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Religiously Involved Black Male Engagement at Religiously Affiliated Predominately White Institutions

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Religiously Involved Black Male Engagement at

Religiously Affiliated Predominately White Institutions

by

Angela L. Brown

MA, Wilmington University, 2008

BA, Oral Roberts University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

General Education

Walden University

August 2018

Abstract

Research studies have indicated that Black male collegians have the lowest retention rates in the higher education setting in predominately White institutional (PWI) settings. Several factors, such as spirituality, involvement on campus, and other positive experiences are cited as contributing to a lower retention rate for Black males in the PWI higher education setting; however, research in the PWI religiously affiliated setting has been limited. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the campus engagement experiences of religiously involved Black males who attended religiously affiliated PWIs.   Astin's student involvement theory and Astin, Astin, and Lindholm's findings on spiritual development in the higher education setting are used as a conceptual framework. The research questions explored how religiously involved Black males who were at religiously affiliated PWIs during college described their campus engagement experiences, how their religious belief influenced their campus engagement, and how other factors influenced their campus engagement and contributed to their graduation. Interviews with 8 Black male participants were analyzed for codes and themes using Merriam and Tisdell's coding method. The themes that emerged suggested that although participants perceived initial negative experiences, overall, they had positive campus experiences due to involvement experiences. The participants recalled that their religious engagement fostered more participation in religious involvement, developed their spiritual identity, and that family and community fostered engagement. This study may contribute to positive social change by providing administrators of religiously affiliated PWIs with approaches to increase the engagement and retention of Black male students.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, the great

Roosevelt Burns, PhD. You knew I would finish, Pop Pop. I wish you could have seen it.

Acknowledgments

I offer eternal gratefulness and thanks to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Without Him, this would not have been possible. It was only by His grace, wisdom, and love that I have made it through my doctoral journey.

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I offer appreciation to the Walden faculty and staff as a whole. They have been supportive of me throughout this journey. I extend words of gratitude to my community partners for research support and additional thanks to my research participants.

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Finally, finally yet importantly, I wish to thank my father and mother, William Brown and Dr. Verrona Brown for their ever-loving support. I thank my children, Kyla and Kevin for being patient and loving with me. You now have your mother back. I love you all.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Several research studies have been conducted in the higher education setting to explore Black males' campus engagement to increase retention and academic persistence (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2012; Lewis, 2012). The graduation rate for students who enrolled in 4-year public institutions in 2010 and who graduated in 2016 was lower for Black students (35.8%) compared with White students (60.7%) (Grinder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2017). The graduation gap was slightly smaller at 4-year private institutions; Black students graduated at a rate of 41.1% compared with White students at 68% (Grinder et al., 2017). Research has indicated Black males' efforts to remain engaged in the higher education setting tend to be associated with one of the four areas: academic, social, emotional, and financial (Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Lewis, 2012). Addressing these retention risks is vital to increasing engagement among Black males, which may lead to academic success and persistence (Harper, Berhanu, Davis III, & McGuire, 2015). In addition, improving retention rates for Black male students is important because it may contribute increased readiness to participate in the workforce (Harper & Quaye, 2015).

Many studies have been conducted in predominately White institutional (PWI) settings concerning the barriers and obstacles that Black students often encounter in these settings (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2012; Lewis, 2012). Various PWI settings have been explored; however, little is known regarding Black collegians' experiences in religiously affiliated PWIs (Strayhorn, Tillman-Kelly, Suddeth, & Williams, 2012) and how those institutions influence their engagement.

Minority enrollment in religiously affiliated PWIs has increased during the past 2

decades, but increasing diversity remains an issue on these campuses (Rine & Guthrie, 2016). Being a minority on these campuses, Black students have been found to encounter difficulty while interacting with majority White populations on PWI campuses, possibly due to U.S. history of segregation and discrimination and the United States' past and current racial climate (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Creating opportunities for Black males to interact and engage with diverse populations has been discovered to have a constructive influence on students' engagement and sense of belonging in PWI settings (Harper, 2015; Harper et al., 2015; Strayhorn, 2014).

Involvement in religious practices or having a sense of spirituality may assist Black collegians with coping in PWI settings (Holland, 2014; Marks, Smith, Madison, & Junior, 2016; Mattis, 2000). Spirituality and religious practices tend to have a constructive effect on Black students' physical, social, and emotional well-being (Holland, 2014; Marks et al., 2016; Mattis, 2000). One significant area that has yet to be explored is how religious engagement and other factors affect Black males at religiously affiliated PWIs. Understanding the experiences related to Black males who are engaged in religious practices while enrolled in religious colleges or universities could provide strategies for increasing engagement of this population.

In this chapter, I present the background, problem statement, the purpose for this study, the conceptual framework, the nature of the study, important terms and operational definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the potential significance of the study.

Background

Black male collegians are more prone to leave the higher educational setting than

their collegians of other racial/ethnic backgrounds or gender of the same racial ethnic

background (National Urban League, 2007; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014).

According to data collected from the National Center for Education Statistics regarding

the number of degrees conferred during academic years 2012 to 2013, Black males were

the lowest degree earning population at 35% compared with all other racial/ethnic groups

who averaged approximately 40% and higher (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Even across

gender, approximately two times as many enrolled Black women completed degrees

within 6 years, compared with Black males (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

Research suggests that several aspects could contribute to Black males' lower

retention rates. Cuyjet (2006), Howard (2013), Lewis (2012), and Palmer et al. (2014)

indicated that particular variables such as underpreparedness for college, academic

challenge, social disconnect from the college setting, family economic position, type of

institution, and family educational status negatively influence retention rates for Black

males. Cultural variables may have affected Black males' retention in the past; Cuyjet

(2006) noted that lack of male role models who encourage college aspirations or female

managed single-parent homes may be among the cultural variables that hinder college

enrollment. Without this foundational support, Black males who enroll in college may

lack the self efficacy to academically persist (Dukakis, Duong, de Velasco, & Henderson,

2014; Noguera, 2003; Strayhorn, 2014). Campus environmental factors in the higher

education setting include racial discrimination, poor management of racial incidents on

campus, poor interactions with White faculty and students, and poorly enacted policies

designed to be inclusive have created obstacles for persistence at PWIs (Newman,

Mmeje, & Allen, 2012). However, researchers have determined that engagement

activities that promote persistence can encourage academic success for Black males in the

higher education setting (Harper, 2012; Harper, 2015; Strayhorn, 2014).

Persistence or grit is positively associated with academic success and engagement

for Black males at PWIs (Strayhorn, 2014). According to Strayhorn (2014), persistence

or grit can be strengthened by providing Black males with academic, emotional, and

social supports; academic supports such as summer enhancement programs, tutoring, and

rigorous curriculum and instruction in the high school setting tend to have a positive

influence on Black males' preparedness in higher education. Emotional and social

supports, Strayhorn found, such as mentoring, interactions within the community, and

peer interactions also are likely to support the academic persistence of Black males.

Considering the identified factors that contribute to Black male retention, higher

education administration and faculty, and student affairs staff have the knowledge to

generate effective strategies and programs to assist this population (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper

et al., 2015; Howard-Hamilton, 1997). However, recognizing the importance of student

risk factors provides limited knowledge. Studies have espoused the benefits of increasing

student engagement for Black male collegians. Harper (2009) noted that active

engagement in campus activities and strong racial identity counterbalanced negative

experiences. Harper's and Strayhorn's (2008) studies indicated that Black males

experience the risk of being racially stereotyped, have fewer social and emotional

supports during transitioning to colleges, and feel less connected to the college community.

Spirituality has been identified as a constructive component of the Black community and studies indicated that spiritual and religious engagement can be a coping strategy for ethnic groups in their college experiences (Chae, Kelly, Brown, & Bolden, 2004; Holland, 2014; Walker & Dixon, 2002). To illustrate, Weddle-West, Hagan, and Norwood (2013) performed a quantitative study to investigate the differences concerning the degree of spirituality held by Black students who attended PWIs and those who attended HBCUs. The researchers noted that HBCUs tended to provide more supports for religious Black students and suggested implications from the study could be applied to PWI settings.

In the religiously affiliated PWI setting, investigations have been performed to discover the influence of the setting on minority students and efforts to increase minority enrollment and student engagement (Perez, 2013). Research findings suggested that African American collegians were more liable to enroll in religiously affiliated universities than other minority groups (Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012). Although investigations have been performed in the areas of college choice and diversity (Bowman & Small, 2012; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Perez, 2013), additional study in the religiously affiliated college and university setting is necessary to explore the religiously involved Black male collegians' experiences with engagement on campus.

Problem Statement

Black male undergraduates at PWIs have been faced the challenge of adapting to the culture of these institutions, achieving academically, and remaining involved and engaged in this setting (Cuyjet, 2006; Parker, Puig, Johnson, & Anthony, 2016; Strayhorn, 2014). Despite statistics indicating that Black student enrollment has increased from 10% of the college population to 15% between academic years 1990 and 2013, the gap of graduation between Black male and Black female students has remained steady at 61% in 1990 and 62% in 2013 (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Low Black male student enrollment and low academic achievement has been associated with low campus engagement (Harper et al., 2015).

Environmental factors such as discrimination on PWI campuses has contributed to racial microaggressions and stereotype threat (Hines, Borders, & Gonzalez, 2015; Harper, 2015; Iverson & Jaggers, 2015; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2015). Factors such as these have had a negative influence on Black males' campus engagement (Harper, 2015). However, research studies have also indicated that certain campus experiences have had a positive influence on collegians' involvement and engagement in college, including experiences of a religious or spiritual nature (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Cuyjet, 2006; Holland, 2014; Strayhorn, 2014).

Studies have been conducted in various PWI settings, such as urban, suburban, community college, and highly selective university settings (Strayhorn et al., 2012). However, few studies have explored Black males' perceived experiences in the religiously affiliated PWI settings (Strayhorn et al., 2012). Bowman and Small (2012)

have noted that religiously affiliated universities and colleges have increased engagement for minority students; however, not much is known regarding the encounters of religiously oriented Black males at PWIs that could provide information on increasing engagement for this specific population in religiously affiliated settings. Strayhorn et al. (2012) recognized the importance of conducting research on the educational and social encounters of Black males in religiously affiliated PWI settings and identified support factors that benefited Black males in this setting. However, Strayhorn et al. did not focus attention on Black males who specifically identified themselves as religious and the study did not indicate student involvement factors for Black males in the religiously affiliated PWI setting. What remains to be explored are the perceived experiences of religiously oriented Black males in religiously affiliated PWIs that may provide information on increasing engagement for this specific population.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study using interviews was to explore and understand the campus engagement experiences of religiously involved Black males who have graduated from religiously affiliated PWIs. The purpose of using a basic qualitative method using interviews was to explore the engagement experiences of Black males in the religiously affiliated higher education setting. These experiences may provide PWIs with strategies and recommendations on engaging, recruiting, and retaining this population on their campuses. In addition to the benefits that colleges and universities might gain, another aim of this study was to give voice to recent Black male graduates who have successfully graduated from religiously affiliated colleges or universities.

Research Questions

1. How do Black males who were religiously involved during college and who attended religiously affiliated PWIs describe their campus engagement?

2. How do Black males who were religiously involved during college describe how their religious beliefs influenced their campus engagement at religiously affiliated PWIs?

3. What other factors, besides religious beliefs, do Black males who were religiously involved during college describe as influencing their campus engagement at religiously affiliated PWIs?

Conceptual Framework

I used Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and Astin et al.'s (2011) findings on spiritual development in the higher education setting in this study to explore the influence of student engagement factors and spiritual/religious factors on Black male student engagement and to provide a conceptual framework for alignment among the research method and research questions. In student involvement theory, Astin et al. suggested that certain activities that students engaged in while in college contributed to them being successful in college and this involvement could promote retention. Involvement in campus activities, such as dwelling on university grounds, interacting with faculty, and joining in extracurricular events was found to have a constructive bearing on students' engagement, thereby increasing the likelihood for graduation. Considering these involvement factors, I used student involvement theory to examine

participants' experiences with engagement as Black males in a religiously affiliated university.

I used Astin et al.'s (2011) findings on spiritual development in higher education setting to understand how religious engagement or spirituality influenced the engagement of the Black male participants in this study. Astin et al.'s findings indicated that certain measures of spirituality and religion tend to have a beneficial influence on student growth and engagement. Spiritual measures (equanimity and charitable involvement) were found to significantly influence students' academic success and engagement on campus, whereas religious engagement was negatively associated with involvement and academic success, for all populations, including an African American subgroup (Astin et al., 2011). Although the findings on religious engagement were negatively associated all populations, including an African American subgroup (Astin et al., 2011), other studies have suggested religious engagement tends to be a support factor for Black males in the collegiate setting due to religious cultural associations in the Black community (Holland, 2014; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Strayhorn, 2014). Therefore, I used the spiritual measures of equanimity and charitable involvement and the religious measure of religious engagement to explore the effects of these factors on the participants' development and to explore whether these factors positively influenced their engagement at campus. In relation to the research questions, the conceptual framework provided validation for the interview questions that provided merit for the experiences of Black males in the religiously affiliated PWI setting.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was a basic qualitative exploration using interviews based on Patton's (2015) and Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) approach for constructing themes based on the shared encounters of the study participants. I chose this approach as the best means to explore the experiences, similarities, and differences regarding religiously involved Black males in their religiously affiliated PWI setting. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posited that basic qualitative study is an approach in which researchers are seeking to understand "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 24). Basic qualitative approach provided the flexibility needed to comprehend the phenomenon and gain a sense of the meaning of the encounters shared by the study participants.

The sample included eight self identified Black male graduates who were religiously involved while enrolled in a religiously affiliated PWI for undergraduate study. Selection was given to Black males who graduated within the past 5 years; however, recent graduates were preferred in the selection process. After conducting interviews with the participants, I coded and analyzed the data using a blended conceptual framework of student involvement theory and Astin et al.'s (2011) findings on spiritual development in the higher education setting to make meaning of and to interpret the participants' experiences. Through an analysis of the data gathered from the Black male participants, I explored and gained an understanding of their experiences in the religiously affiliated PWI setting.

Operational Definitions

Student involvement or student engagement: A term to describe the behavioral

components of students' working input in the education process in the postsecondary

setting (Astin, 1999). Student involvement also encompasses the motivation of the

student to perform behaviors that indicate involvement. *Student engagement*, a term made

familiar to people in the higher education field by Kuh's (2009) student engagement

theory, was used in this study to indicate involvement because both Astin and Kuh

indicated no evident distinction between the two terms (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie,

2009).

Religiously affiliated PWIs or faith-based PWIs: Any postsecondary institution

that has self reported a religious affiliation to the U.S. Department of Education (Council

for Christian Colleges & Universities, 2015).

Spirituality: The inner beliefs and values of people or the way of life that

influences their life and inner development; spirituality may also reflect a person's search

of meaning, direction, and belonging (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering, 2006).

Religion: The commitment to a collection of principles and customs of a

particular belief system (Astin et al., 2011). Usually, religion includes participation with a

particular group that follows the same set of beliefs and practices.

Assumptions

One assumption that I made was that all study participants would be willing to

communicate their experiences, opinions, and views of their undergraduate setting and

would be inclined to complete the entire interview process. I made this assumption based

on other studies where Black male collegians were willing to participate. I also assumed that the participants who replied to this study would represent a highly skewed religious grouping, because I reached out to participants who were from different religious affiliations. Finally, I assumed that the information the participants provided would be relevant to the aim of the investigation and beneficial to the research, and the research questions were well designed to allow them to share their voice. This assumption was made based on the alignment of research questions, research method, and conceptual framework.

Scope and Delimitations

Researchers have examined the experiences of Black males and religiously involved Black males in the PWI setting as opposed to the experiences of religiously involved Black males in religiously affiliated PWI settings. As of June 2015, 1,024 postsecondary institutions were reported as having a religious affiliation (Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, 2015). The need to explore the experiences of religiously involved Black males in religiously affiliated PWIs determined the scope of this study and, as a result, some of the experiences of the participants may not be transferable to the experiences of Black males in public or other private PWI settings. Recent graduates from online religiously affiliated PWIs were invited to participate in this study. The delimitation of this study was the exclusion of Black males who were not religiously involved during college or the exclusion of Black males who did not attend a religiously affiliated PWI.

Limitations

The first limitation of the study was that the population was highly selective due to backgrounds and potential personalities of the participants. The study participants were involved in church ministry, or were from families who were involved in church ministry, or were from families who were high active at their local churches. I also made efforts to recruit through various mediums but was able to recruit only participants from four regions in the United States. Another possible limitation of this study was that my function as a female researcher may have played a role in the responses of the participants, both in terms of those who agreed to participate, as well as how they responded to questions regarding their role as Black males. To address this limitation, I assured participants the information they shared with me was confidential and they could withdraw from this study at any time, for any reason. In addition, I included probe questions from my interview protocol and conducted member checking to allow participants to review, add, or delete responses. My research design presented limitations as I conducted telephone interviews when I was unable to conduct face to face interviews; therefore, I was unable to observe participants' body language and nonverbal cues. To address this limitation, I listened for voice inflection and voice tone to indicate the emotions and feelings of participants. An additional limitation was the discrepant case relating to participant Kevin's interview. The majority of the interviews took place within 45 to 60 minutes, while Kevin's interview was conducted within 25 minutes.

Last, there was likely research bias in this study because I shared several similarities with the participants. I was a religiously involved student who attended a

religiously affiliated PWI for undergraduate study. I attempted to limit any researcher

bias by questioning my assumptions and ensuring that all of my interview questions and

probe questions were not leading questions. I also provided each participant with the

option of member checking so they could verify, question, delete, or change their

interview responses.

Significance

This results of this study provided information on the experiences of religiously

involved Black males enrolled in religiously affiliated higher education institutions as

depicted and examined through interviews. The study results may provide

recommendations and suggestions for religiously affiliated higher education

administrators, student affairs personnel, and student retention personnel to implement

more opportunities for Black males to be engaged academically and socially. Harper

(2009) and Strayhorn (2008) suggested that exploring the experiences of Black males

could be a viable way to create recommendations and suggestions for higher education

institutions on increasing student engagement. Astin (1982, 1984) denoted that student

involvement can contribute to academic success and campus engagement for collegians

of all racial/ethnic backgrounds. As a result, students could benefit with increased

retention and completion of academic goals. Furthermore, as research has indicated that

faith-based universities and colleges have a desire to increase campus diversity and

promote more diverse college experiences for minority students (Bowman & Small,

2012), this study has provided insight on providing better opportunities for creating a

sense of belonging for Black males. Understanding the function that African American

religious institutions play for Black males enrolled in colleges and universities is pivotal. By recognizing the function spirituality has for Black males, student affairs personnel could have the resources to add to campus programs for the benefit of this population (Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008). Exploration of the religiously affiliated setting is beneficial for the Black male population.

Summary

Researchers have focused on the engagement and experiences of Black males throughout the years. Although various topics have been explored regarding Black males in the higher education setting, in this study, I examined the campus engagement experiences of Black males who were religiously involved and who graduated from religiously affiliated PWIs. This chapter encompasses the background for the study, the problem statement, the purpose statement, research questions, a brief summary of the conceptual framework, and the nature of the study. The last sections include the scope, assumptions, and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 contains the literature review that provides the support for the need of this study. I describe the conceptual framework in greater detail to provide guidance for the study and I provide an analysis of the literature findings. Last, I identify the gaps in the literature and describe how this study could fill at least one of the gaps and provide knowledge in the discipline.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research studies have indicated that certain campus experiences have positively affected collegians' involvement and engagement in higher education, including experiences of a religious or spiritual nature (Astin et al., 2011; Cuyjet, 2006; Holland, 2014; Strayhorn, 2014). Studies have been conducted in various PWI settings, such as urban, suburban, community college, and highly selective university settings (Strayhorn et al., 2012). However, few studies have explored Black males' perceptions of their experiences in the religiously affiliated PWI settings (Strayhorn et al., 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and understand the engagement experiences of religiously involved Black males who have graduated from religiously affiliated PWIs.

Black male collegians in all areas of higher education are more likely to withdraw from undergraduate institutions than any other collegian of another racial/ethnic background or gender (Palmer et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Research findings have suggested high rates of higher education withdrawal could be attributed to college underpreparedness, college academic challenge, lack of a sense of belong in college, and prior cultural variables (Dukakis et al., 2014; Palmer et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2014). Studies have indicated that the following could increase Black male persistence and graduation rates: increasing student engagement among Black males (Harper, 2015; Harper et al., 2015), increasing academic and emotional supports (Strayhorn, 2014), counterbalancing negative racial experiences that Black males encounter on PWI campuses with positive diverse interactions and student-faculty

interactions (Harper, 2015; Hines et al., 2015), and creating a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2014).

Furthermore, research has noted that being spiritual or holding religious beliefs has been a coping strategy and sense of support for African Americans during their collegiate years (Holland, 2014; Paredes-Collins, 2014). However, although current literature has explored the influence of spirituality or religious belief for students of color in the religiously affiliated setting (Paredes-Collins, 2014), the research has included students of color, as a whole, and has not focused on the Black male college student only. In the next section, I identify accessed library databases and key search terms that I used for the literature review. After that section, I present my conceptual framework: the combination of Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and Astin et al.'s (2011) findings on spiritual development in the higher education setting. Finally, I present an exhaustive review of the literature related to the key factors for this study, summarize the themes of this literature review, and discuss how this study could fill the gap in the literature.

Literature Search Strategy

To collect literature for this review several databases, I accessed several databases through Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, SAGE, Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Education Source, ERBSCO Host, ERIC and Academic Search Complete, Taylor and Francis Online, Thoreau, and the U.S. Department of Education. I entered the following keyword and Boolean phrases: *Black males and higher education*, *student affairs supporting Black males*, *student services Black males in higher education*

and spirituality, *higher education and religion*, *grit*, *Black male college retention*, *family support in higher education*, *student engagement for Black males in higher education*, *student involvement for Black males in higher education*, *minority student involvement*, *persistence in Black males in higher education*, *supports for Black males in higher education*, *spirituality for African Americans*, *religion for African Americans*, *religious engagement for Black males in higher education*, *religious higher education setting*, *Christian colleges*, *religious colleges and universities*, *factors of support for minorities in religious colleges*, *diversity in religious colleges*, and *spirituality in religious higher education setting*.

The scope of this literature review search was from 2012 to 2018. In addition, I used some seminal works because they were continually referenced by Harper (2015) and Strayhorn (2014) in their commentary and research on Black males in higher education.

Conceptual Framework

Two scholarly works guided this study: Astin's (1984, 1993) student involvement theory and Astin et al.'s (2011) findings on spiritual development in the higher education setting. This framework addresses both student engagement factors and factors related to spirituality and religion for this study. In this section, I describe the key elements, assumptions, and the research context for the framework. In addition, I discuss research using this framework and the relevance to the research questions.

Student Involvement Theory

Student involvement theory was advanced by (Astin (1984) to explain how undergraduate students in the higher education setting develop as a result of their

involvement in academic and co-curricular activities. Multidimensional in its construct, involvement can be described as the "amount for physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 518). This suggests that a student requires both behavioral and psychological actions to exert participation or involvement in the educational process and in their college experiences.

The construct of involvement is grounded on five assumptions:

- Involvement requires students' physical and psychological energy.

- Involvement encompasses diverse degrees and exists along a continuum.

- Involvement can be measured through quantitative or qualitative means.

- The quantity of student ascertaining knowledge and student development coupled with an activity or object is equivalent to the value and degree of student contribution.

- Educational practices and policies are impacted by involvement. (Astin, 1984, p. 519).

Astin (1984, 1993) contended the more involvement a student has in college, the more student learning will occur and the more student development will occur. This indicates that the better the quantity and quality of involvement in campus activities and academic activities from a student, the greater the bearing on the collegian's engagement and involvement in educational activities and academic development.

Although other student development theories, during the time this theory was constructed, emphasized the practices and methods associated with student development, student involvement theory acknowledged the behaviors that contribute to the outcomes

of engagement and development (Astin, 1984). Astin (1984) postulated that student

involvement theory clarifies a linkage between other pedagogical theory in use during

that decade, such as moral development theory, subject-matter theory, resource theory,

and individualized theory, which focused largely on outcomes. Some of the elements that

Astin indicated can be used as resources of student developmental gains are student time,

student motivation, and student effort. Even though student behaviors and actions are

accounted for in this theory, environmental factors are vital as well. Astin recognized

student inputs and environmental factors led to student outcomes. This is referred to as

the Input–Environment–Output (I–E–O) model in Astin's student involvement theory.

Astin constructed this model to control for input differences in student involvement

characteristics so that student outcomes would reflect less bias and in exact assessments

based on the effect of environmental variables (Thurmond & Popkess-Vawter, 2003).

Astin's I-E-O model provides not only a focus on outcomes, but also the magnitude of

input and environmental variables for assessing students' performance.

Astin's (1984) student involvement theory, based on the findings of a longitudinal

study on college students who dropped out of their institutions, intended to explore those

dynamics that led to student motivation based on students who graduated. Astin

determined, by the outcomes of the study, that the components that contributed to

students' perseverance in college could be linked to their degree of involvement in

college (Astin, 1984; Berger & Milem, 1999). Astin speculated that certain activities that

students engaged in while in college contributed to them graduating, whereas those

students who neglected to participate in those activities were more liable to withdraw

from college. Astin identified several variables that were suggestive of student

involvement. Variables such as living on campus, involvement in work study, being

enrolled in honors programs, student-faculty interaction, and participating in

extracurricular activities, such as athletics or fraternal organizations, had a beneficial

influence on students' involvement; the variables that had the most significant effect were

those variables that activities that occurred on the campus setting.

Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009), in their qualitative study, endeavored to create some

discernment relating to involvement and engagement; however, they indicated there was

no clear distinction between the two terms. Wolf-Wendel et al.'s study examined the

overlap of the concepts of involvement, engagement, and integration. The researchers

conducted interviews with Astin; Kuh, known for developing the theory of student

engagement; and Tinto, known for the advancement of the theory of student departure,

and posited that both Astin and Kuh recognized that there is not much distinction

between the two concepts (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

When interviewed, Astin postulated that "trying to make a distinction between

these two words is probably not all that productive, or necessary . . . [the] NSSE

instrument was originally developed under the guidance of a small committee . . . . At

that time, the committee did not make any distinctions between involvement and

engagement" (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 417). Kuh added that engagement "was not

meant to be a critique or extension of involvement per se . . . [involvement and

engagement] are temporal representation of the same thing" (p. 417). However, Astin

recognized that the construct of involvement possibly required improvement in understanding and the use of the construct in practice. Astin submitted:

> Involvement or engagement are very generic constructs. We have not done enough work on the varieties of engagement and what kinds of involvement are positive, or related. For example, political involvement is negatively involved with retention, and satisfaction, it's not a uniformly positive experience. Look at exceptions and think about why some forms of involvement are negatively related to development. (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 425)

Even though I explored the theory of involvement, I used the terms *involvement* and *engagement* interchangeably within this conceptual framework, in this literature review, and in the interview questions.

Astin's (1984) student involvement theory has been used to guide researchers' studies. Many researchers have used Astin's theoretical framework; however, Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, and Slavin Miller's (2007) study is only one of the few to include race. Lundberg et al. performed an investigation to ascertain to what degree race/ethnicity of student and first-generation college student status predicted participation in college and to discover whether first-generation college student status and race/ethnicity of student predicted academic growth by involvement in the college experience. Lundberg et al. applied Astin's (1993) student involvement theory to test whether first generation status along with race/ethnic status had a bearing on the college experience and learning as a result of that involvement.

A stratified random sample of 4,501 students who were undergraduates took the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ), including 643 first generation students self identified with seven racial/ethnic groups: Mexican American, other Hispanic or Puerto Rican, African American, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, White, and multiethnic (Lundberg et al., 2007). The two dependent variables were learning of the academic nature and learning of the personal nature. The study comprised 15 self reported items to assess academic learning, such as attainment of a comprehensive wide-ranging education, enjoying literature, and thinking analytically (Lundberg et al., 2007). The personal learning variable consisted of items, such as understanding one's self and getting along with others. The independent variables were 13 involvement activities inside and out of the classroom and included:

> frequency of use of library resources, information technology, and other campus facilities such as the student union or recreational facilities; involvement in activities related to course learning, writing, and experiences with faculty; participation in activities related to the arts and sciences; participation in clubs and organizations; and interactions with other people around issues of personal support, difference, or topics of interest. (Lundberg et al., 2007, p. 65)

Lundberg et al. (2007) discovered that African American students' ethnicity was a predictor of "frequent use of campus facilities, library, writing experiences, interaction with faculty, involvement in student organizations, and interacting frequently with student acquaintances" (p.74). The findings also suggested that although Native Americans, other Hispanic students, and African Americans were involved in a high

degree they reported less improvement in regards to academic learning than did their other first generation counterparts. Lundberg et al.'s (2007) findings also indicated that African American racial background had a small or indirect influence on the personal acquisition of knowledge.

Findings on Spiritual Development in the Higher Education Setting

Astin et al. (2011) conducted a student on the development in the higher education setting due to their assessment that universities and college lacked concern for the inner and outer aspects of students' lives pertaining to student improvement. Astin et al. proposed that spirituality consists of affective experiences as well as reasoning and logic. Astin et al. defined the construct of spirituality as having several attributes:

- As one's inner individual lives rather than observable behavior and material objects.

- The beliefs and values that people esteem, which includes beliefs and values regarding an individual's self and an individual's purpose for existing.

- The connectedness one feels to others and the world.

- Experiences that are intuitive, inspirational, mysterious, and mystical;

- Comprised of personal qualities, such as affection, empathy, and equanimity. (p. 4)

The researchers indicated that their spiritual construct may not be the most complete; however, the construct does encompass the basic elements of many other definitions that they reviewed in the literature (Astin et al., 2011).

In addition, Astin et al. (2011) offered a definition of the construct of religiousness. Astin et al. indicated that the constructs of spirituality and religiousness have often been given no distinction. However, they characterized religiousness as:

> . . . adherence to a set of faith-based beliefs (and related practices) concerning both the origins of the world and the nature of the entity or being that is believed to have created and govern the world…involves membership in some kind of community of fellow believers and practitioners, as well as participation in ceremonies or rituals. (p. 5)

Astin et al.'s (2011) findings are based on a 7-year study on college students' development and the role higher education institutions have in fostering students' spiritual qualities. The longitudinal study included a pilot study conducted in 2003 with 3,700 students; a follow-up study with over 112,000 students in the Fall of 2004; and a survey with as sub-sample of 15,000 students in Spring 2007 at the end of their junior year. Astin et al. performed individual interviews, focus group interviews, and faculty interviews for their data collection. The findings of the study indicated that students' spiritual growth increased during college, although their degree of religious engagement declined and students' spiritual growth tended to increase other college outcomes (Astin et al., 2011). According to the findings, the spiritual outcomes of growth in the spiritual measures and religious measures are intellectual/academic, personal/emotional, and attitudinal (Astin et al., 2011). Key findings denoted that growth in the area of equanimity could positively affect "students' grade point average, leadership skills, psychological well being, self rated ability to get along with other races and cultures, and

26

satisfaction with college" (Astin et al., 2011, p. 135). Astin et al. (2011) countered that an increase in religious engagement was correlated with lower college outcomes including, less fulfillment with college, inability to get along with other races, and students' desires to complete their degrees. Astin et al. used a t-test to discover the statistical significance between the variables ($p < .01$). Lower satisfaction with college was correlated with religious engagement at -.06, inability to get along with other races was correlated with religious engagement at -.04, and a decrease in students' desires for degree completion was correlated with religious engagement at -.05 (Astin et al., 2011). Astin et al. did not include a statistical sorting by race in this study.

Astin et al. (2011) offered speculation and suggested further research for this area. In regards to Astin et al.'s finding on lower satisfaction for religiously engaged students, the researchers speculated that this outcome could be that students who remain religiously engaged may feel alienated from those students who decrease in religious engagement or students who are not religiously engaged. Astin et al. speculated that students might decrease interactions with other races due to the racial homogeneous nature of religious groups. This may isolate students from interaction with other racial and religious groups. Astin et al. conjectured the negative correlation between students' desire to complete degrees and religious engagement could be linked to religious doctrines questioning intellectual pursuits in favor of spiritual pursuits or the approach of some faculty to alienate highly religious students.

Astin et al.'s (2011) findings on spiritual development embody five dimensions of spirituality and five dimensions of religiousness. Two measures focus on internal aspects

of spirituality. These measures are reflected in the survey tool they developed to assess students' spiritual and religious qualities to determine how students progress religiously and spiritually in college and how college experiences influence the development of religious qualities and spirituality (Astin et al., 2011). The five measures of spirituality include: spiritual quest which evaluates students' interest in finding life's purpose, attaining inner peace, and finding meaning out of life; equanimity which assesses students' extent to which they feel inner peace, are capable of finding value in hard times, and have positivity regarding the path and experience of their lives; ethic of caring which evaluates the degree to which a student desire to help others, contribute to change in the world, and promote understanding among the races; charitable involvement which assesses students' giving to organizations, community participation, assisting friends with problems relevant to their personal lives; ecumenical worldview which measures the degree to which a student has a desire in other cultures or countries and believes in the interconnected of all people. This measure has a strong believe in the power of love. (pp. 20-21). The charitable involvement, ethic of caring measures, and ecumenical worldview focus on the external aspects of students' spirituality.

The five measures of religiousness assess students' commitment, engagement, conservativism, skepticism, and religious struggle: religious commitment reflects a students' internal loyalty to religious practices, teachings in their everyday life. This also measures the personal strength students perceive by believing in a higher power; religious engagement measures the extent to which student exhibit the external behavior reflecting their commitment to their religion. These may be engagement actions which include,

praying, going to services that are religious, or enjoying sacred texts; religious/social conservatism assesses students' beliefs regarding topics such as casual sex, others' beliefs in God, the relation of prayer to forgiveness, the desire to proselytize; religious skepticism measures religious disbelief relating to the creation of the universe, belief in the ability of science to explain occurrences, and the afterlife; religious struggle measures the degree to which students have grappled with religious beliefs about God and the degree to which students' viewpoints correspond with families' or their own expectations on religious matters (pp. 23-24).

Astin et al. (2011) posited many of these measures of spirituality are often related to other measure of spirituality and measures of religiousness are often interrelated with other religious measures. They found only religious struggle was unrelated to any other religious measure. Kuh and Gonyea (2006) a study using Astin et al.'s (2011) findings on spiritual development in the higher education setting to determine if spirituality enhanced or lessened liberal learning. Twenty-nine faith-based universities were used in the sample. The data sample was randomly sampled 149,801 first year and senior year undergraduate students who completed the NSSE at 461 different colleges and universities. Kuh and Gonyea employed variables of interest associated with student engagement and students' observations of the campus atmosphere. The student engagement variables were spiritual actions, diverse peer interactions, and profound acquisition of knowledge. The perceptions of campus environment variables were items that included students' perceptions of activities that were associated with their engagement academically and socially, such as supports inside of the classroom

environment and out of class. Kuh and Gonyea also used self reported outcomes, such as attainment of work-related skills technology skills. The researchers included controls for students' backgrounds, such as race/ethnicity, class standing, and sex; results were not reported by race.

Kuh and Gonyea's (2006) study findings indicated that students on these faith-based campuses who engaged in spiritual practices also tended to participate more collegiate activities. The institutional purpose and campus values influenced spiritual and secular educational results more than other campus institutional qualities and students at faith-based colleges tended to participate more in spiritual activities more and acquire in the extent of engagement and learning; they more likely to participate less in other liberal campus outcomes (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006).

Literature Review Related to Key Factors

In this review of research related to the key factors pertaining to the research questions, I analyze literature related to the experiences of religiously involved Black males in religiously affiliated PWI settings. The terminology of Black males and African American males was used interchangeably throughout this literature review based on the terms used in the specific research. The first two sections include the broader experiences of Black males in the accessing the postsecondary setting and the challenges Black males encounter in accessing the postsecondary education. I chose to analyze predominately literature reviews for the first two sections as the literature in these areas are broad and exhaustive. In the last two sections, I analyzed largely empirical articles to explore factors related to the challenges Black males encounters in the PWI setting and factors

promoting persistence for Black males in the postsecondary educational setting. This literature review aimed to provide a sound background for this qualitative study, including a better understanding of the factors that guided my interview questions and data analysis.

Black Males Accessing the Postsecondary Setting

Research has indicated that Black males' obstacles in attaining access to higher education begin in their high school years, before they apply to higher education institutions (Howard, 2013). Cuyjet (2006), Howard (2013), Lewis (2012) conjectured that Black males encounter academic, social, and emotional challenges in the elementary and junior high years of education that lead to underpreparedness for academic success in and access to the postsecondary setting. Cuyjet's (2006) review of the literature on Black males in higher education attributed deficits in learning and lack of social resources for Black males in the early years of education as a contributor to higher education underprepardness, while Howard's (2013) review of the literature on Black males in education cited the high rate of Black males in special needs classes, living in high poverty areas, and attending schools ill-equipped to cope with the needs of this population as contributing to underpreparedness. In addition, Lewis' (2012) examination of the literature of Black males in postsecondary settings stated that the plight of Black males being unprepared for postsecondary education across all institutional contexts has become a quiet crisis and further examination across all institutional contexts is necessary for change.

Many studies have ascribed these challenges to factors within the school setting and outside the school setting. Studies have indicated that the shortage of quality teachers, the absence of mentors, family, and community support, and low expectations for achievement for Black males from school staff may have an adverse impression on Black male college preparedness (Palmer et al., 2014; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013). Scott et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study to explore the challenges college-bound high school Black males encounter while navigating the college choice process. The participants in this study included 70 Black male students who were currently enrolled as seniors in high school and had been accepted to a 4-year college or university. Scott et al. collected essays as qualitative data and coded the essays for themes. Scott et al. found the participants indicated that unskilled teachers and low community support, mentorship, and family support could make it difficult for them to navigate the college application process and transition to college where they were required to achieve at a higher academic level. Scott et al.'s findings indicated that study participants tended to have less support outside of the K-12 school environment.

Inequality in disciplinary actions among Black males and other racial/ethnic backgrounds may also contribute to challenges for Black males. Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) posited that Black males tend to face more and tougher disciplinary actions than their White counterparts. Gregory et al.'s synthesis of the literature on ethnic and racial patterns in the K-12 school environment led to the conclusion that these actions could hinder learning by causing students to become less acclimatized to the school setting, have less of an investment in learning and school events, be less likely to follow

school rules and policies, and be less likely to complete coursework and become less motivated to achieve academic success.

Palmer et al. (2014) argued through their monograph analyzing the research literature on increasing access, retention, and persistence of Black male collegians that improving teacher preparation programs, setting high academic standards for Black male students, and involving family and community members as support in elementary and secondary school settings could better prepare Black males for postsecondary education.

Challenges to Postsecondary Access

Given the statistical information on the state of Black males in higher education discussed in Chapter 1 regarding the Black male/Black female graduation rate gap, researchers have conducted reviews of the literature on challenges to postsecondary access to understand the many aspects that may hinder the success of Black males in all postsecondary education settings and hinder Black males from graduating from colleges and universities. Researchers have pointed to college undermatch and unsuccessful transition during the first year of enrollment (Bonner II & Bailey, 2006; Dukakis et al., 2014; Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, & Brown, 2015). College undermatch can be defined as an unequal pairing of college students' academic achievement, social needs, and financial needs with their college selection. Others have concluded that unequal institutional practices in the postsecondary setting and educational loans or financial responsibility contribute to low graduation rate among Black male collegians (Dukakis et al., 2014; Naylor et al., 2015). Dukakis et al. (2014) and Naylor et al. (2015) in their examination of literature on disparities in higher education for Black males concluded the research on

college undermatch is concentrated mostly on low-income, first generation college students or minority students and discovered that low-income students who are high achieving are likely to be impacted by this factor. Although the students may be capable of achieving in a highly selective higher education environment, they may settle for a cheaper, less selective environment which may result in dropping out, due to lack of challenge, despite their abilities (Naylor et al., 2015).

In addition, Bonner II and Bailey (2006) posited that the institutional environment of higher education may hinder the transition of Black males during the first year of undergraduate study. In Bonner II and Bailey's synthesis of the literature on improving the academic environment for Black males in higher education, they denoted that Black males may be entering an environment they are not socially prepared to handle. This is especially relevant in settings in which they are the minority or first generation college students (Bonner II & Bailey, 2006; Dukakis et al., 2014). In certain settings in which Black males are the minority, they may encounter alienation and isolation, negative stereotypes, and hostile environments (Bonner II & Bailey, 2006). Second, Bonner II and Bailey postulated that Black male students may require academic assistance to help with the transition the college, but may view this assistance as an indicator of lacking ability. This required academic support may cause Black male students to become resistant to coping strategies that may lead them to success, which may result in them withdrawing from the process of the success of integration and dropping out (Bonner II & Bailey, 2006). Although academic skills reinforcement may be a necessary part of the transition

process for non-minority students, Black males may view it as a stigma in an environment where they are a minority.

Researchers have pointed to other factors as leading to the challenges for postsecondary success for Black males. Dukakis et al. (2014) and Harper (2012) denoted that academic preparedness is only one element requiring attention to create more equality in institutional practices for Black males. Many institutions do not actively recruit of faculty of color, offer training on diversity for college faculty, or actively engage Black males with success Black student leaders (Dukakis et al., 2014; Harper, 2012). Deficiencies in theses institutional practices may promote disproportion in the diversity of programs and opportunities offered to students of color. Dukakis et al. offered as support for this claim the Irvine Foundation's investment in a Campus Diversity Initiative (CDI) to assist with supporting the achievement and persistence of underrepresented students at 28 colleges and universities across the state of California, between 2000 and 2006. Although the program did not focus only on Black males, its purpose was to not only create initiatives that prepared students academically and addressed financial needs, but to recruit more faculty from diverse backgrounds, offer training on diversity, and to focus on diversity goals within the leadership positions. The findings from the 4-year program evaluation denoted that schools that participated in the initiative had an increase in racial/ethnic diversity and higher 6-year graduation rates compared to other schools that neglected to take part in the initiative (Dukakis et al., 2014).

Likewise, Harper (2012) in his qualitative study with 219 Black male participants who were students in 42 institutions across the United States found that high achieving peers and Black student leaders in their junior and senior years had a beneficial influence on the persistence and achievement of newly enrolled undergraduate Black males. The participants indicated that these student leaders assisted with the transition process, with the incoming students becoming engaged academically and socially, and with helping students network with faculty.

Attaining financial aid been viewed as a challenge for Black males achieving success postsecondary institutions. Dukakis et al. (2014), Naylor et al. (2015), and Zhan, Xiang, and Elliot III (2016) advanced that educational loans or financial responsibility could decrease college graduation rates for Black males. Middle and low income Black male students may be impacted by the cost of tuition and related school cost (Dukakis et al., 2014). While Naylor et al. (2015) indicated that financial aid may benefit Black males and increase college access; the impact of educational loans may be twofold. Incurring educational loans could result in heavy debt, which could have negative effects on graduation rates (Harper, 2012; Zhan et al., 2016). Harper (2012) found that many study participants in his qualitative study with 219 participants were more likely to be able to finance their education through fellowships, scholarships, work-study, and off campus jobs, but they indicated that many of their peers were likely to drop out due to financial difficulties. These financial difficulties extended to substantial financial aid debt, inability to acquire loans, or lack of scholarship funding.

Furthermore, Zhan et al. (2016) performed a quantitative study to examine the association between educational loans and college graduation rates and to discover the differential impacts of educational loans by race/ethnicity on graduation rates. The respondents included students who were attending, students who dropped out, and student who graduated with a 4-year degree. Zhan et al. found that educational loans at or below $19,581 had a positive impact on graduation rates; however, higher amounts had a negative impact on graduation rates and educational loans did not have a substantial bearing on racial/ ethnic gaps in graduation rates (Zhan et al., 2016). Black and Hispanic students' graduation rates were much lower compared to White students regardless of the amount of educational debt they incurred; however, Black students tended to incur the most debt. These findings are similar to Harper's (2012) findings, which indicated that Black males tended to struggle with ways to pay for college and had a difficult time managing debt, which contributed to them dropping out.

Although research in this field has depicted Black males' challenges in the higher education sector by addressing the deficits, Harper (2012) suggested that ongoing studies addressing Black males' postsecondary access and success should be framed as anti-deficit. Harper posited that Black males' achievement and success in higher education should receive attention to counterbalance the emphasis on low achieving Black males and the encounters Black males face in all higher education settings. Harper advanced that a reframing of deficits in Black male challenges be changed to focus on a repertoire of resources, experiences, and structures that can be helpful in assisting Black males. Furthermore, Harper conjectured focusing on the deficits in Black males' success tends to

place blame on the males for their struggles instead of holding institutions accountable for Black collegians' success.

Black Males in PWIs

Allen, Teranishi, Dinwiddie, and González (2002) posited that since 1965, affirmative action programs and equal opportunity programs were put in place to give minorities an equal opportunity to complete in discriminatory and racism settings; however, the settings have exhibited unequal opportunities or unfair treatment, which make it difficult for Black American to succeed. Higher education settings have not been immune to this issue. As most higher education institutions are predominately White and Black males have experienced success in these setting (Harper, 2012), in this section of the literature review I delve into Black males' experiences in the PWI setting.

Researchers have speculated that Black males attending PWIs have been impacted by environmental factors of racial inequalities and bias which has led to racial microaggressions, stereotype threat, and feelings of isolation among predominately White populations (Hines et al., 2015; Harper, 2015; Iverson & Jaggers, 2015; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2015; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008).

Racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions can be defined as the subtle and non-subtle acts of racism that occur on college campuses, which are a part of institutionalized racism of school environments (Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Utilizing purposeful sampling, Smith et al. (2007) interviewed 36 self identified African American students from various universities across the United States and collected data through guided discussion focus groups at each of the seven university campus

institutions represented. Smith et al.'s (2007) findings indicated that Black males' experiences of racial microaggressions fit into three domains: campus-academic; campus-social; campus-public spaces. Campus-academic microaggressions were described as the most pervasive on PWI campuses. Black males reported this domain reflected White collegians' fear of Black males and the perceived threat White collegians feel of Black males in the academic campus space results in Black males feeling lack of respect, hostility, or unwantedness in the academic area (Smith et al., 2007). The campus-social spaces domain referred to those spaces on campus that are non-academic, but offer social interaction, such as participation in sports and social fraternal events. In this study, Black males reported perceived a difference in treatment from other ethnic and gender groups in campus social area; elicit more campus policing or heavy police surveillance than events involving majority participation of White collegians (Smith et al., 2007). The campus-public spaces domain finding indicated those spaces that were relatively close to campus, such as area stores and locations close to campus. According to Smith et al. (2007), these areas also educe heavy police scrutiny.

Harper's (2015) qualitative study explored Black males' experiences with racial microaggressions and their responses to these microaggressions that aided their persistence to achieve in spite of encountering stereotypes. Harper identified study participants from the National Black Male College Achievement Study, a study designed to understand how Black males navigate successfully through undergraduate studies. Harper used criterion sampling to acquire participants. The study included data from 143 out of the 219 Black males from PWIs who presented the following characteristics:

earned above a 3.0 cumulative GPA, maintained a record of participation in leadership positions and various student organizations, had relationships with staff and faculty in class and outside of class, earned merit scholarships or honors awards, and had partaken in additional learning experiences, including internships, study abroad programs, or volunteerism (Harper, 2015). Harper conducted individual semi structured interviews with all study participants at all 30 of the campuses represented in this study.

Harper (2015) probed students on their experiences with stereotypes and responses to coping with stereotypes on college campuses. The findings indicated that Black male students experienced stereotypes in the form of racial microaggressions. Participants reported that White students and faculty perceived them as being enrolled based on affirmative action, as being advanced in or participating sports, as being mistaken for other Black males, as being knowledgeable of popular dance movements, and as being from low-income, high-crime environments (Harper, 2015). The findings also indicated that Black males might be able to resist these racial microaggressions by engaging in leadership positions, by actively engaging with multiple student organizations, and confronting negative behaviors from those who perpetuate stereotypes (Harper, 2015). Harper provided, as an illustration, a student from Towson recounting a professor interrogating him over an essay he had written. The student responded: "What makes you think I am not smart enough to have written this paper myself?" (Harper, 2015, p. 666). The professor responded that they had never met a student from Baltimore who wrote so eloquently and the student responded that the professor should examine their generalizations (Harper, 2015, p. 666).

In another study, racial profiling was explored as racial microaggressions, which can lead to stereotypical assumptions, which create frictions among Black males, and school faculty, school staff, and peers. Iverson and Jaggers (2015) in their qualitative study studied the influence racial profiling has on the lives of Black males enrolled at one Midwestern public research university. The sample size was 23 undergraduate Black males who all some level of involvement on campus. Similar to the findings in Smith et al.'s (2007) study, participants in Iverson and Jagger's study indicated high levels of surveillance at campus events, both on campus and off-campus, when compared to White counterparts. Furthermore, Black males denoted they were often blamed for offenses that were perpetuated by White students; the blaming often caused opposition between the Black males and the White students and staff (Iverson & Jaggers, 2015). Furthermore, Iverson and Jaggers (2015) found that Black males indicated they perceived experiences of being viewed as a criminal due to clothing or pre-conceived notions held by White campus officers or White peers.

Stereotype threat. Black males in the PWI settings have experienced stereotype threat. Stereotype threat can be labelled as situations where groups of people perceive stereotypes regarding their group and feel concern about being judged based on this stereotype (Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016). Hines et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study to explore the experiences of first generation Black male college graduates who graduated from a PWI in the southeastern part of the U.S. Two Black male participants were included in the study sample. The interview consisted of question related to the males' college choice decision making process, influences for choosing that college, and

their college experiences. The findings indicated that both participants experienced social

and academic challenges, which influenced them mentally (Hines et al., 2015). Many of

the challenges were related institutional bias in the classroom and stereotypical views of

Black people. Both males reported they perceived they were being the asked to the

spokesperson for their race. This finding is similar to Harper's (2012) findings regarding

Black males who were high achieving and their views of being the spokespersons of their

race on PWIs. One participant, Sam, asserted:

> You feel that you're the only one, and the problem with that is you feel
>
> representative of every Black person [...]. So the question I had to deal with was
>
> how do you overcome the burden of representation? What does it mean you're the
>
> only Black person in a class? [...] I always felt I had a little rebellious spirit. So I
>
> felt I had to represent, and I did. (Hines et al., 2015, p. 236)

Both participants also advocated they felt reluctant to participate in class due to fear of

being stereotyped. Sam also reflected on an incident that occurred during a Southern

politics class when the class had begun to discuss race issue:

> We're still talking around the race issue. And people are looking at you like,
>
> "What are you going to say? Is he gonna be an angry Black man today?" So
>
> trying not to be the angry Black man in class when someone said something
>
> stupid about race issues, whatever. (Hines et al., 2015, p. 236)

Participant Kevin described an occurrence when he was stereotyped as being militant due

to speaking up over racial issues that occurred on campus. He contributed:

made it exciting. Because not only was I having to deal with this college, but this

college had to deal with me. I wasn't the soft guy. Like, I wasn't the one who was

gonna just sit back. I forced them to deal with me and I think, because of that, and

not just me, a lot of my friends, brothers have an easier time here now than we

had when we got here, at least I hope they believe that. (Hines et al., 2015, p. 237)

Although both participants experienced the impact of stereotype threat, they reacted to

those experiences in different ways. Sam asserted that the impact of stereotype threat

contributed to more involvement in student organizations and community service to seek

validation, while Kevin organized protests and establish a Black fraternity on campus

(Hines et al., 2015).

Von Robertson and Chaney (2015) conducted a study to examine the impact of

stereotype threat on the involvements of African American males at a Southern PWI. The

research chose the South specifically to differentiate from other studies by giving

prominence to the perceptions of bigotry and negative stereotype in the South and to

explore their experiences with adjusting to stereotype threat (Von Robertson & Chaney,

2015). The qualitative study employed the method of in-depth interviews and

observations of 15 African American students. The participants were located through

purposive sampling. Von Robertson and Chaney (2015) constructed three themes from

the findings: faculty involvement as a facilitator of stereotype threat, classroom

environment as a facilitator of stereotype threat, and perceptions of racism as a facilitator

of stereotype threat (p. 28).

The participants conceptualized faculty involvement as a facilitator of stereotype threat as the faculty's role in stereotyping Black males as being not as intelligent as majority races or lazier than other races (Von Robertson & Chaney, 2015). Some males perceived the faculty felt threatened by their presence and did not want to interact with them in the same manner as they did with White students (Von Robertson &Chaney, 2015). A participant supported this theme by maintaining:

I feel we (Black males) have a low graduation rate and get fewer jobs after graduation. I feel the professors do not help Black males excel and do well. They do not always want us to do as well in life as whites.

I think they (White professors) do not want to see Black males succeed because we will be competing with them for jobs. For instance, I had a test due and one of my family members was sick and I missed the morning class, but I came back and tried to take it but the professor said that it was too late. However, during the final exam, a White girl came to class an hour late and he still let her take it. (Von Robertson & Chaney, 2015, pp. 29-30)

However, Von Robertson and Chaney's (2015) findings also indicated the impact of stereotype threat as it relates to faculty involvement may be migrated by Black males changing perceptions of being stereotyped by faculty. One participant James (pseudonym) extrapolated "that perhaps if African American students reached out more, collegiate faculty would reach out more to them" (Von Robertson & Chaney, 2015, p. 30).

The theme addressing classroom environment as an enabler of stereotype threat embodied the notion that the classroom environment that does not include information or experience relevant to Black males' race adjustment and success may be undermined (Von Robertson & Chaney, 2015). When participants were asked if their school attempted to infuse information relevant to their race or offer any classes relevant to their experiences, participants responded:

> No, not really. African Americans go through a totally different way of learning.
> We have to be given a chance to learn and express our ideas
> in class. The classes are not offered because it is a problem finding qualified
> professors to teach courses relevant to the African American experience.
> I have only heard of two; an African American sociology class and an African
> American literature course. Because the school is predominantly White, there are
> not any courses (that focus on the African American experience). Also, I believe
> if there were more Black professors, there would be more courses. I do not know
> why there are not more African American professors. (Von Robertson & Chaney,
> 2015, p. 31)

This finding is significant as it addresses the reduction of stereotype threat and the lack of faculty of color. Tinto (1993) contended that minority faculty may improve the challenges with the adjustment that Black students may face when they attend PWIs and may diminish Black students' perceptions of stereotypes regarding themselves.

The perception of racism as an enabler of stereotype threat denotes the bearing of typecasts on Black males' adjustment to their environment and their feelings on the

likelihood of success in the PWI climate. Von Robertson and Chaney's (2015) findings

concluded that Black males perceived the climate as hostile and perceived racial division

between White and Black students socially. The findings did not indicate the impact of

stereotype threat on Black males' feelings on their likelihood of success. One participant

recalled an occasion when he sat next to a White female student on campus and she

clutched her purse (Von Robertson & Chaney, 2015, p. 33). Another participant

contributed a similar incident in which he sat next to a White female student in the library

and she moved her purse; the participant suggested this was due to stereotypes portrayed

about Black males on television and hidden racism on campus (Von Robertson &

Chaney, 2015, p. 32). Similar to the findings in Iverson and Jagger's (2015) study on the

stereotypical nature of racial profiling, participants in Von Robertson and Chaney's

(2015) articulated that they were racially profiled by campus police at a social event or at

their dorms due to stereotypes.

    Sense of belonging. Black males have expressed that environmental factors have

contributed to a feeling of isolation and an increased need for a sense of belonging (Hines

et al., 2015; Parker et al., 2016; Strayhorn, 2008). Parker et al. (2016) conducted a study

of Black males' experiences with diversity on a large southeastern United States PWI

campus. Utilizing purposeful sampling, the researchers employed a qualitative study and

interviewed 21 Black males, using semi structured questioning by conducting focus

groups. Parker et al.'s study findings included a theme linked to the concept of sense of

belonging with divergent feelings from the participants regarding safety and belonging at

PWIs. Some Black collegians reported feeling safe and accepted on campus. One student

stated: "I feel safe; the people are inviting and not standoffish" (Parker et al., 2016, p. 83). Other study participants indicated they felt unsafe and not welcomed on campus, expressing experiences related to discrimination that contributed to feeling isolated such as feeling that their opinions and voices were not heard on campus (Parker et al., 2016).

Other studies considered factors that contributed to a sense of belonging for Black males on PWI campuses. Hines et al.'s (2015) findings on Black males' college experiences at PWIs indicated that a sense of belonging functions as a support for Black males in PWI settings. The findings of their qualitative study indicated that involvement in campus organization abetted Black males' sense of isolation by fostering connections with other Black males, which provided opportunities for validation (Hines et al., 2015). One participant recounted that he received his validation by participating in community service opportunities and winning the MLK Community (Hines et al., 2015).

Strayhorn (2008) conducted a quantitative study to investigate how Black male college students' diverse experiences on PWIs affected their sense of belonging. Strayhorn collected data from the 2004-2005 College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). This questionnaire was a 191-item tool designed to gauge the value and amount of students' involvement in campus activities and their use of college facilities. This questionnaire is used at 500 higher education institutions in the United States. Many of these items were a relevant sense of belonging by involvement as Astin (1993) determined students' involvement in certain campus activities have been shown to positively influence the learning and development of students. The sample consisted of analytic 231 African American students and a 300 White male student comparison group

(Strayhorn, 2008). The dependent variable was a sense of belonging. Strayhorn abstracted

the independent variables from 10 items, which typified interaction with diverse peers on

the CSEQ survey. The research applied multivariate analysis to explore the association

between sense of belonging and diverse experiences and established controls to account

for interfering influences such as background and academic factors (Strayhorn, 2008).

Based on a Likert scale, with 1 representing ("never") and 4 representing ("very

often"), the findings indicated that African American students who interacted with

diverse peers more were liable to have a higher sense of belonging than African

American students with fewer interactions with diverse peers (Strayhorn, 2008).

Strayhorn (2008) emphasized that Black males who tended to interact with peers who

were racially diverse and peers who had different interests reported higher levels of sense

of belonging. Comparing that finding to African American males' White counterparts,

White males reported greater levels of sense of belonging in the same setting (Strayhorn,

2008). Specifically, White males who interacted with peers from different racial

background indicated a greater sense of belonging than their Black colleagues. This

finding is significant as it reflects the advantages that diverse interactions with other

ethnic groups provides Black and White male students, although to distinct degrees.

Academic stigma. Harper (2009) observed that the literature on Black males at

PWI has provided many examples of negative portrayals of Black male collegians.

Harper (2009) elaborated that the negative portrayals that society and higher education

institution maintain regarding Black males are misconceptions about Black males

regarding their intelligence and academic ability in the postsecondary setting, and

stereotypes perpetuated by majority populations have resulted in Black males' collegians being "niggered" as characterized by Harper (p. 701). Harper appropriated "niggering" from the etymology termed in Robert deCoy's 1967 book, *The Nigger Bible* and Randall Kennedy's 2002 book, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* (p. 698). Harper appropriated the use of the term to reflect the portrayals of Black collegians as underachieving and unsuccessful, to reflect the misconception that Black males are unable to successful graduate from postsecondary settings, and to reflect the lack of literature on strategies Black males employ to defy stereotypes and persist to graduation (Harper, 2009). Utilizing the term, Harper explored if there was a population of Black males who were disengaged and underperforming, and if so, how they navigate on PWIs and resist stereotyping on campuses.

Harper's (2009) counternarrative, "Niggers No More: A Critical Race Counternarrative on Black Male Student Achievement at Predominately White Colleges and Universities" was centered on the findings from the National Black College Achievement Study also used in Harper's (2015) study Black male achievers in college referenced above. Harper revisited the 143 Black male participants' statements and recorded examples that reflected cases of the academic experiences that countered the principal narrative on Black male collegians (Harper, 2009). The following categories were emphasized: academic achievement, support from peers and professors, the catalyst for the participants' involvement in leadership or for being engaged in activities, and constructive strategies for approaching racist stereotypes (Harper, 2009). Harper's counternarrative summarized Black males' experiences on the position of Black male

collegians, the social conditions of Black males, views on how Black males are represented in media, the favorable benefits of membership in a Black fraternal organization, positive benefits of sports participation, and other related categories relating to the essence of the experiences with and constructed reactions to distinct typecasts experienced on campus (Harper, 2009).

Through the counternarrative, Black males reported they often felt "niggered" on campus and felt as though their campuses did not recognize them as achievers (Harper, 2009, p. 706). One participant recounted that his reaction of being "niggered" was by participating in Student Government Association and the Residence Hall Council (Harper, 2009, p. 706). Other participants reiterated this averring that they also participated in multiple organizations on campus and used this these interactions to foster relationships with White faculty to change the perception on campus of Black males being disengaged. The participants used these associations to display a more positive representation of Black men. Harper (2009) also indicated that Black collegians were not consulted on what strategies led to their success in postsecondary education. Another study participant reflected:

> No one ever asked me or other Black male student leaders what enabled us to get good grades or what compelled us to take on leadership positions. Instead, they were spending all their time trying to figure out why brothas' were struggling. (Harper, 2009, p. 706)

Harper concluded the counternarrative by advancing that Black male achievers and student leaders are an overlooked population; strategies which promote engagement and

interactions and publication of Black achievers successes are important to dispel deficit views of Black males, and "niggering" can be resisted by Black male representation in leadership and confrontation of stereotypes (p. 709).

Religiously Affiliated PWI setting. Many of the studies regarding Black males and the religiously affiliated PWI setting have been centered on college choice, increasing diversity, and predictors of success for students of color in religious-affiliated schools (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Paredes-Collins, 2014; Perez, 2013). Confer and Mamiseishvili (2012) conducted a study to examine the factors related to minority college choice for those minorities who were admitted to faith-based colleges or universities. They used the sample of minority students from the College Board's ASQ Plus survey between the years of 2005 to 2010. These students were students from eight of the Council of Christian Colleges and University (CCCU) member institutions. Minority students were identified as any student who did not identity as Caucasian. The final sample included 283 minority students.

The dependent variable for the study was a variable that indicated if the student planned to enrolled or not at the institution in which he or she had been admitted (Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012). The independent variables are background and demographic factors, financial components, students' perceptions of the institutions' marketing strategies, and students' perceptions of the institutions' characteristics. They conducted descriptive statistics to explore the characteristics of each student and their responses to each variable. Chi-Square and t-test were used to explore substantial dissimilarities on enrolling and non-enrolling students. Logistic regression was used to explore the factors

that influenced enrollment choice. The findings suggested that, when admitted to CCCU institutions, African American students were more liable to enroll in faith-based universities than other minority groups (Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012). In addition, minority students' choice was impacted by the distance from home and finances. Minority students were more liable to enroll in a CCCU when they came from a family with an annual yearly income of $30,000 or less. They denoted that campus marketing had a positive impact on minority students' enrollment decisions.

Diversity is an important area of focus for both secular and religious-affiliated PWI institutions (Yancey, 2010). Paredes-Collins (2014) conducted a study to explore how spiritual development was impacted by diversity for students of color. The research question was centered on the associations among spirituality and the demographic variables, diversity variables, campus climate variables, and sense of belonging (Paredes-Collins, 2014). The sample for the study 2,860 senior undergraduate students enrolled at 21 faith-based small liberal arts institutions that were members of the CCCU. The participants of the study were 89% White, 5% Hispanic, 3.6 Asian American, 2.7 African American, and 1.7% American Indian. The College Senior Survey (CSS) an instrument of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles was used for this study. After conducting a preliminary analysis and a SEM to explore the relationships between the variables, all students, White students and students of color, were all dissatisfied with the level of diversity on the campuses (Paredes-Collins, 2014). Due to this lack of diversity, students of color were less likely to re-enroll in the school, if given

the choice, and students of color were less significantly fulfilled with the college experience than their White counterparts.

Also regarding diversity, Perez (2013) conducted a qualitative case study to explore how four Christian colleges and universities who were members of the CCCU institutions and who had shown some evidence of commitment to diversity linked missions, histories, and theologies, to increase diversity on their campuses. Perez designed three research questions to describe the aim for the study. The questions concentrated on if the institution's efforts involved their mission statements and if those missions conflicted with diversity, how those efforts reflected their theology and history, how successful these institutions were at embracing all of these components, and increasing diversities at their institutions. Perez selected four institutions from the Northwest, Southwest, Midwest, and East part of the United States. Perez collected data by conducting interviews presidents, faculty members, administration, cabinet members, and students of the universities. Perez also analyzed documents from the universities and institutional archives in the form of mission statements, demographic data, organizational charts, websites, university catalogs, and student handbooks. The findings indicated that faculty and administration are key in creating efforts to increase and sustain minority enrollment in the religious higher education setting. The findings suggested that workshops can be beneficial by assisting university staff members integrating diversity into their institutional programs.

Although many religiously affiliated schools are committing to efforts to increasing diversity (Paredes-Collins, 2014; Perez, 2012), Ash and Schreiner (2016)

explore the predictors of success at Christian higher education institutions. The research

question that directed this study focused on to what degree did interaction with students

with diverse backgrounds, faculty sensitivity to the needs of diverse students, student-

faculty interactions, perceptions of institutional integrity and commitment to student

welfare, institutional fit contribute to students of color intent to graduate. Ash and

Schreiner controlled for students by entering characteristics and levels of spirituality. The

participants for this study were from 12 CCCU institutions and included 1,536 students of

color. An online survey was administered to the participants to assess student success.

The scale was a 25-item measure that incorporated five factors: engaged learning, social

connectedness, positive perspective, academic determination, and diverse citizenship.

Other scales were used to measure other variables such as spirituality, student-faculty

interaction, institutional integrity, and commitment to student welfare. Ash and Schreiner

used path analysis to determine the quality of the associations. The findings indicated that

institutional fit, students' thriving in their environment and students' perception of

institutional commitment to student welfare had the most bearing on students' of color

intentions to graduate from a religiously affiliated college or university. A sense of

community was a key predictor in assisting students of color fit into their environment.

Spirituality was connected to thriving and building a sense of belonging for institutional

fit for students of color in the religiously affiliated environment or faith-based setting.

Diverse peer interactions, student-faculty interactions, and faculty sensitivity to diverse

learners had positive impact on students of color thriving in their campus environment.

Factors Promoting Persistence for Black Males

Although Black males have encountered issues that may influence their achievement in the higher education setting, studies have indicated that there are factors that can contribute to Black males' persistence to graduation. Researchers have indicated that familial support (Brooks, 2015), spiritual/ religious influences (Holland, 2014), academic supports (Farmer & Hope, 2015), and community supports (Strayhorn, 2014) impact Black males' persistence and retention. For this section, an analysis of studies was done on a variety of higher education settings regarding these factors that support persistence, and this led to a narrowing in scope to aspects of persistence pertaining to PWIs in subsequent sections of this review.

Familial support. Much of the literature on elements that contribute to persistence and retention for Black males in the higher education setting encompasses family support for Black males; this incorporates the delineation of familial relationships and the bearing they have on Black males' achievement (Brooks, 2015; Brooks & Allen, 2016; Hines et al., 2015). Brooks and Allen (2016) indicated that Black male collegians considered their peer, staff/faculty members, and community members as family and these relationships promoted a positive influence on Black males' academics and coping skills in higher education environments. In addition, Brooks and Allen determined that familial support aided Black males in making improved decisions related to academics and behavior in school. Brooks and Allen conducted a qualitative study that probed how chosen kin relationships and religious belief effected Black male students attending HBCUs. Brooks and Allen interviewed 14 students who had finished at least 2 years of

college study. The researchers' findings designated three themes for familial support: fictive kin or chosen kin relationships and university faculty/staff, and peer relationships. Brooks and Allen posited that when Black males were likely to perceive relationships with friends, professors, and community members as familial and the supportive impact of these relationships were perceived to be as significant as with relationships with blood relatives.

Hines et al. (2015) also found fictive kin relationships were perceived as supportive. In Hines et al.'s previously referenced phenomenological study designed to understand which factors contributed to Black males' persistence and graduation in the collegiate environment, indicated that two Black male participants articulated that their Black college professors offered them a durable familial support system that sustained them through taxing academic struggles. Similar to Brooks and Allen's (2016) findings regarding the significance of both fictive and blood relationships, Hines et al.'s findings also indicated the supportive impact of these relationships on the academic success and emotional support of Black male collegians. Brooks and Allen's and Hines et al.'s findings add important insight as very few studies have detailed the bearing of non-familial relationships on Black males, despite non-familial relationships being considered a cultural resource in Black communities (Brooks, 2015; Brooks & Allen, 2016).

Studies have indicated that familial support has also been a support for Black males during their transition to college. In Brooks's (2015) qualitative study, 14 Black male participants who were enrolled in an HBCU in their second year of study were asked to describe the impact of their family relationships on their transition to college.

Brooks's interview questions focused on having participants describe their family organization and the impact of that organization on their collegiate experiences, academic support, and emotional support. The participants communicated that their family structure and relationships motivated them academically, emotionally, and socially. Brooks also indicated that study participants' families encouraged them to be self sufficient and this contributed to the participants viewing themselves as role models for younger family members. As suggested by Brooks and Allen (2016) and Hines et al. (2015), Brooks' (2015) findings also submitted that Black male participants' college experiences, both educational and social, were enhanced by family support. Another significant finding from these studies is that not only do Black males benefit from the familial support, but they have implied that family relationship appeared to be strengthened despite the encounters and resistance the participants confronted academically, socially, or emotionally (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Hines et al., 2015).

Studies in addition to the previous study referring to the transition of Black males into college have indicated that familial support has a beneficial influence on the achievement and academic persistence of Black male even prior to enrolling in college. Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) and Spruill, Hirt, and Mo (2014) posited that parental backing and high expectations regarding Black males' education may have a beneficial impact on Black males' academic achievement, their aspirations to attend higher education, and may serve as an impetus for the foundation needed for to be successful in higher education. Hines and Holcomb-McCoy's (2013) quantitative study examined the relationship between African American males' perception of their parents' parenting style

and African American male achievement. In addition, Hines and Holcomb-McCoy

sought to investigate which factors, such as family structure, church attendance, parental

communication, and parental monitoring and peer relationships, best predicted African

American male achievement. Hines and Holcomb-McCoy conducted a survey in which

153 11th and 12th grade African American male students who attended two high schools

within the same school district in the northeastern region of the United States

participated. The predominant outcome of this study was that the students' perception of

parenting styles had no association with GPA; however, family structure (inclusive of

two parent households), family involvement, and peer relationships were positively

correlated to participants' GPAs. Another noteworthy finding from Hines and Holcolmb-

McCoy's study was that Black males' father's education level was an affirmative

indicator for Black male students' GPAs; the greater the degree of education, the better

the students' GPA.

Spruill et al. (2014) conducted a quantitative study utilizing Bandura's theoretical

framework of self efficacy to project which variables, including parental involvement,

had a bearing on underrepresented male persistence. The study encompassed 28 highly

selective higher education institutions in the United States. The study used data from the

National Longitudinal Survey of Freshman (NLSF) and the final sample included 1,226

males: 39% White; 31% Hispanic/Latino, and 30% Black. The researchers did not

consider Asian male students in the study outcomes, as they were not deemed an

underrepresented group in higher education. Spruill et al.'s findings indicated that, of the

many self reported variables they analyzed, only parental participation with students had

a beneficial influence on the persistence of males while in high school for all male groups, underrepresented and non-underrepresented. Spruill et al.'s findings posited that this familial support built a foundation for persistence and academics in the college setting. This finding is similar to Hines and Holcomb-McCoy's (2013) finding regarding the beneficial influence of parental involvement in high school for Black male students. Dissimilar to Hines and Holcomb-McCoy's findings which did not indicate a correlation between parental expectations and GPA, Spruill et al.'s study findings advanced there was a negative correlation between parents addressing students' grades in high school and parents addressing students' grades in college and its effect on students' persistence in college. The researcher suggested that the punishment vs. reward method of addressing grades may impact academic success and impact the probability of males achieving their college degrees (Spruill et al., 2014).

Spiritual/religious influences. Many studies have denoted that religious involvement and spirituality have had a positive bearing on the academic engagement and persistence of Black males in the higher education setting (Astin et al., 2011; Holland, 2014; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). The concepts of religion and spirituality have been complex in their definitions and much literature has been conceived to attempt to clarify a uniform meaning; however, no clear definitions have been determined, claimed Astin et al. (2011) in their thorough and large study and literature review. Astin et al. differentiated spirituality as a focus inner development that surpassed religious beliefs and practices, such as prayer, church attendance; religion reflects religious rituals and practices in which those who hold such religious beliefs or backgrounds engage. In

another study focused on these concepts, Holland (2014) similarly defined religion as systematic beliefs, practices, and collective rituals, while spirituality was an association with a sacred source. Kim and Hargrove's study (2013) offered no specific definition for religion or spirituality; however, the researchers did provide a frame of reference for prayer as a ritual of religion. For this study and for the intents of providing consistency, I used the delineation of religion and spirituality posited by Astin et al.'s (2011) research.

Astin et al.'s (2011) study, as described earlier, indicated religious practices among college students tended to decline in the higher education setting, while spiritual development tended to increase. This spiritual development was reflected by students displaying more empathy for others, building connections with others, progressing academically, and displaying more tolerance. As identified in the conceptual framework section, Astin et al. used data from the CSBV Survey, which was completed by 112,232 first-year students during the Spring of 2007 and later completed by 14,527 students who were completing their junior year. The researchers gathered this data to evaluate fluctuations in students' spiritual and religious traits during college attendance. Based on their findings regarding the impact of spirituality on the student development, Astin et al. recommended that higher education institutions place more emphasis on the inner development of students so that they may be positively influenced psychological, emotional, and academically.

Holland's (2014) mixed methods research study, which investigated under which conditions religiosity, spirituality, and religious places of worship could impact the academic achievement of Black urban youth, suggested; however, that although some

studies denoted that Black males' religious engagement may somewhat wane while attending higher education, it still was influential on their academic progress and the religious engagement of Black males' engagement remained a prominent factor in their lives. Holland used purposeful sampling method to recruit 49 Black males who had graduated from high school 5 years prior to data collection and were currently enrolled in the university where data collection transpired. Holland established three themes: internal motivation, roles/commitments/responsibilities, and congregation members and congregational resources. For the theme representing internal motivation, the findings indicated that Black male study participants credited a sacred source as providing them with the internal motivation to transition into college and persist (Holland, 2014). Regarding the theme specifying roles/commitments/responsibilities, the participants asserted that religious rituals and obligations to responsibilities in the church induced their college choices (Holland, 2014). Regarding the third of them, the participants asserted that congregation members afforded them socio-emotional support to persist in college and the religious organization endowed them with resources, tutoring, and college planning assistance. Holland's findings were substantiated by Brooks and Allen's (2016) study which also suggested that participants who engaged in religious practices and built fictive relationships, even with members from religious organizations, were more liable to persevere academically and cope emotionally in higher education.

Spirituality has been identified as constructive component of the African American community and studies indicate that spirituality and religious engagement can be a coping strategy for ethnic groups in their college experiences (Chae et al., 2004;

Holland, 2014; Walker & Dixon, 2002). Weddle-West et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study to explore the differences between the degree of spirituality held by Black students who attended PWIs and those who attended HBCUs. The researchers denoted that HBCUs tended to provided more supports for religious Black students and suggested implications from the study could be applied to PWI settings.

Studies have also indicated when other support factors are combined with spirituality and religiosity, the impact on achievement may be greater and there may be a benefit to Black males' identity and self efficacy. Kim and Hargrove's (2013) review of the literature on resiliency in higher education, Marks et al.'s (2016) study on the psychology of Black males in higher education, and Reid's (2013) study on academic persistence of Black males in the higher education setting found that spirituality, merged with elements such as peer support, family support, and self efficacy had an impact on Black collegian persistence and academic achievement. In their review of literature, Kim and Hargrove (2013) investigated various studies through the lens of Harper's (2012) anti-deficit framework, which probes Black male persistence through the context of constructive questioning, focusing on studies that focused on themes and factors associated with Black male resilience in the academic setting. Kim and Hargrove observed, in the review of the literature that Black males at HBCUs and PWIs applied religious practices for diverse purposes in their higher education setting. At PWIs, Black males used prayer as a coping strategy to persist academically and emotionally in racist environments. However, at HBCUs, Black males were more likely to make use of prayer as a means for seeking direction and for assistance in purposefully organizing their lives.

Kim and Hargrove (2013) also indicated the literature suggested that religious practices along with awareness of pride in one's racial identity may contribute to increased self–efficacy for Black male collegians. Comparably, Marks et al.'s (2016) study on the psychology of Black males attending urban private colleges and universities offered a perception on the impact of spirituality on the self efficacy of Black males. The researchers used survey instruments and 1,138 Black male college students at 28 anonymous private, non-profit colleges and universities in urban areas completed the surveys. The study used three scales to evaluate the participants' viewpoints toward school, behavior, and psychological postures. The dependent variables were attitude, health values and priorities, leadership, masculinity, and spirituality. Students who indicated they relied on a higher power self reported moderately higher positive attitudes, performed better academically, and displayed positive behaviors in college. The score for this finding on spirituality was 5.58 on a 7-point scale. Distinct from Kim and Hargrove's (2013) study which had an academic emphasis, Marks et al.'s (2016) study findings emphasized the attitudes and behaviors of Black males and emphasized that increased self efficacy provided by several dynamics, including religious practices, could influence attitudes and behaviors of Black males. As Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy conjectures, belief and attitudes may further improved performance.

Continuing with the self efficacy theme, Reid's (2013) study investigated the correlation between Black males' self-efficacy and institutional integration levels and academic integration levels, as suggested by their involvement in their institutions, in academics, and their academic achievement. Reid's quantitative study used the Self-

Efficacy for Academic Milestone Scale (AMS), Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAs-B), and the Institutional Integration Scale (IIS). Two hundred and one Black male students attending research universities were surveyed for this study sample. Reid hypothesized that Black males who reported higher self efficacy, positive racial attitudes, and high levels of institutional involvement would earn a higher GPA. In addition, Reid's (2013) study findings suggested that Black males attending research universities who reported heightened self efficacy and high levels of institutional involvement had greater academic achievement.

Also, central to student development of identity is a strong sense of well-being and some studies have explored the impact religion has on development (Bowman & Small, 2012; Paredes-Collins, 2014). Bowman and Small (2012) conducted a study to explore minority students' religious affiliation and well-being. Bowman and Small addressed research questions relating to the extent to which college students' religious affiliations predicted changes in well-being, and the extent to which it differs between religiously affiliated and secular institutions.

Bowman and Small (2012) used data from Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey, which was a part of the Spirituality in Higher Education project, conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). Data was drawn from the Fall 2004 administration in which 112,232 first year students' self reported on items regarding attitude, behavior, and belief regarding religion and spirituality. A subset of the original sample was invited to participate in a follow up survey for the Spring 2007 and the sample size for this population was 36,307. The

sample size drawn for Bowman and Small's (2012) study was 14,527 students from 136 institutions. Forty-one secular institutions were represented and 95 religiously affiliated institutions were represented.

Bowman and Small (2012) chose hedonic well-being—relating to stress, anxiety, feeling depressed and feeling overwhelmed—and eudaimonic well-being—related to academic self confidence, cooperativeness, and understanding of others—as the dependent variables. The independent variable was religious affiliation. Bowman and Small used hierarchal linear modeling (HLM) analyses to assess the associations between the variables. Bowman and Small found that there was a relationship between Black males' religious affiliation and their social and emotional well-being and development as a student. Bowman and Small also found that that religious engagement was positively associated with student wellbeing and student development.

Along the same lines of development, Paredes-Collins's (2014) study on spiritual development through campus diversity explored students of color's identity development. Paredes-Collins discovered there was a positive association amid diversity and spirituality, especially among students of color, meaning that the more students of color perceived diverse interactions, diverse experiences, and quality interactions, the more likely those interactions were to predict spirituality. Also, sense of belonging was found to be a predictor of spirituality in students of color.

Support factors for Black male achievement. Researchers have investigated academic engagement factors, which increase achievement and retention for Black males. Studies have suggested that academic challenge, academic supports, and mentorship can

aid Black males with persisting in the high school setting and in the higher education setting (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Warren, 2016; Wood & Harris, 2015; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Farmer and Hope (2015) conducted a quantitative study to ascertain if precollege and college-related variables, such as high school GPA, age, residency status, SAT scores, freshman year GPA score, remedial math, reading, or writing courses were related to graduation rates and retention rates of Black males in the higher education setting. Farmer and Hope selected high school GPA, age, and SAT scores as the independent precollege variables. The independent college variables were, freshman year GPA, participants' major during freshman year, residency status, amount of financial aid received during freshman year, the status of a student taking remedial classes in math, reading, or writing, credit hours attempted during the Fall of 2005, profile admits, and credit hours received during the Fall of 2005 school year. Farmer and Hope selected the retention rate for freshman cohort enrolled during the Fall semester of 2005 and Fall semester of 2006 as the dependent variable. The sample for the study was 562 Black males who were a part of the freshman cohort and had graduated with a bachelor's degree by the end of the Spring semester of the 2010-2011 school year. Farmer and Hope's study indicated that high school GPA was the highest indicator of college retention for Black males. First year, first semester Black males with higher GPAs were likely to be retained, and students who were college state residents and had higher GPA were more likely to be retained.

Farmer and Hope (2015) and Warren (2016) findings are comparable concerning the relationship between high school GPA and college retention, however, Warren's

(2016) study concentrated on Black males' experiences with academics and those supports that they deemed as aiding in their persistence in college and retention. Warren conducted a qualitative study, which included 18 Black males who attended a single-sex public high school in Chicago and in which all study participants graduated from high school and were admitted into 4 year universities. Warren condensed the data indicating the males' experiences with persistence and retention into five categories. These categories were: learning encounters/ occasions; curriculum; instruction; course sequence; and stakeholder academic interaction. Warren's findings posited that Black male participants perceived the expectations of faculty and administration impacted their aspirations to persist with education goals. In addition, offering rigorous instruction and a demanding curriculum along with academic supports, such as various instructional strategies and academic interventions, abetted the participants with academic accomplishment.

Studies have indicated that several variables related to the college atmosphere, social supports, relational factors, and economic factors have a bearing on academic persistence and graduation (Wood & Harris, 2015; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Wood and Harris (2015) conducted a quantitative study to determine what function, if any, college selection variables, such as institutional, financial, familial, academic, and social had on persistence in college. Data were used from 2006 collection of the Educational Longitudinal Study (ETS). Wood and Harris selected Black or Hispanic/Latino male participants who were enrolled in a 2-year college. The final sample size was 32,587 Black males and 38,948 Hispanic/Latino males. Contrasting Farmer and Hope's (2015)

study findings, which did not indicate that financial situations had a direct correlation to retention and persistence, Wood and Harris (2015) indicated that participants' economic situation effected students' college choice decisions, college persistence, and retention. Wood and Harris also posited that male participants who had higher mean scores in certain variables, such as familial, academic aspects, and institutional characteristics were more likely to persist than those who had lower mean scores. Both Farmer and Hope and Warren's (2016) denoted that challenging academics and rigor could impact persistence and retention for Black males; however, Wood and Harris also found that when Black males lacked challenging courses in college or were accepted into college thorough an easier admission process, they were less prone to persist and graduate.

Wood and Ireland (2014) conducted a study to explore the correlation between study participants' background characteristics, academic progress, and engagement of faculty. Using data from the 2011 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), utilizing a 3-year cohort, which encompassed 11,384 Black male respondents from 260 community colleges, Wood and Ireland explored variables, such as student-faculty relationships, academic factors, and institutional environment. The control variables were active and collaborative learning. Wood and Ireland's findings indicated that age had a positive influence on students' relationships with faculty and the more credits students earned had a beneficial influence on student engagement in the academic setting. Wood and Ireland also posited that student learning communities that were composed of faculty and student collaboration had the most positive impact of the engagement of students in the learning process. The researchers advanced that these

finding regarding engagement and student/faculty relationships had an affirmative influence on the persistence and retention of Black males. Both Wood and Harris (2015) and Wood and Ireland suggested that institutional factors influenced Black male persistence and retention in the higher education setting.

      Community supports for Black male achievement. As crucial as familial supports, religious/spiritual supports, and educational supports are to foster persistence and retention for Black males, community supports are viewed as supportive, influencing academic aids for Black males in the high school and higher educational settings (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Scott et al., 2013; Strayhorn, 2014). Strayhorn (2014) indicated that Black male students often gain direction, consolation, and support from community organizations. In Strayhorn's mixed method study, utilizing data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) database and semi structured interviews with Black males, the researcher sought to explore those factors, which had a beneficial impact on the persistence and academic achievement of Black males in urban public universities. The final sample for analysis included 332 urban public universities. Strayhorn did not identify the number of Black males who participated in the semi structured interviews. Strayhorn's findings indicated that on campus and off campus community organizations afforded both academic and emotional support to Black males. Another finding indicated that it was in the best interest for Black males from all college majors to form connections with community organizations. Furthermore, Strayhorn's findings indicated that Black males advanced from having a close proximity to college resources, the convenience of support systems in the community, and developing

connections with the community to assist with persistence and academic support.

The value of community support is also impactful at the high school level. Scott et al.'s (2013) study on academically successful Black males enrolled in high school who aimed to attend a higher education institution identified the importance of community supports as academic supports. Scott et al.'s rationale was to distinguish the encounters college-bound Black males encounter while traversing through high school. The sample for the study included 70 Black males who replied to an essay question. The responses were evaluated as data and coded for themes. The themes that emerged were mentorship and family/community support. Scott et al.'s findings reported that the study participants promoted the significance of community organizations as supports.

According to Strayhorn (2014), community mentoring programs, school-based peer networks, counseling services, and grassroots organizations are likely to offer assistance to Black males attempting to graduate. In addition, the theme of mentorship was espoused by Scott et al. (2013) who observed that mentoring interactions are advantageous for Black male students during high school and equally influential as they persist through college. Further, Scott et al. suggested that Black male students' relationships with Black male mentors appeared to have more of a bearing on Black males' persistence, academic success, and emotional support. While both Scott et al. and Strayhorn's findings support the advantage of Black male students engaging with community organizations, Strayhorn conjectured that the value could be more abundant in urban communities in which the males already reside. However, there were several similarities in the findings of both Strayhorn and Scott et al.'s studies; both advanced that

community supports positively affected Black males' persistence and academic success and suggested that these supports could perform a critical function in Black males' college choice decisions.

Brooks and Allen (2016) and Scott et al. (2013) also denoted that religious community organizations may provide substantial academic and emotional support for Black males in higher education settings. Within these organizations, males engage in communal religious practices, such as prayer and singing (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Furthermore, studies have suggested that various Black males attending college have regarded church members and pastors as family and these associations are likely to have the same impact on their achievement and persistence as the affiliations they have with their blood relatives (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Although Strayhorn (2014) did not research the effect of the religious organizations on Black males in his study, the researcher did advocate that religious organizations may affect college choice for Black males and this influence could be likely due to males' desire to stay close to religious community affiliations.

Student involvement. Although various studies have explored persistence and retention factors for students of color in the higher education setting (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Warren, 2016; Wood & Harris, 2015), Harper et al. (2015) advanced that higher education institutions, and perhaps PWIs more so, were not doing enough to engage men of color. Harper et al. suggested that male student of color disengagement trends have indicated that student engagement strategies effort to assist with retention and graduation for Black males. For this section, I conducted an analysis relating student involvement

factors regarding students' satisfaction with college, extracurricular involvement, and academic success and development of students of color.

Exploring the relation amid student engagement and student satisfaction, Chen, Ingram, and Davis (2014) explored the connection between student involvement and student college satisfaction for African American students enrolled at HBCUs and PWIs. The conceptual framework for the study was based on Astin's student involvement theory and the I-E-O model of college impact (Astin, 1984). The research questions for this study were:

(1) What demographic and institutional characteristics may predict African American students' overall satisfaction with HBCUs or PWIs?; (2) Is student engagement a predictor of overall student satisfaction for African American students at HBCUs and PWIs after being controlled for input and environment variables? and; (3) Is there a significant difference between HBCUs and PWIs in terms of African American students' overall satisfaction after being controlled for student engagement and other input and environmental variables? (Chen et al., 2014, p. 567)

Chen et al. (2014) used student responses from the 2006 and 2007 NSSE, which included 3,287 African American students who attended HBCUs and 2,638 African American students who attended PWIs. The dependent variables for the first two research questions were based on the NSSE student satisfaction scale, a scale that measures students' satisfaction with the educational experience (Chen et al., 2014). The independent variables were input and environment variables based on Astin's I-E-O

assessment framework. The findings suggested that African American students' satisfaction with higher education was most dependent on how supportive and welcoming they perceived the campus was to them. The findings also suggested a strong positive correlation of satisfaction with a level of academic challenge had with African American students at HBCUs but not at PWIs. Chen et al. also found that other student engagement measures, such collaborative learning had no statistical bearing on African American student satisfaction at either setting.

Continuing to explore differing institutional settings, Harris and BrckaLorenz (2017) examined student engagement differences for Black, White, and biracial students at HBCUs and non-HBCUs. The sample for Harris and BrckaLorenz's study was drawn from the 2013 and 2104 administrations of the NSSE. Of the respondents for the sample, 36,704 were African American, 303,864 were White, and 2, 600 were African American and White. The HBCU enrollment of participants was comprised of 89% of African American students, 10% White students, and 1% both African American/White students. The non-HBCU enrollment of participants was comprised of 90% White students, 9 % Black students, and 1% African American/White students., Harris and BrckaLorenz's made comparisons among the three student groups by using independent sample t tests and Cohen's d effect sizes, and $p \leq .001$.

Black students reported being more academically challenged, working with peers more, having better quality of interaction with people at their institution, and being more gratified with their collegiate experience than their biracial counterparts at both non-HBCUs and HBCUs (Harris & BrckaLorenz, 2017). In addition, despite collaborating

less with peers than White students at non HBCUs, Black students report higher satisfaction with their campus experience and felt supported by their campus. Regarding student-faculty interaction, there was no statistical measure indicated in the study for non-HBCUs Black students.

   Involvement in organizations. In this seminal study, Guiffrida (2004) explored African American student participation in organizations on PWI campuses in an effort to develop Astin's (1982) theory of student involvement as it relates to the study of African American students and to assist student affair advisors advising African American students relating to the experiences that support and hinder their academic achievement (Guiffrida, 2004). Guiffrida used a qualitative grounded theory approach for this study and selected 84 African American students from a northeastern U.S. PWI for the study sample. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit 45% males and 55% female for this study population. Sixty-five of the students were self selected as low-achieving students, with a GPA of 0.0 to 2.5. The students in this group were also in a 6-week retention group. The remaining students were self selected as high achieving, with a GPA of 2.8 to 3.9. Guiffrida collected data by interviewing small focus groups and conducting individual face to face interviews. In the group interviews, Guiffrida questioned the participants on college experiences, involvement with African American organization, and assets and liabilities with the involvement. In the individual interviews, Guiffrida asked participants about the time they spent in organizations, if they had leadership positions, and balancing academics and involvement.

The assets and liabilities of their college experience theme, participants'

responses ranged from being very involved to enjoying those experiences (Guiffrida,

2004). Some freshman and sophomore respondents expressed that they were not involved

and felt disconnected from the campus and a few high achievers responded that they were

not involved due to the desire to spend more time on their academic endeavors. However,

most of participants in both groupings conveyed that they participated in African

American organizations related to their majors, honors groups, religious organizations,

sororities and fraternities. The participants did not indicate involvement in any other

organization other than African American organizations. Participants also held different

definitions regarding involvement as an asset or liability; many low achieving students

who were very involved, but were struggling academically saw themselves as "overly

involved" (Guiffrida, 2004, p.91). There were participants who were high achieving and

were very involved, but were managing academically and viewed themselves as "actively

involved" (p. 91).

Regarding the definition of success, Guiffrida (2004) found that low achieving

student often associated the role of leadership with their leadership in student

organizations, valuing it over academic success. Some students in the over involved

group tended to look down on high achievers who were less active in African American

organizations because they did not see them making a difference. However, high

achieving participants valued their academic pursuits over their involvement

commitments. The high achieving participants felt they would have time to give back to

the community once they had graduated from undergraduate institution. Relating to the

definition of leadership, the low achieving students perceived a leader as one who was involved with a project in every way from start to finish. They tended to do all of the work themselves and took responsibility for every facet of the project. In contrast, the high achieving students perceived a leader as being a delegator. They often issued out roles to other students when leading projects and saw it as a way to train other people to be leaders in the organizations.

Regarding involvement in African American organizations, Simmons' (2013) qualitative case study examined the involvement, persistence, and development of two African American men who participated in a group intended to decrease African American male dropout rates. The organization, Project Empowerment (PE), was an exclusive program on a PWI campus. The research questions for the study was designed to address factors important to persistence towards graduation for undergraduate Black males who had participated in a retention program intended to foster retention and persistence for that select population. Simmons conducted semi structured interviews with two PE members and conducted member check with the participants to ensure the validity of their responses. Simmons also attended PE mass meetings, collected agendas, and viewed the organization's webpage for historical information. Simmons found that a combination of personal and institutional factors advanced perseverance for the African American males in this study. Four themes emerged: college preparedness, high aspirations and goals; social connections and relationships and; growth through student organizational commitment. For the college preparedness theme, Simmons denoted that the participants expressed displeasure with their high school institutions' support in

preparing them for college. They stated family was a greater support when stressing the importance of college. Both participants asserted that they felt discouraged by their teachers to pursue college prep. classes and rigorous course loads in high school. For the high aspirations and goals theme, both participants held aspirations for a degree beyond undergraduate institution. For one participant, it was after joining undergraduate institution and becoming involved that he gained his graduate aspirations. Regarding the social connections and relationships theme, both participants viewed the involvement in the organization as crucial to their persistence and academic success. Both participants became involved in other organizations and accepted other leadership positions. One study participant stated that his involvement with PE made him more likely to engage with faculty members and staff members. For the growth through student organizational commitment, both participants expressed how they viewed their academic commitment as important as their organizational commitment.

Similar to Simmons' (2013) study on the involvement of Black males in a retention program in an undergraduate institution, Brooms' (2018) study explored the involvement of African American males in a comparable program. Brooms's qualitative study investigated experiences of African Americans involved in a Black Male Initiative (BMI) program, designed to increase African American male graduation rates, on two PWI campuses. The research questions for the study were related to how African American students derive meaning from their involvement in and experiences from an African American campus retention program on a PWI campus. The participants for this student were 40 Black males who were all undergraduate students, except for two

graduate students. A convenience sampling approach was used to recruit participants for this study. Brooms (2018) collected data in the form of observations of participants, program data and printed materials, one on one semi structured open ended interviews with 40 program members, and one on one interviews with three program staff members. After coding the interviews and writing narratives of the interviews for themes, the researcher met with the participants in small groups for member checking. The researcher also shared the findings with the program staff members for member checking.

The findings regarding the participants' experiences with their engagement indicated: a sense of belonging; gaining access; academic motivation; and heightened sense of self (Brooms, 2018). For a sense of belonging, most of the participants shared that the organization helped them feel a sense of belonging with their peer and a collective place to call home (Brooms, 2018). The participants expressed that BMI was a place where they felt safe, free to share, and free to grow (Brooms, 2018). Regarding gaining access, participants viewed BMI as a resource to valuable connections with faculty, staff, and opportunities that they would not have access to if they were not a part of the organization (Brooms, 2018). Also, the participants espoused the value of having peer mentors in the organization assisting them with mitigating the stressors with transitioning to undergraduate institution (Brooms, 2018). For heightened sense of self, the findings denoted an academic focus and academic development. For the participants, they benefited from academic coaching group and one-on-one sessions, organized study session, and study skills sessions (Brooms, 2018). Also adding to increased sense of self,

participants expressed that they benefited from other participants sharing experiences about their successes and development through the program (Brooms, 2018).

Academic success and development. Quaye and Harper (2014) posited that the relationship between academic engagement, academic success, and development is powerful for student retention. Palmer, Maramba, and Holmes (2011) conducted a qualitative study, utilizing open ended in depth interviews to gather data, the researcher sought to explore aspects that contributed to minority students' academic success and retention in higher education. Palmer et al. (2011) used a public, mid-sized, research PWI in the northeast region with approximately 12,000 students for their study. The sample for the study was 19 junior and senior minority students who had maintained a 2.5 GPA or above and had been enrolled in the university since their freshman year. Eleven of the participants self identified as Black and five of the participants were men.

During data collection, Palmer et al. (2011) held in depth open ended interviews with each participant, which ranged from 90 to 110 minutes. Many of the questions focused on participants' academic and social experiences at the institution. They recorded the observations of the participants' responses. The researchers also performed a second phone interview with participants to allow them to expound on themes expressed during the initial interview or to clarify questions that emerged. These follow up phone calls ranged from 20 to 25 minutes. Palmer et al. employed the use of comparative analysis to on the collected data (research notations, observational notes, and interview transcripts) to yield themes.

Palmer et al. (2011) found several themes. The researchers found that the theme impact of student involvement, participants contended that being involved on campus facilitated connections to academic and social conduits on campus. Some participants further noted that organizational involvements, especially with majority minority membership, enabled them to have an emotional and social outlet that was different from other organizations with majority White memberships. Other participants expressed the desire to promote intermingling among groups to promote racial understanding to learn from other racial/ethnic groups.

For the meaningful connections with faculty theme, Palmer et al. (2011) described minority students as expressing connections with faculty as a pivotal part of success. Most minority participants reported that positive experiences and encounters with White faculty members offered them assistance and assurance when they needed to feel supported on campus (Palmer et al., 2011). While most participants noted White faculty had created a welcoming environment for minority students, a few participants expressed that White faculty members had appeared standoffish during office hours or unwilling to approach minority students or take time with them in the same way as White students.

According to the participants, peer support was a contribution to their success and persistence. Many study participants viewed peer support as a motivational and encouraging impact on their academic success (Palmer et al., 2011). Participants expressed that college friends provided a sense of balance to their college experience. Palmer et al. (2011) contended that minority participants that felt as they and their peers held one another accountable for doing well academically, even with peers of other

racial/ethnic backgrounds. A few participants expressed that peers often took on different roles to offer support to assist them academically. One participant noted that that he viewed his friends as role models and they assisted him with his academic assignments so he could be successful.

Continuing with the impact of student involvement on academic success, Webber, Bauer-Krylow, and Zhang (2013) conducted a study to explore the effect of participation on students' academic success related to GPA and overall college satisfaction. The study was guided by Pace's theory of involvement and Astin's theory of involvement. Webber et al. (2013) used responses from the spring 2008 administration of the NSSE survey. The survey was administered randomly to 3,991 first-year and senior undergraduates. One thousand, two-hundred and sixty-nine students completed and returned their surveys. Six-hundred and forty-nine first-year students and 620 senior students returned the survey. African American students contributed to 6 % of the total respondents. Webber et al. (2013) created four research questions to explore how the frequency of involvement predicts students' academic success and college satisfaction.

Webber et al. (2013) performed principle components analysis (PCA) with the 41 individual items in the NSSE survey, which can be grouped into five benchmarks. The researchers used PCA to explore the responses related to the academic and co-curricular items and to make certain the groupings for the dependent variables were appropriate regarding the same categories. All analysis controlled for race, gender, and if the students lived off campus or on campus. Findings that indicated differences regarding race were those that related to GPA and experience with college satisfaction. The findings indicated

that first year non-White students earned a lower cumulative GPA than first year White students (Webber et al., 2013). In addition, findings denoted that significantly higher scores were shown for White students' fulfilment with complete school experience compared to non-White students overall college experience (Webber et al., 2013).

Flowers's (2004) seminal study was conducted to examine African American college students' academic experiences with involvement. Flowers's (2004) study, based on Astin's (1982) student involvement theory, explored the degree to which African American college students' student involvement experiences influenced their academic and developmental outcomes. Flowers (2004) employed the revised third Edition of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) for data collection. The CSEQ permitted the participants to self report demographic information, involvement experiences, and academic and social advances. The sample for the study was 7,923 African American students (2,773 males and 5,150 females) from 192 higher educational institutions who participated in the CSEQ data collection period between 1990 and 2000. Eighty-two percent of the sample attended PWIs. Flowers (2004) based the study's methodological framework on the hypothesis that educational outcomes were a function of "precollege characteristics and background factors, institutional characteristics, and academic and non-academic factors" (p. 636). The dependent variable, educational outcomes, was outlined by five CSEQ scales: "arts and humanities, personal and social development, understanding science and technology, thinking and writing skills, and vocational preparation" (Flowers, 2004, p. 637). The independent variable, student involvement, was gauged utilizing the CSEQ scales: "library experiences; experiences

with faculty; course learning; art, music, and theater; personal experiences; student union; athletic and recreation facilities; and clubs and organizations" (Flowers, 2004, p.637). Control variables were established for the students' demographic and precollege characteristics, characteristics or the institutions, students' academic experiences, and students' social experiences.

For data analysis, Flowers (2004) used a two-step process for analysis. The researcher employed a means and standard deviations for each CSEQ gains scale and each CSEQ student involvement scale. For the second step, to estimate the direct effects of each CSEQ student involvement experience on each CSEQ gains scale, the researcher used ordinary least squares regression. Overall, the study findings indicated that both classroom and extracurricular experiences constructively influenced African American student college students' development (Flowers, 2004). Library experiences, course learning experiences, and personal experiences were more positive than student union experiences, experiences with athletics, and participation in clubs and organizations. These study findings also denoted that African Americans students' level of involvement was low to moderate on most measures.

Summary and Conclusions

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the problem statement and purpose for this study on religiously involved Black males' engagement at religiously affiliated PWIs. I identified the search databases and key search terms that I used to explore the literature for my topic. I discussed my conceptual framework for my study, which was comprised of two theories, Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and Astin et al.'s (2011) findings on

spiritual development in the higher education setting. I analyzed research pertaining to Black males' access to the postsecondary education, the challenges Black males encounter accessing postsecondary education, Black males in PWIs, and factors of support for Black males in PWIs. Within these sections were sub-sections that focused on the religiously affiliated PWI setting, the impact of religious and spiritual factors, and student engagement factors.

From the current literature, it was known that Black males have experienced racial microaggressions, stereotype threat, lack of sense of belonging, and academic stigma in the PWI setting (Harper, 2015; Hines et al., 2015; Iverson & Jaggers, 2015; Parker et al., 2016; Perez et al., 2015; Strayhorn, 2008; Spencer et al., 2016); however, support factors, such as adding family support, academic support, spiritual support, and community support can foster persistence for Black males in the PWI setting (Brooks, 2015; Brooks & Allen, 2016; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Holland, 2014; Scott et al., 2013; Strayhorn, 2014; Warren, 2016). I found that student involvement factors related to peer-interaction, organizational involvement, student-faculty interaction, and academic challenge were influential in fostering persistence and retention for minority students on PWIs and religious campuses (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Brooms, 2018; Chen et al., 2014; Flowers, 2004; Guiffrida, 2004; Palmer et al., 2011; Simmons, 2013; Webber et al., 2013). Although, a couple of these studies focused on the student engagement experiences of the Black males in PWIs and their perception of these experiences on their engagement at PWIs (Brooms, 2018; Simmons, 2013). Few studies address the student involvement and campus engagement of Black male collegians who were religiously

involved and who have attended religiously affiliated PWIs. In my study, I sought to understand how religiously involved Black males who attended religiously affiliated PWIs perceive their campus engagement, how these males perceive their religious beliefs influenced their campus engagement at religiously affiliated PWIs, and how theses males perceive other factors, other than religious beliefs, influenced their campus engagement.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the student engagement experiences of religiously involved Black males who have graduated from religiously affiliated PWIs. In Chapter 3, I describe the research design, the rationale for the design, the role of the researcher, the methodological approach for the study, the issues of trustworthiness for the study, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions for this basic qualitative study were as follows:

1. How do Black males who were religiously involved during college and who attended religiously affiliated PWIs describe their campus engagement?

2. How do Black males who were religiously involved during college describe how their religious beliefs influenced their campus engagement at religiously affiliated PWIs?

3. What other factors, besides religious beliefs, do Black males who were religiously involved during college describe as influencing their campus engagement at religiously affiliated PWIs?

For this study, I used a basic qualitative research approach using interviews. Using an interview approach allowed participants to recount experiences so that I could construct meanings and understanding (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that basic qualitative research is suitable for "understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" (p. 24). A purpose of

qualitative research is to provide rich descriptive information about the research phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I used an open ended semi structured interview structure to allow for the flexibility that the same question prompts were relevant to other participants and allowed the participants to share their experiences liberally. Patton (2015) noted that open ended interview structure provides respondents with the opportunity to answer the same questions, which increases the likelihood of comparability. Using this method of interview structure resulted in rich data that allowed me to explore the patterns and themes that emerged during data analysis. As Creswell (2014) suggested, it is important to do so more inductively than deductively.

I considered a phenomenological approach for this study, because phenomenological study requires the researcher to investigate the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). However, the phenomenological approach requires the use of more in-depth interview structure than required by basic design to explore and make meaning of participants' experiences. Seidman (2013) conjectured that this in-depth interview structure may require three separate interviews to fully explore the context of the meaning of the phenomenon. Patton (2015) suggested that phenomenological studies require the researcher to interpret the experience so that understanding can be made. However, in this study, I was more intent on describing and constructing meaning from the shared experiences of religiously involved Black males in religiously affiliated PWI and this method was more aligned with the research questions.

In addition, I considered case study research for this qualitative study. However, the purpose of a case study is to examine one or several cases in individualized settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). I did not want this study restricted to a particular setting as one setting might have unique characteristics that would limit transferability of the findings. Although an expectation exists that patterns would emerge as they would with phenomenological or that themes may be relative to the setting such as in a case study, the research questions fit basic qualitative study more than any other research approach.

Role of the Researcher

I am a Black woman in the role of an English educator at a vocational high school in the eastern part of the United States. I have worked in several high school settings for 14 years as a teacher, as an instructional coach, and as a dropout prevention coach, most of the time with majority Black high school student populations. In this study, my role as a researcher was an interviewer and data analyst. I am an alumna of a religiously affiliated university. I reached out to three religious organizations as community partners. I had previous associations with the organizations, but I have no lasting relationships with any participants of which I am aware. I posted my recruitment invitation on my Facebook and LinkedIn pages. There were no conflicts of interest due to already existing professional relationships or any researcher biases due to personal or professional relationships held with any of the participants or their organizations.

Methodology

In this section, I describe the methodology for this study, which includes the participant selection logic, data collection instrumentation and interview protocol, and the procedures for participant recruitment, participation, and data collection. Last, I discuss the data analysis plan.

Participant Selection Logic

I selected eight self identified Black males who considered themselves religiously involved while attending a religiously affiliated PWI. Participants were drawn from the United States regardless of geographical location as long as they met the criteria of (a) having graduated within 5 years of the interviews taking place, (b) having graduated from a religious college or university, and (c) having been religiously engaged while attending a religiously affiliated PWI. I collaborated with three religious organizations to recruit participants by asking them to hang recruitment posters in their buildings and make announcements to their congregations. In addition, I posted a recruitment poster on my personal Facebook and LinkedIn pages. Patton (2015) suggested that social media and use of the internet can be an effective way to generate participants. I used snowball sampling strategy to obtain additional participants by providing interviewees with information they could share with Black males they thought might be interested. This can be a suitable method for acquiring information rich participants or participants who may have a similar or different perspective for the study (Patton, 2015).

I interviewed eight individuals who met the criteria of being religiously involved Black males who attended religiously affiliated PWIs and who graduated within the past

5 years. I reached saturation with this number due to the nature of this study. Saturation occurs when data collected from participants becomes redundant or there is no new insight being taken from interviews and observations (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). In addition, Patton (2015) suggested a researcher selecting a minimum sampling size "based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study" (p. 314). Interviewing a smaller number in the time allotted can produce rich and in-depth responses from participants (Patton, 2015).

Instrumentation

For this study, I developed a set of interview questions that were based on the conceptual framework and the research questions (Appendix). I also developed demographic interview questions that were placed as probing questions within the interview. These demographic questions were used to describe and distinguish the participants. I began my interview with an opening statement provided some background information on myself, as the researcher, the study and, as Jacob and Ferguson (2012) suggested, the purpose of the study. Continuing with Jacob and Ferguson's suggestions to establish a rapport with the participants, I asked each participant to provide some background information about himself. Patton (2015) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested open ended responses aims to minimize the fixed responses; therefore, I constructed semi structured, open ended interview questions. The primary open ended questions were phrased to gather the participants' experiences on being Black males who were religiously involved and who attended a religiously affiliated PWI. Patton (2015), Merriam and Tisdell (2016), and Seidman (2013) additionally suggested that

probe questions can be used to follow up questioning and elicit additional information. I

created preplanned probe questions to follow up my interview questions. These

questions were designed to elicit additional information for my study. Last, I asked

participants to share any experiences related to involvement or religious engagement

they felt that they did not have a chance to share. This last interview question allowed

the participants a chance to reflect on experiences they believed were pertinent to the

study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I partnered with three religious organizations to recruit participants. Two

organizations were located in Delaware. The other religious organization was located in

Texas. I asked my community partners to post my recruitment poster and in their

buildings and make one general announcement regarding the study in front of their

congregations. This was the extent of my collaboration with the religious organizations.

My recruitment poster highlighted the inclusion and exclusion requirements for the

study, the details of the study, study compensation ($20.00 gift card), and my contact

information. In addition, I posted my recruitment poster on my Facebook and LinkedIn

social media pages to recruit for potential participants. My Facebook and LinkedIn

network contains my education colleagues, undergraduate alumni, former students who

are attending various colleges and universities, former students who have graduated

from various colleges and universities, acquaintances with various religious affiliations,

and various fraternity members.

After participants contacted me, I forwarded the participants a recruitment email and an Informed Consent Form. These documents specified study requirements, participant requirements, and compensation details. Once I received informed consent via email, I contacted the participants to arrange for a telephone interview or face to face interview. On the day of the interview, I reviewed the purpose of the study, reminded the participants of the confidential nature of the study, and informed them that they were permitted to stop the interview at any time without harm or repercussions. When I conducted my face to face interview with one participant, I obtained a written signature on an Informed Consent Form, in addition to the emailed consent. At the conclusion of the interviews, I asked the participants if they knew of any other potential participants who might want to participate in the study and provided them with recruitment poster via email or in person to distribute to other potential participants.

Data Collection

The data collection period began after I received IRB approval (12-21-17-0482206). I anticipated data collection would take one to two months, and it took two months, including recruitment. I scheduled 60 to 90 minutes for each interview; however, the majority of the interviews were conducted within 45 to 60 minutes. One interview was conducted via face to face and the other seven interviews were conducted via telephone. After I conducted each interview, I asked each participant if they knew of other participants who might be interested in participating. I was able to recruit two participants through the snowballing method. All interviews were audio recorded via an iPad recording app and via an iPhone recording app. The data was professionally

transcribed by Rev.com transcription service. Rev.com ensures that their transcriptionists sign a confidentiality agreement to secure data and delete files after transcribing ("Transcription FAQ", n.d.); therefore, a Confidentiality Agreement was not required. After I received the transcription, I emailed the participants a message of appreciation, based on a form created by Moustakas (1994), for participating in the study, a copy of the transcripts for transcription verification, and a $20.00 e-gift card as compensation for participating in the study. I requested that participants forward me any transcript changes within 5 days. If I received no changes or no email specifying that no changes were required, I assumed that they accepted the interview as it was provided to them.

Data Analysis Plan

I analyzed the interview transcriptions to gain a better understanding of the experiences of religiously involved Black males who graduated from religiously affiliated PWIs. To analyze data I collected, I followed Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) step-by-step process of analysis. I began with the first interview transcript by reading through and open coding. After coding, I went back through the transcript and grouped together codes that were similar. I created categories or themes with these codes. I then went through the other transcripts scanning for repetitive words, phrases, statements, and experiences that were similar. I added these words, phrases, statements, and experiences to the lists of categories or themes. When I found additional words, phrases, statements, and experiences that were unique from those categories, but add to the data, I created new categories. The process of refining and revising the categories and themes was completed by revisiting the research questions, renaming categories, creating subcategories, or

combining categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Eventually, I was able to narrow my categories into five themes.

Issues of Trustworthiness

I established trustworthiness in this study by addressing the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research process. To establish credibility, after every interview I recorded my thoughts in a research journal before transcribing them. The journal was used during every interview. Anney (2014) posited that a qualitative researcher established credibility by reflexivity. In addition, I sought to identify and report negative cases, so that adequate engagement in data collection could occur. Patton (2015) emphasized that supporting evidence for alternative explanations adds credibility and integrity to the claims of a researcher.

To establish transferability of this study, I provided rich, thick descriptions of the processes for the study and the results of the findings. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) conceptualized the importance of providing thick, rich descriptions is so "readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situations match the research context, and hence, whether findings can be transferred" (p. 259). However, it is important to state that small sample size may limit generalizability of findings (Patton, 2015).

I established dependability by conducting peer examinations/ review with my doctoral committee and kept detailed journal notes of the study procedures, coding procedures, and findings as an audit trail. This helped to establish confirmability. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) denoted to ensure dependability in a study keeping running

log of the researcher's' interaction with the data while engaging in analysis and interpretation, is good practice.

I ensured confirmability by keeping reflexive journals to record personal reflections of everything that occurred in relation to this study. Anney (2014) suggested the qualitative research should keep a reflexive journal, which should record all events that happened in the field, personal reflections in relation to the study and thing that may arise the investigation (p. 279). Also, to strengthen confirmability in this study, I was aware of my own beliefs or assumptions that may impact this study. I am a graduate of a religiously affiliated PWI. Although that is my background, I was careful to not allow it to bias this study. I used the reflexive journal to reflect on my beliefs and assumptions in relation to this study.

Ethical Procedures

Following approval from the IRB at Walden University, I recruited participants and collected data following the guidelines specified above and in the IRB application. The confidential nature of the study was disclosed to the participants prior to the beginning of the interview the by Informed Consent agreement. The Informed Consent agreement form entailed that their consent was voluntary, participants' information would be confidential, and they could withdraw from the study at any time. The Informed Consent agreement also entailed that pseudonyms would be used in place of the participants' names and no identifying information would be disclosed to identify them.

All audio recordings, transcripts, audit trails, reflexive journals, and field notes related to this study are stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. Digital and audio

version of the transcripts, analyses, and recordings were saved on a password-protected computer, which only is accessible by me. Data will be saved for a period of 5 years and then destroyed.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I presented the research design for the basic qualitative study on the student engagement of religious-involved Black males who attended religiously affiliated PWIs. Following my strategy for recruitment, I conducted interviews, once approval was obtained from Walden's IRB, with eight Black males who met the requirements for my study. After data collection, I adhered to the plan outlined in my Chapter 3 for data collection, data analysis, storage of data, issues of trustworthiness and credibility, and addressing ethical procedures.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and understand the engagement experiences of religiously involved Black males who graduated from religiously affiliated PWIs in the higher education sector. I paid particular attention to the experiences that included extracurricular activities and religious practices that fostered the persistence of Black males in their religiously affiliated PWI setting. Defining this focus was pivotal as this focus stipulated my objective for analyzing the data. In this chapter, after identifying the research question that guided this study, I describe the setting for this study, the participant demographics, the procedures for data collection and analysis, the processes for ensuring that trustworthiness was established, and the findings from my analysis of the data.

Research Questions

1. How do Black males who were religiously involved during college and who attended religiously affiliated PWIs describe their campus engagement?

2. How do Black males who were religiously involved during college describe how their religious beliefs influenced their campus engagement at religiously affiliated PWIs?

3. What other factors, besides religious beliefs, do Black males who were religiously involved during college describe as influencing their campus engagement at religiously affiliated PWIs?

Setting

For the setting, participants were given the option of interviewing via telephone or face to-face in person. I interviewed seven participants via telephone in a setting of their choosing. I interviewed one participant face to face in person, in a mutually agreed on setting, his church building. This church was not among the churches that were identified as my community partners. Although no negative circumstances were perceived in the lives of the eight participants while I conducted data collection, the setting for Kevin (pseudonym) may have obstructed his full attention during the interview. The setting where Kevin chose to interview was perceived as noisy and boisterous from the action of other people. Several times in the course of the interview, the participant had to stop and ask me to repeat questions due to the noise volume in the background. The participant attempted to improve this situation by going to a quieter location to continue the interview. The interview was completed within a 25 minute period.

Table 1 lists the pseudonyms for the participants by name, university region, university name, religious affiliation, and student population.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants and Religiously Affiliated PWIs

Participants (pseudonyms used)	Year of graduation	College/ university region	College/ university name (pseudonyms used)	Religious affiliation of institution	Student population
Jeff	2016	Southwest	Martel College	Nondenominational*	Approximately 800
Steve	2016	Southeast	Gregson University	Baptist	Approximately 800
Adam	2016	Southwest	Martel College	Nondenominational*	Approximately 800
Kevin	2014	Northeast	Gallus University	Catholic	Approximately 800
Victor	2017	Southeast	Balister University	Baptist	Approximately 800
Damon	2017	Northeast	Bullock College	Nondenominational*	Approximately 800
Terrance	2017	Southwest	Opal University	Nondenominational*	Approximately 800
Howard	2017	Midwest	Grace University	Catholic	Approximately 800

*Accepting all religious denominations.

Although my recruitment search expanded nationwide, my participants represent four regions of the United States. Three participants attended institutions in the southwestern region of the United States, two participants attended institutions in the southeastern region of the United States, two participants attended institutions in the northeastern region of the United States, and one participant attended an institution in the midwestern region of the United States. All participants graduated within 4 years of the study being conducted. Seven of the eight participants were traditional age students while

attending the institutions as undergraduate students; Steve was considered a non

traditional age student, according to the U.S Department of Education, due to exceeding

the age of 24 years, having work responsibilities and a family (Riccobono et al., 2002).

Steve attended Gregson University's online undergraduate study program. This program

required one residency, during which he and other students in his cohort would meet on

campus. In addition, Steve retired from the U.S. Marines and stated that he desired to

become more active in church ministry. Six of the participants attended the campus

locations of the institutions and lived directly on campus. Kevin, who attended a campus

in a large city, lived in a walkable distance from his institution's campus. Three of the

participants were enrolled in majors related to the theological study and remaining

participants were enrolled academic majors, political science (two participants), business

management, history/pre-law, and computer science. Jeff and Adam attended the same

institution, during the same time, and were cousins.

As previously mentioned, I recruited in a variety of mediums to secure a diverse

population of Black males to provide experiences encountered at different religiously

affiliated institutions. The participants seemed to be cooperative and pleased to assist in

providing information that could benefit future Black males who may attend religiously

affiliated predominately White higher education institutions. As the researcher, I sought

to create a comfortable environment so the participants could freely share their

experiences and a few participants requested to know the result of my findings at the

completion of my study.

Data Collection

After IRB approval was obtained, I began recruiting my approved number of eight participants that I indicated to IRB could possibly produce saturation for my study. This number was selected based on Patton's (2015) suggestion that data collection from a small sample size in a limited amount of time may provide the researcher with thick, rich description. The data collection tool for this study was a semistructured set of interviews that were based on the research questions, the conceptual framework, and the review of the literature. Each participant was interviewed once and was given the option of having a face to face interview in person or via Skype and telephone interviews. To ensure the accuracy of the data, each conducted interview was recorded via an iPhone recording app and a recoding app downloaded on my iPad device.

For the data collection, I partnered with three churches in two different states to request for them to make an announcement regarding my study to their congregations and post my recruitment poster in their buildings. In addition, I posted my recruitment letter on my personal Facebook and LinkedIn pages. Moreover, I used snowball sampling by querying interview participants to reach out to other potential participants who might be interested in participating the study. I began data collection at the end of December and completed collection in the middle of February. Although I designated 60 to 90 minutes for the completion the interviews, the majority of the participants completed the interviews within a 45 to 60 minutes. After transcribing the interviews, I sent each participant a thank you email that included the $20 e-gift card compensation that was indicated in the informed consent form and a copy of the participants' transcripts for

member checking. None of the participants indicated any changes in their transcripts. There were no variations in my data collection plan.

Data Analysis

First, to obtain a sense of the participants' disposition at the time of interviewing, I listened to each interview before transcribing. I listened for voice inflection, tones, and emphasis of certain words. I recorded my thoughts regarding this conduct in my research journal. To analyze the data for this study, I used Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) six-step approach of data analysis. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this method included open coding of the transcript of the first interview I conducted. I highlighted words, similar statements, and similar experiences that were represented in the transcript to represent codes. Following the creation of codes, I created categories to organize my codes. After each additional interview, I looked for the same or similar codes that I found in my first transcript and located additional new codes. The new codes were sorted into new categories and the similar codes were place in the already existing categories. After revisiting my codes and categories, I began to combine and change codes and delete categories that were similar. I reviewed my interview questions and research questions and further reduced categories. At the end of this process, I was able to combine categories into themes. At the conclusion of analyzing my data, I narrowed the categories into six themes with five sub themes.

Themes and Codes Related to Research Questions

In this section, I provide a brief summary of the themes and codes from my data analysis. The findings are presented relate to the research questions for this study. In

addition, the findings are expressed in themes that fit respectively under each research question. In a subsequent section, I discussed and explained the themes in detail.
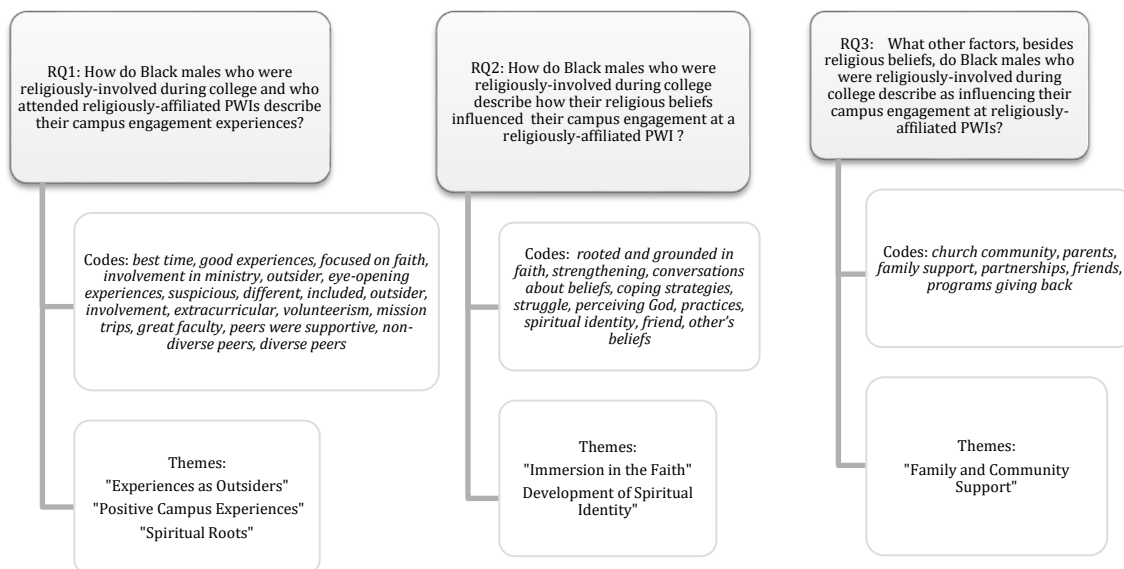

Figure 1. Relationships between research questions, codes, and themes.

Research question 1 was focused on how Black males who were religiously involved during undergraduate studies at a religiously affiliated PWI describe their campus engagement experiences. The themes that emerged for this question were: *experience as outsiders, positive campus experiences*, which includes sub themes *involvement matters*, *lending a helping hand, student-faculty interactions*, and *student-peer interactions*, and *spiritual roots.* The following words and phrases were used as codes to develop these themes: *best time*, *good experiences*, *focused on faith*, *involvement in ministry*, *outsider*, *eye-opening experiences*, *suspicious*, *different*, *included*, *outsider*, *involvement*, *extracurricular*, *volunteerism*, *mission trips*, *great faculty*, *peers were*

supportive, *non diverse peers*, and *diverse peers*. These codes were a part of categories that later became emergent themes.

The second research question for this study was intended to discover how participants perceived their religious beliefs influenced their religious engagement on campus. The phrases that depict this theme are *immersion in the faith* and *development of spiritual individuality*. Words and expressions that depicted the participants' description of experiences related to their faith and involvement were coded. The codes emphasized were *rooted and grounded in faith*, *strengthening*, *conversations about beliefs*, *coping strategies*, *struggle*, *perceiving God*, *practices*, *spiritual identity*, *friend*, and *other's beliefs.*

Research question 3 was constructed to identify additional factors, other than those of a religious nature, that religiously involved Black males describe as influencing their engagement on their religiously affiliated campuses. The theme that was developed for this question was *family and community support*. This theme emerged from codes derived from the descriptive phrases and words of the participants. The codes that developed this theme were *church community*, *parents*, *family support*, *partnerships*, *friends,* and *programs giving back.*

Discrepant Cases

Understanding of the themes and patterns for data analysis often is reinforced by the acknowledgement of negative cases (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) further conjectured that failure to recognize outliers in qualitative analysis and draw conclusions for their existence could negatively influence the study's credibility. To narrow categories into

themes, I included a category for discrepant cases, circumstances, events, words, events, and feelings that did not fit into the developing themes. After organizing these cases, I attempted to analyze the data to create a rationale for the existence of the outliers by examining the background context the participants provided.

Although the majority of the study participants expressed that they had close relationships with diverse peers, two of the participants reflected that they tended to reject getting close to diverse peer in favor of remaining close to people who were of their own racial/ethnic background to gain a sense of belonging.

Another outlier statement was from a participant who expressed that he was not spiritually involved since graduating from his religiously affiliated PWI.

Another outlier was the interview with participant Kevin. The majority of participants completed their interview within 45 to 60 minutes; however, Kevin completed his interview within 25 minutes.

An addition outlier was noted when a participant recognized his own self efficacy as providing persistence to graduate from college. All other participants provided factors outside of themselves as support for coping and graduating from college.

A final discrepancy involved the inclusion of a participant who graduated from an online program. Although this participant shared many similarities with the other participants, his experience was unique in that he did not have direct contact with other students outside of his residency experience and graduation. In my inclusion criteria, I had identified self identified religiously involved Black males who graduated from

religiously affiliated PWIs. I further clarified that I would accept online students for my study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, multiple steps must be followed to ensure that the study being conducted has data credibility, transferability of findings, dependability of study results, and confirmability of researcher bias. While collecting data for this study and completing data analysis, I conducted many processes and followed strict protocols to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility

To ensure the credibility for the study, I maintained a research journal in which I recorded my thoughts during and after interviewing each participant. I also wrote notes after each interview was transcribed and after reviewing each transcript. My goal was to establish credibility through reflexivity. In addition, I provided an opportunity for participants to conduct member checking to verify the accuracy of their responses to the interview questions. Another process I used to establish credibility was analyzing my data for discrepant cases. I identified negative cases by reviewing the data and reviewing the participants' background for context for the responses.

Transferability

To increase transferability of this study, during the interview process I used pre-planned probe questions and additional probe questions to gather rich, thick descriptions of themes so these descriptions could provide readers with vivid details of the findings so

that their transferability might be considered. In addition, I provided rich, thick

descriptions of the participants and processes of this study for study transferability.

Dependability

To safeguard the dependability of the results, I reviewed my study with my

doctoral committee. In addition, I kept detailed journal notes of the study procedures,

coding procedures, and findings as an audit trail. For the study processes, I would write

notes while obtaining interviews with participants, before interviewing, and after

interviewing participants to ensure I followed my study protocol. I wrote notes regarding

coding during data analysis and wrote out categories, and possible questions I pondered

while analyzing my data.

Confirmability

For confirmability, I kept reflexive journals in which I recorded my personal

reflections on the recruiting participants, setting up interviews, interviewing participants,

reviewing transcripts, and questioning of my interpretation and analysis of data. I also

recorded questions and responses regarding my role as the researcher to avoid bias. I

recorded questions, assumptions, and beliefs I had while conducting research to ensure

that they would not impact the objective nature of my study.

Results

The results for this section were gathered from my analysis of my interviews with

eight self identified, religiously involved Black males who graduated from religiously

affiliated PWIs within the past 5 years. The responses the participants shared revealed

several similarities. These commonalities were cultivated into themes to answer each of

the research questions. There are three research questions, which were composed to describe and comprehend the campus engagement of the participants, how their religious beliefs influenced their campus engagement, and how other factors recalled by the participants explored influenced their campus engagement. I organized the data results by research questions. Under each research questions, I have described the themes and findings.

Research Question 1: Campus Engagement Experiences

Research question 1 was "how do Black males who were religiously involved during college and who attended religiously affiliated PWIs describe their campus engagement?" Regarding this research question, the following themes emerged: participants' perceptions of being outsiders on their campus, the positive experiences the participants had concerning their campuses, and the participants' spiritual backgrounds that influenced their decision to attend a religiously affiliated institution.

Participants responses associated with this research question were highly detailed. The participants' reflections revealed descriptive narratives of their campus engagement experience. The overall encounters of the Black male participants tended to be very positive. The overarching concept of the theme was the focused on the occasions that both contribute to engagement of the participants and the challenges the participants encountered while at their religiously affiliated campus.

Participants reflected on encounters on campus, extracurricular activities, interactions with peers and faculty and, experiences related to their decision to attend a religiously affiliated PWI. The participants offered descriptions, encounters, and feelings

to reflect the on this question. Even though all but one participant recollected having negative experiences while on campus, all of the participants recalled more positive occurrences than negative incidents. Overall, the all of the participants perceived great satisfaction with their campuses and their experiences on campus; however, all participants, with the exception of Steve, asserted that there were some obstacles to gaining a sense of belonging at campus upon first arriving, however, they did not feel their experiences impacted their involvement. Much of this might be attributed to the memory of their desire to remain actively involved while attending undergraduate studies, as all of the participants reported gratification from their involvement experiences. Victor stated of his experiences on campus and the impact on his chosen involvement, "I would definitely say they positively affected my involvement. I think the negative experiences I had been a part of a predominantly White institution drove me to do more to help out in my own personal community, to help out fellow students of color…" Victor felt these experiences were inspirational to his involvement.

In addition, all participants recalled that volunteer activities were an essential part of their involvement. All participants participated in at least one volunteer activity during their tenure as undergraduate students. Some of the volunteer activities they recollected were community outreach, assisting families in impoverished communities, completing activities for local churches, and volunteering by providing mentoring services in their communities and at local churches. Other similarities regarding the involvement experiences shared by the participants were their positive encounters with faculty and the benefits of interacting with peers from other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Regarding

involvement with faculty, all of the participants recalled memories that were supportive of their experiences. The majority of the participants perceived that their interaction with peers, especially those interactions with diverse peers, were instrumental to their involvement. Adam recalled that "relationship building" with diverse peers was supportive of his engagement.

The majority of participants, with the exception of Kevin, stated that their spiritual background had an influence on their choice of a religiously affiliated institution. The data indicated that the participants' level of involvement with their faith prior to enrolling at their religiously affiliated institution had an influence on their decisions to attend their institutions.

Experiences as outsiders. The first theme related to the research question was *experiences as outsiders*. Overall, all of the participants felt that the institutions' demographic population did not deter their decision to choose a religiously affiliated. Specifically, Damon, who attended an institution close to his home stated, "the factor of the school being predominately White did not impact my decision." In addition, all participants, with the exception of one, expressed feeling out of place when they first attended their institutions. Steve, the online institution participant, described that he did not encounter any obstacles to fitting in due to the anonymity of the online setting. He stated, "I think from that perspective …well of course outside your name, they don't know your race. They may know, unless you identify your race."

Regarding the other seven participants, five perceived that they had minor incidents they characterized as biased during encounters with White students, while two

participants expressed overt experiences with discrimination. Jeff and Adam, cousins, recalled from memory how White students were reluctant to accept them when they first arrived on campus; however, once the students became acquainted with them, the participants felt accepted. Jeff stated, "First, before they got to know us, they did seem ... They were a little stand-offish." Jeff felt as though his appearance and the White students' preconceived notions regarding Black males may have made him an outsider. He explained:

> You don't see a lot of young, Black males with tattoos with earrings that are out front with their relationship with God, whether it's them praising God and not being nervous or anything like that. I think that changed a lot of people's perception about us, because they didn't think that we were they look like thugs, but I've never seen anybody act like, like African American praising God and everything like that." I think that changed a lot of their perception and stuff like that.

In addition, Adam during his interview stated that he did perceive that White students were not welcoming to him at first. He recalled:

> I'm not going to say it was automatically open arms. I feel like when you're at a predominantly White institution, I feel like they make it seems like you have to earn, not so called say respect, but I feel like they automatically judge you like 'I don't know how to take this guy. Is he what the stereotype is or is he actually a good guy?' Yeah, that's how I feel about that. Definitely felt that way. I received a comment from someone saying I never expected you to be this good of a person. I

don't feel as if they realized how backhanded that comment was, but saying I didn't expect you, everybody loves you type of statement. I feel like they thought I was going to be more of a problem type person.

Kevin's experiences that he shared were similar to the experiences shared by both Jeff and Adam in their interviews, but he perceived that he continued to be singled out due to his race during his time on campus. He stated, "Yeah. Sometimes you get called on [in class] for a different experience, for a different perspective. It's kind of assumed for that perspective. That's happened. Nothing like really overt."

Furthermore, Damon explained that he was often perceived being uncommon on campus and most typically in the classroom. Damon recalled from memory an experience during an interaction with White students in his class. Several times, he was asked by White students to speak on behalf of his race. He stated:

Sometimes I felt like an outsider in some settings or felt uncomfortable, like especially when I was interacting with White students and they assumed I was like the representative for all black people. Like one time I was in class and we were discussing something about slavery. The students in my group were saying things and asked for my opinion as an African American person. I felt like they were pointing me out 'cause I was Black. I said I never was a slave.

Although most participants described experiences with prejudice that they perceived as being unintentional, Victor and Howard described overt experiences with racism that made them feel like outsiders. Victor described several instances where he felt in which he was intentionally discriminated. As a self described Black activist, Victor

was very adamant about being a voice for the Black community on his predominately White campus. He felt this often placed him at odds with the White community and he feared it would make him a target for expulsion. He stated that he came to campus with experience of being active in civic engagement. Of the experience, he shared:

> Our university had a history of working with very black activist students [and] because I did grow up as a student activist and going to protests and being civically engaged, [the] previous president before our current president had had some bad experiences with student activists [. He even] asked one of our students to leave the university because of their activist work, so I had a little bit of a fear going in, like okay, I understand that you're coming into an institution where there is power that you're going to have to come up against, but also understanding that this is the place that needs the experience of allowing someone like myself that is active, that is educated, that is willing to learn.

Victor also described an incident that took place 2 months after he arrived on campus in which he felt openly discriminated in an off campus setting in the surrounding community while with a group of White students. The event made him perceive his status as an outsider on and off campus. He explained:

> When I entered the [restaurant] there were several people who just kept looking at me strange. I knew I was the only person of color in the group, but I knew something was off. As soon as I got to the counter, the lady behind the counter literally said to me, "We just don't serve your kind here. It may be safer for you to get out of the town." I was looking around the restaurant like this can't be

happening. This is the stuff you see in movies. Then the other people in the restaurant were nodding their heads. She kept letting me know that this was a very predominant Klan area, "This may not be the best time for you to be out in the community or be involved, and to go back to Balister and go back where you came from". So that was very much a ... It brought me back to reality, that this wasn't ... Because I'm originally from a big town…so it was a reality check that this was no longer the home I grew up in.

Not only did Victor perceive this experience as a "reality check" for him. He recalled that many of the White students who were with him during that experience were, as a result, also enlightened to the "realities of being a Black person." He observed that his White colleagues "shocked" by the incident and did not know how to support him.

Similarly, Howard, a self described ambitious student, told of an experience in which he felt purposely discriminated against and denied certain positions or opportunities due to his race. He stated:

Yeah. A few of the times, I was not given an appropriate placement for either classes or for different other opportunities just because in general, I was perceived as lower in certain instances…one of my negative ones was that I was judged and not given a research position because of my background.

Overall, the data indicated that seven out of eight participants felt a struggle to integrate into their institutions to varying degrees and during different times while on campus. The participants indicated that being in a predominately White environment created certain situations in which they felt unconnected within the institutions.

Positive campus experiences. The second theme related to the research question was *positive campus experiences*. This theme included sub themes of *student involvement*, *lending a helping hand*, *student-faculty interactions*, and *student-peer interactions*. All of the participants considered their overall college experience as positive and they perceived their positive experiences as impacting their engagement and persistence academically, socially, and emotionally. Although all of the participants recalled incidents in which they perceived they were excluded or felt unconnected to their institutions, they perceived that most negative experiences were overshadowed by their positive experiences at their institutions. Many of the incidents the participants recalled that assisted them with being engaged were related to their extracurricular involvement experiences, their volunteering experiences, their positive relationships with faculty and staff, and their positive relationships with peers. Adam described his campus environment as "very accommodating" due to what he perceived as the faculty's efforts to make students feel included and succeed. Steve felt that his institution made online students feel as if they were a part of the campus environment by allowing them to attend certain campus experiences, such as chapel and allowing the students the use of informal, outside of class discussion boards that allow student to discuss their faith or other concerns. Steve felt that those options made him want to become more engaged:

> I think because…Gregson, particularly does a real job of discussion groups within the course that you're taking to get you involved. And then you can Skype in and watch Chapel. You know, you feel like you're an extension of the campus, far away. They're very inclusive to their online students. So you feel like you're, you

know, even though you're not there you feel like you can, you know, come online

and watch Chapel on Wednesdays and you're constantly chatting with your

classmates on … discussion groups. … the counselors have a whole, you know,

online program that's geared toward making you feel that way.

Kevin, who lived close to campus, felt that his campus environment was very

"nurturing" due to the campus allowing students to experience a variety of experiences,

due to the diversity of the campus location and the campus exposing students to

opportunities to interact with one another. Kevin recalled various multicultural

organizations, multiple club, which allowed him opportunities to engage in unique

experiences, campus events that promoted interaction with diverse peers. He perceived

these experiences help to promote his engagement. He explained:

Yeah, I'd say it's a nurturing environment in general. They kind of let you figure

out what works for you. So it's kind of, I don't want to say liberal in that sense, but

there's a reputation for Jesuit colleges to be liberal especially in conservative

Catholic culture. So, I don't know if that was part of it, but I think it kind of

helped to be a more I guess, free thinking place. And so I think that helped to let

everyone have those diverse experiences and diverse conversations, that maybe

you wouldn't have other places.

Howard considered his campus experiences as constructive due to the institution's ability

to make students feel included and expressed that he felt satisfaction with his experiences

on campus:

I would say that most of them were positive. I didn't see that many negative

experiences just because of the fact that the school I went to is very accepting of

people…. They did have some special programs that I did take advantage [of], but

not just that, but in general, the school provided a safe environment. In general, I

would say that my life on campus was good because of that fact that I had

previous experience from my high school balancing life with people of different

backgrounds. …I'd say that in general, I had more positive experiences than

negative ones, in general, even in the school and in the living halls as well.

Certain experiences or programs tended to have a greater impact on students'

enjoyment with campus. All of the participants perceived that involvement in

extracurricular activities, participation in volunteer activities, supportive faculty

interactions, and interactions with peers from different backgrounds tended to assist them

with enjoying their experiences and being more engaged academically, socially, and

emotionally.

Involvement matters. The first sub theme of the theme of *positive campus*

experiences is *involvement matters.* Eight out of the nine participants indicated that they

were actively involved in extracurricular activities during their tenure as students. Due to

Steve's enrollment in his institution's online program, he did not have the opportunity to

participate in extracurricular activities on campus, only to observe chapel online. The

remaining participants perceived extracurricular activity involvement was a pivotal factor

in promoting their engagement on campus. Kevin, Victor, Damon, Terrance, and Howard

all stated during their interviews that not only did involvement influence their

engagement, but it provided them with a method of coping with struggles on campus. The

majority of the participants' involvement was related to sports, religious activities, choir, and clubs related to their majors and interests, and scholarship or academic programs; however, Victor was involved with leadership initiatives and originating two organizations. He perceived these leadership experiences as not only increasing his engagement, but aiding him with coping with the demands of college and his environment. When he spoke of these experiences, he expressed:

> My first two years at Balister, I started two Bible studies that for me were a good outlet for leadership, because [those opportunities were not really present]…while I was [enrolled]. I mean I was in organizations, but wasn't really leading things, doing a lot of following and stuff. So getting a chance to lead people in worship and talk about the Word and start these organizations that lasted after I left I think was very foundational on why I stayed at Balister as long as I did….They were probably one of the top two things that helped me cope with everything that went on, including life and extracurricular and school work.

Victor recalled that the other factor that assisted him with coping was his scholarship program.

Terrance, a self described hardworking student, also expressed during his interview how participation in extracurricular activities abetted his ability to cope on campus. He regularly participated in intermural sports competing against other dorm wings, his school choir and engaged in events with his dorm wing, which were all diverse. When asked about his extracurricular activities and if they assisted with engagement and coping, he replied:

Yeah. I would say that they did, especially when I was able to get out there and be among the other students that I was friends with, just to get away from it all, because college is very demanding and trying to keep your grades up and trying to make sure that you pass your classes and you've got deadlines, but you're also trying to fit a little bit of fun in there. Yeah. I would say that probably the biggest ones that were able to help me with stress was when I was able to participate with my friends in different sports activities…

Damon also felt that his participation in intramural sports, academic clubs, and religious clubs provided coping to assist with the demands of college life:

If I was really stressed I would try to do one or the other so that I could relieve the tension, stress, and get it out before I had a breakdown or do something so I wouldn't have to deal with that, so I could continue on with doing my work on time and participating in what I wanted to participate in. Also in pre-law club I got to do stuff that was related to my area ...It gave a good look at my future a lawyer and helped me to focus on that. When I did the choir and bible study, it was a good way to reflect on my reason for being at school and my place in the world. The bible study was really good for that.

When asked if they felt their experiences as Black males on campus hindered or promoted their involvement, only Terrance stated that he felt that certain experiences hindered his involvement. Although Terrance was highly involved in several extracurricular activities on campus, he felt that his perception of White students being judgmental and his low level of comfort in some settings hindered him from participating

in some activities. He explained:

> I would say that I think with a couple of events it did stop me because I remember
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> there was this one club that I was going to join and the people kind of acted
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> funny. I don't know if it was because of my race but I just didn't feel comfortable
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> there, so in that instance, yeah, it did hinder me. There were so many other
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> activities that I could do where I felt like I was included and I didn't feel like that.
>
> I guess I can say that it was a help, or it hindered me in some ways like where I
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> felt like I was uncomfortable in that setting, but also it didn't really stop me
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> because I kept trying to go out for different activities.

Although Howard stated that he was at first skeptical with participating, he later realized "that by participating, I would get more acceptance and I would have a better community to feel safe around."

The other six participants, however, expressed that their experiences, even negative experiences, promoted their engagement in their predominately White setting. Kevin, the campus commuter, felt that difficult experiences inspired him to want to become more involved. He stated, "Maybe ... for me it was always wanting to be more involved, just if there was a challenge to not back off and put in more effort to overcome it. It's just kind of the way I am." Victor shared that his involvement was positively impacted as well. He felt the predominately White environment inspired him to want to become involved and make changes on campus:

> I think the negative experiences I had been a part of a predominantly White
>
> institution drove me to do more to help out in my own personal community, to

help out fellow students of color at Balister who felt like they didn't have a

community, just like I did. But it also drove me inevitably to have the job I have

today, working for a scholarship program that brings in predominately students of

color because without the program I was in I wouldn't have been able to continue

to go to college, because it was so expensive. So providing that opportunity for

other students of color who are in similar situations like I was when I was

younger really was shaped early on by those involvements I had as a student.

Damon also felt his race was not a factor in his involvement. He recalled:

I don't really believe it impacted my involvement. I was involved because I

wanted to. I did things because I wanted to. It wasn't really focusing ...I wasn't

really focused on being Black and participating in things. I was just focused on

participating. I don't really think that there's really much of a problem or a

difference between me and the next person participating. I just participated

because I wanted to. I really didn't have any experiences or anything that was

weird about it to me. Yeah, I was focused on participating, rather than my race.

Lending a helping hand. The second sub theme for *positive campus experiences*

is *lending a helping hand*. The participants perceived their experiences with volunteerism

were all constructive and beneficial for engagement, both academically and emotionally.

All participants recalled that volunteering positively impacted their engagement, coping,

life goals, sense of peace, and sense of belonging and also enhanced their

spiritual/religious qualities. Steve was required to complete acts of volunteerism in his

online program. His felt volunteer participation not only benefited him academically, but

personally as well. Since his major was Christian counseling, he volunteered in a counseling center operated by his local church. He stated his experience with volunteering helped him to realize that he wanted to continue his academic aspiration and obtain a doctoral degree and he felt the volunteering experience assisted him becoming named as the associate pastor at his local church. Jeff explained by volunteering in children's church ministry and youth church ministry he was able to gain more "hands on" experience for his career of being involved in church ministry. Kevin volunteered for 2 years in a tutoring program for children. He stated he had to give up this activity due to academic commitments and time restraints, but he perceived the volunteerism as making him "a more well-rounded" individual and allowing him to cope with college life by providing him a "break" from responsibilities. Kevin's feeling that volunteering provided him a break was similar to Damon's perception of gaining a break from responsibilities by performing extracurricular activities.

Victor was a highly active participant in volunteer activities. He was a part of a scholarship program that required volunteer participation. He perceived that his volunteer experiences provided him with strategies for coping, opportunities to feel more engaged, opportunities to feel more of a sense of belonging by working along with peers, and exposure to great mentors. Damon also perceived his experiences of volunteering at a church in the area provided him with ways to cope as well as giving him a sense of peace and fulfillment in serving the community. Damon stated:

I was able to interact and really be a happier me volunteering with people at the church. It's mostly people outside of the church who would come into the church.

At this church, they had an outreach ministry so we would get to go out into the community to help the less fortunate. It was very nice and it made me feel a lot better and a lot less stressed about what was going on in life because I was getting away from the campus and from my responsibilities for a little while and helping someone else and focusing on someone else. It helped me to realize that I did not have things all that bad and life for me was good. That was always something that helped me and it still helps me today.

Terrance participated in several volunteer activities while enrolled at Opal University. He participated in several community outreach programs that required working with the less fortunate community in his local area and he participated in a school-based mission's trip to a missionary organization that gave him the opportunity to travel to another country and teach young children and attend to their needs. He described that experience as enhancing his spiritual life and expanding his worldview:

Also, the school had ... like they had mission's trips so that was also something that I had the opportunity to participate in. I was on the Azerbaijan team and we visited that country. We ministered to the youth and that was a great experience. It was kind of good to see how other people live because I think here in America we often times think that we're the only ones in the world, so it was really good to see how other people live. It really gave me a heart for Christ because I really wanted to reach these people for the Lord.

Howard recalled that helping his local school community provided him with a sense of fulfillment and enhanced his spiritual/religious qualities. He stated:

They were mainly local communities that involved with giving back…Yeah. I

realized that life isn't just about making money for yourself and for your family

and for those around you, but that it's also important to donate your time and

resources to those who are less fortunate and to those who might not have as good

a situation as you would. Yeah. They provided me with a good set of friends and a

good set of people that I could trust and a good set of peers that I could interact

with and share my experiences with.

Student-faculty interactions. The third sub theme for *positive campus*

experiences was *student-faculty interactions*. All participants perceived that most of the

faculty and staff they encountered in class and on campus offered academic and

emotional support and guidance that increased the participants' satisfaction with the

campus and helped to foster academic engagement. Victor explained that although he did

not care for all faculty members, the campus faculty was overall helpful.

I definitely think ... naturally, as a college student, I had negative experiences with

professors I didn't like, but I think overall it was a positive experience in that

unlike some of the universities I visited in high school before deciding to go to

college. This university really had faculty who were willing to be personal with

students, who were willing to open up, who were willing to have these

conversations. That I didn't see when I got to other colleges.

Largely, all of the participants perceived the faculty to be accessible, willing to support,

good at building relationships with their students, and good at creating an inclusive

environment for their students. Jeff recalled that he was able to establish strong

connections with the faculty and that his faculty went above and beyond their work responsibilities to engage students. He communicated the importance of the faculty's impact on his life after graduation:

Faculty and staff was awesome. The dean of the school and myself and my cousin were very, very close. We would talk basketball. We would talk different things. When I had ... I recently had a baby and he reached out to me. The same thing with another one of my instructors. The school and everything, they did a very good job if you need to talk to a teacher after class or anything like that. The relationship aspect as far as faculty to student, it's amazing. It's really amazing.

Although Steven was in an online program, he expressed the faculty were very accessible and attempted to create an inclusive environment for the students to increase their comfort level with the online program and help them to be more engaged. Steve stated:

[The faculty were] very prevalent onscreen, you know, you got to see them each semester, you know, each class, maybe give a vignette about something that we'd have to study or review and the dean, you know the dean of the department, you know, you'd see them. So it, you know, it felt more homely. Then, of course, going there for the class and then actually going there for graduation and you seeing them, you know, putting the faces to the names and getting interaction with them, which they do a good job of making sure that all of those people are available.

You know, doing the pre-graduation, you know, events and things like that, so.

Made it feel like, you know, you're not just, you know, online, just grabbing a

degree and go. They make you, they make it very inclusive.

In addition, Steve perceived the accommodating nature of the support staff and how the

staff's support was essential to keeping him engaged. He stated:

I think that I mean, they do a good job of keeping you on task. You know,

between the counselors within the school. They do a good job of making

everything, you know, on task kind of, you know. So, I think, so before this, I

mean, it just seemed, I don't think there was any more extra or emphasis to keep

you motivated other than, you know, making it everything available. Making sure

that you have what you need in order to stay on the graduation route and things

like that.

Adam evoked from memory that the faculty were inspirational, helpful, and even

willing to offer financial support to students who were in need. He described experiences

with faculty and "as something to be cherished." He stated:

I felt included by both actually. My youth ministry professor was actually a White

woman, but I look to her as an inspiration because I love her, I definitely love her,

and what she's given to me, and what she's spoken into my life. I've always felt

included when I was in that program and being there.

He recalled further:

I would really truly say it was all positive. There's kinds of people ... and it seems

like I'm speaking so high of them, but it's the kinds of people who actually want to

see you succeed, because you succeeding is a reflection on their ministry, and I truly want to say everybody there was actually a help. I don't remember any professors that wouldn't stay after if you weren't getting something. I don't remember any professors that had any ill will towards students. That's why it was such a beautiful thing. I loved the dean there. If you weren't actually making it financially, they would have some help, some people giving to those people as well. That's why I love that institution.

Victor recalled an incident in which he experienced the death a close loved one while away at college. He stated that not only did staff service reach out to him, but he was also well supported by faculty. When he returned to campus, he stated that an advisor provided empathy, concern, and support:

I was very much struggling and counseling services had reached out to me, but I had to go and turn some papers in to my advisor, and I wasn't very close at the time with my advisor, but as soon as I walked in it was the first time she ever looked me in the eyes. She sprinted towards me and she hugged me and she said, 'it's going to be okay. I'm here to support you through whatever you need right now." To this day, I call her for anything I need, whether it's having a conversation about a good book I'm reading, about spiritual questions, about what's going on with my job. I can remember that being the moment I knew that this lady was going to be a lady who would help me through the rest of my life.

Terrance also recalled the loss of a close family member and the faculty's support for him during his during this difficult time. He stated:

I did have a couple of times where I had gone through some things in college. Like I lost my cousin and I communicated that with my professors and they were very supportive. They let me turn my assignments in late. They were very supportive in that fact, so overall, I would say that they were supportive. Some of them like in that instance they went above and beyond to help me.

Howard recollected that the faculty supporting him academically. He perceived that a faculty member would not support him with his academic goals of applying for an internship, but he was surprised when a faculty member not only suggested the internship to him, but offered to write a letter of recommendation for him.

Student-peer interactions. The fourth sub theme for *positive campus experiences* is *student-peer interactions*. This theme reflects the majority of the participants' experiences with interacting with their diverse student peers. Five of the eight participants perceived their relationships with diverse peers were positive and pivotal to their engagement on academically, socially, and emotionally, and that relationships with diverse peers were enriching to the campus experience and were beneficial in assisting them with adjusting on campus.

Steve, the online program graduate, recalled in a prior sub theme of his online environment that it was difficult to know the racial/ethnic background of other peers unless they disclosed it. However, during his residency, he met peers of different ethnic/racial backgrounds and he formed relationships with them and formed professional connections. He expressed these connections were pivotal in helping him his complete his major. Steve attributed the formation of these relationships to the commonality that he

and his peers shared, their faith. He stated:

> I think because, this is my opinion, because, you know, Gregson is a Christian
> school, you know, eight times out of ten, most of the people that you're interacting
> with are Christians…So, it, you already have that in common. So, it makes it, you
> know, it makes it less of an issue to have a conversation [with people because you
> have your faith in common].

Jeff described his experiences with diverse peers as "some of the best
relationships in my entire life, because those are actually friends that believe the same
thing as me." He recalled an experience explaining how he developed such a close
relationship with a group of friends that treated him like family while he was away from
home. Jeff expressed:

> I spent my Easter in Texas with my Hispanic friends and then there was another
> time, I think, I didn't go home for Spring break. I stayed with them. It was
> awesome. It was awesome. They treated me like I was one of their own. It was ...
> I loved it.

Adam perceived his experiences with his friends as helping in inspiring his faith,
his life goals, and his ambition to graduate. Similar to Jeff's experiences he recalled, he
felt the friendships that he formed in undergraduate studies as being more like family
relationships than friend relationships. Adam stated, "I have a lifetime friends I actually
gained from out there. I wouldn't even really call [them] my friends. [They're] more like
my brother." Furthermore, Adam recollected his experiences with diverse peers and how

he perceived the institution's "welcoming" environment fostered the type of atmosphere that made it comfortable to engage with others from different backgrounds. He stated:

> Yeah, the thing about it is I had friends from Canada, I had friends from Guatemala, I had friends that are African American, White. That's the thing about the institution I went to. Everybody was so welcoming. At first it feels like everybody is feeling each other out and getting to know each other, but the crowds were so diverse and I was introduced to other people from people that I made friends with, and it felt like a full family being there. You know how you get to certain universities and it's like okay the Black kids hang with the Black kids. I had friends from all over the map, which made it such a beautiful thing.

Howard described his experiences with diverse peers as being supportive of his adjustment on campus, supportive of engagement, instrumental in the evolvement of his beliefs, and helpful in providing a multicultural experience.

> Because the school I went to was very large, at first, it was hard for me to find a group of people whom I could associate with, but as I found more friends, it made it easier. They were very important. They provided me with support in many ways, not just as friends, but also, they were people I could consult with, people I could trust, people whom not just had the same background, but different backgrounds. It helped me multiculturalize myself as well…

Victor said the majority of the friendships he formed were with White students. He perceived that many of the Black students at his institution were in different circles than he was, such as athletic circles or partying circles. He stated that, "I mean I

didn't play sports, so I didn't have a ton of sports friends. Then I wasn't really big into

partying when I was an undergrad, so I didn't really hang out with that crowd." Victor

described his experiences with his White student peers as both positive and negative, but

he felt that all of the experiences were supportive of his evolvement in interacting with

diverse peers and assisting with his White peers' understanding of Black culture. He

stated that:

> I would definitely say that there was a little bit of a positive and a negative with
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> those relationships. Early on there was [sic] a lot of conversations about the things
>
> that my friends could do and could not do. Many of my friends were asking ... or
>
> not asking to touch my hair and sticking their hand in my Afro, and asking, "Oh, I
>
> want to just feel how Black people's hair feels like." Those conversations early on
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> were definitely foundational in making sure my friends understood some of that
>
> stuff is just not okay, but also being willing to share questions for them. Some of
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> my friends said that they had never seen a Black person because they lived in a
>
> rural community that ... I mean there just weren't Black people in their
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> community, so sharing about culture and about community and about what life
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> was like being a Black student in general, but being a Black student at Balister I
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> really think shaped my friendships with them down the line.

Damon and Terrance recounted that although they formed relationships with peers

of different racial/ethnic backgrounds, primarily, they formed relationships with other

Black students due to them feeling more comfortable with peers from the same

ethnic/racial background. These two participants perceived that these peer interactions

provided them with a sense of belonging on campus and helped them to remain engaged. Damon explained that negative experiences on campus with White peers made him hesitant to form deep relationship with them:

> ... maybe it was just their personalities, their political views, and other things of that sort that I just didn't hang out with them. Also, you go to a history class and you really see how people are and what their views are. Especially in my history class, I didn't really hang out with White students just because none of them were open about their views in Blacks in America and things like that. I really just hung out with the Black people because they were more comfortable than White students.

Regarding the White peers that he did form relationships with, he perceived it was due to his adjustment to the campus and the White students' desire to engage:

> Yes, because I was able to get a taste of what the campus was like. I was able to get a little bit more comfortable around white people. But no, because they weren't like every single White student on campus. They were more of the relaxed types of ones that were more willing to hang out with me and be friendly and things like that. Don't get me wrong, the other students, they did hang out with me if they needed to, but these were the ones that were willing and were comfortable with doing it just because we gravitated towards each other more, rather than the other White students that I was not friends with.

Terrance considered friendship important in remaining engaged in campus and how pivotal friendships were to adjusting to life on campus. Of his experiences with peers he stated:

> If I didn't have friends there I probably would have left because it's kind of a place where you can either thrive and survive or you can drop out. I think the more people that you have around you supporting you the better off you are in a college environment.

Terrance expressed that he formed close friendships with people with whom he felt as though he shared commonalities. He explained that he had both Black and White friends, but he felt that his friendships with his White peers were not as close as his friendships with his Black peers. He expressed:

> I would say my friends were Black and White, but I mostly hang out with students who were in my field and students that I could really relate to. I had a couple of friends who weren't from exactly where I'm from but they were close by so we would talk about living on the East Coast. We would just have different conversations about our spiritual life and growing up and different things. We had a lot of different things in common. I did have White friends but I wouldn't say that our relationships were really all that deep.

Spiritual roots. The third theme related this research question was *spiritual roots*. A majority of the participants perceived that their religious background experiences were primary factors in their decision making process for choosing a college. All of the

participants expressed that their institutions' status as a PWI had no bearing any of their decisions, nor did it hamper their desires to attend.

Seven out of eight participants recalled that their decision to choose a religiously affiliated PWI was related to their previous background with their faith. Damon felt that his inspiration to attend a religiously affiliated institution was due to his family's history in church ministry. Even though Kevin's religious beliefs did not align with the religious affiliation of his chosen institution and he stated that religious affiliation was not a consideration for choosing the institution, he still perceived the religious foundation benefited him. Kevin stated, "I didn't have any history at the university, so I didn't really know what it was gonna be like because I'm not Catholic, and it's a Catholic school. So, I was kind of maybe, not concerned about it but curious…" Even with this statement, Kevin felt that the institution was accepting of his religious beliefs.

Howard recalled that religious affiliation was not a primary factor for his choice, but it was a factor. Howard stated, "…my decision was mainly based on numerous factors, including of program, cost, and also religious affiliation…I wanted a more complete experience, so I went for a non secular experience."

All of the participants had parents or grandparents who were active in church as pastors or came from families who were actively practicing their religious beliefs, or they were actively participating in church ministry themselves. Jeff, Victor, Damon, and Terrance had family members that were pastors. Steve and Adam were involved in their church ministries and Kevin and Howard came from families who were very spiritual and actively participated in the local churches.

Adam, Victor, and Terrance did not anticipate enrolling in a religiously affiliated institution after graduation. Adam and Terrance first enrolled in secular institutions, while Victor considered himself an atheist while in high school. Adam was attending a community college when he received an opportunity from his pastor to visit his alma mater Adam recalled:

I was actually going to Delly Community College (pseudonym), and I felt like there was a calling [on to be active in the ministry]... My pastor and my youth pastor were talking about taking a trip to his alma mater, which is Martel College, and I felt the calling that I need to take this Winter Bible Trip… It's like a Winter college get to know you event at Martel to get to know if you actually want to go to that school. When I went to that, I was a little nervous, because I didn't know what to actually expect, but when I went there I had real peace about the situation.

Victor spent his high school years as an atheist; however, he converted to the Presbyterian faith during his senior year of high school due to his love for the church and their generous actions toward him. He felt it was ultimately his conversion experience and his experiences with his father, who was a pastor who influenced his decision to attend a religiously affiliated institution. He recalled from his memory:

I went through 4 years of high school as a very devout atheist and it would very much cause tension in my home, because my dad was a very devout Baptist pastor, so he was very confused how I was raised in such a spiritual home but not in a religious aspect in my own personal life. But when I got to my senior year in high school, I really got involved with the bilingual church in my community. It

was Presbyterian and they really helped nurture my growth... Making sure I went

to college, gave me amazing opportunities through the church…and church

centered focused education was something that I wanted to continue even after I

left high school. So even not being religious at home and in high school, it really

drew me to a community like that after high school as well.

Terrance chose to attend a secular, predominately White university after

graduating high school; however, after attending for a year, Terrance decided to switch to

a religiously affiliated university due to his previous affiliation with Christian schools. He

described the impetus for the change as the death of his grandmother. He stated he missed

the support of his religious community. He stated:

I actually have been in Christian schools all of my life. I went to Christian

elementary school, middle school, and went to a Christian high school. I was

ready a new experience. I think that's why I decided I really didn't want to go to a

religious university because I wanted a different experience, but I guess it won out

anyway.

Analysis of the data suggested that while all but one of the participants

experienced the feeling of being an outsider while in undergraduate study, the majority of

the participants still perceived their campus experiences as positive. Also, the majority of

participants indicated that support factors such as extracurricular activities and volunteer

involvement, positive peer relationships, and positive student-faculty interactions

influenced their engagement, persistence, and coping. In addition, the findings indicated

participants' spiritual background was a strong contributing factor for their college choice decisions.

Research Question 2: Influence of Religious Beliefs

The purpose of this research question was to identify factors that influenced the Black male participants' involvement on their religiously affiliated campus. The Black male participants conveyed positive experiences regarding their religious involvement that contributed to their religious engagement and emotional coping on their religiously affiliated campus. The participants' perceptions of their spirituality or faith, the experiences that contributed to their spiritual engagement and spiritual development, and the spiritual practices, which assisted the participants with persisting in their academic environment are addressed through these themes. The themes that emerged from data indicated that the participants' engagement was related to religious engagement on campus rather than academic engagement. The themes for this research questions were *immersion in the faith* and *development of spiritual individuality*. Regarding *immersion in the faith*, the participants described experiences regarding how conversations with friends and peers had a positive impact on the strengthening of their beliefs and how experiences on campus that strengthened their beliefs. This reinforcement in turn created more desire for the participants to become more involved in religious practices and the religious activities on their religiously affiliated institutions. In addition, this strengthening led to an evolvement of the eight participants' religious beliefs while at their institutions. Although, the participants did not indicate that their religious engagement led to increased involvement in academic activities, they did indicate that their religious

engagement helped with coping. Two participants emphasized that they had personal experiences and experiences on campus that led them to momentarily doubt their faith during their time on campus; however, they were able to overcome this based on their religious foundation, campus support, and conversation with peers.

The *development of our spiritual identity* theme describes the participants' experiences that assisted with development their spiritual identity, which resulted in a continued involvement in their faith after graduating. All but one participant stated that they were actively involved in their religion after graduation. In addition, all of the participants perceived the building of this spiritual identity provided them with coping that led to persistence.

Immersion in the faith. The first theme for the second research question is *immersion in the faith*. All of the participants perceived that their religious beliefs were an influence in fostering their engagement in religious practices and activities at their institutions. A majority of the participants expressed that they benefitted from discussions with friends regarding matters pertaining to their beliefs or from campus discussions regarding religious beliefs. The majority of participants perceived that these conversations were beneficial to reinforcing their current beliefs, validating the beliefs they previously held, providing them with the confidence they needed to express their beliefs openly, and stimulating the evolvement of their beliefs. The majority of participants perceived these relationships with friends and religious practices as being pivotal to their persistence and religious engagement on their institutions.

As I reported in response to research question 1, Jeff and Terrance recalled that during their time in their institutions, they had multiple opportunities to converse with other about their beliefs. Jeff stated that his friendships were a valuable part of his experiences on campus. He voiced that his relationships with his friends not only made him more involved in his beliefs and were beneficial to his spiritual growth, but these friendships enhanced his religious engagement on campus: He articulated:

> [My] house was the hangout spot. …I had one of my friends come in the house, and it's the same friend who was on a travel ministry and everything like that. He came in the house when he got back from a crusade and he was like, "Ya'll, I think we need to pray."…Even being a pastor's son, I've never had somebody come in and say, "Yo, we need to pray." Stuff like that, it helped me grow so much, because I don't know ... It helped me grow more as a person. It helped me rely on God more to see people my age so tuned in to getting what God has for them was awesome. It took me to a different level…

Jeff recounted when he first arrived on campus, he was not as active in the religious practices of his religion; however, after being on campus, he perceived that the conversations he had with other peers made him feel more comfortable to engage in spiritual practices on campus. He stated of his experiences:

> Mostly everything out there was to strengthen my beliefs. One of my good friends, I remember, he used to joke about it, but he was on the travel ministry and the praise and worship team [out there]. When I went out there for, when I went out there the year before to visit, me and him, or me, him, and my dad, and

all of us, we got somewhat acquainted and when we came out there to go to school he remembered us. He jokes about how he saw our praise and worship life grow from being nervous to raise your hands and then to be going all out and to be crying out for God. He said it jokingly, but him reminding us of that, it was cool to see how we grew as individuals being out there and getting what God had for us.

Terrance also felt that his spiritual engagement and spiritual activities were fostered by conversation with friends. He articulated, "We always talked about the Lord and different things. We would pray together… I never really had people that I could pray with. Like also them being there for the same goals that I was and so it was very good to have that."

Before enrolling in Gregson University, Steve stated that he was not sure what to expect from a religiously affiliated university. He believed that the institution would focus heavily on religion and give little focus to academics. However, he stated that his assumptions were proven wrong when he enrolled. He felt as though the institution provided a great balance for engagement of faith and academics. He communicated that this engagement was provided by his institution during discussion posts, which allowed him to hold discussions with peers about his faith. These discussions not only strengthened his belief, but persuaded him to become more active with the additional religious activities offered by his university, such as attending online chapel and being more active in his discussion posts.

In addition, Victor recalled from memory that his institution's class discussions and conversations with peers were beneficial and supportive to the building of his beliefs and on educating him on his religious foundation. Victor emphasized:

But here at Balister they were willing to say 'okay, you believe in God, but why do you believe in God? If you believe that we can die and go to heaven, why do you believe those things?' …even the larger questions, the free will questions, why do people believe in reincarnation? The difference between our religion and other religions? Like those questions weren't being asked at home, so being in an environment of educating the people and willing to have a conversation about those were really instrumental in making my religious beliefs what they are today.

While all of the participants stated they had mostly positive experiences, which fostered their evolvement spiritually and their religious engagement on campus, both Terrance and Victor admitted that they also had moments where they struggled with maintaining their religious beliefs; however, they were able to overcome those struggles to grow and evolve in their faith. Victor recalled that after the death of his close family member, he began doubt his faith and belief in God. He was able to overcome his doubts by conversations with a friend. He expressed, "So he [makes] it very intentional that every week, regardless if it was religious or not, we'd literally just had conversations about what I was feeling, what was going on, and how he could help in any way, which was ... I mean I wouldn't have made it through without him." These conversations and his religious involvement on campus helped him to cope during his struggle.

In addition, Terrance recounted how he struggled with his faith when he saw famous pastors' children who attended the same school experience favoritism due to their family's popularity in his religious affiliation's community. He stated:

They were getting different perks that regular students wouldn't get and it was very obvious that it was going on. When I saw stuff like that it made me really question. I was like, "Well, is this how Christians are? Is this what goes on behind the scenes?" It kind of hurt my faith for a little bit because I really thought this is a form of something that shouldn't be going on in a Christian community where people were given perks.

He expressed that he was able to overcome his doubts and strengthen his faith by participating in spiritual practices.

All of the participants perceived that religious practices, such as prayer, fellowshipping with other people with like beliefs, and studying of the Bible helped as coping strategies and impacted their persistence during difficult times. Both Jeff, Steve, and Kevin felt that reflecting on the tenants of their faith assisted them with persistence and coping with difficult situations. Steve shared, "I would say, yeah, I mean, I would say faith and belief in Christ and being equipped I would say helped me make it…." Kevin attended religious fellowship meetings that offered Bible study and discussions about maintaining his beliefs. He stated that the events gave students time to reflect, in a group setting, on their faith and how to apply their faith in real life situations.

Terrance and Howard recalled that their church attendance was the practice that was supportive to their religious engagement and coping. Also, Terrance felt that his

participation in dorm wing meetings in which students completed Bible study and prayed together helped him with coping and engagement. He stated:

> Well, I went to church all the time. They had a church that was nearby but they also had several churches that would come pick up students and so I would go to church. Every, I think it was Thursday, we would meet and our [resident advisor] would lead us into prayer and bible study and we would have a devotion. That was very, very helpful getting through because it helped to keep your mind on Christ instead of focusing on things that were going on because college is a challenge sometimes.

Victor stated that he inspired was by a former Buddhist he met during his sophomore year about the benefits of mediation. He perceived that this practice strengthened his relationship with God, helped him cope with trying times and helped him prepare for this day. He expressed:

> Actually, my sophomore year I met a young girl who was Buddhist and she had just recently converted to Christianity, so she really got me into a lot of daily meditation. Even to this day, I do a couple hours of meditation just as centering and time to talk to God for myself. That has just become a part of my routine now. I started back then when I really, really, really needed it and now it's just routine for me.

Damon's religious practices included fasting and praying. During fasting, he would abstain from meals and pray. He felt this practice helped him to be strong in his beliefs and assisted him with completing challenging coursework or difficult situations.

Development of spiritual individuality. The second theme for this second research question is the *development of spiritual identity*. Participants described the experiences that helped them develop their spiritual identity. All participants felt that the development of the spiritual identity was a part of their experiences at their religiously affiliated institutions. When the participants were asked about their spiritual identity and its impact on their engagement, a majority of the participants expressed that their spiritual identity was an important part of their engagement in an institution that had a religious focus. Five out of eight students were able to answer the question without clarification. When asked to identify concepts related to their spiritual identity, the participants indicated that their spiritual identity was reflected in these terms "identity in Christ," "strive to be better," and "growing in the faith." All of the participants perceived they had developed their spiritual identity by experiences they had on campus or through involvement in spiritual practices. These experiences led to increased religious engagement on campus. Although Kevin did develop his spiritual identity while attending his undergraduate institution, he acknowledged he was no longer affiliated with his beliefs after graduation. Of the experiences, he stated, "I'm more focused on career and work, so it's a little different lifestyle. Maybe that'll change later, but for now, it's more focused on work and relationships as opposed to the church."

Adam recalled how his experiences on campus helped him to "realize the man of Christ I needed to be and what I need to strive to be today…"

Damon perceived that he developed his spiritual identity through discussions with a friend who used to be a practicing Muslim. He felt his conversations with the student

helped him to grow in his relationships with others, develop his patience with others, and understand how loving God is toward all people. He stated:

> That aspect, it showed me that I maybe wasn't as loving as I thought I was. Maybe I was a little bit more judgmental than I thought I was, and so I did have those experiences in which I was thinking, "Maybe I'm not as who I thought I was." I did have some situations in which maybe I realized that, heh, maybe I need to pray a little more, or maybe I need to preach more about love and forgiveness.

Terrance perceived that experience of being on his own and having to build his own relationship with God outside of the experiences he knew about God from his parents helped him to grow spiritually. He expressed:

> I think one thing that really helped me to reflect on my spiritual identity ... I feel like it really made me grow because I was away from my parents for the first time. I was away from everything that was known to me. It was just me and God, so it forced me to build a relationship with God on my own and really get to know who he was for myself, instead of this God that my parents and my grandfather always taught me about. It made me really reflect on who I was as a Christian and where I wanted to go with my faith and how I wanted to grow in my faith.

Although all participants, with the exception of Kevin, decided to continue their spiritual journey after graduating, all participants indicated that they felt that the development of their spiritual identity was pivotal to their experiences in their institutions. The data indicated that the influence of participants' religious belief led to an

increase in their religious involvement while in undergraduate study, whether the increase was in religious practices or campus related religious activities.

Research Question 3: Influence of Family and Community

Research question 3, "what other factors, besides religious beliefs, do Black males who were religiously involved during college describe as influencing their campus engagement at religiously affiliated PWIs? The purpose for this research questions was to explore other factors the participants attributed to engagement. The religiously involved Black male participants primarily recalled experiences that involved their families and the participants' home communities. These categories eventually expressed the theme for this research question: *family and community support*. The majority of participants expressed that their families and local communities, both church and organizational, supported them during their tenure at their institutions. This support fostered persistence, coping, and led to increased involvement. Seven of the majority participants recalled having the support of either family or community, or both, with assisting their persistence, coping, and engagement and only one participant credited his own self efficacy with assisting his persistence and engagement.

Family and community support. The only theme for this research question is *family and community support*. The theme in this section reflects other aspects of the participants' experiences that they perceived as helping them to persist, assisting them with coping, and motivating them to remain involved. Family and community support was perceived by all participants to foster their persistence, coping, and engagement. One participant, Damon, also perceived, in addition to family, that his self efficacy was a

factor in fostering his engagement or a majority of the participants, family support came in the form of encouragement, inspiration, and motivation. For those participants who indicated that community was a factor of influence, those influences came from church family support and encouragement, educational community programs for youth, and a desire to provide examples for their community.

Jeff and Adam, who were cousins, recalled in their interview that they felt the presence of a family member on campus made it easier for them to cope and remain engaged. In addition, Jeff stated that his father's support and words of encouragement regarding his faith helped him through some struggles on campus. He expressed:

My dad always taught me sometimes the fight gets tough, but you have to use your faith to get through it, and whatever situation you're believing in, you could use your faith to bring you through as long as you do your part… You're going to go through hard things. You have to push through. You have to fulfill what your purpose was at that time and that space, though.

Adam perceived that his family's and church community's support in the form of prayers was proof "that they were actually there for me." Likewise, Damon stated that knowing that he had his family praying for him and prayers of his church community "were the main two things that helped [him] when it came to struggles in college. Damon and Howard communicated that family's support, in the form of calls and motivation, was pivotal to adding to their persistence to graduate.

Steven stated that other factors that motivated him to persist to graduation were his daughter, the desire to make the other members of his family proud, the desire to

"give back" to the community that supported him during childhood and to honor the community. Steve perceived he had an advantage over traditional age students due to being a retiree from the Marines. He felt this advantage was his ability to offer advice to current young males who may have a desire to go to college. In addition, Steve articulated that community programs, such as Upward Bound were available for him when he was younger and he felt the responsibility to "give back" to this organization by pursuing a degree. He articulated that these experiences made him feel proud and motivated him: "…that pleases me. So, I see, you know, [I'm] from the African American community. … that makes me proud…" Victor stated he received support from his parents. He voiced that their weekly phone calls, their expectations, and their questions regarding his coursework were motivation and added to his persistence. In addition, he talked of the support of his church community, in the form of letters, emails, and baked goods. He stated, "I had the amazing support from my congregation, even now that they were almost 300 miles away from me. I mean it was big for me."

In addition, Terrance recalled the persistence he gathered from family support and church community support. He stated, in addition to phone calls from family and care packages from his church, he received valuable advice from his parents, which kept him engaged. He conveyed:

Like whenever I had a problem or a question I would call home. There was even a time when I thought about changing my major because my friends were going into [it] ... they were in a major that seemed more interesting…My parents really ... they really supported me and listened to different things that I had to say and

gave me good advice…My grandfather, because he is very educated and so he
would give me advice to help me make it through because he's a doctor and so he
would give me advice on staying strong and finishing.

The study findings indicate that religiously involved Black males who attended
religiously affiliated institutions found family, their religious community, and, in some
instances, local community organizations, influenced their persistence and motivation to
graduate. In addition, the findings indicated that the participants' families and
communities supported them by offering advice, providing them with motivational
sayings, offering prayers, and providing them with physical support through food and
care packages.

Summary

This data analysis led to findings related to the campus engagement of religiously
involved Black males who attended religiously affiliated higher education institution
within the past 5 years. The findings related to research question 1 indicated that
religiously involved Black males who attended religiously affiliated predominately White
institutions perceived feeling like outsiders on their campuses, both unintentionally and
blatantly.

The findings related to research question 2 indicated that peer support and
interactions related to religious beliefs have a positive impact on the spiritual
involvement of religiously involved Black males in a PWI religiously affiliated setting.
This support and these interactions contribute to increased religious involvement on
campus in the form of religious activities and religious practices. In addition,

conversations related to religious beliefs and involvement in religious practices and activities contributed to the building of the spiritual identity of Black males in the religiously affiliated setting.

The findings related to the research question 3 indicated that family and church and local communities contributed to increased engagement for Black males in the PWI religiously affiliated setting.

In Chapter 5, I include an analysis and interpretation of these findings through the lens of the literature in Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework, the implications for social change, and possible recommendation for practice and future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the campus engagement experiences of religiously involved Black males who attended predominately White religiously affiliated higher education institutions. The key findings of this study emerged from the participants' perceptions regarding their experiences at their institutions. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do Black males who were religiously involved during college and who attended religiously affiliated PWIs describe their campus engagement?

2. How do Black males who were religiously involved during college describe how their religious beliefs influenced their campus engagement at religiously affiliated PWIs?

3. What other factors, besides religious beliefs, do Black males who were religiously involved during college describe as influencing their campus engagement at religiously affiliated PWIs?

The findings related to research question 1 indicated that participants perceived overt and unintentional experiences with discrimination, which they indicated did not impact their engagement. Each participant, with the exception of Steve, the online participant, went to campus expecting to encounter some form of discrimination. Adam perceived being a newcomer in a predominately White setting. He felt he had to "gain respect" or "disapprove stereotypes" before being accepted. Terrence perceived the same experience; however, he was the only participant who felt it had an impact on his engagement in some activities. All participants expressed that their involvement in

activities on campus and off campus, and faculty and peer support tended to increase

their engagement and increase their perceptions of experiences and the quality of their

experiences, and the participants' spiritual backgrounds tended to influence their college

choice decisions in considering religiously affiliated institutions.

The findings related to research question 2 suggested that peer support and peer

interactions on religiously affiliated institutions may have had a positive impact on the

spiritual and academic involvement of participants. Findings also suggested that these

interactions led to increased involvement in religious practices and activities and

impacted the evolvement of the spiritual identity of Black males in these religiously

affiliated settings. Last, findings related to the research question 3 indicated that

participants' families and communities positively impacted their engagement the PWI

religiously affiliated setting.

The findings for this study are represented by five themes: *experiences as*

outsiders, *positive campus experiences*, *spiritual roots*, *immersion in the faith,*

development of spiritual individuality, and *family and community support*. Analysis of the

participants' responses to interview questions suggested that participants' campus

involvement experiences fostered persistence, which led to successful graduation from

their religiously affiliated institutions. In this chapter, I present the interpretation of the

findings, describe the limitations to the study, discuss the recommendations for future

research, and present the implications for social change for this study.

For research question 1, the themes that emerged were *experiences as outsiders*,

positive campus experiences, and *spiritual roots*. The first theme describes the

participants' experiences with feeling discriminated on campus while making attempts to be engaged on campus. The *positive campus experiences* theme contains four sub themes, which reflect the types of experience that fostered their engagement on campus, including extracurricular activities, volunteer activities, and positive interactions with other students, faculty, and staff members: *involvement matters*, *lending a helping hand*, *student-faculty interactions, and student-peer interactions*.

For research question 2, *immersion in the faith* and *development of spiritual individuality* emerged as the key themes regarding how the participants perceived their religious beliefs influenced their campus engagement. Within this theme, participants felt that their campus engagement was strengthened by their spirituality and their spirituality was strengthened by peer engagement and religious activities. Participants also perceive the development of their spirituality thorough engaging in religious activities on campus more.

For the last research question 3, one theme emerged, *family and community support*. This theme reflected the participants' perceptions of their families and home communities as support for keeping them engaged. The participants particularly noted assistance from their home churches.

Interpretation of Findings

I interpreted the findings of this study by considering the five themes in the context of the empirical literature discussed in Chapter 2 and through the lens of my conceptual framework, including Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and Astin et al.'s (2011) findings on spirituality in the higher education setting. This section is

organized by the three research questions for the study, which pertained to how Black males who were religiously involved during undergraduate studies at religiously affiliated PWIs describe their campus engagement experiences, how their religious belief influenced their campus engagement, and how other factors influenced their campus engagement.

Interpretation of Themes Relating to Research Question 1

The purpose of research question 1 was to explore religiously involved Black males who graduated from religiously affiliated PWI describe their experiences with campus engagement.

Experiences as outsiders. The racial inequality experiences of the participants in this study were similar the experiences of Black male students who attended secular PWIs (Hines et al., 2015; Harper, 2015; Iverson & Jaggers, 2015; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2015; Smith, et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008). The eight participants had initially experienced varying degrees of discrimination socially and the academic setting. A majority of the participants perceived the discrimination as unintentional, as minor incidents where White students made assumptions about the participants or singled out the participants in a classroom discussion based on their race. As result of these experiences, participants found that they initially struggled to fit in on campus. Parker et al.'s (2016) qualitative study findings also indicated that Black males on PWIs perceived that White students initially were standoffish and uninviting.

Participants described their discrimination experiences to be overt. Smith et al.'s (2007) interviewed with 36 Black males who attended PWIs indicated that they felt "out

of place" (p.1190) due to racial microaggressions, both subtle and overt. Von Robertson and Chaney's (2017) semi structured interviews with 12 Black students who attended PWIs indicated that 75% of the participants encountered experiences with discrimination and microaggressions. Further, Harper's (2015) research of Black male students from PWIs found that perceived racial microaggressions were a part of their campus experience.

When Kevin first arrived on campus, he perceived that White students judged him based on his race before they became acquainted with him. In addition, Damon perceived he was asked to be a representative of his race during class discussions. Both of these participants described experiences that indicate stereotype threat. Hines et al. (2015) found that Black college graduates from PWIs perceived White student viewed them based on stereotypes or asked them to be the spokesperson for their race on campus.

Only one participant felt he was discriminated against based on a faculty member's perception of him as "lower class" academically. He perceived he was excluded from being considered for an internship based on the faculty member's evaluation. Harper's (2009) counternarrative also found that Black male students felt that their campus did not view them as academic achievers. However, this finding was more widespread in Harper's study and his study was conducted on several religiously affiliated PWIs.

One participant who attended his institution through an online study program reported he did not experience any discrimination at his institution. This participant felt that the anonymity offered in the online class environment provided him with a way to

avoid being identified. He was the only participant who did not report that he felt like an outsider. His experience is supported by literature. Hall (2010) found in his qualitative study, which included 12 Black male online students, that participants perceived fewer racial microaggressions in the online collegiate setting. In a more recent study, Tucker (2014) suggested that one of the factors that contribute to Black males' success in online environments was the feature of it being a color-blind setting. Similarly, Stanley (2014) suggested that online environments do create a potentially culturally neutral setting for African American males who have had negative experiences with racial microaggressions in other higher education settings.

Positive campus experiences. All of the participants in the study described their campus experiences as positive and enjoyable and perceived that their experiences contributed to their persistence, engagement, and successful graduation. Participants reported their involvement in extracurricular activities, volunteerism, and positive interactions with both faculty and diverse peers led to better experiences on their campus. Astin (1984) suggested that activities such as living on campus, participating in extracurricular activities, and positive interactions with faculty have a constructive impact on the engagement of students. Six of eight participants lived on campus, seven of eight participants participated in extracurricular activities, six of eight participants had interactions with diverse peers, and all participants participated in volunteerism and had positive interactions with faculty. Simmons' (2013) qualitative case study of involvement and persistence of two African American males also indicated that involvement to be crucial to their persistence and academic success. Brooms (2018) also indicated that

students' engagement led to a sense of belonging and academic motivation. For instance, Howard expressed that he was hesitant to get involved, but he discovered by becoming involved, he felt more of a sense of belonging. Another participant also felt academically motivated when he was engaged on campus and through volunteer activities. Furthermore, Astin et al. (2011) found that charitable involvement, a spiritual measure, had a positive influence on students' campus engagement and spiritual development.

Regarding student-faculty interaction, Palmer et al. (2011) suggested that for students of color, building connections with faculty is a necessary part of their success. Most students of color reported in his qualitative study their encounters with White faculty were positive and they felt supported by a White faculty member; however, a few students of color expressed that White faculty had been unwelcoming or appeared standoffish (Palmer et al., 2011).

Ash and Schreiner (2016) explored predictors for success for African American students at religiously affiliated institutions in a qualitative study with 1,536 students of color and found that student-faculty interactions and faculty sensitivity to diverse learners had a positive influence on students' persistence. For example, participants recalled how friends and faculty members formed close relationships with them that were supportive of them in college and continued to be supportive continued to after graduation. Brooks and Allen's (2016) findings suggested the impact of fictive kin relationships may also positively impact the academic and emotional support of Black male collegians.

Two participants recalled that although they did interact with diverse peers, they felt more support and felt more of a sense of belonging with peers of the same

racial/ethnic background. Research supports that Black males who attend PWIs often feel a sense of belonging and gain academic, emotional, and social support among peers of the same racial/ethnic background (Brooms, 2018; Simmons, 2013). One participant, however, felt that he did not have a sense of belonging on campus with many peers of the same racial/ethnic background due to others being athletic or enjoying different social activities, and he being a high achiever and a student leader. Harper's (2012) findings suggested that Black male collegians who are high achieving and hold leadership positions on PWIs often considered same-race males less engaged. However, Harper's study did not confirm if high achieving Black males felt a lower sense of belonging to same race males due to this factor.

      Spiritual roots. All participants, except for one, indicated that their religious background was one primary factor in their decision making process of choosing their religiously affiliated institution. Confer and Mamiseishvilili (2012) in their study examining factors related to college choice for minority students that did not explore religious affiliation as a factor for college choice. However, the findings did suggest that African American students were more likely than any other minority group to enroll in a religiously affiliated institution (Confer & Mamiseishvilili, 2012). Holland (2014) mixed method's study indicated that Black males' religious practices and responsibilities to their churches influenced their college choices. Davignon (2016) also found that choice reasons for students who attended religiously affiliated institutions were similar to the choice reasons for students attended public and private institutions, financial support and academic reputation; however, religiously affiliated college students placed similar

emphasis on an institutions' religious identity. Howard felt that education costs and academic programs were as important in decision making as religious affiliation. The results also differed by demographic population. Davignon (2016) found that White students more likely to place similar emphasis on an institutions' religious identity than other student groups.

Interpretation of Themes Relating to Research Question 2

With the creation of research question 2, I wanted to explore how religiously involved Black males described how their religious beliefs influenced their experiences at their religiously affiliated institutions. The themes that emerged from the data reflected the participants' engagement relating to their academic and religious engagement and their emotional support through reliance on their faith. The themes for this section are *immersion in the faith* and *development of spiritual individuality*.

Immersion in the faith. Although Astin et al. (2011) suggested that college students tend to decline in religious practices while in the higher education setting, the researchers also suggested that spiritual development tended to increase. All of the participants in this study indicated that their religious engagement in activities and their spiritual development increased. A majority of participants attributed this increase to discussions in class and with friends and colleagues; also, campus activities influenced participants' religious engagement. Holland (2014) suggested that Black males' religious engagement was influential on their academic progress and remains a prominent factor in their lived during college. Brooks and Allen (2016) indicated that Black males who engaged in religious activities and formed relationships with others who were religiously

involved were more likely to persist in the academic setting and cope emotionally. Reid (2013) found that spirituality combined with other factors such as, peer support, had a positive impact on Black males' persistence and achievement. A majority of participants felt that their faith was pivotal in providing coping and persistence. Kuh and Gonyea (2006) who based their study's conceptual framework on the preliminary findings of Astin et al.'s findings on spiritual development in higher education framework, found that students on faith-based campuses who were religiously involved tended to participate more in campus activities. Also, the researchers indicated students who attended faith-based campuses were more likely to engage in spiritual activities on campus and gain more through engagement and learning (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006). Astin et al. also suggested that growth in the area of equanimity could positive influences college students' academics, leadership skills, emotional state, students' self assessment capability of relating to others, and satisfaction with their college experience.

Development of spiritual individuality. As mentioned above, Astin et al. (2011) suggested that college students' spiritual growth increases in the higher education setting. All participants indicated that they perceived growth or development of their spiritual identity in their higher education settings through religious engagement on campus and religious practices. All participants, except one, stated that at the time of interviewing they were still religiously involved. Paredes-Collins's (2014) study on students of color's spiritual development at religiously affiliated campuses found the greater the perception of diverse interactions, diverse experiences, and quality interaction were for students of color, the more likely spirituality development could be predicted for students of color.

The findings indicated that spiritual identity was more of a focus than racial identity. A majority of the participants appeared unsure of how to express the campus' impact on the development of their racial identity. Kim and Hargrove (2013) suggested that religious practices combined with pride in one's racial identity may contribute to increased self efficacy for Black males in college. Marks et al. (2016) also indicated increased self efficacy provided by factors, such as religious practices could influence the behaviors and attitudes of Black male collegians. Only one participant stated that self efficacy contributed to his persistence and academic success.

Interpretation of the Theme Related to Research Question 3

For research question for, the intent was to explore other factors, other than religious factors, that contributed to religiously involved Black males who attended religiously affiliated PWI engagement. Only one theme were constructed for this question. The theme is *family and community support*. The theme encompasses the participants support factors that further influenced their engagement and persistence.

Family and community support. Research suggests that familial support and community supports are two key factors that support Black males in the higher education sector (Brooks, 2015; Brooks & Allen, 2016; Scott et al., 2013; Strayhorn, 2014). Participants perceived that family and home-based communities offered them emotionally support; this support provided the participants with motivation and persistence. The participants referenced blood relatives, not fictive kin. Brooks and Allen (2016) suggested that family support may aid Black males with making appropriate decisions regarding their academics and their behavior. The support of family in the

higher education environment may positively impact the experiences of Black males (Brooks, 2015). Participants received familial support in the form of phone calls, prayers, and advice. Research has suggested that family relationships appeared to be strengthened due to the encounters and circumstances the participants experienced academically, emotionally, and socially during undergraduate studies (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Hines et al., 2015). Although the participants indicated that they were supported by family relationships, no participants indicated if their relationships with family members were strengthened.

Regarding community supports, participants expressed that their church community and home-based community organizations provided supports to impact their persistence. Strayhorn (2014) found that community organizations offer both academic and emotional support, however, participants did not indicate if any of the community support offered academic support during their undergraduate studies. One participant expressed that his appreciation for a community program that assisted him in his youth provided him with motivation to preserve. Brooks and Allen (2016) suggested that religious community organizations may provide support to Black males that may impact them academically and emotionally. Another participant stated that his community church offered prayers that he felt sustained him emotionally. Two participants received support from their church community in the form of baked goods and care packages. Although the majority of participants expressed support from their home communities, no participants indicated that local campus communities offered assist. Strayhorn (2014) suggested that there may be advantages to Black males partnering with local campus

community organizations. These local organizations may offer mentoring, counseling, or academic assistance to Black males attempting to graduate (Strayhorn, 2014). Building partnerships with community organizations in close proximity to campus may offer convenience to males who need resources close to campus.

Limitations of Study

Although the purpose of this research was attained, a few limitations existed. First, the study population was highly selective. Study participants fit into the following categories: from families whose parents or grandparents were involved in church ministry, from families who were highly active in their home church ministries, and participants who, themselves, were involved in church ministries. I made efforts to reach a population from various areas of the United States. I partnered with three churches and posted recruitment letters on my personal LinkedIn and Facebook pages. However, the participants I recruited attended schools in four regions of the United States. Also, since the selection size was small, I may have been limited to an extraverted population who enjoyed being active on campus. These limitations may present few challenges with transferability and generalizabilty to other religiously involved Black males who graduated for religiously affiliated PWIs.

Secondly, another limitation was that a majority of the interviews I conducted were via telephone. I provided participants with the option of conducting their interview via telephone or face to face. I completed seven of the interviews via telephone and one interview face to face. Since the majority of my interviews were completed via telephone, I was unable to observe the body language and non-verbal cues that compliment face to

face interviews. To address the challenge of this limitation, I listened for voice inflection, hesitation with answers, and change of voice tone to indicate emotion, feelings, and comfort level.

An additional limitation was the discrepant case relating to participant Kevin's interview. The participant completed the interview within 25 minutes, while all of the other participants completed their interviews within a 45 to 60 minutes.

Lastly, there was a likelihood for research bias in this study as I shared several similarities with the participants. I was a religiously involved who attended a religiously affiliated PWI for undergraduate study. Another possible limitation of this study is that my function as a female researcher may have played a role in the responses of the participants, both in terms of those who agreed to participate, as well as how they responded to questions regarding their role as Black males. First, I ensured that each participant was made aware of their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time. Secondly, I attempted to limit any researcher bias by questioning my assumptions and ensuring that all of my interview questions and probe questions were not leading questions. Lastly, I provided each participant with the option of member checking so they could verify, question, delete, or change their interview responses.

Recommendation for Future Research

After reviewing the findings of this study, the limitations of this study, and the literature review of Chapter 2, I have several recommendations for future research. First, due to the highly selective small population. I recommend additional qualitative studies

with larger populations. These studies will add to the current findings of this study. All of the participants in my study were religiously involved. Literature has indicated that Black males in secular PWI and HBCUs tend to use spirituality for coping, academic support, and building of self efficacy. The findings of this study suggest that religiously involved Black males in religiously affiliated PWIs engaged in spiritually for coping, development of spiritual identity, and growth of religious practice. Future researchers should consider conducting a comparative study with non religiously involved Black males to explore the similarities and differences between the two populations on religiously affiliated PWIs. The results of a study of this nature could provide data to explore the impact of spirituality and engagement with non practicing religious Black males in religiously affiliated PWIs.

I recommend that future studies be conducted on Black males attending religiously affiliated online PWIs. Research has indicated that Black males experience fewer microaggressions in this more culturally neutral environment. Findings from this study confirmed that the one online study participant, Steve, felt included in his online environment. The results of this study could provide additional findings on Black males' experiences in the religiously affiliated online environment.

Future studies are recommended on high achieving Black males in the religiously affiliated setting. Research indicated that high achieving Black male student leaders tend to view Black males who were not as high achieving as less engaged. One participant, Victor, who was a self described Black male student leader felt excluded from other

Black males on campus who appeared less engaged. The results of such a study could confirm or refute the findings in this study.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study could be used by religiously affiliated administrators, student affairs personnel, and student retention personnel to evaluate their current programs and make recommendations for changes for the benefit of their Black male students. The study results indicated the participants held perceptions of overt and inadvertent racism on campus from students and at one time from a teacher. The findings of this study suggest that Black male participants' sense of belonging can be increased by interacting with faculty and staff on campus. Ash and Schreiner (2016) and Palmer et al. (2011) noted that quality interaction with university faculty and staff may increase students' persistence and academic success. Such interactions could lead to open conversation between administration, students of color, and White students. These conversations could result in changes regarding the manner in which Black students are perceived on campus by others and Black males could have more of a voice in their religiously affiliated PWI.

The results of the study suggested that participants perceived involvement in extracurricular and volunteerism and positive peer interactions and positive faculty interactions were beneficial to increasing their engagement. All participants said they benefitted from their participation in extracurricular activities and volunteering. By participating in these activities, Black male study participants were more engaged socially, academically, and emotionally. With religiously affiliated PWIs having

knowledge of these findings, these institutions could build more programs for Black males to increase engagement for this population, which experiences the lowest rates of retention in the higher education setting.

Recommendations for Action

Higher education administrators, student affair personnel, and student retention personnel are responsible creating and overseeing programming that promote the academic development of their students, the development of student career readiness, and the improve the quality of their life after graduation. This can only occur if religiously affiliated PWIs recognize the importance of the diversity in their institutions and make efforts to engage Black male students to increase retention in their institutions. For this to be a possibility, I propose the following recommendations for others to consider, which are gleaned from the findings of this study;

- Require a minimum number of hours per term of participation in extracurricular activities for students.

- Require a minimum number of hours per term of participation in volunteer participation or service learning for students in addition to other extracurricular activities.

- Establish learning communities for online students to build connections between the institution and students.

- Plan multiple yearly events that encourage student-peer interactions to increase a sense of belonging among Black male students.

- Integrate parent events into institutional programing as a support to students' engagement.

- Collaborate with local community organization for mentoring, tutoring, and counseling for Black male students.

Conclusion

This study explored how religiously involved Black males who attended religiously affiliated PWIs described their campus engagement experiences, how their felt their religious belief influenced their campus engagement, and how other factor influenced their campus engagement. The review of literature suggested that involvement in undergraduate could increase academic development (Astin, 1984). Involvement in the form of extracurricular activities, volunteerism, and interactions with faculty and other peers could affect retention (Astin, 1984). The literature also indicated that students develop spirituality during their college years (Astin et al., 2011). In religiously affiliated PWIs, this development can impact engagement.

The results of this study indicated that the Black males were highly active in extracurricular activities, volunteerism, and positive faculty and peer interactions that encouraged their engagement. The results of this study also suggested Black males' religious belief influenced their campus engagement and religious engagement on campus. Family and home community were supportive of Black males and added to emotional engagement. Implications for further practice should continue to study Black males in the religious-affiliated setting.

Implications for social change include providing recommendations for religiously affiliated PWI administrators, student affairs personnel, and student retention personnel. Recommendations for religiously affiliated PWI to assist with engaging Black males on campus were related to creating a sense of belonging for Black males on campus, engaging Black male on campus, and creating a sense of community of Black males for in the surrounding community.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

Ten Interview Questions with Probes
1. How did you make the decision about what college to attend?
   Specific Probes:
   a. What was important to you at the time? Was religious-affiliation important at the time?
   b. Did you attend a religiously-affiliated high school?
   c. What college did you attend?
   d. What features of it stood out to you as a predominately-White institution?
   e. In what year did you graduate from undergraduate? At what age?
2. How would you describe your experiences as a Black or African American male on your religiously-affiliated college campus?
   Specific Probes:
   a. Can you provide a specific example?
   b. How did these experiences make you feel?
   c. Did you feel included on your campus? How so? By school? By students?
   d. Did you live on campus? How did you adjust to life on campus or how did you balance the challenges of being a commuter with feeling a part of campus?
3. Were you involved extracurricular activities on your college campus?
   Specific Probes:
   a. Can you tell me what they were?
   b. Why did you choose these?
   c. Were you involved in any activities that required giving back to the community or volunteerism? If so, could you tell me about them?
   d. Did any of your extracurricular activities help you with coping with the stresses of college life? How so?
   e. How did you balance academics and time in extracurricular activities?
   f. How did your experiences as a Black or African American male at the university impact your involvement in campus activities? If so, how?
4. Tell me about your interaction with faculty and staff throughout your years in college.
   Specific Probes:
   a. What, if anything did you gain?
   b. Why do you think you did not gain anything?

5. How did you view your relationships with your peers during your time in college? How important were they to you? Can you describe your peers to me (best friends?)

   Specific Probes:
   a. How did you interact with peers who were diverse racially and ethnically?
   b. Do you think your interactions with diverse peers contributed to your adjustment on campus? If so, how? If not, why?
   c. Did you have conversations with peers regarding your religious beliefs and did that help to strengthen or weaken your beliefs?

6. Were there circumstances or factors that inspired you to continue practicing your religious or spiritual beliefs throughout college? Can you tell me about them?

   Specific Probes:
   a. If not, why do you think you remained religious in college?
   b. Are you currently religiously-involved or spiritual? If so, do you have a religious affiliation?

7. Were there aspects of your religion or spirituality that helped you to remain engaged in college and persist to graduation?

   Specific Probes:
   a. If not, what do you think kept you going through to graduation?
   b. If not, do you think your religion helped you at all? If so, how?

8. Are there ways you think your religion or spirituality contributed to the evolvement of your ethnic or racial identity?

   Specific Probes:
   a. Did it contribute to any sort of personal evolvement or development for you in college?
   b. How so?

9. Are there other factors you would attribute to your engagement in college and successful graduation from college? Can you share what comes to mind?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share that I did not have the chance to ask?