition, research focused on African American men is often conducted from a deficit approach, which is detrimental to the academic success of the population (Harper, 2015). According to Silverman (2011), a deficit or cultural deficit approach means that attributions of an individual's achievement are due to cultural factors alone, without considering individual characteristics or systems of oppression. In response to the poor achievement rates and to counter the deficit perspective, this study is designed to capture the experiences of African

American men who are currently enrolled in Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), after successfully transferring from community college.

This study uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) to honor the contributions of race to the experiences of participants (Taylor et al., 2016). CRT guides the design and provided a lens for understanding the contributions of race to the experiences of participants. CRT's tenets for educational research are used to make meaning of participant experiences in PWIs by recognizing the complexities of race in America.

The Researcher

Background

I chose the topic of African American men in higher education because I am familiar with the population. I identify as an African American and male, bringing my study very close to my own experiences. In the past, I felt that African American men were the most disenfranchised human beings on earth. These feelings I have toward the history of African American men is why the integrity of design and the voices of participants are essential. My study gives me the power to elevate the experiences of African American men. I consider it my duty to reflect the experiences of participants in my study accurately, a responsibility I do not take lightly.

Growing up, my parents consistently communicated to me that I was going to college. They were not sure how to finance my post-secondary education, but they assured me that when the time came, I would be ready. Their belief in the power of education, especially for a young African American man, cannot be understated; it pains me to know that others did not receive the support and encouragement to attend college that I did. I attended Western Michigan University beginning in the Fall of 2007, after completing high school in the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan.

With the completion of this dissertation, I have fulfilled all the requirements to receive a doctoral degree; a momentous achievement that I never thought I would have an opportunity to do. In the past I can recall thinking to myself, "Black men do not become Ph.D.'s; you will never need a graduate degree in your future." It feels good to know I was wrong about my future; my education has opened and will continue to open more opportunities than I currently realize.

I now work as the Director for the TRiO Upward Bound Program at WMU. Upward Bound's mission is to increase the number of underrepresented individuals in higher education. I was hired by a similar program, MI GEAR UP, as a work-study student in 2008 and have been promoted several times. My path from work-study student to Director is uncommon to many in my professional network and I am proud to be someone whose career path has been unique.

My Experience

Much of the existing literature approaches the narrative around African American men in higher education from a deficit perspective. I do not agree with this narrative, nor was it my experience at WMU. To me, the literature appears to suggest that African American males cannot be successful in higher education. I am exasperated with the negative notions in conversations about the deficit perspectives of the African American man. Too often we are shown a narrative that suggests we only have two fates: die, or go to prison.

During my path to degree attainment, I never enrolled in a two-year institution or community college. I am African American and I identify as male, but I do not have the same educational experiences as my participants. Though I do not share all of the experiences of participants, it is essential to capture and describe their's ethically and accurately.

Biases Toward Race in Education

It is my opinion that race and other topics surrounding African American men in higher education is something that some individuals do not feel comfortable discussing. Where others are fearful of this discussion, I feel empowered. I enjoy talking about racial issues in America. I feel that identifying as African American does give me an experiential advantage in conversations surrounding race.

Thinking about myself as an academic, completing a dissertation, fills me with an over-whelming sense of accomplishment. I believe society never saw me coming, to know I am one of a few, is hugely empowering. It gives me the courage to understand that I stand on the shoulders of giants such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and others who have dedicated their lives so I am able to participate in higher education and conduct my study. Though I have not always felt this way, I appreciate my opportunity, and I value my education. I plan to nourish it and continue this fight long after this dissertation is complete.

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Terminology

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This study utilizes terminology that is often used in higher education, without being defined. Because of the importance of these terms for this study, and in an effort to be exceptionally clear from the beginning, I am leading Chapter I with these definitions.

Predominantly White institution (PWI). This term, PWI, is used throughout the literature on higher education. It represents an institution of higher education which has historically served a student population that is majority White. Additionally, for this study, PWI represents institutions that meet the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.) for *large* (25,000 students), *public, four-year degree granting or above*, *primarily residential*, with

high research activity. Also, this study focused on PWIs in the Midwest due to regional culture, as well as my future career goals (Fu et al., 2014).

African American men. The population for my study includes students in higher education who self-identify as African American and as a man. Race and gender are socially constructed in our society (Johnson, 2006), leaving no agreed-upon definition of what both race and gender are. Therefore, in an effort to honor the experience of these students, my study includes participants who self-identify as African American. Gender identity was also self-reported by participants. This study only includes participants who self-identified as men. African American male is only used in reference to studies which has used the term to define a population.

Successfully transferred student. Participants for this study are currently enrolled in a PWI, and met this study's definition of "successfully transferred." Publications found related to successfully transferred students were broad, unclear, and varied. To bound the sample for this study, the definitions from publications by Adelman (2005) and Ellis (2013) are referenced. The first definition from Adelman's report on transfer students defined a "successful transfer" student as "one who (a) started in a community college, (b) earned more than 10 credits from the community college before (c) enrolling in a four-year college and (d) earning more than 10 credits from the four-year college" (p. xv). The second definition is from Ellis' (2013) study, which defines a successful transfer student as anyone who transferred into a four-year institution with between eight and 125 credit hours.

The issues with both Adelman's (2005) and Ellis' (2013) definitions of "successful transfer" students relate to how broad they are. Adelman's definition does not account for the time the students spent in community college and the PWI, and makes defining a range of credits or class level of successfully transferred students difficult for my study. To correct this, I have narrowed

the definition to only include participants who have spent at minimum one year attending the community college and one year enrolled at the PWI. This adjustment allowed participants to pull from a greater wealth of experience to reflect on. In Ellis' study, the sample consisted of transfer students from first-years to seniors (eight to 125 credits hours). This definition is also too broad for my study, posing issues related to time spent in both the two-year and four-year institutions. To narrow the population for this study, I accepted participants who have sophomore status and above, in the PWI where they are currently enrolled. Again, this definition is used to ensure that participants have more than merely a foundation of experience to reflect on.

Additionally, because I did not find a solid, agreed-upon definition of what a "successful transfer" student in higher education is (empirically speaking), I reached out to a scholar who has published literture on transfer student success (see Grites, 2013). Grites explained that defining "successful transfer" students has been dominated by data pertaining to what is really institutional success. For example, retention rates or graduation rates are typically a reflection of what the institution defines as a success (Grites, personal communication, January 30, 2019). To understand the voices of transfer students, Grites (2019) went on to add that transfer student success should be defined by what the transfer student believes success is. Therefore, success could be described as very interdisciplinary by themes such as graduation from college, earning a license, improving a skill, getting into an academic program, or more. Due to the broadness, a specific interview question was asked to capture how the participants in my study described their success.

In an attempt to counter the deficit narrative in much of the literature on African American men, my study only includes students who are not on academic probation. All participants reported being in "good standing" at their PWI. In summary, the sample of "successfully transferred" students for this study have had, at minimum, earned sophomore status and have had spent at

least one year enrolled in the PWI to demonstrate the academic skills needed to be successful. Participants also needed to have completed at minimum 10 credits and spent at minimum one year at the community college.

Background

This section includes a brief overview of the legislation that has increased access in higher education for African Americans, the experiences of African Americans in higher education (including African American women), the experiences of African American men in higher education, and more information about the deficit perspective found empirically in research pertaining to African American men. This chapter also includes an introduction to the experiences of transfer students. All of these areas of the literature are integral for understanding the development of this study. A more detailed review of the literature highlighted here is presented in Chapter II.

Access in Higher Education for African Americans

Three historical legislative events largely shaped access to higher education for African Americans in higher education: The Morrill Acts of 1890, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Higher Education Act of 1965.

Morrill Acts of 1890

From 1870 to 1944 the American system of higher education transformed drastically (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). As the nation began to grow during the post-Civil War era, the opportunity to earn a college degree became possible for millions of Americans, including African Americans.

Access increased for African Americans beginning with the passing of the second set of Morrill

Acts in 1890. The Morrill Acts mandated public colleges and universities to stop admission

practices based on race. Many southern states resisted the integration of schools and created

separate institutions for African American college students labeled Historically Black Colleges

and Universities (HBCU). In the states that did not create HBCUs, PWIs were required to admit

African American students but could maintain "separate but equal" facilities. The Morrill Acts

were significant because this was the first time in American history that higher education was

federally mandated to provide access for African American students.

Brown v. Board of Education

In 1954, case law altered American education by ending racial segregation (*Brown I*) and

by forcing integration within America's publicly funded schools (*Brown II*) (Stallion, 2013). In

Brown v. Board of Education (1954), the implicitly accepted principle of "separate but equal"

was overturned. For the first time in American history, African Americans had access to schools

that were historically reserved for only White students (*Brown I*). This ruling was not enough to

force schools to serve minorities, and their lack of compliance led to mandated integration of

schools based on federal law (*Brown II*). The results of these cases were significant because they

opened access to many more American institutions of higher education for African American

students and increased the number of African American men in higher education.

Higher Education Act of 1965

This act furthered access to higher education for African Americans by developing

initiatives aimed at fighting poverty, creating federal student aid, improving teacher training

programs to increase student enrollment into higher education, and establishing support programs for underrepresented students ("Do you know TRiO," 2003). Additionally, HBCUs and other developing institutions such as junior colleges and community colleges began to receive subsidies that increased their ability to survive and subsequently educate more African American students. Similar to previous legislation, the Higher Education Act of 1965 expanded access to PWIs for African American men, and developed new initiatives to support various groups of underrepresented students on American college campuses.

African Americans in Higher Education

There is a wealth of literature pertaining to the experiences of African Americans in higher education. During this section I highlighted a few studies with relevance to my study. Studies focusing on the experiences of African Americans in PWIs found that faculty interactions, understanding of relational dialectics, and the role of support organizations were fundamental in the experiences of African American in higher education (Luedke, 2017; Simmons et al., 2013). Also, the role of a minority group and ethnic student organizations in PWIs was examined by Museus (2008), who found that these groups/organizations help strengthen and maintain strong relationships with a minority student's cultural background while they are becoming adjusted to campus.

Gipson, Mitchell, and McLean (2017) found factors related to why top achieving African American students stay in community college. They discovered that the number of hours spent studying was significant in predicting if a student would remain in community college. Family support, engaged faculty, and self- determination all emerged as salient factors for African American student retention in community college.

The gender gap in higher education for African Americans proves a need for targeted research efforts focused specifically on men in this racial category (Garibaldi, 2007, 2014; Hayes et al., 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017) reported that in 2013–14, of bachelor's degrees awarded to African American college students, 36% went to African American males and 64% went to African American females, with women graduating at almost double the rate of men. In graduate education, African American women account for 70% of master's degrees awarded to African Americans and 60% of all doctoral degrees awarded to African Americans ("Black women students," 2006). The history of this achievement gap between African American men and African American women dates back to the early 1980s. It was found that "Black males received 7,900 fewer degrees than Black females in 1976, and 11,700 fewer in 1981" (Garibaldi, 2014, p. 372). In addressing the achievement gap for men and women in higher education, Garibaldi (2007) recommends that, to grow the low participation rates for African American men, education must begin to reinforce them to reach higher levels of academic achievement. Also, participation in pre-college programming and access to college student mentors was found to be essential to the academic success of African American men. The literature illustrates that African American men are in need of more targeted efforts with African American women, according to standard measures, performing better in higher education.

This is not to say that African American women are performing well in higher education. In fact, for African American women the six-year graduation rate was 45%, the second lowest of any gender specific racial category (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). With many other racial categories performing better statistically than African American women, I recognize that there is a need for targeted research efforts for African American women. Additionally, although this study does

not address the needs of African American women, I do want to honor the notion that African American women still face significant challenges to being successful in higher education.

African American Men's Experiences in Higher Education

To understand the experiences of only African American men, literature is presented pertaining only to this population is presented. This section highlights the experiences of African American men entering and attending community college, followed by their experiences in four-year/PWIs, HBCUs, and graduate school.

Community College

Before providing information regarding African American men in community colleges, it is important to understand the significance of two-year colleges. Community colleges saw growth between 2000 and 2010, and today, many students of color are actually overrepresented in community colleges (Ma & Baum, 2016). A report found that enrollment in community college is related to several background characteristics, including if students are low-income, first-generation, and members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011). Students enter community college for many different reasons but do so primarily to save money or because of their ambitious future goals (Chrystal et al., 2013; Goldrick-Rab, 2010). For many low-income and students of color, enrolling in community colleges is seen as a great method for upward social mobility. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Dr. John B. King stated that "Community colleges are described as a ticket to the middle class" (Smith, 2019, p. 3).

Recently, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation (Glynn, 2019) reported that community college students graduate at a higher rate than first-time freshman students at selective four-year colleges. This data challenges the traditional notion that community college students lack the academic preparedness to be successful in academically rigorous settings of higher education. In addition, more recent data attributes enrollment increases by colleges and universities to a rise in the admission of transfer students. In fact, in 2018, University of California announced that more than 28,750 transfer applicants were offered admission, the largest number in thier history (University of California, Office of the President, 2018).

A somewhat dated report on African American men transitioning to community college found that the number of men graduating from high school has decreased, but the number of African American men enrolling in higher education has increased (Jackson, 2003). During their transition, African American men feel supported during their transition but also reported experiencing high anxiety (Baber, 2014). Factors which increase likelihood of transitioning to community college included having relevant teachers and previously attending high schools with high academic standards for students (Scott et al., 2013).

Community colleges often serve as the first point of contact with higher education for African American men, with about 43% of African American men who are high school graduates beginning their journey in post-secondary education at the community college (Villavicencio et al., 2013). Studies have also shown that African American men in community college express that institutional and administrative support is fundamental in shaping their experiences (Bush & Bush, 2010; Coney, 2017; Vasquez Urias & Wood, 2014; Wood, 2012). Additionally, faculty interactions and participation in Black Male Initiatives (BMI) increase the sense of belonging for African American men in community college (Brooms, 2018; Wood & Harris, 2015b).

Multiple studies have shown that African American men are dissatisfied with community college and persistence continues to be an issue (Coney, 2017; Harris & Wood, 2013). For African American men who plan to transfer from community college to a four-year institution, Wood and Palmer (2013) reported a finding which seems counterintuitive: the use of campus services was shown to decrease the likelihood of transferring. African American men's level of social integration was found to be positively related to community college satisfaction (Strayhorn, 2012). Similarly, spirituality (adherence to spiritual beliefs) was found to increase African American men's success at the community college (Wood & Hilton, 2012). Finally, African American men enrolled in community colleges who desire to transfer to four-year institutions to earn a degree are highly motivated to persist (Villarreal & García, 2016).

Four-Year/PWI

In addition to the pressures of performing well academically at a PWI, African American men have the challenge of "being an African American in society." In other words, the role of being Black in America did not disappear just because they enrolled in college. Harper (2015) found that African American men enrolled in a PWI reported that their White classmates often inflicted racial harm either intentionally or unintentionally. For example, many participants in Harper's study experienced micro-aggressions from other students, faculty, and staff. Some examples of micro-aggressions include assumptions about being considered a college athlete or being asked if they were a drug dealer because of their race. Successful African American men also reported hostile interactions with faculty, such as being accused of cheating, being seen as insolent, or generally being considered a threat to the PWI learning environment (Harper, 2015). African American men in PWIs reported having experienced racism, and attributed their success

to developing a high awareness of their racial identity while enrolled in PWIs (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Reid, 2013; Singer, 2016). In the face of negative assumptions about academic performance and participation, African American men in PWIs still aspire to earn college degrees (Harper & Davis, 2012; Lynch, 2015).

Many studies reported that sense of belonging for African American men enrolled in PWIs was increased by participating in Black Male Initiatives (BMIs) and through positive interactions with faculty (Brooms, 2018; Clark et al., 2015; Henningsen, 2005; Strayhorn, 2014b). Also, recognizing the complexities of social identity group affiliation, research found that African American men with multiple underrepresented identities will suppress the less salient identities to maintain other group affiliations in the PWI (Banks & Hughes, 2013; Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). Studies focused on the success of African American men at PWIs compared to HBCUs and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) found no difference between PWIs and other minority-serving institutions in terms of academic achievement of African American men (Nelson Laird et al., 2007).

HBCU

While Nelson Laird et al. (2007) found no difference in HBCUs and PWIs in relation to academic achievement, other studies focused on African American men in HBCUs have un-covered specific indicators of success. Successful African American men in HBCUs reported that family support was salient to their experiences (Brooks, 2015; Farmer & Hope, 2015). Another study found urban HBCUs struggle to keep up with other rural HBCUs concerning retention and graduation of African American men (Gasman et al., 2017). Also, African American

men with multiple oppressed identities enrolled in HBCUs reported that external support and insti-

tutional support services were vital to their success in higher education (Banks & Hughes, 2013).

Graduate School

In graduate school, studies on African American men reported that participants pushed to

be academically successful in an effort to prove others wrong (Ballard & Cintron, 2010). In

addition, another study found that these graduate students held notions of negative perceptions of

upward social mobility because of racism (Sánchez et al., 2011).

Deficit Perspective and Counter Stories in Literature on African American Men

Many studies conducted on African American men in higher education have been shaped

and informed by a deficit perspective. The deficit perspective blames African American men for

poor performance and lowers academic expectations for members of the population (Coney, 2017;

Harper, 2012; Palmer et al., 2014). A deficit or cultural deficit approach is attribution of an

individual's achievement based on cultural factors alone, without considering an individual's

characteristics (Silverman, 2011). Studies conducted from the deficit perspective often focus on

failures, not successes. For example, studies designed from the deficit perspective focused on the

lack of degree attainment for African American men, where no relationship was found between

racial identity and wellness for successful African American men (Spurgeon & Myers, 2010;

Warde, 2008). Research conducted from this perspective is unidimensional and therefore does

not account for complexities and nuances of African American men's achievement in higher

education, nor the influence of racism in society.

This research was not conducted from a deficit perspective. It was intentionally designed to capture the experiences of those who have had success in higher education. These stories of success revealed the essence of the experiences of African American men enrolled in PWIs, after successfully transferring from community college, and challenges the notions of inability which has often been the empirical foundation in studies pertaining to this population.

Use of counterstories can be found empirically pertaining to African American men, which challenges the deficit approach. One example is Moore, Madison-Colmore, and Smith's (2003) study which reported that many high achieving African American men are determined to counter negative external perceptions of their academic achievement, so they work extremely hard to be successful. Capturing counter stories of success is essential in understanding how to move the conversation on African American men in higher education from deficit to achievement.

Transfer Student Experiences

About 33% of all community college students complete the transfer to a four-year institution and, of those transferring, only 13% graduate within six years (Berkner et al., 2002; Shapiro et al., 2017b). Also, there is a positive relationship between those who completed their intended transfer and having a high GPA (Wang, 2012). Studies seeking to understand the relationship between associate degree attainment in community college and bachelor's degree attainment after the transfer reported conflicting findings. Some studies reported that earning an associate's degree can increase the chances of earning a bachelor's degree, and another set of studies reported that earning an associate's degree has no effect on bachelor's degree attainment after transferring to a four-year institution (Kopko & Crosta, 2016; Melguizo et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2018). Other studies that explored the experiences of transfer students

reported that academic advising played a vital role during a student's transfer process (Allen et al., 2014; Blaylock & Bresciani, 2011; Chrystal et al., 2013; D'Amico et al., 2013; McGlynn, 2006).

The factors related to why students are not successfully transferring and completing degrees were examined in the literature. For example, studies have reported that transfer shock, isolation, and imposter syndrome lower a transfer student's ability to perform academically (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Ishitani, 2008; Jacobson et al., 2017; Rhine et al., 2000; Scott, Thigpen, & Bentz, 2015). Finally, Wang (2012) found a strong relationship between the lack of transfer and merely identifying as African American, presenting race as a major barrier to successfully transferring; Wang's finding speaks directly to the rationale for conducting my study.

Historical Data Regarding African American Men Transferring from Community College to Four-year/PWIs

The educational statistics for African American men entering community college who intend to transfer to a PWI to earn a bachelor's degree are alarming. Statistical rates are used to develop a narrative which contextualizes the problematic circumstances related to African American men who enter community college, intending to earn a bachelor's degree.

Beginning with high school, African American men have a graduation rate of 76%, the lowest of any subgroup reported (NCES, 2017). Of the 76% of African American men who complete high school, 56% enroll into higher education (NCES, 2018). Half of these students enter four-year institutions, and the other half begin at the community college level (Villavicencio et al., 2013).

Educational statistics focusing on African American men's college student transfer and completion rates from a community college to a four-year institution were not found. While searching for studies related to bachelor's degree attainment for African American men, nothing

was found on the WMU libraries databases or Google Scholar. My search included keywords such as "African American male transfer students," "bachelor's degree attainment for African American male transfer students," and other variations of the words related to uncovering studies focused on African American male transfer students. I did not find studies related to my searched key words but I did uncover studies related to transfer students and studies that uncovered the experiences of African American transfer students, and degree attainment for African American men. According to Shapiro et al. (2017b), 80% of transfer students indicated the intent to transfer to a four-year institution (this statistic is for all students, including African American men). Meanwhile, only 31.5% of all students in community college complete their intended transfer to a four-year institution (Shapiro et al., 2017b; Wood et al., 2012); only 13% of transfer students complete a bachelor's degree within six years from the time they enrolled in community college (Berkner et al., 2002).

To understand the seriousness of this situation, imagine a fictional sample of 100 African American men attending high school. According to the statistics cited above, of these 100 African American men, 76 of them graduate from high school and are eligible for college, but only 43 enroll in a post-secondary institution. Of these 43 students, half enroll in community college, bringing the sample to roughly 22 students. Using the general transfer data cited earlier, of these 22 African American men who enter community colleges, approximately 18 indicate their intent to transfer to a four-year institution, but in reality, about seven students complete the transfer process. According to the current statistics, of the seven remaining students, only one African American man completes a bachelor's degree within six years from beginning post-secondary education.

In summary, of this fictional sample of 100 African American men graduating high school, only one African American man, who started his post-secondary education in a community college with the goal of seeking a bachelor's degree, will earn his desired degree within six years of entering higher education. Currently, this represents the story presented in the literature about the educational pipeline for all African American men in four-year institutions of higher education seeking bachelor's degrees, after transferring from community college. My study seeks to add another dimension to this story by adding the voices of African American men who have been successful and are willing to address that success.

For consistency and clarity in representing the data, it is important to recognize that the other half of African American men who enroll in institutions other than community college typically enter higher education at private and four-year institutions. About 15% enter private institutions and 36.6% enter four-year institutions (NCES, 2017). The six-year graduation rate for African American men who enter four-year and private institutions was 31.2%, the lowest graduation rate of any subgroup reported but higher than those students who begin their academic journeys in community colleges.

Problem Statement

Researchable Problem

No study could be found that captured the experiences of African American men in PWIs seeking a bachelor's degree, who began in community college. When educational data is considered, the chances of a transfer student who is also an African American man earning a bachelor's degree within six years of entering higher education is meager. Also, the deficit perspective found empirically pertaining to African American men is detrimental to the success of the population.

This study is designed to uncover how those who have had success in higher education describe and make meaning of their experiences.

Data on the completion rates for African American men who transfer to PWIs was not found, but degree attainment data and unemployment data further supports the need for targeted research efforts for the population. For example, approximately 16% of African American men over the age of 25 have completed a bachelor's degree, which is the lowest of any subgroup reported (United States Census, 2017). Additionally, the unemployment rate for African American men in 2017 was 5.1%, which at the time, was almost two percentage points higher than any other subgroup in America (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Lower unemployment rates have a positive relationship with increased degree attainment; therefore, if more African American men earn bachelor's degrees, it is likely they have lower unemployment rates moving forward (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Additionally, the low rate of persistence and graduation for students who transfer into four-year/PWIs is a problem addressed by my study. This study intentionally focuses on capturing how successful African American men enrolled in PWIs, who transferred from community college describe and make meaning of their experiences to gain a greater understanding of success mechanisms for members of the population.

Previous studies have focused on the experiences of African American men transitioning to community college (Baber, 2014; Jackson, 2003; Scott et al., 2013), the experiences of African American men enrolled in community college (Brooms, 2018; Bush & Bush, 2010; Coney, 2017; Newman et al., 2015; Strayhorn, 2012; Vasquez Urias & Wood, 2014; Villavicencio et al., 2013; Wood, 2012; Wood & Harris, 2013; Wood & Hilton, 2012), the experiences of African American men who plan to transfer from community college (Villarreal

& García, 2016; Wood & Palmer, 2013), and the experiences of African American men in PWIs (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Brooms, 2018; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Clark et al., 2015; Harper, 2015; Henningsen, 2005; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Reid, 2013; Singer, 2016; Strayhorn, 2008), but no studies could be found that focused on African American men in PWIs, who successfully transferred from community college.

Based on my review of the literature related to study of African American men in higher education pertaining to their experiences in community college, their experiences with intent to transfer, and the experiences of those enrolled at four-year/PWIs, I have identified a gap empirically. This study examines the experiences of African American men enrolled in PWIs, who have successfully transferred from community college.

Themes Found Empirically to Support This Study

This study is designed to capture the experiences of African American men in PWIs, who have successfully transferred from community college. Three themes were found empirically, which support the need for this study.

(1) The experiences of African American men in PWIs, who successfully transferred from a community college, have not been captured by previous studies.

(2) Much of the literature on African American men in higher education is from a deficit perspective which is detrimental to the success of the population. This study captures stories of success and provides a counter narrative to this perspective.

(3) Studies related to transfer students' conflict on whether or not transfer students perform as well as first-time college students who do not transfer.

Significance of This Study

This study is significant based on the literature gaps found empirically, to counter the deficit found in studies pertaining to African American men; when new information presented regarding to transfer students' achievement is considered, I determined that their was a need for this study. Although studies have looked at the experiences of African American men in the community college (Baber, 2014; Strayhorn, 2012; Vasquez Urias & Wood, 2014; Villarreal & García, 2016; Wood, 2012; Wood & Hilton, 2012), and the experiences of African American men enrolled at PWI campuses (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper, 2015; Reid, 2013; Singer, 2016; Simmons et al., 2013), no studies could be found that focused on the experiences of African American men enrolled in PWIs, who successfully transferred from community college.

The findings from my study add to the growing literature base on African American men in higher education. Presently, African American men are reported to have one of the highest attrition rates of any other subgroup in higher education with approximately two-thirds of African American men leaving higher education before completing a degree (Strayhorn, 2014b). By understanding the experiences of those who have had success, more victories by members of the population can occur. This study is designed to capture the experiences of African American men who are now enrolled in a PWI seeking a bachelor's degree, after having successfully navigated the higher education pipeline from the community college.

Also, there are many assumptions associated with the academic performance of transfer students. Recently, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation (Glynn, 2019) reported that transfer students graduate at a higher rate than first-time students at selective colleges and universities. With many colleges and universities ignoring this population, greater research efforts are needed to uncover

why these students maybe performing better academically compared to traditional students who enroll in four-year institutions from the beginning of their academic journey.

Research Questions

The purpose of my study was to capture and understand the lived experiences of African American men, who have successfully transferred from a community college. My overarching research question is: How do African American men enrolled at PWIs, after successfully transferring from community college, describe and make meaning of their experiences? My specific sub-questions include:

1. How, if at all, does identifying as an African American man shape their experiences at the PWI?

2. How, if at all, did attending a community college shape their experiences at the PWI?

3. What helped them to be successful at the PWI?

4. What were challenges at the PWI, and how did they overcome those challenges?

Methodology

The qualitative design used in my study is phenomenology. Marshall and Rossman (2016) articulate that phenomenological frameworks are used to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experiences. Also, Creswell (2013) adds that "phenomenology is an examination of shared experiences to develop practices, policies, or to establish a deeper understanding of the phenomenon examined" (p. 45). During this study, I captured data which describes how African American men make meaning of their lived experiences while enrolled in PWIs, after successfully transferring from a community college.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) served as the theoretical framework for this study. A primary underpinning of CRT is that race continues to be a significant factor in determining equity in the United States (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Therefore, a critical lens is necessary to accurately portray the experiences of those not represented by other traditional analytical methods in social sciences (Cabrera, 2018; Crenshaw, 2002; Taylor et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). CRT was initially used to address colorblindness in legal studies. Over time researchers in education began to use CRT to give context to race in educational scholarship. There is an emphasis on the centrality of race, racism, and White supremacy when CRT describes institutional structures in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT's use in educational settings led to the development of five tenets by Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009). During my study, these tenets were considered at the design phase and are applied after data analysis to emergent themes.

Yosso et al. (2009) defined five tenets to guide CRT research in educational settings. They are:

(1) race in America is connected to racism,

(2) challenge to the dominant majority or the status quo is required,

(3) there must be a commitment to social justice which exposes interest convergence,

(4) the significance of the centrality of experiential knowledge, and

(5) an interdisciplinary perspective is essential. (pp. 662–663)

Application

As the researcher for this study, I applied the CRT lens to experiences of African American men who have successfully transferred to a PWI. The use of CRT occurs at multiple points during

my study. The first application of CRT occurred during the initial design stage of this study, whereby CRT was used to define a population worthy of further investigation. When searching for a gap in the literature, a critical lens assisted me in selecting a problem in need of further research pertaining to African American men and transfer students. CRT was key in creating the interview protocol for data collection, where I used a critical lens to design open-ended interview questions related to understanding how participants describe their experiences.

During data analysis, after coding and theming without constrictions, CRT assisted in creating a narrative to support the emergent themes from participants' interviews. The five tenets of CRT were used to determine if and how race factored into shaping the experiences of participants. I connected the tenets of CRT which have, and have not, presented themselves while creating the textual narrative of participants' experiences represented by emergent themes during data analysis. These tenets also were used to shape the implications and findings of this study.

Chapter I Summary

Uncovering the experiences of African American men who transfer to a PWI from a community college may help strengthen the pipeline through higher education and provide significant gains for the population. A qualitative approach is used to understand how participants describe and make meaning of their experiences. The primary theoretical framework for this study is CRT as this framework adds a new lens for understanding the findings from interview data. This study has implications that strengthen the understanding of the experiences of African American men in PWIs, who successfully transferred from community college.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative study is to capture the experiences of African American men in Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), who successfully transferred from community college. Chapter I introduces my study by providing background information and highlighting circumstantial data, which contextualizes the severity of the problem addressed by this research. In Chapter II, previous findings from studies conducted with similar populations and further empirical support for this study is provided.

This literature review begins with studies focused on all African Americans in higher education (including African American women), followed by studies with only African American men. This review also covers literature related to the deficit perspective found in the higher education research on African American men and studies pertaining to transfer students in higher education. At the conclusion of this chapter, background information about Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its application as an analytical tool in education is covered.

African Americans in Higher Education

Community College

In a mixed method study by Gipson, Mitchell, and McLean (2017) designed to understand why high achieving African American students stay in community college instead of leaving, it was reported that the number of hours spent studying was significant in predicting if a student

would stay in community college. Data was collected from 243 participants during the quantitative phase of the study; during the qualitative phase, data emerged from two students during face-to-face interviews and from eight students during three focus groups. Through qualitative analysis, family support, engaged faculty, and self-determination all emerged as salient themes from the study. Gipson et al. provide indicators that increase retention for African American students in community college.

PWIs

Luedke's (2017) study focused on the experiences of African Americans in higher education found that faculty interactions, an understanding of relational dialectics (Blackness vs. Whiteness), and the role of support organizations were present in the experiences of African Americans in higher education. Luedke designed a qualitative study to capture how first generation Black, Latinx, and Bi-racial students describe the mentoring roles of staff and administrators. The study's sample included 24 students from two PWIs in the Midwest. The study reported that participants felt that White staff and administrators did not support students of color holistically. Additionally, participants reported that staff of color nurtured them through various forms of human capital, that their mentors of color were honest with them, and that their mentors made themselves available at all times. Luedke's study brings forth how African American students describe their experiences with faculty and staff while enrolled at PWIs.

Baxter's Relations Dialectic Theory (RDT) of intercultural communication was used to understand the meaning-making and discourse processes of African American students in PWIs. RDT assisted in understanding "how the meanings surrounding individuals and relationship identities are constructed through language use" (Simmons et al., 2013, p. 378). Their study

extracted data from six focus groups, each group consisting of five to seven participants. They found that acknowledgment of dialectical tensions was important to African American students. This was done by discussing aspects of black culture with peers. Also, participants reported that the more they had success in higher education, the more they felt disconnected from their culture, and that participants struggled with the balance between integration and segregation as a means of safety. Simmons et al.'s study focused on understanding the experiences of African American students with dialectics while enrolled in PWIs.

The role of a minority group and ethnic student organizations in PWIs was examined by Museus (2008) in a qualitative study with 12 African American and 12 Asian students. Their study found that these ethnic group serving organizations help students strengthen and maintain strong relationships with their cultural background while becoming socialized to campus. Interview data came from a large PWI enrolling 36,000 students. Museus' study strengthens the argument for the use of supportive spaces for African Americans enrolled in PWIs to increase minority student engagement at PWIs.

Gender Gap

A significant academic achievement gaps exist for African American students who are male and female. The National Center for Education Statistics (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017) reported in 2013–14, of bachelor's degrees awarded to African American college students, 36% went to African American males and 64% went to African American females, almost double the rate of men. In addition, the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* ("Black women students," 2006) reported that African American women account for 70% of master's degrees awarded to African Americans and 60% of all doctoral degrees awarded to African Americans. The history

of this achievement gap between African American men and African American women was found in literature. "Black males received 7,900 fewer degrees than Black females in 1976, and 11,700 fewer in 1981" (Garibaldi, 2014, p. 372). These large discrepancies in degree attainment for men and women suggest that African American men are experiencing college much differently than African American women.

In addressing the achievement gap for men and women in higher education, Garibaldi (2007) published an article that assessed the educational attainment of African American males between the 1990s and the 2000s. Garibaldi recommends that to grow the low participation rates for African American men, education must begin to reinforce high levels of academic achievement. Also, participating in pre-college programming and access to college student mentors is essential for the academic success of African American men. Garibaldi's study provides strategies for engagement of African American men in higher education and suggests that men need targeted research efforts.

In a literature review published by Hayes, Cunningham, and Courseault (2006) focused on race gender gaps and related barriers for African American men pursuing higher education, factors contributing to the achievement gap are presented. The review reported that African American men lack the support needed to perform in high school and that higher education must increase the recruitment of African American men. The article also suggests strategies for institutions to improve the number of African American men in higher education.

During this section, empirical information is provided pertaining to African Americans in higher education. In community college, African American students with support and higher levels of self-determination were more likely to be retained. In PWIs, African American students who are connected with support organizations and faculty report a higher sense of belonging while on

campus. Also, the achievement gap for African American men and women has currently and historically resulted in men being outperformed by women.

African American Men in Higher Education

This section begins with articles focused on African American men enrolling into community college and their experiences while enrolled in community college. Also, I highlight studies which focused on the experiences of African American men at PWIs, HBCUs, and graduate school.

Enrollment into Community College

In 2016, African American men graduated from high school at a rate of 76%, the lowest graduation rate of any subgroup recorded (NCES, 2017). This small percentage of African American men who graduates from high school reduces the overall pool of African American men eligible for enrollment into higher education. Upon the completion of high school, 56% of African American men qualified for college will enroll in higher education within six months of graduation, the lowest rate reported for any subgroup (NCES, 2018). Studies have been done to understand the circumstances surrounding the low transition rate to college for African American men to college from high school.

A study focused on understanding how the educational pipeline affects administrative diversity found that the number of African American men graduating from high school decreased over the years, but that the amount of African American men enrolling into higher education has increased. Jackson's (2003) study analyzed data from the following databases: Current Population Report, Enrollment in Higher Education, Digest of Education Statistics; Doctorate Records

File, National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, and American Council of Education Corporate Database. Jackson's results demonstrate that the gap between African American men graduating from high school and those entering higher education are trending in different directions.

Baber's (2014) study focused on the experiences of African American men transitioning from high school to community college found that while transitioning. This study reported that African American men feel supported but faced high levels of anxiety during the process of transitioning to college. In this qualitative study with 17 African American men enrolled in four Midwestern community colleges, data was collected through interviews. Most participants reported feeling supported by those around them, but also stressed by the process of transitioning from high school to community college. Also, most students expressed that they needed more assistance navigating post-secondary pathways.

A qualitative study focused on capturing the voices of African American men before attending college was conducted by Scott, Taylor, and Palmer (2013). This study's sample consisted of 70 African American men transitioning to college from high school; data was collected from written narratives. The four themes that emerged from participant narratives were:

1. Before entering college, participants had skilled and relevant teachers.

2. Academic mentorship was available to participants.

3. The institutions they attended in high school held high academic standards for participants.

4. Family and community support was essential to participants. (pp. 292–295)

Scott et al.'s study provides further information about the experiences of African American men transitioning to college from high school, and the themes which are salient to them while transitioning.

Community College

A report by Villavicencio et al. (2013) found that approximately 43% of African American men will enter higher education at the community college level. In addition, studies have sought to understand the experiences of African American men entering community college and have found themes pertaining to the successes and challenges for the population.

African American men in community college have expressed that institutional and administrative support is fundamental in shaping their experiences. Studies have shown that support at institutions increased satisfaction and persistence of African American men in community colleges, especially support from faculty (Bush & Bush, 2010; Coney, 2017; Wood, 2012). In Wood's (2012) literature review discussing strategies for faculty to increase their support of African American men in community college, recommendations for faculty and administrators working with African American men in community college were made. They are that:

1. Faculty should maintain contact with African American men;

2. Faculty should be open to working with African American men;

3. Faculty and staff encourage support for African American men from the administration;

4. The university staff monitor African American male student progress; and

5. The university staff should listen to student concerns. (p. 32)

Wood's article furthers the conversation surrounding strategies for supporting African American men in community college to increase their success.

Bush and Bush's (2010) study reported that many African American men perceive a less supportive environment than their peers in community college experience. Also, that faculty play a significant role in shaping their feeling pertaining to receiving less support. Bush and Bush's

mixed methods study focused on the impact of institutional factors influencing African American men's achievement at the community college. They found that many African American men are dissatisfied primarily due to the level of faculty interactions they received. Their study used aspects of qualitative case study analysis with data emerging from a focus group consisting of six African American men. Quantitative statistical analysis was conducted on survey data from 742 students with various racial backgrounds. Bush and Bush's findings suggest that faculty have high influence over the retention and persistence of African American men in community college.

Studies have focused on African American men and their experiences with Black Male Initiatives (BMI) in community college. A BMI is a social or academic support initiative/program in higher education focused on serving African American men. These studies have shown that faculty interactions and participation in BMIs increases the sense of belonging for the population. Wood and Newman (2017) conducted a quantitative study examining African American men's sense of belonging with faculty members. Their study used existing data from the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM) with 364 African American men. Wood and Newman reported that African American men who place greater emphasis on their studies were more likely to perceive a sense of belonging from faculty members. This study also found that older students have a greater sense of belonging in community college and that part-time enrollment status decreased the level of sense of belonging for African American men.

Brooms' (2018) qualitative study explored the experiences of African American men who engaged with a BMI program in community college. This study's sample consisted of 40 Black men and data was collected from interviews. Four themes emerged:

1. A sense of belonging was important to these students.

2. Gaining access to sociocultural capital was important.

3. Receiving academic motivation enhanced educational performance.

4. These men gained a heightened sense of self from the BMI program. (p. 146)

Studies by Brooms (2018) and Newman, Wood, and Harris (2015) both found sense of belonging salient to the experiences of African American men who participate in BMIs in community college.

Persistence in higher education continues to be an issue for African American men in community colleges (NCES, 2018). Coney (2017) conducted a quantitative study to examine the differential perceptions of institutional services by African American men in community college and its effect on anticipated persistence. The study extracted data from 212 African American men enrolled in a large community college district; the survey data came from the CCSM. Coney found that the deficit perspective can distract from student success initiatives and provided support for the use of systemic approaches for understanding the conditions and consequences influencing the attrition of African American men from community colleges.

Another study found that African American men in community college have more success depending on institutional characteristics. Vasquez Urias and Wood (2014) conducted a quantitative study to investigate African American male graduation rates in public two-year degree-granting institutions. The study consisted of 646 public, two-year institutions, whereby graduation data was collected using the 2008 IPEDS Dataset, specifically graduation data for African American males. The study reported that African American males perform better at community colleges who enroll primarily students who have full-time status in a rural setting. This study adds that the location and composition of a community college affects African American male achievement.

Level of social integration was positively related to community college satisfaction for African American men. Strayhorn (2012) conducted a quantitative study, which attempted to measure the relationship between social integration factors and satisfaction for African American men in community college. The study consisted of 127 African American men enrolled in a community college and data was extracted from the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaires (CCSEQ). The study found that background information was related to success factors such as age. Also, grades were only marginally associated with satisfaction, and family influences made African American men more satisfied.

In addition, spirituality was found to be a reliance factor for successful African American men in community college. A qualitative study conducted by Wood and Hilton (2012) sought to understand the relationship between spirituality and academic achievement for members of the population. The study consisted of 28 participants at Star Valley Community College and data was extracted from in-depth interviews. Their study found that:

1. Spirituality served as a confidant, an entity with whom students could dialogue about issues;

2. Spirituality also served as inspiration for excellence, the pursuit of important religious virtue;

3. Spirituality provided life purpose, thereby reassuring students of their academic plans;

4. Spirituality provided an ability to overcome barriers;

5. Spirituality reduced relational distractions, especially those not aligned with a spiritual worldview. (p. 37)

This study brings an understanding of how spirituality affects the academic success of African American men, especially when spiritually is used as a mechanism of guidance, purpose, and inspiration while in college.

African American Men Who Are Transfer Students

Villarreal and García (2016) reported that African American men enrolled in community colleges who desire to transfer to four-year institutions to earn bachelor's degrees, are highly motivated to persist. Their qualitative study was conducted with 18 African American and Latino men. Data was collected from participants being interviewed about their perceptions of persistence in a community college, transfer-level writing course. The goal of this study was to learn what mechanisms advanced participants' success and persistence in developmental and transfer-level writing courses despite the obstacles they faced. The study found that men of color continued to take and complete English courses because they were determined to achieve their academic goals. During the course, the participants sought assistance and guidance from their English professors, from the writing lab attached to the basic skills course, and from the tutoring staff. When participants reported feeling overwhelmed and considered dropping their English classes, their determination to achieve their goals coupled with the assistance received from faculty and other staff ultimately kept them from leaving school. Villarreal and García's study is significant because it demonstrates that African American men are determined to be successful in community college when preparing to transfer, and that African American men are successful when high but achievable goals are set.

A quantitative study by Wood and Palmer (2013) designed to investigate the effects of student engagement on African American male students who self-reported their intent to transfer,

found that use of campus services was shown to decrease the odds of transferring. Data emerged

from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) from a sample consisting

of 9,354 African American males enrolled in 259 community colleges. All participants reported

the intent to transfer to a four-year college or university as a primary or secondary goal. As

previously mentioned, the use of campus services decreased the likelihood of transfer for the

participants in this study. Additionally, Wood and Palmer found an increase in likelihood of

transfer when African American males are exposed to a diverse peer group in community college.

Their study brings forth factors that increase and reduce the likelihood of an African American

male transferring to a four-year institution.

African American Men in PWIs

Capturing the experiences of successful African American men in PWIs was the focus of

a qualitative study by Harper (2015). The study consisted of 143 participants currently enrolled

in PWIs; data emerged from face-to-face interviews. The study found that participants were

undoubtedly threatened by racial stereotypes they encountered at their PWIs, but they learned

how to resist the harmful internalization of them. They did so by understanding racial stereotypes,

assuming leadership positions, and skillfully confronting stereotypes. The experiences of success-

ful African American men enrolled in PWIs is designed very closely to this study and is relevant

for future consideration.

Sense of belonging for African American men enrolled in PWIs has been the focus of

studies by Strayhorn (2008) and Brooms (2018). Strayhorn reported that African American men

who have a diverse group of peers report a higher sense of belonging than those who do not.

Interestingly, Strayhorn's study found that White men have a higher sense of belonging than

African American men at PWIs. This study's sample consisted of 531 randomly selected African

American and White men enrolled in PWIs. Similarly, Brooms (2018) conducted a study focused

on the experiences of African American men involved in BMI programs at PWIs finding that

sense of belonging was salient to participants. This qualitative study consisted of 40 African

American men and data was collected from interviews. Brooms' participants also reported that

gaining access to sociocultural capital was important, that academic motivation and support

enhanced their educational performance, and that these men learned a heightened sense of self or

an awareness from participation in BMI programs. Strayhorn's and Brooms' studies provide

information pertaining to the experiences of African American men with sense of belonging at

PWIs.

Participation in BMIs, fraternal organizations, and athletics was shown to increase

academic success of African American men in PWIs. Henningsen (2005) published an article

about a BMI program called *Brother to Brother*, at St. Petersburg College, which assists African

American men in remaining in college until graduation. The article features the story of Ernest

McDonald, one of the African American men who participated in the program and graduated

from college. The article states that McDonald reported that a support program like *Brother to

Brother* was "Heaven Sent." He explains that participating in a program where African American

men could support each was the key to their success. Henningsen's article highlights how vital

group membership was to the success of the African American men in in PWIs. Additionally,

Clark, Tanner, and Logan (2015) conducted a literature review to present a framework for

educating African American men using the themes of athletics and fraternity. Clark et al. suggest

that real role models, cascade mentoring, and academic support fosters academic success for

African American men. Henningsen and Clark et al.'s publications provide examples of how important support programs are to the success of African American men in PWIs.

Racial Identity/Racism

Studies have found that successful Black men in PWIs reported having a high awareness of their racial identity on campus. Brooms and Davis (2017) conducted a qualitative study to understand how Black men construct meaning from their collegiate experiences. This study consisted of 59 Black men from three different PWIs. The study found that identifying as an African American man on campus affected how their racialized and gendered identities mattered. Participants reported that peer-to-peer bonding, student reflections about the value and meaning of their peer relationships with other Black men, Black faculty mentoring, and student narratives about how mentoring from Black faculty members (primarily Black men) all were salient to them during their collegiate experience. This study provides a strong example of the racially hostile environments that Black men enter when enrolled at PWIs. In addition, Reid (2013) conducted a quantitative study to understand the relationships among racial identity, self-efficacy, institutional integration, and academic achievement of Black men attending research universities. The study consisted of 190 Black men enrolled in PWIs. Reid's study found that Black men attending research universities who report heightened self-efficacy, positive racial identity attitudes, and high levels of institutional integration would earn higher cumulative GPAs. Brooms and Davis' and Reid's studies highlight Black men's experiences with racial identity at PWIs.

A study on racial identity and the intersection with other identities found that African American men with multiple oppressed group identities often minimize one identity to maintain

group affiliation with the intersecting group. In a qualitative study by Goode-Cross and Tager (2011) with eight African American men enrolled in PWIs who identify as gay or bisexual, participants reported that the repression of their LGBT identity was salient for them. This study informs the experiences of racial identity and the intersection of other oppressed identities for African American men enrolled at PWIs.

A qualitative study by Boyd and Mitchell (2018) focusing on African American men and how they persist in spite of stereotypes, uncovered internalized emotions and feelings associated with being stereotyped at the PWI. Data emerged from interviews from six African American men enrolled in PWIs. Boyd and Mitchell reported that internalization of feelings and emotions were common for participants. These were internalized feelings of anger and frustration with racial treatment in the PWI. They also felt they needed to contain their anger to mitigate the risk of judgment within the PWI environment.

Experiences with racism by African American men who play sports at PWIs was the focus of a study by Singer (2016). This qualitative study was conducted with three elite African American men who are former football athletes at a historically signifigant PWIs. Data gathered from focus groups reported that participants experienced various racial biases during their time in the PWI setting. Singer's research helps to inform the experiences of African American men with racism on PWI campuses.

The success of African American men at PWIs compared to HBCUs and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) is the focus of a study conducted by Nelson Laird et al. (2007). Their quantitative study's sample consisted of 2,896 African American seniors from 334 PWIs, 1,852 African American seniors from 20 HBCUs, 2,149 Hispanic seniors from 321 PWIs, and 2,028 Hispanic seniors from 26 HSIs. The findings of this study suggest that campuses which claim to

have ethnic and cultural orientations have less than ideal conditions for African American and Hispanic students. Nelson Laird et al.'s study also suggests that African American and Hispanics enrolled in PWIs feel as supported as their peers who attend HBCUs and HSIs.

HBCUs

Family support and expectations was found to be a positive factor in increasing persistence of African America men in HBCUs. Farmer and Hope (2015) conducted a quantitative study focused on African American men in higher education aimed at understanding the academic factors that influence retention and graduation of African American men enrolled in HBCUs. The study sample included 562 participants from Gateway University (fictional). In addition to family support, this study reported that GPA's are strong predictors of college retention and graduation. Consistent with the research on most college students, the higher a student's GPA, the more likely they are to be retained by the institution. In a related qualitative study, Brooks (2015) examined how African American college students perceive family structure, relationships, and support as impacting their academic persistence and collegiate experiences in HBCUs. The study consisted of 14 students attending HBCUs in the southern United States. The study's participants reported that living up to expectations set by the family, changes in family dynamics after attending college, worrying about what is occurring at home, and not burdening the family and togetherness of the family affected their experience in college. Farmer and Hope's and Brooks' work connects to my research because it discusses the role that family plays in the experiences of African American men in higher education.

A study found that urban HBCUs struggle to keep up with other HBCUs concerning retention and graduation of African American men. Gasman, Nguyen, and Commodore (2017)

conducted a quantitative study using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to examine retention and graduation for African American men. The study analyzed data from 22 institutions and reported that both retention and graduation is lower at urban HBCUs compared to other HBCUs. Gasman et al.'s study provides context to the circumstances surrounding African American in urban HBCUs.

A study focusing on African American men with multiple oppressed identities was the focus of research at an HBCU. Banks and Hughes (2013) conducted a qualitative study focused on the experiences of African American men with disabilities in post-secondary education. The study included interviews with 12 African American men with disabilities at a Mid-Atlantic HBCU. Banks and Hughes' study found that self-doubt and notions of incapacity were present, that those with invisible disabilities rejected the labeling, and that community support services were vital to their success in higher education. This study proves context to the experiences of African American men with multiple points of oppression in HBCUs and their experiences with navigating multiple identities.

Graduate School

African American men in graduate school reported pushing to be academically successful in order to prove others wrong. Ballard and Cintron's (2010) qualitative research was designed to understand the academic success of African American men in graduate education. The study included five African American men and data was collected from narratives. Their study found that counter stories, or stories that cast doubt on existing ideas of the dominant culture, were present. In other words, these men wanted to change the narrative around African American men in doctoral programs and worked to do so in the shadow of much doubt. Also, participants

reported that safe spaces for African American men was essential to their success. Ballard and Cintron's work discussed the behaviors adopted by academically successful African American men in graduate school, while facing doubt pertaining to their academic abilities.

In another study by Sánchez, Liu, Leathers, Goins, and Vilain (2011), graduate students who were African American men and their perceptions of social class and upward mobility was the focus. Interviews captured the experiences of 14 African American men enrolled in PWI graduate schools. This study found participants perceive racism as hindering to their social mobility; that skin tone can hinder their social mobility; and that partnering with a socially privileged (White) partner is an avenue for upward mobility. Sánchez et al.'s study is essential to understanding the social ramifications of becoming an educated African American man and highlights the intersection between race and education.

This section of the literature review covered studies related to African American men in higher education. Beginning with the experiences of African American men entering community college, while enrolled in community college, and those who intend to transfer, studies have reported that these men feel supported. Also, African American men transferring in higher education report faculty engagement was significant is increasing the success of members of the population. Furthermore, this section of the literature review included articles related to African American men in PWIs, HBCUs, and graduate school. These publications contained themes related to discriminatory racial treatment, proving others wrong, and the importance of family support while enrolled in higher education.

African American Men and the Deficit Perspective

Scholars have focused on how the deficit perspective in educational research pertaining to African American men in higher education is extremely detrimental to the success of the population (Coney, 2017; Harper, 2012; Palmer et al., 2014). My study counters the deficit approach by examining the experiences of those who have been successful. Other studies have been conducted using this strategy, seeking to solve the issues related to African American men in higher education by uncovering the mechanisms of success for African American men (e.g., see Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Moore et al., 2003; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010; Warde, 2008).

Warde (2008) conducted a qualitative study exploring the narratives of African American men who successfully completed a bachelor's degree. The study consisted of 11 African American men who graduated, and data was extracted from two focus groups. The study reported that knowing the importance of higher education, access to resources needed to attend and persist, access to a good mentor, and developing resiliency was connected to academic success for African American men. Warde's work accurately uncovered success indicators related to degree attainment for African American men at four-year institutions by focusing on those who had success academically.

The use of counter stories which directly challenge the deficit perspective was found in Moore et al.'s (2003) qualitative study focused on understanding the persistence of African American males in engineering programs of higher education. Their study found that while participating in higher education, African American men worked hard to counter negative perceptions of their academic ability. The study consisted of 42 African American males (juniors and seniors), and data came from individual and group interviews. The study found that challenges facing these students call for adaptive and non-adaptive coping mechanisms that

promote academic persistence in unwelcoming engineering environments. In this study, Moore

et al. reports that the African-American males developed personality traits that embodied the

"prove-them-wrong" syndrome, which means that the participants became even more determined

and committed to engineering when it was perceived that their intellectual capability was less

than their peers. Moore et al.'s work brings forth how African American male students develop

a growth mindset aimed at success in the face of deficit-minded educational environments.

Another study designed to understand success factors for African American men found

no relationship between racial identity and wellness. Spurgeon and Myers (2010) conducted

quantitative research investigating relationship between ethnic identity and welfare with 203

African American male juniors and seniors attending HBCUs and PWIs. This study brings forth

the notion that successful African American males may not need a high sense of self to be

successful in college and challenges other research conducted from a deficit model.

Within this section of the literature review, studies that have countered the deficit per-

spective are provided to demonstrate how an anti-deficit framework benefits African American

men. Participants involved in anti-deficit framework work are successful and therefore can

provide researchers with context into the mechanisms of success. It is extremely important that

African American men are represented empirically as a group that is able from an asset-based

perspective rather than deficit based.

Transfer Students in Higher Education

Intent to Transfer

Of those entering community college, 80% intend to transfer to 4-year institutions to earn

a bachelor's degrees or higher (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011), but in reality, only 31.5% of students

in higher education complete the transfer (Shapiro et al., 2017b). To understand the circumstances surrounding transfer students in higher education, studies have been designed to understand the predictors of upward transfer in higher education.

Wood, Nevarez, and Hilton (2012) conducted a quantitative study seeking to find individual student determinants of transfer. Data originated from the United States Department of Education's Beginning Post-Secondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS), whereby information was captured at three points in time. The study found that first-generation students and older students are less likely to transfer. Also, Wood et al. found that the higher a GPA, the higher the transfer rate. Wood et al.'s study provides information pertaining to determining and deterring factors related to transfer student success.

In addition, Wang (2012) conducted a quantitative study seeking to find factors associated with an upward transfer of baccalaureates beginning at community colleges. The study consisted of approximately 2,300 participants from the National Educational Longitudinal Student of 1988's and the Postsecondary Education Transcripts Study's (PETS) database. The study found that high socioeconomic status and high academic performance increased the chances of transferring. More interesting is that this study found that being an African American decreased the likelihood of transferring. Wang's study highlights indicators and inhibitors to a successful transfer student.

Academic Advising

Studies have shown that academic advising is salient to college students in transition. Blaylock and Bresciani (2011) conducted a mixed methods study seeking to explore the success of a transfer support program for community college students. They found that many transfer

students report academic advising playing a large role during their transition process. The study

consisted of 101 students in the transfer support program with data emerging from focus groups,

essays, surveys, and academic information (GPA, persistence, etc.). Academic advising was

found to be critical to the success of these students both pre- and post-transfer. Additionally, in

Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, and Laanan's (2013) qualitative study designed to understand aspects

of the transfer student transition experience, it was reported that academic advising was salient to

participants. The study collected data from interviews with 22 students who transferred from

community colleges to four-year institutions. Chrystal et al.'s study found that students began at

community college because of their ambitious future goals, lack of academic preparedness, to

save money, and due to an apprehension to leave home. In addition to academic advising, the

perceptions of these students were that:

1. the four-year college would be more difficult academically,

2. the difference in the physical size of campus (students and geographically) would be
   challenging, and

3. they would experience anxiety over how large their classes are at the four-year
   school. (pp. 13–14)

Blaylock and Bresciani's and Chrystal et al.'s studies provide information regarding how

important academic advising is for transfer students and highlights the perceptions surrounding

transfer students.

Allen, Smith, and Muehleck (2014) conducted a mixed methods study to understand the

role of academic advising in addressing challenges of intended transfer students in community

colleges. Their study found that pre-transfer students were significantly more satisfied than post-

transfer students with the various forms of advising they received. The 8,904 participants for this

study came from nine universities and were those who intended to transfer to a four-year and also those who already completed the transfer. Data came from a survey containing both structured and open-ended questions. The findings of this study suggest that academic advising is salient to transfer students at both pre- and post-transfer.

Associate's Degree Attainment

Conflicting information was found empirically related to if earning an associate's degree before transferring to a four-year institution increases the transfer student's chances of earning a bachelor's degree. Kopko and Crosta's (2016) quantitative study reported that earning an associate's degree before transferring is associated positively with earning a bachelors' degree within six years. The study involved 41,000 first time in college students who began at state community colleges between fall 2002 and summer 2005. The results of Kopka and Crosta's study conflict with the findings from Wang, Chuang, and McCready's (2017) quantitative study. Wang et al's study included 1,140 students with data from the BPS and PETS databases, and found no significant difference in degree attainment for those earning an associate's degree before transfer and those who do not. Wang et al. did report small gains in credits earned by those who earned an associate's degree. Wang et al.'s and Kopko and Crosta's studies conflict, leaving uncertainty about the subject.

First-Time Students vs. Transfer Students

Research findings have conflicted on whether or not first-time students out-perform transfer students. In a study focused on labor market outcomes, first-time students and transfer students were found to perform equally well academically in college and earn jobs at the same

rates upon graduation. Xu, Jaggars, Fletcher, and Fink (2018) conducted a quantitative study to examine whether transfer students and first-time students perform equally well in terms of academics and labor market outcomes. The study consisted of 4,678 students from data provided by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. Other studies have found first-time students perform better academically compared to transfer students. Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) conducted a quantitative study which found first-time students earn degrees at a rate of 73% and transfer students at a lower rate of 60%. Their study consisted of 3,160 participants from the NCES database and all participants successfully attained junior status. Xu et al. and Melguizo et al.'s studies' findings suggest that further information is needed to conclude if first-time students or transfer student perform better academically at the host institution.

In a quantitative study by Jacobson et al. (2017) focused on transfer student retention, distance from home was reported as a factor in why transfer students left college. Set at the University of Albany, this study was conducted in response to low retention rates for transfer students compared to first-time students. The study consisted of 1,350 transfer students and an unspecified number of first-time students enrolled at the University of Albany in fall 2014. Data was collected from a survey. The study found that distance from home was a significant reason for leaving the University of Albany and that many first-time and transfer students stated their desire to move closer to home. Furthermore, similar to previous studies, this study reported that the higher a student's GPA is, the more likely they are to be retained by the University of Albany.

Transfer Shock

The term transfer shock refers to a decrease in GPA when a student transitioning from community college enters a four-year institution (Rhine et al., 2000). To address the issues

related to transfer shock, Ishitani (2008) designed a study focused on the experiences of transfer students who have encountered this issue. Ishitani reported that upperclassmen handle transfer shock better than underclassmen. This quantitative study consisted of three cohorts of students ($N = 7,631$) who matriculated to a four-year institution during the fall semester. In relation, Ishitani's study reported that by the end of the fifth semester 52% of first-time students were still enrolled, compared to 36% of transfers. This large discrepancy in enrollment between first-time students and transfers is attributed to transfer shock.

Support programs have shown to help transfer students overcome transfer shock. Scott, Thigpen, and Bentz's (2015) conducted a study focused on increasing the retention of math and science majors who transferred. The study was set at Texas A&M University in partnership with a local community college. The institutions partnered on an initiative to strengthen the pipeline to degree attainment for underrepresented students who are STEM majors. The program saw success, reporting that 83% of the underrepresented students who participated in the program graduated or are on track to graduate. This study's findings demonstrate how imperative support programming is for transfer students with underrepresented identities in higher education.

The strategies have been reported to lower the effects of transfer shock are encouraging pre-transfer students to actively prepare for transfer and to use campus resources after they make the transfer. Berger and Malaney's (2003) quantitative study collected survey data from 372 transfer students at the University of Massachusetts. Data was collected from phone surveys of recent graduates of University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Berger and Malaney's study reported that those who prepare for the transfer by using campus resources reported lower levels of transfer shock and those who used campus resources after transferring.

Other Transfer Studies

Academic history or performance and previous college background can predict early integration and educational outcomes for transfer students. D'Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozzine, and Ginn (2013) conducted a quantitative study examining the relationship between academic and social fit for transfer students. Participants in the study were transfer students at a 4-year institution, who reported having transfer status. Data emerged from 1,147 students enrolled at an unnamed four-year institution. This study is significant in understanding the outcomes of transfer students after they complete a transfer.

Hood, Hunt, and Haeffele (2009) conducted a qualitative study to inform state policy by collecting data to characterize issues that affect students as they transfer from one college to another. The study consisted of 32 students who had transferred in during the spring or fall of 2007. Data emerged from the findings were categorized into five categories.

1. Academic advising and other counseling supports were critical to these students both before the transfer and afterward.

2. Transfer students did not have problems enrolling in courses, but course availability, financial aid, and housing all presented issues mostly related to deadlines.

3. Most transfer students are happy with how easy it was to transfer course credits.

4. Perceptions of academic preparations were mixed; some reported the academic work as being difficult and others did not.

5. Transfer students understand that their time-to-degree stalling was their fault. Many students had stopped out or made decisions that ultimately extended their time at the 4-year institution. (p. 121)

Hood et al.'s findings provide context into the experiences of transfer students. This information is essential to understanding the knowledge and perspectives of transfer students.

McGlynn (2006) published an article discussing transfer rates and trends. The article covered traditional transfers and reverse transfers (students that are back in college after not participating in higher education). Also, they discuss why community college is a better option for some students at the beginning of their career in higher education and how a vertical transfer is typically the endgame. McGlynn explains that many students choose community college for their accessibility, or due to their academic preparedness. The article also notes the growing struggles for transfer students. Topics such as credit recovery, the difference of environment between two-year and four-year institutions, and public backlash for enrolling at a community college give transfer student issues. This article brings forth both the reasons for entering in community college and the struggles with a transfer to a four-year college and is therefore significant when discussing the current state of transfer students who are African American men.

In summary, this section of the literature review focused on previously conducted studies related to transfer students in higher education. For transfer students who indicate the intent to transfer, completing the transfer often proves difficult. Predictors of a successful transfer include having a high GPA and having a high socio-economic status. Transfer students also reported that academic advising played a large role in their transfer process. Studies have shown that during pre- and post-transfer, advising helped these students navigate higher education more confidently. There is conflict in the literature pertaining to whether earning an associate's degree before transferring increases the chances of baccalaureate degree attainment. In addition, the literature conflicts about whether or not first-time students and transfer students perform at similar levels

academically. In all, further research is needed to fully understand how transfer students describe their experiences to better serve this population.

Critical Race Theory

Background

Critical Race Theory (CRT) comes from "a long tradition of resistance to the unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources" (Taylor et al., 2016, p. 1). Altering the unequal distribution of power and resources is the focus of my study. I choose this framework because participants in this study are asked to talk about experiences which are based on historical and current systems of oppression in America. CRT originated in legal studies and Taylor et al. (2016) explain that CRT was initially used in the criminal justice field to give voices to those disenfranchised or underrepresented by the criminal justice system. My research similarly uses CRT; providing a voice to those who have been historically underrepresented in higher education.

In addition to law, recent educational studies have been using the theory as an analytical tool (Cabrera 2018; Crenshaw, 2002; Yosso et al., 2009). In an article focused on CRT used as an analytical tool in educational studies by Cabrera (2018), CRT is applied as a standalone theory in higher education studies. This literature review is aimed at constructively critiquing the use of racial theory in CRT. The review also provided the education tenets of Yosso et al. (2009) as a framework for analyzing using CRT in educational studies. The five tenets are:

1. Race in America is connected to racism,
2. Challenge to the dominant majority or the status quo is required,
3. There must be a commitment to social justice which exposes interest convergence,

4. The significance of the centrality of experiential knowledge, and

5. An interdisciplinary perspective is essential. (pp. 662–663)

Analysis Tool in Educational Research

Other educational studies have used CRTs tenets as an analysis tool. For example, Beachum (2018) used CRT's tenets as an analysis tool to contextualize and categorize the persistence problems for students of color in the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA). CRT is applied to contemporary K–12 education, individually as ESSA racism, objectivity/color-blindness/neutrality, and whiteness as property. Beachum then categorizes findings based on the undertones of privilege that the ESSA was designed from. This study concluded that change is needed in American education and CRT can assist in planning equitable outcomes for education.

CRT was used during the analysis of another study by Comeaux (2013). Their study examined faculty perceptions of high-achieving African American men and consisted of 411 faculty members from a large research university in the Western United States. Data was extracted from photo elicitation with faculty members, who were required to write a narrative based on what they saw in the photo. CRT was applied during the analysis of participants' responses to the African American and White students they saw in the picture, and was used to make sense of the role of race and racial ideologies that emerged from the data.

In another study by Vasquez Heilig, Brown, and Brown (2012), CRT is used to show that their macro-racial context has shaped recently revised Texas state standards. During the analysis of their data, Vasquez Heilig et al. coded for various forms of racism in state standards. They found that there was limited involvement from other racial groups outside of Whites and also that there is an acknowledgment but distorted view of racism and view of racism in U.S. history

standards. By using CRT, this study was able to produce findings that addressed equity issues related to race in Texas K–12 education.

Chapter II Summary

This literature review covered relevant studies found about African American men in PWIs, who began college in community college, starting with studies examining the transition to community college from high school for the population and leading to studies focusing on their experiences in PWIs. It also covered studies about African American men in other institutions of higher education, gender gaps and the deficit approach in educational studies on African American men, and other studies related to transfer students. It concluded with background information about the theoretical framework for this study and examples of other educational studies which have used the structure as an analysis tool.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Setting the stage and contextualizing the narrative pertaining to African American men in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI), who successfully transferred from community college, was provided in Chapter I. The research questions and educational tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) were also covered in Chapter I briefly, and are covered in greater detail here in Chapter III. An extensive review of the current literature pertaining to this study was covered in Chapter II. The literature included studies regarding the experiences of African Americans (including African American women), African American men in higher education, transfer student experiences in higher education, and the use of CRT as an analytical tool in educational research. In all, Chapter I and Chapter II assisted in developing a conversation surrounding the circumstances which African American men and transfer students face in higher education.

The purpose of my qualitative study is to describe the lived experiences of African American men enrolled in PWIs, who successfully transferred from community college. This study is designed to capture and understand how African American men make meaning of their experiences. My overarching research question is: How do African American men enrolled at PWIs, after successfully transferring from community college, describe and make meaning of their experiences? Currently, no study was found capturing the experiences of this population.

Phenomenology Design

The qualitative research design used in my study is phenomenology. Marshall and Rossman (2016) articulate that phenomenological studies are used to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experiences. Also, Creswell (2013) adds that "phenomenology is an examination of shared experiences to develop practices, policies, or to establish a deeper under-standing of the phenomenon examined" (p. 45). During this study, I captured data which described how African American men make meaning of their lived experiences while enrolled in PWIs, after successfully transferring from a community college. Critical Race Theory (CRT) served as the theoretical framework for my study. The five educational tenets of CRT developed by Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) assisted during the development of this study and lead me to uncover a research topic in higher education in need of greater attention. CRT's tenets also guided how this study's background, problem statement, literature review, research questions, and interview questions are framed. For example, the interview protocol was designed to ask participants directly about their experiences with race while enrolled at the PWI. Finally, after data analysis was concluded and a written description of the participants' experiences is formulated, CRT's tenets were then used as a lens to describe how race presented itself in the experiences of participants.

With CRT's momentum shifting to education, Yosso et al. (2009) defined five tenets to guide CRT research in educational settings. The five tenets are:

1. Race in America is connected to racism,

2. Challenge to the dominant majority or the status quo is required,

3. There must be a commitment to social justice which exposes interest convergence,

4. The significance of the centrality of experiential knowledge, and

5. An interdisciplinary perspective is essential. (pp. 662–663)

A phenomenological design allows research studies to see "what it is like as we find ourselves in relation to others or other things" (Vagle, 2014, p. 20). My research has allowed others to hear from African American men in this study and understand what it is like for them to exist at a PWI. "Phenomenology… the study of research problems by addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). The meaning participants attribute to their experiences while at the PWI provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomena studied and allowed me to capture the story from their perspective.

This study aligns with transcendental phenomenology founded by Edmund Husserl, a pioneer of modern phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Van Manen (2016) defines transcendental phenomena as experimental entities that become the objects of our reflection regarding the meaning placed on these objects. The object of reflection in my study is the participants' experiences in a PWI, after successfully transferring from community college.

Intentionality and intuition are two concepts within transcendental phenomenology which are found in my research. Intentionality is congruent with the idea of objectivity, meaning that in our minds, after we experience an object, the object always exists (Moustakas, 1994). As previously mentioned, the object of reflection in this study is the participant's experience in a PWI, after successfully transferring. This object exists for them and shapes all subsequent experiences following their initial encounter. Intuition affects the beginning judgments we place on objects we encounter or concerning phenomena experienced. Therefore, "everything becomes clear through an intuitive-reflective process" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32). During the interview, participants in my study refined the original meaning of their experiences by internal

reflection. As the primary researcher, my role was to interview participants, generate themes, create a description of how they described the phenomena, and relate their description to CRT.

Finally, transcendental phenomenology also aligns well with my study because it is retrospective, whereby reflection is used to understand the phenomena experienced by individuals (Van Manen, 2016). My research began with an epoche or supposition of all assumptions and prevailing attitudes toward the aspects of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994), To fully practice epoche, I kept a journal and wrote about my thoughts, feelings, and views toward my research. This practice of reflexivity is covered in the data collection section of this chapter. Following the development of an epoche, a data reduction occurred. Reduction is a process of returning meaning of the phenomena into consciousness, allowing us access to the subjectivity associated with the object of reflection (Moustakas, 1994). Both epoche and reduction assisted me in uncovering the true essence of participants' experiences and shaped results.

Moustakas (1994) provides guidance on the design of a transcendental phenomenological study. Beginning with the researcher conducting an epoche, a transcendental phenomenologist must understand their own experiences in relation to the phenomenon being studied. To epoche, Moustakas recommends practicing reflexivity to manage biases and assumptions throughout the study. Next, during the first stage of data analysis, a transcendental phenomenologist identifies significant statements from participants' data and groups these statements into meaning units or clusters. These clusters are then aligned by category to create the themes for the study. Upon themes being identified, Moustakas provides that a construct (a composite description of the meaning) and essence of participants' experiences are to be created. This is done by developing structural and textual descriptions of all participants' experiences involved in the transcendental phenomenological study.

Trustworthiness

For the integrity of this study, I used several strategies to ensure trustworthiness. For this study, Trustworthiness is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Guba lists strategies to ensure trustworthiness by the use of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility for this study is ensured by member checking and peer debriefing. Transferability was ensured by creating a purposeful sample. A log trail or audit trail was used to ensure dependability. Finally, confirmability is ensured by practicing reflexivity. Trustworthiness strategies are defined in the section below. Strategies are categized by when they will occur in this study, mainly data collection, and data analysis. Trustworthiness is being included early in this chapter because these trustworthiness strategies are referenced in later sections.

Data Collection

A reflective journal assisted in upholding trustworthiness during data collection. The reflective practice of bracketing was conducted to elicit and document any potential researcher biases and assumptions while conducting the research (Creswell, 2013). These reflections were reviewed before, during, and after the process of collecting data. This reflective journal helped me maintain an emotional awareness while collecting data and informed my perceptions during the data collection process. At the end of data collection, this reflective journal was referenced during the formulation of the results for this study. Also, my reflection during data collection was used as reference documents while shaping and conducting analysis.

The use of *purposeful sampling* allowed me to recruit participants who have experienced a common phenomenon, ideally making findings transferable to the broader population. Purposeful sampling is defined by Creswell (2013) as "selecting individuals…for study because they can

purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem or central phenom" (p. 156). The sample for the study represents individuals who all meet Creswell's definition of purposeful sampling.

A process called *member checking* ensured trustworthiness in interview data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Member checking helped validate the accuracy of data transcripts and allowed participants to share additional information not captured during the interview. Participants were asked to review and affirm their interview transcripts, which were emailed to them following the conclusion of their interview. I planned to transcribe each audio-recorded conversation as quickly as possible following the interview. During the member checking process, I asked participants if there is anything further they would like to communicate about their experiences or, and their feedback was added to their original transcript. I gave participants a week to confirm transcripts after sending the interview transcription for member checking. Within member checking emails with participants, a read receipt was included. By requiring a read receipt, I was able to gauge whether or not participants have seen the email and this increased my ability to ensure responsiveness during member checking.

Data Analysis

During data analysis, trustworthiness was maintained by keeping analytic memos and peer debriefing. I kept analytic memos or a *Log Trail,* to record changes throughout the coding process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Richards, 2015). Keeping analytic memos allowed me to maintain a record of my assumptions and alterations during the coding process. It also allowed me to develop a chronological timeline of how analysis had evolved and informed decision making. The memos also helped me confront my assumptions related to the coding process.

Spall (1998) articulates that peer debriefing assists in confirming that the findings are worthy, honest, and believable. I engaged in peer debriefing with my dissertation chair and with a colleague who is also a qualitative researcher. I thoroughly explained my analysis process to the debriefer to develop an understanding of how I reached my findings. This interaction challenged me to think methodically about justifying my analytical process and how I reached my findings. It also allowed me to think thoroughly about how to present my analysis in Chapter IV.

Protection of Participants

As a guide for the protection of participants, I followed the regulations of the WMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). The role of HSIRB at WMU is to ensure that research is conducted ethically and responsibly. Marshall and Rossman (2016) state that "to protect human subjects from unnecessary harm, universities and professional associates have created codes of ethics and research review boards" (p. 52). I understand the purpose of conducting responsible and ethical research, and I followed the agreed upon directions of WMU HSIRB. This was done by completing all necessary documentation, gaining an approval letter from WMU's HSIRB committee (see Appendix A), and gathering all the required data and following all procedures to ensure this study was conducted in a responsible manner.

Informed Consent

Consent forms were gathered from participants to ensure they understood what was occurring before, during, and after they took part in my study (see Appendix B). Consent forms provided participants information about the risks, benefits, and responsibilities of someone who

participates. Additionally, this document informed the participants of the purpose of my research and detailed the limits of confidentiality based on the law. The form was reviewed and signed by participants before the interview took place. After signing the consent form, participants were given a copy to keep for their records.

Setting, Population, Sampling, and Screening

This section details information about the research setting, population, and how sampling and screening participants occurred.

Setting

I asked participants to share experiences in a particular institution type, not a specific setting, as established by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2018) for *large (25,000 students)*, *public, four-year degree granting or above, primarily residential*, with *high research activity*. PWIs were chosen because of their institutional composition and history of hostility toward African American students (Harper, 2012). The Midwest was selected because geographical context has an impact on racial populations (Fu et al., 2014)—meaning that over time, racial people living in a certain area adopt the values and attitudes of a certain place (Chan-Lentz, 2018). This institutional type was also chosen due to my current and projected career goals. In the future, I plan to further my research agenda and career at an institution with a similar composition.

Population

African American Men

The population for my study included students in higher education who self-identify as African American and as a man. There is literature that perpetuates the notion that African American men cannot be successful in higher education (Harper, 2015; Strayhorn, 2012). This study provides an opportunity for African American men to share their stories of success to counter this outdated and exhausting narrative.

In recognition that race and gender are socially constructed in our society (Johnson, 2006), and that there is no agreed-upon standard, biologically-based, definition of what both race and gender are, I have chosen to affirm each individual's identity by allowing them to self-identity with their selected labels of race and gender. Therefore, this study only includes participants who self-identify as African American and this study only includes participants who self-identify as a man.

Successfully Transferred Students

Participants in this study are currently enrolled at a PWI, and met this study's definition of "successfully transferred." Publications found related to successfully transferred students were broad, unclear, and varied. To bound the sample for this study, definitions by Adelman (2005) and Ellis (2013) were considered. The first definition, from Adelman's (2005) report on transfer students, defined a "successful transfer" student as "one who (a) started in a community college, (b) earned more than 10 credits from the community college before (c) enrolling in a 4-year college and (d) earning more than 10 credits from the 4-year college" (p. xv). The second

definition is from Ellis' (2013) study, which defines a successful transfer student as anyone who transferred into a four-year institution with between eight and 125 credit hours. These definitions of transfer students are incredibly different; however, they provide the empirical groundwork for my study.

My study included students not on academic probation one year after transferring. To counter the deficit narrative in much of the literature on African American men, this study only includes those who are in "good academic standing" at their respective PWI. In summary, the population of "successfully transferred" students for this study have earned, at a minimum, sophomore status and have had spent at least one academic year enrolled in the PWI to demonstrate the academic skills needed to be successful. They also needed to have completed a minimum of ten credits and spent a minimum of one academic year at the community college.

Sampling

"Qualitative research identifies purposeful selected participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem" (Creswell, 2013, p. 189). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, purposeful sampling allowed me to recruit participants who have experienced a common phenomenon, ideally making findings transferable to the broader population.

Two techniques were used to recruit participants. First, I sent out a recruitment email to my professional and personal networks (see Appendix C). I also used my personal social media accounts (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter) to connect to a wide range of potential participants using a flyer (see Appendix D). Secondly, participants were recruited using a snowball technique. The snowball technique involved recruiting potential participants through referrals from current participants or informants. The snowball technique is one of the most widely used

methods in sampling and is among the most effective strategies for gaining access to potential

participants with knowledge of the experience examined (Noy, 2008). At the end of interviews, I

asked participants for leads on potential participants (see Appendix E).

Vagle (2014) states that there is no "magic number" as a sample size of research partici-

pants for phenomenological research. Vagle also encourages researchers using phenomenology

to survey similar studies to get an idea for how many participants are needed. Based on my

review of other phenomenological studies with an identical scope and aim as mine, I determined

that 10 interviews are likely to fulfill the needs of my study. However, a sample was built until

the interview data reaches saturation; I accepted additional participants and listened for repetitive

information which indicated saturation had been reached. Participants were selected based on the

first-come, first-serve basis and based on their location.

For the integrity of my study, I avoided participants with whom I have a relationship.

Although I did use my personal and professional networks for recruitment, I did not interview

any potential participants with whom I have close relationships.

Screening

The screening process began with me sending a recruitment email through my personal

and professional networks (see Appendix C). This email contained brief information about my

study and included an electronic link for potential participants to follow to a screening survey

(see Appendix F). The beginning of the screening survey contained text related to the purpose of

the study, consent by the participant in the preliminary parts of my research, and a statement on

confidentiality. The screening survey consisted of questions on a potential participant's

demographic information, and gathered information about their time spent in higher education.

Potential participants who responded to the screening survey received one of two emails. Those who met the selection criteria were contacted via email (see Appendix G) to schedule a time and location to review the consent form and possibly continue the interview. Volunteers who did not meet the participant criteria were contacted by email and given my contact information for their reference (see Appendix H). As soon as potential participants completed the screening survey, I contacted them as quickly as possible. If I did not hear back within a week from potential participants whom I have contacted, I sent again the email regarding their participation. In order to have as diverse a set of experiences as possible, I attempted to limit how many participants were selected from one particular institution. This was handled as the sample was being generated with careful consideration.

Data Collection

This section includes information about instrumentation, pilot testing, and data collection procedures.

Instrumentation

For my study, I collected data by conducting "in-depth interviews" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 147), with each interview lasting up to 60 minutes. Vagle (2016) indicates that an open-ended interview is best for phenomenological studies and allows for the potential to learn something new from each interview. The interview questions for my research were designed for the participants to explore their experiences freely and without constriction. The interview was semi-structured, containing approximately six open-ended questions with additional prompts. CRT's tenets assisted in structuring the interview protocol and when questions are asked during

the interview. By strategically planning questions, the interview was designed to extract information to understand how race effected the experiences of participants. A standard interview protocol was used with each participant to maintain consistency across interviews (see Appendix E).

Interviewing for a phenomenological study was difficult as I am asking participants to reflect on their experience. Therefore, prompts were often required in addition to the main question to elicit deeper responses. Van Manen (2016) explains that it is much easier for participants to talk about an experience as they are experiencing it, rather than afterwards.

Pilot Testing

To ensure that this study's interview protocol is effective at capturing the experiences described by participants, I conducted a pilot test (Creswell, 2013). Pilot testing was completed before my study was formalized during my graduate coursework at Western Michigan University (WMU). After interviewing participants and receiving feedback from my instructor, the interview protocol was enhanced in various ways. This process helped shape how interview questions were asked, the order in which questions are asked during the interview protocol, and when to use probes. Upon the conclusion of the course, I submitted a request to keep all materials from this pilot test conducted within the course, for use during this study.

Data Collection Procedures

During my initial meeting with participants, I reviewed the information in the consent form and if potential participants had the time, I interviewed them. If participants did not set aside the time, I communicated with them to set up another date to conduct the interview. At the end of the consent form, confidentiality was to be ensured by participants choosing a pseudonym.

This selected name is the only identifier attached to transcripts and other participant data after the interview was completed. Upon the completion of the interview, I reassured the participant of the limits of confidentiality based on the law. I also informed participants that I would be engaging them in a process known as *member checking*, by contacting participants through email (see Appendix I). This email asked them to review the transcripts, informed them about the research process moving forward, and provided them my contact information.

I practiced reflexivity during data collection by bracketing. Bracketing was used to decrease the chances of researcher biases and assumptions I hold while conducting the research (Creswell, 2013). A reflective journal assisted me in documenting my experience with this research. These reflections were reviewed before, during, and after the process of collecting data. At the end of data collection, this reflective journal assisted in developing and understanding of how successful I was at keeping the biases out of the research and results for this study.

Participants who were within 60 minutes of Kalamazoo, Michigan were given the option of a face-to-face or electronic interview. I asked those who were located more than 60 minutes away from Kalamazoo, Michigan to use electronic software to be interviewed. I used electronic telecommunications software such as a phone call and Apple FaceTime for electronic interviews. Those who agreed to a face-to-face interview were interviewed in a private location; these locations were different for most all of the participants. In addition, during the beginning stages of data analysis, profiles were created for participants. All participant data was be saved by participant pseudonyms following the completion of the interview.

The interviews were audio recorded to capture as much data as possible during a participant's interview. I also took notes on non-verbal behavioral cues each participants'

interview. An audio recording allowed me to replay and revisit my interview data during the member checking process.

Throughout the study, all information was saved on password protected secure servers. I backed up all data on my personal computer, which is password protected. At the completion of my dissertation, I gave all the data to the primary investigator to save for a minimum of three years in a locked office.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with transcribing the interviews, followed by coding interview data. Through the coding process, themes from participants' experiences led to the development of a written description of their responses. The educational tenets of CRT were then applied to the written description and served as the lens to determine how race presented itself during participants' experiences.

Transcripts

I used an online transcriptions service called Rev.com to transcribe interviews for this study. was called Rev.com. After uploading the interview, the service returned the transcriptions to me in less than a week typically. I used Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel to organize the interview data from participants. After downloading, reading, and cleaning the transcripts of errors or identifying information, the transcripts were saved using only the participant's pseudonym. I read the transcripts for errors before emailing the documents to participants for member checking (see Appendix I).

Coding Process

I used *In vivo coding* (Saldaña, 2013) during this study. This coding strategy was used to analyze the data by breaking the transcripts up by paragraph or sentence by *chunking*. *In vivo coding* was selected because it prioritizes and honors the participants' voices and aligns well with the design of my study (Saldaña, 2013).

Transcripts of each participant's interview were printed out during the coding process. After chunking was complete, I organized codes into clusters. I used mailing envelopes to keep track of these clusters and categorization of codes during analysis. After coding was complete, I recorded the codes, attempted to destroy them, and recoded the data again. This is to determine if my coding process yields the same findings.

I kept analytic memos or a *Log Trail,* to record changes to the coding process or the codes (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Richards, 2015). Keeping analytic memos allowed me to maintain a record of all thoughts, ideas, alterations, and assumptions that emerge during the coding and analysis processes.

I began the process of creating themes by horizontalizing the data. Horizontalizing the data is to gives all data points equal amounts of significance (Moustakas, 1994). This process ensured that all information is provided at the same levels of consideration during analysis. Horizontalizing the data was done by laying out all my codes from participants' interviews and purposefully grouping them into themes. After grouping codes, envelopes were used to organize the codes into clusters or categories. The most salient categories from participants' interviews were decided based on which envelopes have the most codes in them, and I reported these as themes from participants' interviews.

Emergent themes were then used to write a textual-structural description of the essence of how participants experienced their journey (Moustakas, 1994). The structural description focused on how participants described their experiences and included the actual quotes from students. The textual description focused on the context surrounding the experiences. After the structural and textual descriptions were developed, I used CRT's tenets as a lens to determine how, if at all, race factored into participants' experiences. The structural descriptions, textual descriptions, and the CRT tenets perspective were all weaved together to create the essence of participants' experiences and my interpretation of those experiences.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations are potential weaknesses of a study. A possible limitation is that participants are being interviewed about experiences from the past to the present. Without having a present-day context for what occurred to participants, I may inadvertently misrepresent their experience. Additionally, as for any researcher, a limitation of this study was my ability to bracket out my preconceived notions. I was reflective during the process, but this is my first time conducting this scale of research, so issues did arise. I did my best to bracket out my assumptions by keeping organized and reflecting in a timely manner.

Delimitations are used to narrow the scope of a study. A potential delimitation of my study is that I created the definition of a "successful transfer" student to help bound the study. Currently, literature surrounding transfer student is broad, unclear, and varied, so I created a description that best fits my study. My definition of a successful transfer student is one that has never been used empirically. My study is narrow in that it focuses on students transferring to attain their bachelor's degree. Another delimitation of my research only seeks to understand the

experiences of African American men enrolled in a PWI, who successfully transferred from community college. It did not capture the experiences of all African American men, nor does it completely articulate the experiences of African American men outside of higher education. Other delimitations are the research questions, the conceptual frame, the population and setting examined, the design of the study, and the analysis of the study. All of these areas are designed to bound the context of my current research. The parameters of my research also ensure that my research may be recreated.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study focuses on capturing the experiences of African American men at predominantly White higher education institutions, after successfully transferring from a community college. The qualitative design for this study is phenomenology, whereby data was collected from semi-structured interviews, lasting about 60 minutes. Interviews were transcribed, and data was analyzed by me, the researcher. After the analysis process was completed, the five educational tenets of Critical Race Theory by Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) were used to understand the contributions that race had on the experiences of participants.

African American and Black are used interchangeably in reference to race during this chapter. This is due to maintain consistency with interview data, participants' responses, and affiliations with named organizations such as Black Greek Letter organizations and Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of my study was to capture and understand the lived experiences of African American men enrolled in PWIs, who successfully transferred from a community college. My overarching research question was: How do African American men enrolled at PWIs, after successfully transferring from community college, describe and make meaning of their experiences? My specific sub-questions include:

1. How, if at all, does identifying as an African American man shape their experiences at the PWI?

2. How, if at all, did attending a community college shape their experiences at the PWI?

3. What helped them to be successful at the PWI?

4. What were challenges at the PWI, and how did they overcome those challenges?

Participant Profiles

The sample for this study consisted of 10 participants who are either attending or have recently graduated from a PWI in the Midwest after successfully transferring from a community college. Participants for this study met the following criteria:

1. Self-identified as African American

2. Self-identified as male

3. Began higher education at a community college

4. Currently enrolled in a Predominantly White, 4-year Institution, or recent graduated

Also, each participant met this study's definition of successfully transferred. For this study, successfully transferred is defined as having above sophomore status with good academic standing in the PWI. Also, all participants completed a minimum of two academic semesters while at the PWI and has above sophomore status. In addition, participants needed to have attended the community college for at minimum one year or completed 10 credits. Below, each participant is listed by their preferred name and details specific about who they are as individuals are provided to be able to differentiate them from each another.

Scott Wayne

Scott Wayne is an African American man who began higher education at a community college in the Midwest before transferring to a PWI in the Midwest. He is a native of an urban Midwestern city with a population of about 600,000 people, where he attended a predominantly African American high school. Scott is six feet tall, has a brown to darker complexion, wears glasses, and dreadlocks. He spoke very clearly, processed interview questions quickly, and formulated responses filled with passion.

Scott Wayne was transparent about his feelings regarding the PWI he currently attends and its shortcomings. He began with his path to college and highlighted his experiences by discussing his involvement on campus. Scott Wayne recommends that others attend community college before a PWI because of affordability. He also expressed a high level of skepticism regarding the financial practices of PWIs and other large institutions of higher education. Scott is studying to become a K-12 educator because he believes African American men need greater levels of representation in the teaching field.

Martin James

Martin James is an African American man who began higher education at a community college on the West Coast before transitioning to a PWI in Midwest. Martin is from an urban Midwestern city with a population of about 2.7 million people, stands at about six feet tall with an athletic build, and is brown-skinned. After attending a predominantly African American high school, he attended a junior college to follow his dream of playing in the National Football League (NFL). After moving far from home, Martin realized how much he missed his family and the support he received in the Midwest, so he decided to move back. With the assistance of his

fiancé and family, he moved back to the Midwest to continue his bachelor's degree. During his interview, Martin spoke using both formal and colloquial language to describe his experiences.

Martin is an active participant in the TRiO program at his PWI. He attributes much of his growth in the areas of relationship building, leadership, and networking to the program. TRiO programs are funded by the United States Department of Education and are designed to provide academic support for first-generation and low-income students. Upon graduation, Martin wants to start his own mentoring program in his hometown. In addition, the mentoring role he serves for his younger nieces and nephews is the primary reason he has remained in college. He also stated that his fiancé is a huge supporter of his decision to continue in higher education.

Chris Tops

Chris Tops is an African American man from the West Coast of the United States. He began higher education at a community college on the West Coast with aspirations of playing in the National Basketball Association (NBA) before transitioning to the Midwestern PWI for his bachelor's. Chris is light-skinned with short hair, stands six feet tall, and wore business casual clothing. He is older than a traditional age college student, which gave him more confidence compared to his peers. Chris has had to overcome several barriers in his life including gang affiliations, spending time in jail, and managing a long-distance relationship with his daughter. Chris spoke very candidly about his life and is extremely proud of the path he is currently on.

For Chris, providing for his family is the primary motivation for him to complete college. He is the father of four children, and a dedicated husband. Chris' family has experienced success in higher education, with his father having earned a master's degree and his wife holding a bachelor's from the PWI he currently attends. Chris is driven by the educational success of his

family members, and like them, plans to also earn his bachelor's degree and eventually a graduate degree. Chris is also a diehard Los Angeles Lakers fan and uses sports references in comparison to his experiences in higher education and in life. Taking lessons from Kobe Bryant, Michael Jordan, and other sports legends has helped him stay focused in college.

James Patrick

James Patrick is an African American man who attended a community college in the Midwest, before transitioning to a PWI, also in the Midwest. James is light-skinned, wore glasses, stands about six foot and two inches, and grew up minutes from his PWI campus. He is an active member of a Black Greek Letter organization, and aligns closely with the pillars regarding service and leadership that his organization was founded on. He spoke about his time in higher education with optimism and did not use much slang or jargon when referring to experiences.

James Patrick values his family and attends church regularly. He leans on both support systems to provide a foundation for his success in higher education to grow from. He understands that as an African American man, the challenge of overcoming barriers to earning a higher education are immense. James Patrick is also the recipient of a place-based scholarship. This scholarship guarantees him full-tuition to any university in his home state for 10 years post-graduation from high school. James Patrick is a criminal justice major and plans to work in law enforcement when he graduates.

Jordan Brown

Jordan Brown is an African American man who attended a Midwestern community college before attending a Midwestern PWI. Jordan is a native of an urban Midwestern city with

a population of approximately 600,000 people. He is light-skinned with short hair and is about five foot nine inches tall. Jordan Brown describes himself as an introvert who keeps to himself, unless approached by others. During his interview he spoke authentically, using an abundance of colloquialisms and slang. Jordan's primary objective in higher education is to do well academically and graduate with a business degree.

Jordan is not formally involved in any Registered Student Organizations (RSO) at his PWI, but regularly attends events designed for African American students. Attending these events helps him meet other college students at his PWI. He attributes his persistence in the PWI to developing relationships with African Americans working in staff positions while on campus. Jordan meets with certain individuals regularly and refuses to meet with anyone else in his PWI's advising offices because situational rapport is important to him. Also, Jordan stopped attending school for a period of time to work in a factory, which was a negative experience for him. The resentment he holds toward working in hard labor conditions for minimal pay is a big reason why he enjoys being a college student and is looking forward to his future with a bachelor's degree.

Kalen Taylor

Kalen Taylor is an African American man who attended a community college in the Midwest before attending a PWI in the Midwest. Kalen's interview was conducted over the phone, so there is no physical description available for him. He spoke using little jargon or slang during his open and transparent interview about his experiences. His knowledge of higher education was impressive for an undergraduate student. Kalen attended a predominantly White high school before attending community college, which helped him in his transition to his current PWI.

Kalen is heavily involved on campus and has helped coordinate on-campus programs for underrepresented students at his PWI. He serves as a campus leader and champion for African American students' success. With the help from agents in upper administration, Kalen uses his leadership role to leave a personal legacy on his PWI campus. He also expressed a strong affinity for his institution and the positive impact that earning a higher education degree has made on his life.

James Bronson

James Bronson is an African American man from and urban Midwestern city who attended community college in the Midwest before attending a Midwestern PWI. James is six feet tall, dark-skinned with a husky build. He is reserved and interview questions needed to be presented in a fashion that sparked his interest for him to fully engage during the interview process. He spoke succinctly about his experiences and used colloquial language throughout the interview.

For James Bronson, the landscape of his institution he is currently attending is much different from where he grew up. For him, he enjoys the PWI's ability to expose him to different cultures, food, and new ideas. James is excited about the possibility that he will graduate in one year with a criminal justice degree and after, plans to begin a career in law enforcement.

Rodney Bell

Rodney Bell is an African American man from an urban Midwestern city with a population of about 120,000 people. He attended community college in the Southeastern U.S. before attending and graduating from a Midwestern PWI. Rodney's interview was conducted over the

phone so a physical description is not available for him. Rodney was excited to be given the opportunity to discuss with me his experiences and said that he discusses racial topics regularly with his peers. Rarely did I need to probe him or ask him clarifying questions because he was extremely forthcoming with his experiences.

Rodney graduated from his PWI in Fall 2019 and now has a full-time job in the community where he was raised. Growing up, Rodney became accustomed to being one of the few minorities in his peer group and stated that he often enjoys experiencing cultures outside of his own. While at his PWI, he found support from a staff member who is a member of his extended family. Rodney expressed that without their guidance and support, he would not have graduated from his PWI and be able to move forward with his life.

Kevin Jones

Kevin Jones is an African American man who attended a community college in the Midwest before attending a PWI in the Midwest. Kevin is six feet one inch tall, light-skinned, with glasses, and wore business casual. He is determined to graduate in spring 2020 and move to North Carolina to start a new career in business. Kevin has an infant son and a girlfriend, so he wants to be successful for the future of his family.

Kevin enjoys the variety of networking and relationship building opportunities he is exposed to at his PWI. He enjoys that there is a difference in class sizes at the PWI and said that this dynamic helped him become academically successful and build/maintain relationships while on campus. Kevin is also a member of a Black Greek Letter organization. His affiliation with his fraternity has provided leadership, networking, and professional development opportunities.

More importantly, participating in a fraternity helped him develop a strong sense of belonging while attending a PWI.

Jimmy Smith

Jimmy Smith is an African American man who attended and earned an associate's degree from a community college in the Midwest before attending a PWI in the Midwest. He is from an urban Midwestern city with a population of approximately two million people. He stands about five feet ten inches tall with brown skin. Jimmy Smith was very proud that he lost over 100 pounds during the past few years. His weight loss accomplishment was something he never thought he could do and which he uses as motivation to complete his bachelor's degree, which he earned in spring of 2020.

Jimmy comes from a family that has had success in higher education, with his mother and aunt both earning post-secondary degrees. He continues to look to them for guidance while completing his degree and planning for his future. Also, Jimmy is determined to have his own sport management company that works with athletes from similar backgrounds as his. Upon reflecting on his experiences with his peers who have attempted to play professional sports, he says that sports agents need to act like an extension of the athletes' family; therefore, that is what he plans to do when while representing his clients.

Academically, Jimmy says he never fully applied himself until he got into higher education. He is very familiar with the nuances of K–12 education and figured that he could scrape by academically, until it mattered in college. Upon leaving high school, Jimmy had a 1.5 GPA and felt that others considered his life a failure. Fortunately, Jimmy changed this narrative by attending community college and successfully transferring to his current PWI. At both institutions, he

earned high academic marks and found a passion for working with underrepresented populations in higher education.

Data Collection and Analysis Overview

Data collection began the beginning of the fall 2019 semester and concluded at the beginning of the spring 2020 semester. A total of 10 interviews were conducted, lasting up to 60 minutes each. Eight interviews took place face-to-face and two interviews were completed over the phone. Interviews where recorded on my personal computer and uploaded to Rev.com, an online transcription service. Turnaround for transcripts for each interview was anywhere from two days to one week. After transcripts where reviewed for error by me, they were sent to participants for member checking. Analysis started after participants reviewed and confirmed that the transcripts were accurate, or after seven days had passed with no response.

The coding process was completed in four steps. Step one included downloading transcripts fromRev.com, member checking transcripts with emails, and printing the text using Microsoft Word once they were approved by participants. Then, I cut up the printed interview transcripts by looking for significant statements. Significant statements were identified by the key words/phrases used by participants or based on the context in which a participant shared their experiences. Step two involved clustering significant statements into envelopes based on the meaning associated with each statement. To cluster significant statements, I reflected on how each statement aligned with others in terms of context, idea, or by situation/circumstance. As the number of envelopes containing similar statements grew, significant statements from newer interviews were aligned with previously established envelopes. If newer statements did not align with envelopes that had been previously created, a new envelope was created reflecting the

notions/ideas of these newer statements. In total, this step in the process led to the creation of 29

envelopes. During step three, envelopes from 29 clusters were reduced into four themes. Step

three was done twice with the first process being disregarded upon realizing that the interview

questions shaped this first attempt at theming, rather than the essence of the interview represented

by the 29 clusters. Upon recognizing that themes were driven by interview questions, I decided

to take a step back and think about the essence of the interviews. During this second attempt to

identify themes, I reflected on the major points from all 10 interviews in their entirety, using most

significant clusters as a guide, and emerged four themes. This process of identifying emergent

themes was done by me with my committee chair assisting in refining my thoughts. Reflection

helped me narrow my 29 clusters to 12 clusters, and these 12 clusters effectively captured the

essence of participants' responses captured by my four themes. Step four was identifying and

contextualizing the emergent themes from participants' interviews and creating a written

description. Step four was completed by connecting with a textual description of participants'

interviews to thematic findings, which are detailed later in this chapter.

After analysis was completed, the educational tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) by

Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano, (2009), the framework for the study, is applied as a lens to

see how race presented itself in the participants' experiences. Each tenet was considered

independently and it was determined that four of the five tenets were present in participants'

experiences related to this study.

Emergent Themes

Analysis of participants' interviews resulted in four emergent themes which captured the

essence of their experiences. They are:

I. ***The Always Present, But Often Invisibility of Race***

II. ***Community College "Made Me"***

III. ***Stay in the Fight***

IV. ***No Regrets About Attending the PWI***

Each emergent theme was supported by a range of sub-themes. A summary of emergent themes

connected to sub-themes is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-Themes
I. *The Always Present, but Often Invisibility of Race*	(a) Elusiveness of Bias (b) Cannot Let Race Trap Me (c) Survival in Alignment with Communities of Color (d) Ignorance of Reality for African American Men
II. *Community College "Made Me"*	(a) Helped Me be a Better College Student (b) Expectations More Fluid than the PWI (c) Not Perfect, but Highly Beneficial
III. *Stay in the Fight*	(a) Find a Lifeline at the Institution (b) Purpose in Life (c) Positive Attitude and Positive Behavior (d) Motivational Pressure from Family/Community
IV. *No Regrets about Attending the PWI*	(a) Power of Relationships (b) Exposure to a New Climate (c) Financial Challenges and Return on Investment

Theme I: ***The Always Present, but Often Invisibility of Race***

This theme detailed the participants' experiences with visibility of race, and its invisibility.

While all participants discussed race and its contribution to their experiences in the PWI, they

did so in the context of both overt and unseen experiences. Six participants described race as

having little to no impact on their experiences at the PWI, while four participants expressed that

they perceived hostile, biased, or differential treatment because of their race.

Four sub-themes aligned with Theme I; three were identified based on positive experiences and one was tagged as negative. Beginning with positive experiences, in the first sub-theme participants addressed how participants were aware of stereotypical perceptions of African American men at the PWI, but reported not experiencing differential treatment based on their race. This sub-theme is referred to in this study as the *Elusiveness of Bias*. The second sub-theme addressed how participants did not let themselves get trapped by negative perceptions of their abilities based on their race. The third sub-theme discusses how participants felt they found support at the PWI from communities of color.

One sub-theme related to negative experiences that emerged from participants' experiences. The negative sub-theme is titled the *Ignorance of Reality for African American Men*. This sub-theme details participants' experiences with the ignorance of reality, shown by faculty/staff and participant's peers of African American men, African American people, and African American culture. Another aspect of this sub-theme is harmful experiences of participants with the "N-word" that occurred while at the PWI.

I(a). *Elusiveness of Bias*

In this sub-theme, participants articulated that while attending the PWI, they had not perceived any biased treatment based on their race. Most of the participants who felt this was their experience, also expressed that they knew the PWI can be a hostile place for members of their race, but reported no such treatment. One participant shared that he uses his communication skills to shield himself from this biased racial treatment at his PWI. Below Chris Tops explains his experiences with this sub-theme.

> At [PWI]? I haven't really had any bad experiences as far as race goes... I haven't came into contact with anything…, but every class that I've been into, like I said, I'm a

> talkative person. And I don't care who you are, I'm going to talk to you. And every conversation or every engagement I've had has been receptive. I haven't had anybody give me the cold shoulder or not want to talk to me….Coming from [hometown, large Westcoast city], there is, I wouldn't say boundaries, but there is stigmatisms of race there. I would say the people here in [Midwestern State] are really friendly as far as talking to and saying "Hey, how you doing?" when you walk by somebody. In [Westcoast State] they'll mean mug you or just look at you crazy, out here people are more friendly out here and they do talk to you more out here. (Chris Tops)

Chris Tops' experiences connects with the invisibility of race because while he recognizes that his experiences at his PWI in the Midwest have not been hostile, coming from the West Coast he is aware of how hostile the treatment can get. He anticipates and heads off potential hostile treatment with communication that mitigates the chances of facing racial bias.

Another example of participants reporting no perceived biased treatment based on their race was expressed by a participant in relation to his classes. James Patrick reported that while working in academic groups at his PWI, he did not feel any different treatment from other group members based on his race. He expressed that at first, they might not have expected him to do his work on the project because he is African American, but by the project's completion, he felt valued and built relationships with those who collaborated on the project with him.

> I feel like I really don't receive that much negative feelings when I work in groups then people get to know me. I worked in a group with all White people one semester, they were my best friends that semester and I was the one putting in all the work. They were helping, but when they first met me they might have not expected me to be the one working on the PowerPoint late at night and cleaning up the slides and editing all the slides and making sure everything was spelled right. At the end, they appreciated me, but I'm not going to say they had negative feelings about me, because they never even showed that. (James Patrick)

James Patrick's experience connects with this theme because his words indicated that he expected to be treated differently, and worked hard to prove that he was a reliable classmate. In the end, this experience was positive for him, but constantly negotiating the complexities of his racial identity and his academic abilities can be mentally exhausting.

I(b). *Cannot Let Race Trap Me*

In the second sub-theme, participants' experiences were related to the awareness of the subtle ways in which racial bias could hold them back while in higher education. One participant expressed that he has perceived racial bias because he has dreadlocks. Scott Wayne explains how ignorant peers would ask him questions regarding the authenticity of his hair or assume that his favorite music was by artists whose hairstyle is similar to his. For Scott Wayne, he needed to make a mature decision to not let these micro-aggressions derail him from living his life and being successful.

> Every now and again, I get those questions like you know, "Is that your real hair? Can I touch it?" "No, you can't." "Like, what type of music do you listen to? Who's your favorite Migo?" Like, I've literally had somebody ask me that. First of all, I do not listen to them because I'm Black with dreadlocks. They just assume that I listen to that type of music, but I don't know. The older I've gotten, the more I've like, just, I'm aware of what's going on, but I just stopped really caring and paying attention to all the nonsense that goes on, especially like the micro-aggressions from Caucasian people. (Scott Wayne)

Scott Wayne also reported that he needs to control his emotions or be perceived as yet another "Angry Black Man."

> I'm going to be perceived, yet again, as an angry Black man, so... I don't have to necessarily suppress it, just like, brush it off because like I say, after all this time, it's just like whatever, me at this point. I'm not really bothered by a lot of stuff. Every now and again you do got to check them, but it's like, for the most part, a lot of them just ignorant. A lot of people just ignorant, when it come to a lot of stuff…(Scott Wayne)

Both of Scott Wayne's experiences connect with this theme because his behavior and decision-making are rooted in perceived racial bias he has experienced and currently experiences. He must constantly self-regulate to keep himself focused on continuing his path to success.

Additionally, this sub-theme highlighted how participants try to see the bigger picture when they encounter racial bias in order to not be trapped by the negative circumstances faced by so many African American men. Jimmy Smith expressed that when he encounters any bias or

"hate," he tries to remain positive so that he can continue to grow. When discussing how the

world can be very hateful, he expressed that remaining positive and not letting the pressure of all

the hatred get to him is key.

> No hate towards our people, even the people that you would think is close to you with your same skin. There's just going to always be a lot of hate in this world, and it's like you just got to not be a part and just grow positive in positive ways and just be different in your ways from other people and stand out. (Jimmy Smith)

When Rodney Bell encountered biases associated with his race, it was challenging for

him, but he needed to remind himself that he had worked too hard for too long to let one bad

experience derail him. When discussing his encounters with this sub-theme, he added, "Right, to

let an ignorant dude bring me down and take me out of the success I plan on having in life"

(Rodney Bell). Rodney Bell has made a conscious choice not to let outside influences derail him

from his success in higher education.

I(c). *Survival in Alignment with Communities of Color*

The third sub-theme highlighted how participants found supportive spaces or commu-

nities filled with students of color while attending their PWI. This support was in the form of

registered student organizations, Black Greek Letter organizations, informal peer-to-peer

interactions, attending social events hosted for African Americans, and through relationships

built with staff members who also identify as African American.

The importance of their affiliation with Black Greek Letter organizations was reported

by two participants. Kevin Jones discussed how after he transferred, his fraternity gave him an

opportunity to develop authentic relationships with other members of the organization at his PWI.

> Initially, it wasn't too crazy, because when I transferred from my previous institution, I was already a [Fraternity Member] before. So kind of coming to this, it kind of gave me an opportunity to just have that organic relationship with the fraternity members here. So

that, from my personal experience made it a little bit better. Because even though I didn't know any of them prior to it, we had that automatic connection already. So it made it to make that adjustment a little easier. Obviously, not everybody's granted that opportunity. But for me personally, it's made it a little bit less of a challenge… (Kevin Jones)

Similarly, James Patrick reported that his membership with his Black Greek Letter organization and socializing with other undergraduate students, helped him feel supported and connected at his PWI.

Probably because of the Fraternity and the other people I put myself around. And then Black people on campus, like here, are real tight, we undergrads are real tight. We partied on Monday yesterday, we do everything together…so I feel supported by my peers and because I'm here and I know people. Outside of school like church and everything. (James Patrick)

Participants with affiliations with Black Greek Letter organizations reported that their participation in these groups leads to them building community while at the PWI. Connections to their networks gave them access to higher levels of social capital with other African American men and proved to be the primary reason they remained invested.

Rapport with African American administrators or staff members working at their PWI, assisted one participant in feeling connected to his institution. Jordan Brown expressed that he only meets with one advisor, an African American woman with whom he has been working since he transferred to his PWI. He says that her knowing his situation and understanding his background are important for him. Jordan Brown explained, "Yeah. I made sure this time around, just keep the same advisor my whole time, every time I just book the same person. Because she already knows my case" (Jordan Brown). By working with an African American administrator on-campus, Jordan Brown reported building a level of trust that helped elevate miscommunications during his time in the PWI.

I(d). *Ignorance of Reality for African American Men*

This sub-theme is related to negative experiences faced by participants who attend a PWI. The lack of awareness, shown by others at the PWI, related to African American men was expressed by multiple participants. This lack of awareness is defined by disregard for their needs, misunderstanding their challenges and barriers, fielding insensitive comments about circumstances affecting African American men, and having to address situations when others demonstrated biased toward African American men. In addition, a few participants reported experiences with the use of the "N-word," including being called the racial slur and being asked to use the word by peers who did not identify as African American. Beginning with the lack of understanding of African American men, Martin James explained how in class, at times his peers did not understand how their feelings toward African American issues are ignorant and undermines the struggles that many African Americans previously faced.

> Even if you talk about it in class, you got people that get ... that really get upset to the facts were like, if we're talking about Black history or something, it's certain people that get upset, like, "Why are you guys still talking about this? It happened so long ago, it's not the same thing. It's not the same thing now." But what they don't understand, it really is the same thing now. It's just being shown in a different way. Like class-wise, some people, they be butthurt, because they don't want to hear about it, but like I said, that's the understanding that they can't even accept. But they can only say, "Okay, well, we are sorry, we said we were sorry, blah, blah, blah." (Martin James)

Martin James' experiences reflects a lack of understanding by his peers regarding the circumstances that African Americans have had to overcome in America. During this experience, participating in class means that Martin James must confront the ignorance of his peers while at the same time control his frustrations about their insensitivity toward the plight of his ancestors.

Another participant expressed how he uses the fear of African American men as an advantage while on campus. Though he understands that this hostile treatment is also detrimental to his success, he continues to use whatever advantage he can.

> It honestly really doesn't bother me that people are scared of me because I'm Black. If anything, I think it's an advantage in a sense because when I'm walking down the street people just literally move out the way. I'm like, "All right. I ain't have to move." You know what I'm saying? But at the same time, like I'm on a college campus. I'm here trying to get an education. I'm not about to mug you in broad daylight, you know what I'm saying? (Scott Wayne)

Scott Wayne's experience connects with this sub-theme because he is knowledgeable about the notion that the lack of awareness or fear of African American men, in his opinion, helps him to maneuver campus. This survival tactic is helpful for him in the short term, but may have long-term effects on the perception of he holds about himself in society.

In addition, participants reported interactions with university police while attending their PWI. Kalen Taylor reported that for the first time in his life, he encountered police within a few hours of arriving at his PWI. In response, he facilitated an on-campus event for African American men to ask about their interactions with university police. The group was asked how many of them had had run-ins with university police while on campus and most of the African American male college students in attendance confirmed they had.

> So my question was, how many of you generally have had a run in with the police, or things of that nature since you've been here? There was not a single person… but there was not a person that had not raised their hand or stood up, and didn't have a story. So because of that, and then the follow-up question was, how many of that was your first time having an encounter? And I would say 95% of the people also raised their hand. And it was like being that we're at college and we're supposed to say, always with police. Because the university recognized that, it has calmed down. I would say that was one of the biggest things because it opened their eyes, to not only the divisions but also the police and things like that that was going on, to strategically our Black men of color… (Kalen Taylor)

Kalen Taylor's and his peers' experiences with university police highlights how racial bias while on campus presents itself. His university took steps to ensure this treatment did not continue but for him the damage had already been done.

Use of the "N-word" was reported by participants in relation to being called the racial slur and being asked permission to use the word by peers. Both experiences left the participants reportedly feeling negatively and aligns with ignorance toward understanding the reality of being African American. The first experience is from Rodney Bell who was called the "N-word" at the student recreation center while playing basketball. This was highly traumatic for him.

> I've literally had a White guy, it was all about basketball, we were just playing basketball five on five or whatever, he got mad at me about something, he threw the ball at me then proceeded to call me the N-word. (Rodney Bell)

In Martin James' interview, he explained that he had been asked by a fellow student, if he was fine with him using the "N-word." At first, Martin James was under the impression that his peer was bi-racial which lead to some uncertainty, but in reality, his peer was not. Martin James expressed that if his peer wanted to say the word, that his actions would have caused issues between them. He also says his peer was a cool guy, but for Martin, being asking to say the N-word demonstrates a lack of understanding of African American men.

> He told me one day, he said, "Well, can I say the N-word, because my dad is black." He changed it, he was like, "My stepdad is black." I was like, "No." I'm like, "It don't matter if he's black, no. That's nothing that you're supposed to say regardless." Then he was like, "Well, I think I have the ..." He kept saying, "I think I got the rights to say it. I know I can say it, blah, blah, blah." I was like, "Well, that's going to issue a problem between me and you, if it go that far." …..I mean, don't get me wrong, like he was a cool dude, he was nice. It was just, he was pushing, pushing the button for something that shouldn't have went the way it should've went. I just feel like it's certain people that don't really understand the racial…the race aspect of being a Black male. Some just think it's cool, but some don't understand it. It's a big problem because if you don't understand it, you wouldn't be able to step a foot or toe into a Black man's shoes. So that's one of the big ... I just think they really don't understand it, that's one of the big thing for me. (Martin James)

Participants' experiences with the N-word communicate the harmful ways racial slurs and bias affect them. While attending college both participants needed to shield themselves from the negative effects of either being called, or being asked to say it, bringing race to the forefront of their lives. In alignment with Theme I, the constant negotiation with racial bias supports the notion that all times race is present, but effects participants in various invisible ways.

Theme II: *Community College "Made Me"*

Theme II captured participants' experiences with community college and its impact on them after they successfully transferred to the PWI. Nine participants felt that community college influenced their experiences in the PWI. Several participants compared community college to a training ground or practice run—a space for them to learn the expectations of higher education before entering the PWI.

Three sub-themes emerged in relation to the community colleges' ability to mold and shape participants' experiences. The first sub-theme was that community college helped them understand how to be a college student, both academically and socially. The second sub-theme was that expectations in community college were different and somehow seemed more fluid or flexible in comparison to the PWI. The third sub-theme is that for participants, community college experiences were not perfect at all times, but that the experience was still highly beneficial for them.

II(a). *Helped Me Understand How to be a College Student*

The first sub-theme addressed how participants viewed the community college experiences as essential in helping them understand how to be a college student. Several participants reported

that community college helped them build good habits for being successful in college. For example,

Chris Tops reported that community college was great preparation before attending the PWI. In

community college, he had to change his mindset from high school and the community college

environment was a great place for him to do so.

> Community college played a big part in my experience because it kind of prepped me for what I'm doing now, as far as like getting ready for the papers, my study habits. Really focusing on... this is not high school anymore, nobody's going to care if you go to class, nobody's going to care if you do your homework, it's all up to you. You have to really put in the work. You have to really put in your time management and you have to really focus in on if you really want this. Because nobody's going to tell you what to do, or "Okay, you want to fail this semester? Fail this semester," like that's up to you if you want to fail so it really gave me the preparation of the work ethic, to know that you got to put in the work if you want to pass this class. (Chris Tops)

> Jordan Brown expressed that school is easier for him now. Since attending a community

college in 2014 and then successfully transferring to the PWI, he reports feeling very comfortable

with the expectations of school.

> Now that I've been to school for so long, because I graduated in 2014, so I've been in school for damn near six years. School is easy to me now because I've been doing it for so long, but for sure, going there, it prepared me for it for sure. (Jordan Brown)

Chris Tops and Jordan Brown reported that community college made them stronger students.

Attending community college helped them understand how to make themselves successful

before entering the PWI.

> Community college also helped build self-confidence in participants. Martin James

reported that while attending community college, it was difficult for him academically, but his

professors never gave up on him. He reported that attending was great for his self-esteem

because he felt that others saw something in him that he did not see in himself.

> but yeah, those professors are definitely hard, but they stayed on me, I guess. So they knew what they saw, like I said, there's certain people that you run into, see stuff in you that you don't even see in yourself, and they knew what they saw, and they just stayed on me, stayed on me. (Martin James)

For Martin James, the confidence built in the community college set participants on a path of success moving forward in higher education. Though participants did not spend a major amount of time in the community college, relationships with professors, mentors, and academic knowledge gained contributed to their long-term prosperity.

II(b). *Expectations More Fluid than the PWI*

The second sub-theme addressed the difference in academic expectations experienced while attending a community college, in comparison to the PWI. Kalen Taylor reported that his experiences in the community college gave him a false sense of college.

> I've had really good, but really bad. In comparison to transitioning from community college, I'm going to say even, it's nothing like ... what I say, it's like going to community college first kind of gave me a false sense of what college would be like. And I got here, and it was nothing like that. You had to work a lot more…get acclimated with the online servers and doing, teaching yourself outside of class. (Kalen Taylor)

Similarly, when asked if community college prepared him for his transition to the PWI, James Patrick provided the following statements about community college expectations.

> I mean, I actually have to put the work in here [at his PWI]. It's stuff that I care about now so it makes it easier but you actually got to go because they mark you down whether you come or not. I got a class where if you miss more than three classes they start taking off half a letter grade. That's not that class anybody is going to miss, if you're doing all the work and you got an A, then you missed four classes now got a C, B or something like that, you going out like that. I'm going to all my classes now, I'm not missing class. When I was at community college, I would feel like if I miss, I wasn't going to miss anything, but here if you miss class, they are only teaching this stuff one time. They are not going back, they aren't answering questions for you. They're like, "Why weren't you in class?" Stuff like that. Being here helped me be more confident, unlike community college. (James Patrick)

Both participants reported feeling like community college did not accurately prepare them for what was to come at the PWI. This knowledge served as a benchmark for participants with ambitions of transferring to the PWI to compare their experiences too.

Additionally, Rodney Bell was not happy with the fluidity of expectations at the community college level. Being provided extensions and accommodations, he was surprised he still received good grades after turning in assignments late.

> No. It was definitely ... the expectations at community college are definitely more flexible than they are at [his PWI]. Even as far as homework, even as far as teachers working with you, teachers helping you. At [his community college] I had a project that I didn't finish in time, and I just talked to her and she let me extend it. She extended it for two weeks. That's crazy to think about, a two-week extension. At [his PWI] unless you have a doctor's note or anything, you can't get that. They're deadlines, they don't care. I think [his PWI] is a lot more stricter, as they should be... (Rodney Bell)

Rodney Bell reported that he was frustrated with this lack of accountability in the community college. He stressed that he wished that his community college had better prepare him for the PWI. Like many other participants, the knowledge and awareness gained in the community college was better than not having any knowledge at all. The knowledge gained from attending the PWI was invaluable, but often participants reported that academically, the community college did not communicate meet the expectations of the PWI. This

II(c). *Not Perfect, but Highly Beneficial*

The third sub-theme highlighted how participants valued community college as a path to earning a bachelor's degree. Participants based their experiences on being able to meet the academic expectations of college after leaving high school, saving money while in maneuvering different pathways in higher education, the value of their first exposure to higher education while attending community college, close proximity from home, and more. In all, the consensus from participants was that community college added value to their higher education journey. James Bronson explains how community college exposed him to post-secondary expectations while transitioning from high school.

> It gave me a foot in to see what college was kind of really like. Like the shift from high school to college, everybody's like ... you already know you've got to pick up a higher workload. Going to community college first, then to a four-year institution is like ... it seems like it should be the way. (James Bronson)

Jimmy Smith explains how his route from high school to community college, then to

earning his bachelor's degree was not a "fairy tale," but in the end, he ended up at the same point

as many of his peers and with much less debt.

> I was that guy in high school, sophomore, junior year, I knew I can go to community college. A lot of people... It's crazy, a lot of people didn't know that, though. A lot of people probably see me now, they'd ask me, "Are you a senior?" Then some people who don't know my story... I'm telling you my story. They don't know my story. They're like, "Oh, you spent four years here, blah, blah, blah." I don't say nothing. I just be like, "Just college." Little smirks. It's like, "You took another route from me. My route was different." We the same people, but I've saved money and saved a lot of time, stress in my life growing up just to get to the same point you're here at. Just to be right here. (Jimmy Smith)

Attending community college and meeting professors helped one participant see that

professors are relatable and approachable human beings. Building relationships with professors

helped lower his anxiety when transitioning in to the PWI because he felt less intimidated by

them after attending community college. Chris Tops reports that getting to know his professors

helped him better understand that professor are allies, not adversaries.

> And then really opened me up to just seeing different people and meeting different people, and talking to different people and seeing different professors and seeing how the professors are people at the end of the day. They're not drill sergeants or nothing. Like, they're really people at the end of the day and they really care for your well-being. If you care about the class, they care about you getting an A in the class. It really prepared me for that. (Chris Tops)

Similar to other participants, Kalen Taylor and Rodney Bell reported that getting to know their

professors at community college on an intimate level was great for their success moving forward.

> I said, transitioning from community college honestly is quite hard, I felt unprepared, because on the intimate level, at community college you were more so on an intimate level with your professors and could possibly be one on one. There weren't large lectures, and everyone seemed to care so transitioning in to [PWI] it's what you make it. Each

class you have to go, honestly to make that connection you have to go above and beyond first years, having that one on one level in community college. (Kalen Taylor)

Rodney Bell reported that the smaller feel of a community college helped him develop a better understanding of course content while interacting with professors at community college before transitioning to a PWI.

> I think community college made me aware of what I wanted to do and what I wanted to go into before I got to [PWI]. It allowed me that ability to kind of ... community college is smaller. It allowed me the ability to have that kind of interaction with the teachers that I wanted. The one we should have had at [PWI], but we didn't. It allows me to have that interaction with the teacher and to really be able to understand how I studied. So once I went into college, once I went into actual four year university program, I was able to kind of take up the slack and not drop the ball or not be confused or be overwhelmed by the process because I kind of got my techniques down at a community college. (Rodney Bell)

All three of these participants engaged with professors before attending the PWI and gained knowledge pertaining to how to effectively communicate in a post-secondary setting.

For James Patrick, attending community college was not required, he simply wanted to be closer to home while he decided what to do with his life after high school. Attending community college gave him a chance to plan for his future and transition at a pace conducive of success for him.

> And I felt like I was holding myself back because I didn't really have to go to community college, but I was there because I didn't know where I wanted to be. It made me appreciate being home, being in the calm, not having bills or anything like that. (James Patrick)

James Patrick used his time in community college to discover what he wanted to do with the rest of this life. As a young adult, community college provided the perfect environment for him to discover his passion and move forward on the right path.

The mentoring relationships built during their time in community college helped lay the foundation for the success at the PWI. Chris Tops explained how while running track in community

college, he was coached by a former Olympic track star and maintains this relationship with his

mentor to this today.

> Man, I just think community college was a great opportunity for me. Like, I ran track in community college. That was a great experience. We got to travel. My coach was…he was like the greatest coach I've ever had…., those relationships I built with them, they still exist to this day. Just relationships I built in community college and meeting people. (Chris Tops)

Along the same lines, Jimmy Smith reported that his mentor working at his community college

assisted in his transition and gave him advice about the academic expectations of the PWI.

> Time management, academically, there was good people there to set you up. Like I had this... Actually, it's funny. When I worked for the TRiO Lab, there was lady in there. Her name was Brandy. She always used to tell us like, "When you graduate, go to the next level, you're going to have to step up the game a little bit." She used to tell me like, "Oh, your grades is pretty good, so I feel like you would be on the right track when you touch there." They said it'd be slightly different, seeing more people, bigger classes, moving around, staying off campus to get to campus. (Jimmy Smith)

In all, most participants saw some good in attending community college and did not shy away

from recommending that others take this route. Though their experiences consisted of aspects

that could be deemed positive and negative, the knowledge gained was beneficial to their success

moving forward in higher education.

Theme III: *Stay in the Fight*

Theme three provided insights into participants' motivation, drive, ambition, and resilience.

Use of terms related to resiliency or some variation was used during all participants' interviews.

On the surface, participants related this theme to academic success but on a deeper level, many

aligned elements of this theme with their entire life. After facing much adversity (life and school),

not giving up and "staying in the fight" was salient to participants' experiences and their success

in higher education.

Extracted directly from participants are quotes that speak to their ability to "Stay in the Fight." Beginning with embracing failures, one participant said that in order to find out who are you, you have to deal with failures in life.

> And I feel like we all have failures in life, but those failures help us be who we are, help us find out who we are. I think it's very... it's very educational for every person to find out who they are and once they find out who they are and to be confident in that person that they are, and then once you find that I mean, sky's the limit. (Chris Tops)

Another participant discussed failing tests and how he did not let short-sighted losses derail him from his ultimate goal.

> It's so much stuff that's consuming people. They don't take the time to look at the bigger picture of things and just kind of slow down and understand that this is all a process of being here. You don't graduate overnight. You may fail three tests in a row, don't stop, don't stop. (Rodney Bell).

Lastly, Kalen Taylor discusses how he did not want to live life based on the low expectations of African American men in society; he wants to enjoy a fulfilled life. This is his response in relation to excelling and changing the narrative for African American men in higher education.

> I'm like, but there's so much more I can do, there's so much more I can excel at doing, so I don't want to stay in pond of fish swimming … so the expectation of what they thought I could have done, or thought black men can do, it's so low. (Kalen Taylor)

The three examples above represent participants' personal testimonies or experiences with staying in the fight. In all, their reliance and staying focused to finishing their career in higher education is key to being successful.

There are four sub-themes related to participant's experiences with staying in the fight. The first sub-theme summarized how while at the PWI, seeking out safe spaces, allies, and agents assisted participants in remaining diligent. The second sub-theme brought forth how continuing their education and attending the PWI enhanced purpose in life for participants. The third sub-theme discusses how a positive attitude, mature conduct, and self-affirming behaviors

kept participants determined to achieve their collegiate goals. The fourth sub-theme addressed how pressure from external influences gave participants the motivation to press forward by any means necessary.

III(a). *Find a Lifeline at the Institution*

In this sub-theme, participants discussed that while attending their PWI, support from staff people, institutional programs, and registered student organizations (RSO) assisted in their success. This sub-theme differs from sub-theme I(c) because it highlights how support came from institutional offices and programs, as opposed to groups comprised of other African American students.

Finding support on campus was very important to participants. Rodney Bell reported how a family member, employed by the PWI he attended, assisted and supported him while enrolled at his PWI. "She was the big ... she was helping me so much, and helping me meet people, helping me get acclimated to the school." (Rodney Bell). Additionally, another participant reported that the multicultural student affairs office at their institution assisted him most. When asked where he spends most of this time, Kalen Taylor responded;

> In the student multicultural center, I'm really here right now. A lot of students, even if we're just on campus, this is where we are. I can say I spend a good 75% of my time here. And the other time is in my apartment. So it's like I spend more time here than I do at home, just because of the atmosphere, and the people. And because it also has been a great support for me. (Kalen Taylor)

These participants reported they found strength and support within the institutional office and with administrators at their PWI. This was essential to their development and continuation in higher education.

For Martin James, the support at his PWI came in the form of a federally funded program called TRiO Student Support Services (SSS). While participating in the TRiO SSS program, Martin James reported feeling connected, engaged, and surrounded by authentic people. He says unlike other social circles in higher education where you may have to put up a front or "wall," within TRiO Martin James likes that he can be himself and met others like him.

> It's been good. TRiO is one of the best social groups, I feel like. Because they put up so many events where you…. like you have to interact… Then, yeah, TRiO, just going to the events, making sure I'm able to be social, I'm able to tell people about me, tell people about ... just be real with people, instead of just running into somebody and you really got to put up a wall. With TRiO, it's like you don't have to put up that wall because most of these people that's in this room is in the same boat you in. (Martin James)

Martin James' experiences align with this theme because in an effort to be successful in higher education, he found a resource that was extremely valuable to him. The TRiO SSS program gave him strength and it provided ability to build authentic relationships that helped him remain enrolled at his PWI.

III(b). *Purpose in Life*

The second sub-theme addressed how attending the PWI added or contributed to enhancing participants' purpose in life. Some reflected on how attending a PWI was something that not many others from their community had done. Others discussed how earning a college degree would further their goals of creating mentoring programs, providing for their family, or landing a dream job. For Chris Tops, furthering his education meant taking advantage of an opportunity to change his life.

> Especially where I come from, coming from where I come from, like I said, I've been through a lot, man. I survived being a gang member. I've survived going to jail, coming out of jail. I've survived having a high school diploma to getting my Associate's degree to, not even thinking I'd get an Associate's degree to coming to [PWI], not even thinking I can come to [PWI], and getting that. I survived [home state]. That's a whole another...

in a state, like you said, where we come from, most people, you get one chance. And I think I got more than one chance to make it out. I think, yeah, at this particular time, yeah, I am successful. (Chris Tops)

During his interview, Martin James discussed how after earning his degree he plans to return to his hometown to start a mentoring program for youth, giving him a chance to use his education to give back to his community and leave a legacy.

> Well, one, my mentoring program. After graduation, I want to have ... We started the mentoring program, but we just don't have the building. I want to have the building, I want to have the setup, I actually want to have sponsorships by the end of next summer. That and I just want to ... I really just feel like changing the way people think about us. That's the big thing about my part of the mentoring program, is changing the way people think about us. People just think we play basketball, we play football, we sell drugs, we gangbang, this and that. But you put that stuff on the youth that ain't even been in that position to be considered gangbangers and stuff like that. When you put that stamp on them, it's like, that's a kick in the face to them. Then I feel like the success for me is making sure that they can hurdle that stamp, they can hurdle that instead of just getting stuck into it. Regardless of what people say, you can still be a doctor, you can still be a black lawyer, you can still be whatever you want to be. It really don't matter. Seeing them jump over that would be my dream. (Martin James).

The ability to attend college helps Martin James fulfill one of his lifelong goals of giving back to his community. For him and others like him, attending college not only means earning a degree, but it also means added value to their lives.

> Participants also discussed that attending college would set them up for better financial situations later in life. Jordan Brown talked to me about how attending college keeps him out of trouble and focused on earning an income without having to jeopardize his future. In the end, earning an income by getting a college degree is the best option for him.

> I don't know, I just don't want to be broke. I don't want to have to go down no illegal path. For me, it's either school... I don't see me working at no McDonald's and nothing like that. So it's just school or doing something illegal. So I know school is best option by far. Money is my goal in life, to have money. Not even have money, just be well off. (Jordan Brown)

Although not many participants reported that earning large income was the primary reason for attending college, Jordan Brown was adamant about it. His purpose for pursuing higher education was to set himself up for better financial success in the future, adding to his greater purpose in life of being financially stable.

III(c). *Positive Attitude and Positive Conduct*

The third sub-theme addressed how a positive mindset helped participants be successful at their PWI. Participants referenced religion, self-regulation, and work ethic when discussing their attitudes and behaviors toward being at the PWI and working to earn a bachelor's degree.

Remaining strong in faith is essential to the success of participants like Rodney Bell, who recently graduated from his PWI and began working full-time. When asked about being successful at his PWI, this was his response.

> On the same token, you've just got to have some things go right for you. You've got to have God kind of bless you. I'm a heavy believer in ... and I don't want to get through religion because I realize that's not the topic, but I'm just a heavy believer in whatever you put in will come back, whatever you put in, whatever work you put in, however you treat people, God will bless you. (Rodney Bell)

Remaining strong in faith by maintaining a positive attitude was salient to about half of the participants in this study. Many times, strong faith meant they has developed a mindset conducive of success because they felt God had put them on a successful path, so the path they are currently on in life must be part of a greater plan. In all, faith played a large role in shaping the positive attitudes of participants who reported spirituality as important to them.

For participants like Martin James, self-discipline and self-reliance were the positive aspects of the mindset he embodied while enrolled in at the PWI. For him, providing for his current and future family is his primary reason for persevering in higher education.

> I just had to think about where ... basically, where I come from. I don't have the help other students ... I don't have the financial help, the mental help, like everything I do is on me, it's by myself. If I feel like I ain't got food in the fridge, but I got to go to class, I'll probably end up like, "I got to put food on my table before I go to class," type of thing. That discipline that I learned, it took me back and was like, "Well, if you put ... If you go to class, get your papers, get your degree, you wouldn't have to worry about ever putting food ... ever having to rush to put food on your table, because you'll have a means to do so. You'll have the means to have your refrigerator full all the time." (Martin James)

Similarly, having an attitude that reflects gratitude, and developing an appreciating for the chance to earn legit money was salient for some participants. Jimmy Smith provided that his attitude towards education is to work hard to get things done.

> I'm starting my own business and graduating and investing in a lot of other businesses. People with my skin complexion... It makes me happy at the end of the day. We're doing something that they don't teach us to do, but you've got to be wise and strong enough to get it done. (Jimmy Smith)

Jimmy Smith also added a passionate testimony about how other members of his family spent many years in prison. While reflecting on his life, he says that he has been beating the odds his whole life.

> You don't understand. My grandfather spent 35 years in prison. My dad was in prison half of my life. I've been beating the odds…. A lot of Black kids don't see their... I've been through all that. I didn't grow up with everything. My mom had to make some things happened. She did what she always had to. I'm beating the odds, so now you're getting older and seeing it in this type of frame, we don't supposed to be here. I mean we've been beating odds our whole life, but it only made me stronger though. (Jimmy Smith)

Both Martin James and Jimmy Smith altered their mindset to ensure they had success at their PWI. Without an option to give up, many participants had to adjust their attitudes and behavior to earn success in higher education.

III(d). *Motivational Pressure from Family/Community*

The fourth sub-theme addresses how expectations from outside influences boost the drive

to success for participants. Beginning with family, all participants reported that their family

supported their decision to enter higher education and assisted them in different ways during

their time in college. Participants also reported feeling compelled to earn a degree to keep up

with other members of their family.

> My mom like me being here because my auntie graduated here. My whole family went to
> a [Midwestern State] university. That was the biggest thing too. I forgot to say that. My
> whole... In my family, the women always graduated. That was one thing I always said.
> Women always graduated and all of them, from my cousins to my sister, graduated from
> a school in [Midwestern State]. I got a cousin graduated from [PWI]. I got another cousin
> that graduated from [PWI]... (Jimmy Smith)

Similar to Jimmy Smith, James Patrick uses the education success of others in his family to keep

him motivated to not give up: "Yeah. Some people in my family went to college but not too

many. I'm here, I really got to do good because my sister went here and she did good. My sister

had a 3.9" (James Patrick). Family competition kept participants motivated to persist. Pressured

by the fear that they might become a "black sheep" of the family, participants used the success of

their family to keep motivated.

In relation to family but in a much different arena than most participants is Chris Tops,

who reported that he is supporting his family while working full-time and attending his PWI.

> Yeah, definitely got to try. So my daughter moved to Texas, she moved to Texas a couple
> years ago with her mom so that was kind of challenging, that was like an external challenge
> of, ooh that was draining, of trying to stay in contact with her, make sure she is okay and
> not worrying about her, and then I had my twin sons and they were born four months early.
> So that was like the biggest challenge of like, making sure they were okay. They stayed at
> the hospital for four... it was five months... they stayed at the hospital for five months so
> that was a challenge of dealing with that, and then dealing with school, and then I just
> had a new one and that's just a new challenge because it's been five years since she had a
> baby, but yeah. Just those, those external challenges, those have been the only ones that
> have been... but kids are a blessing. I think they come when God wants you to have them,

so I don't…. [think] He'd put nothing on my plate that he doesn't think I could handle, I think it was something definitely I can handle. And it gives me experience of being a leader as far as like leading them and gives me a chance to do what's right. I can't just do what I want to do anymore, like I can't just not go to school anymore, I have to go. This is what I have to do. There're no ifs, ands, buts about it. (Chris Tops)

Like other participants, Chris Tops views his family as motivation to stay strong and finish school. The stress to provide for his family fuels his desire and will ultimately make his successful journey even better.

Lastly, Martin James uses the external perceptions of his ability, after coming up from modest beginnings, as motivation to continue and complete his education. For him, being by himself and learning to live on his own filled him with the tenacity to keep working toward his bachelor's degree and helped him learn to ask for help.

For me, so I grew up with nothing, but I ... I guess I'll put that stamp in the back of my head, as far as, "Okay, I don't feel like no one's going to do anything for me, so I got to do everything by myself." So that was my ... I felt like that was my mindset to go through life, but I had to change that mindset, too, because that's not a good mindset to have. Especially being by yourself, so you're going to be a lone wolf your whole life and that cuts off your network and that cuts off your family ties, your relationship ties, that cuts off everything because you want to be by yourself. I had to learn how to change that mindset and it was kind of hard because with me being like that for almost six some years, it's hard to change that little thing about myself. (Martin James)

In all, participants reported that pressure from family and stress that they put on themselves actually motivated them to keep persisting in higher education. Ultimately, their struggles have made them stronger.

Theme IV: *No Regrets About Attending PWI*

Theme IV addressed how participants had no regrets about transferring and attending a PWI. For different reasons, all participants expressed that they did not regret attending their selected PWI, even though they were aware that the PWI environment could be hostile for them.

Three sub-themes were present in relation to Theme IV. Networking, relationships, and leadership opportunities comprise the first sub-theme, and addressed how participants valued being able to connect with new people while at the PWI. The second sub-theme is exposure to a new climate and how while at the PWI, participants gained an experience they would not have otherwise gotten if they had not attended. The third sub-theme addressed participants' experiences with various financial circumstances and the return on their investment from attending a PWI.

IV(a). *Power of Relationships*

The first sub-theme details how participants found opportunities to grow their network by attending the PWI. Many discussed that participating in RSOs and other school sponsored programming helped them build relationships. Others talked about how being on campus surrounded by members of the higher education community allowed them to build social capital.

Participants with high social capital like Scott Wayne reported that meeting people in the African American community at his PWI was not difficult because he attends events on campus.

> I mean, meeting other African American students here on campus, it isn't really that hard, you know what I'm saying, because you'll bump into them at events that are really geared towards African American students, like you know Black Student Union, they'll have a cookout or something like that. That'll be a place where you can go and meet other Black students on campus, especially if it's just your first year here and you don't know anybody… (Scott Wayne)

In addition, participants felt that meeting people on campus and growing their network, sets them up for success later in life. Martin James discussed how while playing basketball at the his PWI's recreation center, he built social capital.

> Then just like, even with the old heads that I met, it's like, they didn't ... haven't known me for awhile, they just know me from playing basketball. For some of them to say, "Yeah, if you need a reference letter, I'll write you a reference letter." That's something, and these people that I haven't even known for probably a year. So it's like, that's a great way to run into people, network. This is a director, saying he's going to write you a reference

letter. What does he ... In your mind, you're thinking is writing it, like, "What he got to say about me? What is there to say about me?" Type of thing. Because he hasn't known me for this long. But a whole page full of good stuff about you. So like, the stuff that you ... I feel like the energy that you put off is the energy that you get back. (Martin James)

Networking and relationship building is something that was enjoyed by many participants attending the PWI. An abundance of resources, exposure, and new faces to interact with are a few of the reasons that the PWI was great for participants to find themselves and grow.

IV(b). *Exposure to a New Climate*

The second sub-theme was related to being at a PWI and being exposed to new surroundings. Participants reported that being in a new environment was good for their development and kept them on the right path to success. Jimmy Smith discussed how being at a PWI exposed him to a more positive culture than in his hometown.

> This is a university so it's different…but at the end of the day, school is... For me, this is just a way for me to stay out of trouble and not be out doing stuff that I'm not supposed to be doing. If I was back at home. If I was... I have to be honest, if I was back at home, I probably would not be doing nothing good with the amount of friends that I knew what they was doing. This is really a way out for me to be here taking classes and getting my life on the right track. (Jimmy Smith)

Along the same lines, coming from his hometown, James Bronson enjoys the fact that his PWI is different than where he grew up. When asked why he remains in college, he said,

> Probably just being around a different culture. Like just being away from [hometown] and the whole ... where I was born….I don't know. Basically like the landscape really. [hometown] you just feel like houses, buildings, potholes and shit. Up here it's just like cornfields, lakes, trees. (James Bronson)

> Exposure to other cultures at the PWI was important for participants. Jimmy Smith

discussed how he enjoys the opportunity to connect with others with different skin colors at his

PWI. When asked about building relationships on campus, this was his response.

> Pretty easy. I'm not the type... Anybody who knows me even in high school, I'm always interactive, always met new people. I'm outgoing. Anywhere I go, I'm going to speak, talk, follow each other on social media, interact, go out, see you out. I'm always speaking. That's how you know, it's a respect level thing. Getting to know people, getting out more. Meeting new people here has been... It clicked on. I met people from... Not even my skin, same skin….pretty cool people coming from [hometown]. I'd say that's the good, getting out and just meeting new people from different cultures, different races. (Jimmy Smith)

This new climate that the PWI provided gives participants a broader perspective on community and relationships. For many participants, the new PWI climate was nothing like environment they grew up in and for many the change was refreshing for them.

IV(c). *Financial Challenges and Return on Investment*

The fourth sub-theme addressed how participants dealt with the financial circumstances and viewed the return on investment from attending the PWI. Experiences were positive and negative, but all participants made it a point to not let financial barriers prevent them from meeting their goal of attending a university. Scott Wayne discussed how he feels that his PWI is not doing enough to expose African American students to the financial resources needed to be successful.

> I feel like something, they don't really, what they don't really do for a lot of, what I think, African American and minority students is talk about the cost of being here, really. They don't provide enough financial aid for students to stay here. I don't think you realize how many people I met last fall, not even this past spring, last fall, who couldn't come back in the spring because of financial aid problems, you know what I'm saying? They're not providing enough money for these kids to stay here. Like, yeah, you accepting them, but you not giving them enough money to stay here, so it's like, what's really the point of accepting people? (Scott Wayne)

Even while being critical of the financial resources set aside by his institution for African American students, he still feels that the power of a higher education is life changing. His passion is rooted in this notion and by making his voice heard, he is hopeful that more resources will be dedicated to assisting students in the future.

Kalen Taylor explained that while acting as a campus leader, his organization was able to secure more financial capital for African Americans at his PWI. Kalen Taylor talked about how his involvement led to a large donation designated for scholarships for African Americans at his PWI.

> I really love it. That's why I'm heavily involved with the program…, as well as featured on the Steve Harvey Show, and he gave us a huge donation to our initiative, that he had superseded what the university regularly gives us. A lot of people don't know that, but it's so amazing, and it's so great what we can do. As well as having that national coverage, as well as having the eight students that he sent to [PWI], the elite eight, under full scholarship, and knowing that we have that opportunity to make sure, they don't have the financial struggle, but we have to make sure that all of the other struggles that come along with being at [His PWI], we either prepare or try to alleviate for those students. (Kalen Taylor)

Kalen Taylor is fortunate to be able to use his leadership platform at this PWI to grow capacity for other students at his PWI. He was adamant that he wanted to leave a legacy on his PWI campus and securing funding for scholarships is a great way to do so.

James Patrick is fortunate to be a recipient of a promise scholarship, so the financial barrier that many other college students encounter does not affect him. Below he describes his experience with the scholarship program.

> The promise is a scholarship in…from anonymous donors where if you are a student in the …public school system, from grades K-12, you get 100% of the promise. From 2nd to 12th you get 95%, from 6th grade and up you get 85%, if you go all of middle school you get 75%, if you go all of high school you get 65% of your tuition covered and fees for 130 credits worth of undergraduate degree. (James Patrick)

James Patrick is extremely fortunate to have the promise scholarship. Like him, many participants secured scholarship dollars that helped lower the financial burden of their education.

In conclusion, the four emergent themes effectively captured the essence of participants' experience while attending a predominantly White university after successfully transferring a community college. Though all participants' experiences did not comfortably fit into every

thematic category, when all interviews were considered, these four themes best captured the overall essence of the participants' powerful experiences.

Emergent Themes Connected to Interviews

A table of the four emergent themes from this study are connected to participants' interviews can be found in Appendix J. Theme I: *The Always Present, But Often Invisibility of Race* was present in six interviews positively and was present in four interviews negatively. Theme II: *Community College "Made Me"* was present in eight of the 10 interviews. Theme III: *Stay in the Fight* was present in all 10 interviews. Theme IV: *No Regrets About Attending a PWI* was present in all 10 participant interviews*.*

<p align="center">**Application of Five Tenets of Critical Race Theory to Themes**</p>

Yosso et al.'s (2009) five tenets of CRT for educational research were applied after data analysis was completed to understand the contributions of race on the experiences of participants. I did this by thinking critically about how each tenet of CRT aligned with the emergent themes from this study, attending to how they paralleled and differed from each other. These tenets are:

(1) Race in America is connected to racism,

(2) Challenge to the dominant majority or the status quo is required,

(3) There must be a commitment to social justice which exposes interest convergence,

(4) The significance of the centrality of experiential knowledge, and

(5) An interdisciplinary perspective is essential.

Race in America Connected to Racism

This tenet describes how race and racism are endemic to and permanent in American society (Yosso et al., 2009). Additionally, Solórzano (1997) provided that racism has four dimensions. They are: "(1) it has macro and micro components; (2) it takes on institutional and individual forms; (3) it has conscious and unconscious elements; and (4) it has a cumulative impact on both individual and groups" (p. 6).

Theme I: *The Always Present but Often Invisibility of Race* aligns with aspects of this tenet. Even when some participants reported experiencing little or no biased racial treatment, they reported being aware that they could potentially encounter racial bias at any time. Also, participants who reported having experiences with racial bias, understood the social ramifications of being an African American man at the PWI. This also meant that they may encounter ignorance while enrolled at the PWI and understood that they would need to overcome these invisible barriers.

Kalen Taylor's experience provides an example of the presence of this tenet, grouped under sub-theme I(a). He explains that while facilitating an on-campus discussion in response to campus police interactions with African American students, he found that he and many of his peers experienced their first encounter with police while on campus. His experience and the experiences of others at their PWI align with this tenet in that race and racism are always connected. As African American men, they are constantly subjected to racial bias based on the color of their skin. This reality was regardless if these men are college students or not.

Challenge to the Status Quo

A Critical Race theorist challenges the traditional claims of objectivity, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Solórzano, 1997). They also argue that "traditional claims are a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society" (Calmore, 1992, as cited in Solórzano, 1997 [p. 6]).

Theme III: *Stay in the Fight* and Theme IV: *No Regrets about Attending a PWI* overlap with aspects of this tenet. Participants of this study reported that they knew how society views the educational abilities of African American men and are working extremely hard to challenge these notions of their ability. Participants also reported that earning a bachelor's degree would change the trajectory of their life long-term, which will allow to them to continue to challenge the status quo in the future.

An experience that aligns with this tenet is from Jimmy Smith's experiences, which are grouped under Theme III: *Stay in the Fight*. He explained that his father and grandfather both spent time in prison. Therefore, he feels being on the right side of the law benefits him and that beating the odds has only made him a stronger person. His counter story of success challenges the status quo laid by other members of his family and is leading him to a life filled with more success and prosperity. Jimmy Smith knows that him being on the right side of the law challenges many people's assumptions about what African American men do with their lives.

In relation to Theme IV: *No Regrets about Attending a PWI*, this Challenge to the Status Quo connects to the experiences of two participants grouped under sub-theme IV(b). They explained that being exposed to different people and scenery at their PWI is enjoyable for them. Literature findings expressed that the PWI is hostile for men of color, especially African American men (Harper, 2012), but here are participants that enjoy being on campus and interacting with

those unfamiliar to them. Their experiences on campus challenge the notions of previous literature and demonstrate that African American men can and will feel welcomed on PWI campuses.

Social Justice That Exposes Interest Convergence

"CRT has an overall commitment to social justice and the elimination of racism" (Solórzano, 1997; p. 7). In the struggle towards social justice, the abolition of racism is part of a larger goal of ending all forms of subordination. This tenet did not readily align with any emergent theme for this study. Not one participant brought forth notions of social justice related to exposure of interest convergence by the majority.

This is not to say that this tenet was not present in the experiences of participants. It very well could have been the participants intended to go to college to help abolish racism and eliminate notions of inability put forth by the majority to keep African American men locked in subordination. This information was not captured by emergent themes, nor was it reported in interviews with participants.

Centrality of Experiential Knowledge

"CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of men of color is legitimate, appropriate and essential to understanding, analyzing…racial subordination" (Solórzano, 1997; pp. 6–7). "CRT views this knowledge as a strength and draws explicitly on a person of color's lived experiences" (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1989, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Olivas, 1990, all as cited by Solórzano, 1997 [p. 7]). Findings related to Theme I, Theme II, Theme III, and Theme IV are congruent with this tenet. Participants' experiences in community college added to the knowledge

that they carried with them to the PWI; whether or not these experiences were race-related could not be concluded by this study due to its design.

In relation to Theme I: *The Ever Present, but Often Invisibility of Race*, Scott Wayne explains how during past experiences he learned that showing to much emotion effects how others respond to him. In this interview, he explained that his past experiences as an African American man has led him to be negatively perceived if he shows too much emotion in certain situations. Therefore, now he realizes that expressions of race (e.g. Angry Black Man) must be monitored very carefully to mitigate any negative consequences based on his behavior.

Theme II: *Community College "Made Me"* and all three sub-themes, align with this tenet. Participants reported that community college exposed them to higher education and was a way to lower their anxiety. As African American men, participants moved through community college, learning their strengths, understanding their barriers, and building relationships with peers and administrators. They then took this knowledge with them to the PWI and used it to be successful in the PWI. As African American men in higher education it was extremely important to understand the self in order to move forward with success.

This tenet connects to participants' experiences with Theme III: *Never Give Up,* in relation to sub-theme III(c), which reports that attitude and behavior helped participants become success-ful. They learned that having a positive attitude got them further in life than being negative. Developing an attitude aligned with success ultimately led to success for them. Do not quit on yourself—higher education can be difficult, but in the end it will all be worth it.

This tenet also connects to Theme IV: *No Regrets about Attending the PWI*. Similar to the previously mentioned emergent themes that align with this tenet, the presence of experiential knowledge is fluid in the experiences of participants in this study. Participants entered the PWI

after transitioning from community college with the awareness that they are African American

men and could encounter biases due to their race. Yet while recognizing they could encounter

racial bias, they reported a deep appreciation for their opportunities in the PWI and expressed no

regrets about their decision to enroll. Additionally, participants recognized that had they not

attended the university, that they may have engaged in other behaviors. Many of the behaviors

mentioned by participants were not beneficial to building a good life or may have required them

participate in illegal activities for financial gain.

Interdisciplinary in Perspective

"CRT challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analysis and insists

on analyzing race and racism in the law by placing them in both historically and contemporary

contexts using interdisciplinary perspectives" (Delgado, 1984, 1992; Garcia, 1995; Harris, 1994;

Olivas, 1990 as cited by Solórzano, 1997 [p. 7]). I determined that based on its definition, that

this tenet was not present in the experiences of participants in this study. Participants discussed

their participation in higher education from a disciplinary perspective, but did not discuss their

experiences interdisciplinary or across academic disciplines.

In all, three of the five tenets of CRT overlapped with the themes and thus the experiences

of participants in this study. CRT was applied to themes from this study to understand the role of

race in participants experiences.

Chapter IV Summary

This chapter covered the results of my study capturing the experiences of African

American men in Predominantly White Institutions of higher education, who successfully

transferred from community college. It began with the purpose statement and research questions for this study, followed by an overview of the data analysis process that led to results. Data analysis included a coding process that took four steps to complete and led to a total of four emergent themes that captured the essence of interview data.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study captures the experiences of African American men at predominantly White institutions of higher education, after successfully transferring from a community college. Chapter I introduced African American men in higher education as the focus of this research and contextualized the need for counter stories of success for the population. Chapter II detailed a deep dive literature review, highlighted by studies in higher education related to African American men's experiences, transfer students, and previous research conducted using Critical Race Theory. Methodological procedures and aspects of this study's phenomenological design are covered in Chapter III. Chapter IV reported the results of data analysis from interviews with 10 African American men; which lead to four emergent themes. Additionally, in Chapter IV the five educational tenets are applied to emergent themes which help us to understand how race presented itself in the experiences of participants.

The primary research question for my study was: How do African American men enrolled at PWIs, after successfully transferring from community college, describe and make meaning of their experiences? My specific sub-questions include:

1. How, if at all, does identifying as an African American man shape their experiences at the PWI?

2. How, if at all, did attending a community college shape their experiences at the PWI?

3. What helped them to be successful at the PWI?

4. What were challenges at the PWI, and how did they overcome those challenges?

Findings

This study captured the essence of participants' experiences represented by four emergent themes. Also, three of the five tenets of CRT were determined to be present in participants' experiences. This study's themes were: Theme I: *The Always Present, But Often Invisibility of Race;* Theme II: *Community College "Made Me";* Theme III: *Never Give Up;* and Theme IV: *No Regrets About Attending a PWI.* This study's connections to the tenets of CRT were: (a) Race in America Is Connected to Racism, (b) Challenge to the Status Quo, and (c) Centrality of Experiential Knowledge.

Connections to the Literature

Theme I. *The Always Present, But Often Invisibility of Race*

Participants' experiences were consistent with empirical findings pertaining to racial identity, racial development, and experiences with racial bias for African American men attending PWIs. In close alignment with literature findings is that the African American men in my study embodied a feeling that they needed to "prove others wrong" (Moore et al., 2003, p. 7) when it came to their academic abilities. Participants reported an awareness of biases and stigma surrounding the educational skills and abilities of African American men. Studies on African American men proving others wrong reported that African American men worked extremely hard to counter these low expectations of their academic abilities. This is also in alignment with what was found in the experiences of participants in this study.

Theme I is also consistent with the findings in Brooms and Davis' (2017) and Reid's (2013) studies, which uncovered a connection between understanding self-racial identity and

having success in higher education. In the experiences of seven participants, I determined that their understanding of the complexities of identifying as an African American man assisted in shaping their success at the PWI. Even further, some participants reported that they gained a stronger affinity in their awareness as racialized beings after attending the PWI. This was because while on campus, they began to see how important remaining connected to their African American identity was to them, after transitioning from their home communities.

Unfortunately, participants' experiences also aligned with negative findings regarding race and its invisibility/elusiveness while attending a PWI. Harper's (2015) study reported that African American men are threatened by subtle and overt racial stereotyping while enrolled at a PWI. In the current study, six participants reported experiencing hostile treatment while attending the PWI, based on their race. Harper's study provided that communication skills acquired outside the classroom effectively mitigated and assisted in the resistance to these stereotypes. Two participants in this study reported similar experiences, expressing that they use their communication skills to lower the effect of potentially facing racial stereotypes while enrolled at their PWI.

Additionally, Singer (2016) reported that African American men face racial bias while on campus. Though Singer's research was conducted with athletes on campus, the study provided insights into experiences for African American males while attending a PWI. Similar to Singer's study, a participant reported a faculty member singling him out in class because of what he felt was racial bias. This same biased treatment was consistent with what Singer reported by African American athletes and their in-class experiences, that professors would single them out as trouble-makers or problem students without really knowing who they are.

Boyd and Mitchell (2018) reported that African American students who internalized stereotypes reported feeling negative emotions. This finding is consistent with the experiences of

participants in this study who reported that it can be emotionally exhausting to constantly have to confront biases about their academic abilities. Many participants used these negative feelings to motivate them to do better and be positive, but the weight of having to do so could potentially be great. This study cannot fully conclude whether or not these internalized emotions lead to negative feelings of self but I do feel that the impact of this treatment greatly affects participants' self-esteem while enrolled at a PWI.

Theme II. *Community College "Made Me"*

Participants' experiences were somewhat consistent with empirical findings related to the experiences of African American men and the importance of community college. Baber's (2014) study found that African American men felt supported while transferring to the community college from high school, but also felt extremely stressed by the process. Two participants in this study reported that they knew how to transfer to a PWI from community college, but said that the process was stressful and confusing at times. The other eight participants reported that moving from community college to the PWI was not very difficult. Additionally, they reported that an unofficial transfer agreement resource was used by advising staff in two-year institutions to provide them with information on what courses would transfer to four-year institutions. Participants found staff at their community college who helped ease their transition to the PWI by providing information and resources to them (Allen et al., 2014; Blaylock & Bresciani, 2011; Bush & Bush, 2010; Chrystal et al., 2013; Coney, 2017; Wood, 2012).

Consistent with the findings of Coney (2017) and Wood (2012), institutional satisfaction in community college increased persistence in higher education. For African American men, Coney reported that quality of services received at the community college was the best determining

factor of persistence while at the community college. Similarly, eight of the participants in this study reported that community college was helpful to them in some fashion. Whether or not they were satisfied with the services received in the community college cannot be concluded by this study, but overall, participants reported that attending community college was beneficial.

Wood (2012) reported five practices that reduce apprehension and facilitate positive faculty-to-student interactions with African American males while in community college. Of the five, the practices of "Initiate and Maintain Contact" and "Be Affirming and Encouraging" were consistent with the experiences of participants in this study. Several participants reported that while in community college, faculty or staff members provided academic support and developed personal relationships with them while attending community college. Participants also reported that after interacting with faculty at the community college level, moving forward, interactions with faculty at the PWI became much less intimidating. Also, while working with faculty and staff at the community colleges, participants reported receiving motivation from these individuals. For African American male participants represented in this study, staff members working at community college filled mentoring roles and solid faculty relationship helped boost their self-confidence academically.

Theme III. *Stay in the Fight*

Participants' experiences were consistent with several empirical findings related to the experiences of African American men in Theme III. By remaining in higher education, participants in this study reported being focused, motivated, and determined to meet their educational goals. Their experiences are consistent with the findings of Gipson, Mitchell, and McLean (2018) and Scott, Taylor, and Palmer (2013), who reported family support as a key

motivator for participants attending community college. For example, one participant in this study stated that without the support of his family, he would have never continued with his education after attending community college. Other participants reported using the educational success of other members of their family as motivation or competition to continue in higher education. Family competitions, or the desire to want to remain on par with others in the family, was very common among the participants of this study. This family competition brought out the best in participants and pushed them towards higher levels of academic success. Many are becoming the first male in their family to graduate with a four-year degree; others are blazing a trail for younger nieces and nephews and some are keeping up with spouses or siblings. In all, using family as a motivator was salient to the experiences of African American men who participating in this study.

This study's findings mirror those of Villarreal and García (2016), who reported that African American men are highly motivated by their academic and career goals to continue in higher education. Participants discussed using a multitude of examples such as beating the odds, financial stability in the future, providing for family, and more as motivators to remain in higher education. Future goals, laid out by participants for themselves, kept them focused and motivated even when they feel overwhelmed by higher education. Goal-orientation made participants resolute or helped them remain focused on the ultimate goal of graduation.

Studies by Ballard and Cintron (2010) and Moore et al. (2003) reported on attitudes and behaviors embodied by academically successful African American men. Both studies found that participants developed an attitude referred to as "Prove-them-Wrong" syndrome, discussed earlier in this chapter. In comparison, this study captured counter stories of success in the experiences of African American men with interviews designed to uncover success mechanisms.

In alignment with Ballard and Cintron and Moore et al.'s studies, the participants in this study wanted to prove they have the ability to participate and be successful in higher education, so they developed a mindset that assisted them in reaching the level of success they are currently experiencing.

This study aligns with Museus' (2008) findings regarding students who join groups with others from their same cultural background. Museus reported that for college students, affiliation with cultural groups helps strengthen and maintain strong relationships on-campus. Four of the participants in this study are members of African American serving registered student organization at their respective campuses. Two more participants reported that they are not formally involved with registered student organizations at their PWI campus, but that they regularly attend events designed for African American students. Therefore, attending events designed for those from similar racial backgrounds, and establishing relationships on campus and was salient to the experiences of participants in this study.

Theme IV. *No Regrets About Attending a PWI*

Several articles reported that participation in Black Male Initiatives (BMI) increased sense of belonging for African American men enrolled at PWI (Brooms, 2018; Clark et al., 2015; Henningsen, 2005). Henningsen's (2005) publication discussed African American men's experiences with a BMI called "brother to brother." The program was designed to encourage comradery within a group of African American men at one PWI campus. Similarly, to Henningsen's publication, participants in this study reported that the support they received from others African American men on campus is key. For some, just seeing other African American men at their PWI assisted in helping them feel less isolated. Connections to others with similar

racial background was especially important for the two participants who are affiliated with Black

Greek Letter organizations. Clark et al.'s literature review provided that African American

fraternities and sororities served to solidify bonds among Black college students. Clark et al.'s

review also adds that cascade mentoring and connections with real role models assisted African

American students in feeling engaged while enrolled at PWI campuses. Participants represented

this study who reported connections with mentors while enrolled at PWIs and community college

assisted them greatly. These mentors provided counsel and helped build confidence in their

academic abilities. Lastly, Brooms (2018) reported that participation in Black Male Initiatives at

PWIs increased an African American male's sense of belonging at the PWI. For participants in

this study, sense of belonging was reported for those who participated in programs or initiatives

aimed at serving African American students.

This study's findings are also consistent with the findings of Luedke (2017) in that

participants reported that they were supported by staff of color while at their PWI. Participants

relied on institutional office and family members working at their PWI to provide them with

support while on campus. One participant stated that without this type of support, he would have

not been able to graduate and move forward with his life.

Contributions to the Literature From This Study

Vertical Transfer to PWI from Community College Was Not Difficult for African American Men

Participants in this study reported that transferring in higher education was not very

difficult for them. They discovered information that helped ease their transition, built relation-

ships with staff members, and used other resources to assist them such as transfer agreements.

Previous studies highlighted how difficult transferring in higher education can be for African American men as well as all transfer students (Bush & Bush, 2010; Coney 2017; Scott et al., 2015, Villavicencio et al., 2013). These studies reported that students encountered difficulties with course credits transferring, encountering transfer shock, experiencing issues with maneuvering the higher education pathways, African American men feeling a lack of support from faculty members in comparison to their peers, and issues with the presence of the deficit perspective for African American men moving through higher education. Unlike these aforementioned studies, participants in this study overcame these challenges and ultimately became successful during their higher education career. Their stories of success add a new dynamic to literature regarding the challenges of African American men and transfer students completing vertical transfers not captured empirically before now.

Family Competition Positively Contributing to African American Men's Success in Higher Education

Participants reported that the pressure to keep up with the educational success of other members of their family, motivated them to continue to move forward in higher education. Motivated by the fear of failure, or that they would be considered less successful as other members of their family pushed them to overcome challenges during their academic career. Upon searching the research databases which I have access to, I found only one article conducted in the last 20 years which examined the effects of sibling rivalry and degree attainment (Bauer & Gang, 2001). This study focused on family dynamics, household budget, or resource allocation among children in the household. Though their findings did not highlight how African American men use family competition/rivalry to boost degree attainment, their study did highlight who household budget effects the return on education for both men and women. Therefore, regardless

of how many boys or girls are in a German family, educational achievement among members of the unit remained consistent.

Furthermore, the current study adds a base of knowledge to growing literature for African American men in higher education and their experiences with family competition. Without finding any studies conducted on this topic in the last 20–30 years, this is an unexplored area. It would be beneficial to design studies that attempt to understand how this competition within African American families can impact increased levels of success in higher education for African American men.

Implications for Future Practice

When the experiences of participants in this study are considered, there are two primary recommendations for practice in the field of higher education. First, higher education must continue to develop and enhance initiatives around stories of success and academic achievement for African American men. To effectively do so helps to shift the conversation about African American male achievement from a deficit, leading to practices geared toward success by members of the population. The second recommendation is that higher education must work to destigmatize the academic abilities of students who attend community college and transfer to four-year universities. This recommendation is not based on just the experiences of African Americans, but is being brought forth due to the changing climate of higher education. Moving forward, community colleges will play a vital role in shaping the climate for students as they progress through college. In relation to the reported experiences of participants in this study, community college plays critical role in molding high quality students. In addition, the negative idea that transfer students are somehow less qualified than first time in any college students is outdated.

Stories of Perseverance and Academic Achievement for African American Men

This study was able to capture counternarratives of successful African American men in higher education, not typically found in literature. After connecting with participants, I further recognize the importance of community for African American men on the campuses they choose to attend (Harper & Davis, 2012; Reid, 2013). Failure see others from their same racial background as themselves represented on the campuses will be detrimental to their success at their respective institution.

Specifically, there must be more African American male representation in higher education (Garibaldi, 2007; Harper & Davis, 2012; Reid, 2013). This sentiment is reflected empirically at all levels of education and that feeling is consistent with my findings in this study. Moving forward institutions will need to make a conscious effort to address the fact that currently, faculty and administrators are not as diverse as the student populations which they serve (Simmons et al, 2013). For participants in this study, finding individuals (faculty, staff and administrators) from the same background as them proved difficult but rewarding.

Another recommendation for practice in higher education is facilitating intentional programs, initiatives, and supporting departments aimed at creating spaces for African American men to be successful (Ballard & Cintron, 2010). Although many of the participants in this study reported not experiencing any overt negative experiences at the PWI, they addressed the importance of safe spaces for members of the population. All too often, African American men feel isolated upon first arriving to PWI campuses; intentional programming would assist in lowering these feelings and hopefully will lead to African American men being retained in higher education more effectively (Brooms, 2018; Reid, 2013). This recommendation is to elevate a conversation that

has been at the forefront of literature on African American men for the last 20 years (Garibaldi, 2007; Singer, 2016).

Though finding the African American men who participated in this study proved difficult at times, the difficult search was worth the reward. Uncovering participants' experiences, hearing their stories, and connecting with them on an intimate level was uplifting for me as a researcher. For practitioners, I encourage them to not give up, to seek out successful African American men at their institutions at all costs and they too will feel the sense of pride and accomplishment that I felt while working with the population. Again, their stories of success and academic achievement are key to changing the deficit narrative plaguing African American men in higher education.

Negativity runs rampant in discussions pertaining to African American men in the realm of higher education (Harper, 2015). I respect the notion that we have to understand the negatives in order to create more positive circumstances, but I am suggesting that there be more balance in discussions pertaining to the topic. I encourage practitioners to provide African American men and others that support them in higher education something positive to look forward to. Some suggestions are highlighting the value added to their lives by attending PWI, how PWIs are actually safe environments, conducive of academic success for African American men, or sharing stories of success like those presented in this study.

Finally, participants in this study are African American men enrolled at PWIs, who successfully transferred from a community college. They all share the same racial categorization, but come from many different backgrounds and circumstances. Groups of people are often lumped together for convenience. The tendency to group populations together to try to understand them should not only focus on negatives. Ultimately, I hope that one day higher education reaches a

point where a person's racial category, gender, disability status, or any other identity marker is not a determining factor in success related to a student's collegiate experience.

Destigmatizing Community College and Transfer Students

While conducting this study, I found that the negative stigmas associated with community colleges and transfer students must be addressed. Higher education must alter the notion that attending community college or identifying as a transfer student somehow lowers a student's ability to be successful academically in higher education. Participants in this study discussed their experiences in community college and most of them reported that their time spent in community college was beneficial to them. The academic skills and knowledge gained from attending a community college built confidence in participants, even if they felt that academically, community colleges may not have been comparable to the PWI. When participants eventually transferred to the PWI, the confidence gained from their experience in community college served as a foundational reference point as they entered the PWI. Essentially participants gained a lot of self-understanding by getting their feet wet in a post-secondary environment before moving on to a large predominantly White university.

Community college students who plan to transfer have unique positionality compared to first time in any college (FTIAC) students. For example, many transfer students may have learned how to manage course work, have broken bad academic habits, and have found various strategies to pay for college (Chen, 2018). By being able to learn and grow in community college, students who make a vertical transfer to a four-year institution (including PWIs) are then more likely to succeed because they have an awareness of what it takes to be successful in higher education. Often transfer students are not given an opportunity because some elite colleges

have not altered the ways in which they review and consider transfer student applications (Sánchez, 2019). This could not be further from the truth; transfer students are great students just like first time in any college students. To blanketly label transfer students as a group of students who are less likely to succeed is oppressive and unethical.

As students begin to make decisions about whether or not to attend college based solely on financial circumstances, the community college may be the most viable option for those students from lower- or middle-income backgrounds (Bell et al., 2016). With the rising cost of higher education, many academically sound students will choose alternative routes to degree attainment and attending community college to save money will more than likely factor into that decision. Higher education must recognize that there are quality students who attend community college and plan to transfer. Students who begin in community college will benefit institutions with increased enrollment and students benefit from saving money.

More recently, there have been social media campaigns by administrators at community colleges in an attempt to destigmatize community colleges in the minds of potential college students (Barrington, 2019). Similar to this study, these campaigns focus on the positive aspects of community colleges and attempt to change the negatives typically associated with them. Practitioners in community colleges have been advocating for years, but more recently received attention by expressing the value of attending community college and advocated that the students they serve are not less equipped for success in higher education. Moving forward, I recommend that four-year intuitions including PWIs also work to challenge these notions of transfer students' abilities. As stated before, to do so benefits students, community colleges, and four-year institutions alike.

Implications for Future Research

This phenomenological study sought to capture and understand the experiences of African American men in PWIs, who successfully transferred from community college. Though the four emergent themes effectively captured the essence of the participants' experiences in this study, there is still a vast amount of research needed to fully understand the circumstances and mechanisms of success contributing to the experiences of African American men in higher education.

Understanding the Invisibility of Race and African American Men's Mental Health

Beginning with Theme I: *The Always Present but Often Invisibility of Race*, it is important to identify and understand effects of the invisibility of race on the mental health of African American men attending PWIs. On an everyday basis, African American men who are successful are subjected to the mental stress of being African American and maintaining an optimal level production when it comes to maintaining that success. This may lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and more. Further studies should explore the relation-ships between maintaining a success-driven mindset and the pressure that puts on an African American man's mental health and well-being.

Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) published an article about Racial Battle Fatigue and its effects on African American men. Racial Battle Fatigue "is an interdisciplinary theoretical frame-work that considers the increased level of psychosocial stressors and subsequent psychological, physiological, and behavior responses of fighting racial microaggressions" (Smith et al., 2011, p. 68). Essentially, their study reported that the higher the higher educational attainment is for an African American man, the greater the impact of Racial Battle Fatigue will be for him. Studies

like theirs are important to continuing to understand the effects of racism on African American men who elevate to higher levels of education.

With respect to mental health and well-being, my question is what are the coping strategies used by successful African American men at PWIs? By identifying what types of strategies are used, recommendations to other African American men can be made by university leaders, staff, and administrators. Moving forward, research designed to uncover these coping strategies used by successful African American male transfer students can greatly benefit the population and research community.

Critical Race Theory and the Five Tenets

Though CRT and the five tenets by Yosso et al. (2009) are great models for understanding the contributions that race has on the experiences of people of color in educational settings, I do feel other conceptual frameworks are needed to study the experiences of participants in a study designed like this one. For this study, I often found it difficult to weave the complexities of CRT and its tenets into this study authentically. After data analysis was concluded, I applied the tenets of CRT almost on a prescriptive basis, to understand the contributions that race played in the experiences of participants. This proved effective but left me with questions about the other ways, outside of the CRT tenets, that race may have been explained as it pertained to my participants' experiences. For example, for many participants relationship building on campus was extremely important. The tenets of CRT can only contextualize these relationship building experiences to the limits by which the parameters are set by the tenet's definition. I found while conducting this study that many of the African American men represented in this study gained life-long peers as a result of stepping out of their comfort zone and building bridges with those

outside of their race. This intercultural relationship building is a key area, something that the tenets of CRT have little ability to address.

CRT provides a somewhat pessimistic view of race and how bias impacts racialized people. The language of CRT has its origins in law and legal studies, where those who had no voice needed to be provided some way to be heard. Though I feel this is important for social justice and social equality, the optimist in me finds it difficult to hold back my feelings about wanting find more racial hope embedded in certain aspects of CRT. In all, I recommend that higher education scholars work diligently to develop a more helpful perspective on race in educational studies, one that honors race and does not case it in a negative light.

Johnson (2016) published an article titled "Somebodiness and Its Meaning to African American Men." In this article he presents a phenomenological study focused on "Somebodiness" and how it can be used to create a positive depiction of African American men in higher education. This study reported that each participant felt like they are somebody due to a sense of worth, purpose, and community. They also felt they must be something to somebody because their God had created them this way; therefore, their existence is all part of a greater plan. Though I am not an evangelical researcher, it is refreshing to come in contact with other research designed with a more optimistic research methodology and framework. Moving forward, I do believe that more studies like Johnson's must be conducted if we hope to move the needle from a deficit mentality in African American research.

Broader Setting for This Study

In the future, it would be beneficial to capture the experiences of African American men in PWIs, who successfully transferred from community college in a broader setting than the

Midwest. Many of the participants in this study were recruited from a specific region in the United States and questions about those attending institutions outside of this study's target area are not examined. Moving forward, it would be interesting to see how the experiences of African American men enrolled in PWIs across the country, who successfully transferred from community college, are different from those in this study.

Success, Not Deficit

Finally, there must be more research of higher education conducted with African American men which highlights their ability to succeed (Harper, 2015, Harris & Wood, 2013, Scott et al., 2013). With this study, I hoped to add a beacon of hope for what some consider a difficult population to serve. Like other scholars who publish articles focused on African American men in higher education attempting to change the narrative from negative to positive, it was lonely at times. At many points, I questioned whether my study further contributed to the problem or the solution and will this study be respected or rejected because I am an African American man. While reflecting as I conducted this research, I became aware that this study challenges notions of abilities of African American men put forth by many other researchers. This awareness is both alarming and powerful. As a researcher, I have decided that no longer will I listen to rhetoric about African American men and their inabilities. It is my responsibility to act—I will be the change I want to see in for my people. I encourage other researchers to also step out on a limb and do the same. Together we can make higher education a more equitable and valuable place for African American men.

I have often seen visualizations of success being compared to the growth of a carrot, where on the surface, we see a green stem growing tall and healthy; what is unseen is the base of

the carrot growing underground, pushing, forcing, and maneuvering its surroundings to grow larger. This metaphor is true for many African American men in higher education. We see the diplomas conferred, the positions awarded, and the façade that success creates on the surface. Underneath is struggle, growth, development, and hard work, all of which are more important than what is above the surface. We need to honor what is unseen by successful African American men. Awards are great, but what did that process take?, what did these African American men sacrifice?, and how did this journey to success make you them who they are today? I am recommending that when researchers seek out stories of success, that we also honor the struggles that accompanied African American men in their journey. A healthy understanding of these struggles gives context to what it takes to earn a college degree and possibly will lead to other African American men developing skills necessary to overcome all obstacles to educational success.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses of a study. One potential weakness reflected in this research was nine of the 10 participants attending the same Midwestern PWI. When I put out the call for potential participants, I did notice that most of the participants came from one institution, so I attempted to use other networks outside of those I am most familiar with. It was to no avail, as I only was able to contact one participant who attended a different institution than the other nine participants.

An additional limitation is the definition I created and used for successfully transferred students. After exhausting a search for a consistent and usable definition for successful transfer student, I created one based on what was found empirically and based on advice from a respected researcher on the topic. For this study, the created definition served to fit well within its designed

parameters, but others may have a different opinion of how transfer students' success should be defined. For example, other scholars may define successful transfer students by degree attainment, credits completed, class rank, career outlook, or by whatever the transfer student defines as success.

**Final Reflections of an African American Man Conducting Research
on African American Men**

As a successful African American man in higher education, I feel grateful for the opportunity to capture the experiences of successful transferred African American men in my study. This work has given me great purpose and filled me with a sense of pride. When reflecting back on what I have accomplished with this study, it was tough but completing this dissertation provided a rush of excitement and positive emotions.

Getting to this point in my educational career was a lofty accomplishment, but working with my participants made all the heavy lifting worth it. To really hear participants' experiences, to feel and understand the circumstances they had to overcome, was motivating and encouraging for me. I often found myself reflecting on my time in higher education and saw similarities in the experiences of participants. This contact helped me feel less isolated while completing this dissertation, respecting the fact that as African American men, we are not alone in what we go through.

During the process of planning, conducting, analyzing and completing this study, I found myself feeling as if finding successful African American men is like searching for water in a desert—meaning that I knew they are present in higher education, but finding them proved more difficult than I originally realized. I felt myself become discouraged at multiple points during this study due to not being able to find African American men who qualify. This quickly faded when I

found more participants, but the feeling of isolation in finding participants was very emotionally draining for me. I cannot help but think about the isolation that my participants may have felt in the past. Similar to me conducting this study, many are doing something that is foreign to them. With few others to rely on, participants in this study have shown me that remaining tough and accomplishing your goals is key to the human experience. As far as conducting research, I wish I had done more peer debriefing during this whole process. Based on how this study was initially structured, I only planned to peer debrief after analysis, but discussing my designed and with peer would have proved as beneficial as it had when I did it during analysis. Moving forward, peer debriefing during the whole process of conducting research will occur in all scholarship and research produced by me.

Most importantly, this research has led to a deeper appreciation for the African American men who came before us. I realized how great of a feat being successful in higher education can be for many of my brothers. The path laid for me by previous pioneers and scholars is filled with failures and shortcomings of those who were unsuccessful. Like those successful African American male academics before me, this journey has not always been an easy one, but I have consistently tried to remain positive and focused in the face of adversity. The opportunity to tell the story of participants in this study is a great one and I will cherish these memories that I gain conducting this study for the rest of my life.

Conclusion

The success stories of African American men can be difficult to find but are present in higher education. This phenomenological study was framed using CRT and captured the experiences of African American men in PWIs, who successfully transferred from a community

college. Datum captured by interviews and analysis led to the creation of four themes, which

captured the essence of participants responses. The four themes are Theme I: *The Always Present,*

But Often Invisibility of Race; Theme II: *Community College "Made Me"*; Theme III: *Stay in the*

Fight; and Theme IV: *No Regrets About Attending a PWI*.

There are also recommendations for practice and research based on the findings of this

study. The recommendations for practice focus on strategies aimed to uncover stories of

perseverance and academic achievement for African American men and to destigmatize

community colleges and transfer students. The recommendations for research are to conduct

studies to understand the invisibility of race and African American men's mental health;

identifying frameworks other than CRT, and the five tenets to understand the contributions of

race in the experiences of African American men in higher education; conducting this study in a

broader setting than the Midwest; and conducting more studies that focus on success, not deficit

for African American men.

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Appendix A

Western Michigan University, Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: July 29, 2019

To: Donna Talbot, Principal Investigator
Keenan King, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: IRB Project Number 19-07-27

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "The Experiences of African American Men at Predominantly White Higher Education Institutions, after successfully Transferring from a Community College" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., *add an investigator, increase number of subjects beyond the number stated in your application, etc.*). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

A status report is required on or prior to (no more than 30 days) July 28, 2020 and each year thereafter until closing of the study.

When this study closes, submit the required Final Report found at https://wmich.edu/research/forms.

Note: All research data must be kept in a secure location on the WMU campus for at least three (3) years after the study closes.

Appendix B

Consent Form

Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator:	Dr. Donna Talbot
Student Investigator:	Keenan A. King
Title of Study:	The Experiences of African American Men in Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education, After Successfully Transferring from Community College

STUDY SUMMARY: This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study, and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you want to take part in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The purpose of the research is to capture the experiences of African American men enrolled at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) of higher education, who successfully transferred from community college and will serve as Keenan King's dissertation for the requirements of the Higher Education Leadership program. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to be interviewed and confirm interview transcriptions. The time requirement for this study is 60-90 minutes to complete an interview and 20 minutes to approve the interview transcriptions. Possible risk and costs to you for taking part in the study may be answering personal questions and dedicating the time to participate. There is no cost to participate in this study. A potential benefit of taking part in this study is a $10 Amazon Gift card. Your alternative to taking part in the research study is not to take part in it.

You are invited to participate in this research project titled "The Experiences of African American Men in Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education, After Successfully Transferring from Community College" and the following information in this consent form will provide more detail about the research study. Please ask any questions if you need more clarification and to assist you in deciding if you wish to participate in the research study. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by agreeing to take part in this research or by signing this consent form. After all of your questions have been answered and the consent document reviewed, if you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form.

What are we trying to find out in this study?

The purpose of this study is to capture the experiences of African American men enrolled at PWIs of higher education, who successfully transferred from a community college. Educational research has shown that African American men perform academically among the lowest of any subgroup in higher education. Many studies have looked at increasing the level of achievement for African American men, but many are conducted from a deficit approach or negative approach, which blames the African American men for their shortcomings. To counter this deficit, this study will only examine the experiences of those who have been successful. This study is significant because a study of this kind has not been be conducted previously.

Who can participate in this study?

Individuals who self-identify as African American and male. Participants must be currently enrolled in a Midwestern Predominantly White Institution and must have begun higher

education in community college. Participants will have spent at minimum one year in community college (or have completed ten credits) and have spent at minimum one year in the PWI.

Where will this study take place?

Data for this study will be gathers either in person or using electronic software. Data collected in person will be collected in an agreed upon private locations. Data collected electronically will occur via online software formats such as Skype and FaceTime.

What is the time commitment for this study?

Participants in this study will be interviewed for 60-90 minutes. After the interview is completed and transcribed, participants will be emailed a copy of the transcripts asked to confirm their accuracy. This should take approximately 10-20 minutes.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?

Participants will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Then participants will be asked to confirm interview transcripts that capture the details of their experience. Within the email asking participants to confirm interview transcript, they will also be asked send read receipt, which will be contained in the heading of the confirmation email after interview concludes.

What information is being measured during the study?

The researcher is simply interested in participants lived experiences in a predominantly white institutions after transferring from a community college. Responses from the participant's experiences, which emerge from interviews will be measured during this study.

What are the risks of participating in the study?

The risks for participating in this study are minimal. Participants will have to dedicate time to be recruited, participate, and help produce results for this study. Participants will be asked questions that may seem invasive or personal which may cause them to be reluctant to answer.

The names of participants will remain confidential. All participants will be asked to assume a pseudonym or alternate name/identity. Data will be aggregated, and analyzed across participant responses. Data will not be analyzed by individual responses.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

The participants of this study will get to use their voices to help higher education administrators understand the experiences of African American men in higher education.

Are their financial costs associated with participation in this study?

There are no financial costs associated with participation in this study.

Is there any compensation for participation in this study?

Participants of this study will receive a $10 gift card to Amazon during member checking, after completing the interview.

Who will have access to this data collected by this study?

Data from this study will be collected and used for Keenan King's doctoral dissertation. Keenan King and his doctoral committee will have access to the information in this study. Only Keenan King will know the real names of participants and confidentiality will be maintained to the extent to which it is allowed by law. After data is collected, the participant will only be referred to by their pre-selected pseudonyms.

What will happen to my information collected for this research after the study is over?

The information will be securely kept in a locked location for a minimum of three years and then destroyed.

What if participants want to stop participating in this study?

You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study.

If you have any questions, contact the student investigator, Keenan A. King by email at Keenan.a.king@wmich.edu. You can also contact the primary investigator, Dr. Donna Talbot by email at donna.talbot@wmich.edu.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Dr. Donna Talbot at 269-387-3891 or donna.talbot@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

_____
Please Print Your Name

_____   _____
Participant's signature   Date

_____
Pseudonym/Alternative Name

Appendix C

Recruitment Email

Hello (NAME),

Greetings, I am a doctoral student here at Western Michigan University working on my dissertation. For this study, I need to find participants who meet the following criteria.
(a) Self-identify as African American
(b) Self-identify as male
(c) Began higher education at a community college
(d) Currently enrolled in a Predominantly White, 4-year Institution

For this study I will interview participants who meet the criteria for this study (approximately 60-90 minutes) about college experiences. Upon the completion of the interview and review of interview transcript, participants will receive a $10 amazon gift card.

This study has been approved by WMU Institutional Review Board.

If you or someone else you know is interested in participating, please complete this email which includes the screening survey attached to the link below.

https://forms.office.com/Pages/DesignPage.aspx?auth_pvr=OrgId&auth_upn=kdh6403@WMICH.EDU&origin=shell#FormId=USJ2Jal6ckyQXzm_AmqKhOl3od_fREFDmMa491oua4FUQ0oxUzVDNTlMVjY0QlVHSFIzVVFMSjJOUi4u

I really need your help to find participants for my study. Your assistance is greatly appreciated. Please contact me by email at keenan.a.king@wmich.edu if you have any questions.

Thank you
-Keenan

Keenan King, M.A.
Director, TRiO-Upward Bound Program
Western Michigan University
2211 Ellsworth Hall
Office: 269-387-2875

Appendix D

Recruitment Flyer

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

The Experiences of African American Men in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI), who

Successfully Transferred from Community College.

Introduction:

Hello, my name is Keenan King and for my dissertation, I am trying to understand the experiences of African American men in Predominantly White Institutions, after they have transferred from a community college.

I only am concerned with your experiences from your perspective and you can tell me anything you want about these experiences. All of your responses will remain confidential and to the extent of the law.

This interview will be audio recorded and I will be writing notes during the interview. Please feel free to stop the interview at any point in time if you need to so. Do you have any questions about this study or the process you are participating in?

(Participants Asks Questions)

<u>**Interviewee Background (Pre-filled):**</u>

I need to verify the following personal information that you submitted on the screening survey.

Participant's Name:_____

Pseudonym Name:_____

PWI Institution Attended:_____

How many credits have you completed in the PWI?_____

How many credits have you completed in the PWI?_____

Are you comfortable being audio recorded?_____

Logistics (Pre-filled out)

Please allow me to make note of the time, date and location of our interview.

Time:_____

Date:_____

Location:_____

Thank you. Now let's get started. (Start Recording)

Can you verbally confirm that we have reviewed the consent form and you understand.

Interview Questions

1. Talk to me about what is like for you here?

    a. Classes

    b. building relationships

    c. As a student

    d. Faculty interactions

    e. Socially

2. If and how did community college influence your experience here?

    a. Advising

    b. Support

    c. Credits

    d. Academic Rigor

3. Talk to me about race and its effect on your experiences here?

    a. Do you feel supported racial here at the PWI

    b. Race-related circumstances

     c.   So where do you spend downtime? Why?

4.   What does success mean to you here?

     a.   Do you believe your successful?

         i.   GPA? Academically?

         ii.   Career?

         iii.   Graduate School?

     b.   How did you know you were successful?

5.   What has helped you stay here in at (Institution)?

     a.   Family support?

     b.   Sense of belonging?

     c.   Enrollment in an academic program?

     d.   Goal-orientation?

6.   Discuss some challenges you have had to overcome?

     a.   External expectations?

     b.   Are you managing coursework?

     c.   Socially?

     d.   Physically?

7.   Is there anything else you would like to add?

     a.   Fully explore thoughts?

     b.   Variety of information?

     c.   Interdisciplinary?

Closing:

If you do not have anything further to add, thank you for participating in my dissertation. In a week or so, I will send you the text transcripts from this interview. Please review the transcripts and follow the direction in the email. Within the email will be a read receipt, please click the option to send the receipt, once prompted. You will receive the $10 Amazon gift card after responding to the email or a week has passed. At that point I am going to assume you are fine with the transcript.

(Explain return receipt)

Do you have any other questions?

It would be really helpful if you knew of anyone else who would like to participate in my study?

(Participant asks questions)

Thank you

Appendix F

Screening Survey

Screening Survey

Heading: The Experiences of African American Men in College

Sub-Heading: The purpose of this study is to capture the experiences of African American men in 4-year universities, who successfully transferred from community college. Participation in this study is voluntary and all data collected is primary for research purposes, but maybe presented at conferences or published.

If selected to participate in this study, participants will be contacted by Keenan King. At that time, he will send potential participants an informed consent document, and once it is reviewed and if you consent to participate further, an interview will be scheduled. After reviewing the informed consent, will be interviewed. This study is being done in partial requirement for Keenan King's doctoral dissertation. All participant information will remain confidential to the extent that the law allows.

There are a limited number of participants in this study. Participants will be selected based on a first come, first serve basis and selections will also be based on the institutions potential participants are currently attending.

By completing this survey, you are only agreeing to be screened for potential participation in my study.

Questions:
1. What is your name?
2. What is your email?
3. What is your phone number?
4. Do you self-identify as male?
5. Do you self-identify as African American?
6. Did you begin college in a community college?
7. Which community college did you attend?
8. How many semesters did you complete at community college?
9. Are you currently enrolled in a 4-year/ Predominantly White Institution?
10. What 4-year institutions are you currently enrolled?
11. How many semesters have you completed at the university?
12. What is your current class status at the university?
13. What is your GPA at the university?
14. If you meet the screening criteria for the study, and are within a 60 minute drive of Kalamazoo, MI, would you prefer to do the interview face to face or electronically?

Google Form Link:
https://forms.office.com/Pages/DesignPage.aspx?auth_pvr=OrgId&auth_upn=kdh6403@

WMICH.EDU&origin=shell#FormId=USJ2Jal6ckyQXzm_AmqKhOl3od_fREFDmMa491oua4

FUQ0oxUzVDNTlMVjY0QlVHSFIzVVFMSjJOUi4u

Appendix G

Email to Schedule First Meeting

Hello (NAME),

Thank you for willingness to participate in my study. Based on your responses, I believe you meet the criteria to participate. This study is designed to capture and understand the experiences of African American men in 4-year institutions, who successfully transferred from community college.

Please be aware that the interview will take up to 60-90 minutes. Below are a few questions pertaining to coordinating a meeting to review the informed consent form and potentially conduct an interview.

What are the typical times you are available for the next two weeks?

When we meet, first we need to review the attached consent form and if you agree, I will ask you sign it. Following you signing the consent form, I plan to interview you. If you do not have time to be interviewed after this initial meeting, we will set up a time at a later date.

Thank you in advance for participating in my study
-Keenan

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Appendix H

Email for Those Not Selected for the Study

EMAIL

Hello (NAME),

Thank you for your interest in my study.

This is not a reflection of you and your abilities, but your participation in my research is not needed at this time.

If you have any questions about anything pertaining to this study please email me at keenan.a.king@wmich.edu.

Best,
-Keenan

Keenan King, M.A.
Director, TRiO-Upward Bound Program
Western Michigan University
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Office: 269-387-2875

Appendix I

Member Checking Email

Hello (NAME),

Thank you for participating. Please review your interview transcripts. This is a word for word transcription of our interview. Do not worry about grammatical errors. I am more concerned that these transcripts are an accurate depiction of your experiences.

If there is anything you want to add or clarify, you can send your additional information in a return email, or you can add it to the bottom of the transcript. Please do not change the original transcript.

If I do not hear from you within two weeks. I will assume that this transcript has accuracy captured your experiences.

Additionally, here attached to this link is your $10 Amazon gift card.

Best,
-Keenan

Keenan King, M.A.
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Appendix J

Crosswalk of Emergent Themes Connected to Interviews

Crosswalk of Emergent Themes Connected to Interviews

Participant	Always Present but Often Invisibility of Race	Community College "Made Me"	Stay in the Fight	No Regrets About Attending the PWI
Scott Wayne	(-)	X	X	X
Martin James	(-)	X	X	X
Chris Tops	X	X	X	X
James Patrick	X		X	X
Jordan Brown	X	X	X	X
Kalen Taylor	(-)	X	X	X
James Bronson	X	X	X	X
Rodney Bell	(-)	X	X	X
Kevin Jones	X		X	X
Jimmy Smith	X	X	X	X