Eastern Michigan University

DigitalCommons@EMU

2020

The lived experiences of first-generation African American males during their freshman year at a rural, middle Atlantic predominately White institution

Sharon E. Procter

The Lived Experiences of First-Generation African American Males During Their Freshman
Year at a Rural, Middle Atlantic Predominately White Institution

by

Sharon E. Procter

Dissertation

Submitted to the College of Education

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSPHY

in

Educational Leadership

Dissertation Committee:

Theresa Saunders, Ed.D., Chair

James E. Berry, Ed.D.

Malverne C. Winborne, Ph.D.

Beth Kubitskey, Ph.D.

April 27, 2020

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Clark K. Procter, and my son, Clark K. Procter, Jr. for your enduring and unwavering love, patience, and encouragement as I took this journey. I love you both more than words can say. You never stopped believing in me and supported me through the entire process; for that, I am eternally grateful.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Rogene, and father, Willie James. I know you are looking down from heaven and smiling upon me for accomplishing my goal. I miss you so much.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the Black and Brown collegians who are striving to meet their educational goals. You *can* do it.

Acknowledgements

First, I want to thank my Heavenly Father for His grace and mercy, and for giving me the strength, and mental and emotional endurance to persevere through this long, arduous process.

I extend a sincere thank you to my dissertation committee. I am so grateful for your participation and service.

Dr. Theresa Saunders—thank you for agreeing to serve as my advisor and dissertation chair. I appreciate your kindness, support, and words of encouragement over the past eight years. You have no idea how much it meant to me when you said, "Yes".

Dr. Malvern Winborne—thank you for your dedication and desire to make the educational paths for Black and Brown children better.

Dr. James Berry—thank you for pushing me to "narrow my topic" and asking probing questions in the way that only you can!

Dr. Beth Kubitskey—thank you for stepping in at the last minute to pinch hit after Dr. Broughton's retirement.

I also thank the following people for their constant support and encouragement:

My siblings—Doc G for leading the way. Therese—keep going; you'll get there!

My other siblings—thank for your love and support, and for being pretty cool sibs.

Dr. Jahzara Mayes—thank you for constantly reminding me that "it's an academic exercise" and for pushing me to get "our" dissertation done!

Dr. Laurie Evans—thank you for your absolutely amazing editing skills and your friendship.

The Lady Warriors—Dr. Robbya Weir-Green and Dr. Maria Jackson-Smith. I appreciate your friendship, support, and encouragement as we took this journey together. It would have been a lonely journey without you! Congratulations to all of us!

My Girls—you know who you are! Thank you for cheering me on!

Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher—for being a great role model. Black girls do rock!

Abstract

There has been a great deal of scholarly research over the past 50 years concerning the disparities in education for minority populations. Research relating to African American males specifically has increased over the past decade, highlighting the disparities and plight of Black males in kindergarten through postsecondary education. Additionally, the body of literature regarding this population of scholars has been from a deficit model. This is a phenomenological study that investigates the lived experiences of five first-generation African American male students during their freshman year at a rural, mid-Atlantic predominately White institution (PWI). The study specifically sought to learn about the lived experiences of first-generation African American males who completed their freshman year of college at a rural, mid-Atlantic PWI in regard to their transition to the college environment as it relates to their level of preparedness, adjustment, persistence, support systems, and racial experiences on campus. African American male theory (AAMT) was the theoretical framework that was used as the lens to study the experiences of the Black male study participants. A qualitative methodology was used, with counter-storytelling to allow the study participants to tell their stories in their voices. Purposeful sampling was used to identify the study participants. Individual interviews and a focus group were conducted to gather the rich, thick descriptions of the participants' experiences. Thematic analysis was used to identify the seven themes that emerged from the data: preparedness for college, adjustment, motivation and persistence, challenges, support systems, social integration, and microaggressions. The themes were analyzed through the lens of the six tenets of AAMT to show how they intersected. Findings showed that the five study participants had positive experiences that contradicted the extant body of literature, except for racially related issues and microaggressions. Racial issues and microaggressions that were described by the students

continue to exist at PWIs. Educational leaders need to work toward eradicating such issues as

students of color continue to enroll at their institutions. Additional research is recommended to

determine if the experiences described by the study participants are consistent at similar PWIs.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Education is the most powerful weapon which we can use to change the world."
Nelson Mandela

Background

Over the past 50 years, there has been a marked increase in the literature delineating educational disparities in minority communities. The lived experiences of African American males in the United States are complex and have been well documented in the literature for decades. The issues they confront in their home lives, communities, and educational settings are stifling to their positive growth and development. Numerous scholars have reported that African American males are the most stigmatized and least understood among all the racial groups in the United States (Anumba, 2015; Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013; Brooms, Clark, & Smith, 2018; Bush & Bush, 2010; Butler, Evans, Brooks, Williams, & Bailey, 2013; Cuyjet, 2006; Davis, 2013; Harper, 2014; Harper & Davis, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Howard, 2014; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014; Sinanan, 2016; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010; Wood & Palmer, 2015). In 2006, Jackson and Moore reported there was a limited amount of research that addressed the experiences of African American males in the educational pipeline, i.e., from pre-kindergarten through the postsecondary level (Jackson & Moore, 2006). In the last decade, a considerable amount of research regarding African American males in education has been published and continues to be added to the discourse concerning the disparities and the plight of Black males from kindergarten through postsecondary education and their need for support and cultural sensitivity (Brooms, 2017; Brooms et al., 2018; Brown & Dancy, 2010; Harper, 2014; Harper & Wood, 2016; Howard, 2008, 2014; Palmer et al., 2014). Howard (2008) posits the United States democratic creed of life, liberty, and the pursuit of

happiness makes it necessary to examine the social, political, educational, and economic disparities of African American males in this country. He states:

> Before we advance to a post-racial society, I would contend that we need to become racial. By this I mean racial considerations need to be an integral part of the questions that are asked, the frameworks that are used, the analyses that we engage in. I also would contend that becoming racial means a national acknowledgement of what slavery and Jim Crow have done over the course of the past 3 centuries to create a caste system in American life. I would contend that these racial considerations should be present in all research, but in particular when engaging in research with people of color, and in this instance of this work, Black males. In short, before becoming post-racial, we need to shed an intense spotlight on the legacy that race has left on the United States, and what it means for individuals whose interests have not been well served by racial hierarchies and race-based policies that have been created. (p. 134)

Palmer et al. (2014) suggest the reasons for the proliferation of research in this area are due to the sociopolitical history of Black males in America. African American males have social experiences that dictate how they navigate and understand educational institutions and how they are perceived and accepted on campus. Black men exist on the periphery of student life in higher education, yet their experiences can inform programs, policy, and practice that can benefit all students. Harper and Newman (2016) report that over the past 15 years, there is more research about Black males than any other student population in higher education.

In *Advancing Black Male Student Success from Preschool through Ph.D.*, editors Shaun R. Harper and J. Luke Wood (2016) present the realities of the education of Black males in America by levels of education. They begin the publication with the acknowledgement of

President Barak Obama's 2014 initiative, My Brother's Keeper (MBK), a Federal effort that addresses the opportunity gaps of young men of color to ensure a successful pathway from pre-K through college and beyond. They also acknowledge the numerous other foundations and initiatives to support and improve the lives of Black males. The authors of each chapter provide a telling account of the experiences of African American males in the educational pipeline and make recommendations for future research and identify what institutions can do to improve the experiences of these students.

In his book *Black Male(d): Peril and Promise in the Education of African American Males*, Tyrone Howard (2014) states the goal of the book was to cause a paradigm shift from thinking of Black males as uneducable and academically inferior to recognizing them as individuals who have potential when they are placed in an educational environment that is caring and supportive (Howard, 2014). He goes on to state:

> It is my belief that through identifying some of the root causes of the construction of Black males as being problems, we can begin to engage in scholarship, theory, and practice that challenge these ideas, and then seek to re-conceptualize them. In other words, the objective would be to move the pendulum from dehumanizing Black males, to humanizing them, and seeing them in a more dynamic and diverse context wherein they are worthy of love, care, concern, and respect. (pp. 29-30)

K–12 Education

Johns (2016) reports that in the United States, many young Black boys from low-income families enter pre-kindergarten or kindergarten educationally lacking. Further, students who do not have access to quality early learning programs typically remain behind academically; those who have access are less likely to live in poverty when they become adults (p. 2).

A number of scholars have reported that this under-preparation results in African American males being placed in special education classes. Further, African American boys who lag behind academically are considered to be developmentally or learning disabled. Young Black males are also suspended or expelled from school for behavioral issues at disproportionately higher rates than their peers (Brown, 2011; Brown, 2013; Cuyjet, 2006; Gooden, 2013; Graves, 2010; Harper & Wood, 2016; Kunjufu, 2010; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Palmer et al., 2014; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2008; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd, and Varner (2013) conducted a study of 220 African American seventh through ninth grade students to determine the role racial pride, self-efficacy, and self-acceptance (i.e., cultural assets) play in the relationship between school-based discriminatory experiences and academic persistence. Results of the study indicated students who experienced racial discrimination at school and had low racial pride, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-acceptance had lower levels of academic achievement than their peers. Students who reported higher cultural assets reported higher academic persistence. The findings of the study support the need for teacher training workshops to address teachers' gaps in knowledge in regard to diversity, discrimination, oppression, prejudice-reduction, and intergroup dialogue intervention to reduce discrimination and encourage a more positive, welcoming environment for all students (Butler-Barnes et al., 2013).

Another major concern regarding Black males in education is the rate at which they drop out of high school. The Schott Foundation for Public Education 2006 report titled *Public Education and Black Male Students* reported that during the 2003-2004 academic year more than 50% of Black males did not graduate from high school in 4 years. The study also reported the highest dropout rates were in the cities such as New York, Detroit, and Chicago (Howard, 2014,

p. 49). Brown (2013) cited the Schott Foundation's 2010 report titled *Yes We Can: The 2010 Schott 50 State Report on Black Males in Public Education*, in which, based on the data, it was concluded that the American educational system is failing Black males in that less than 50% complete high school (Brown, 2013). Palmer et al. (2014) cite the 2012 Schott Foundation report titled *The Urgency of Now: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, which states Black males are in a "pushout crisis" and are kept out of schools for two reasons: one, third graders in schools that have more than five unscheduled school closures report reading and math scores at almost 3% lower than third graders who attend schools with no unscheduled school closings, and two, the high suspension rate for Black males (Palmer et al., 2014).

Parental involvement in the early years of education can also have a significant impact on a child's interest in education in later years. Graves (2010) conducted a study of the differences of parental involvement between African American males and females in elementary school. According to his findings, the amount of parental involvement for males is highest in kindergarten and drops off by the third grade as the level of parental expectation decreases. Furthermore, third grade is when a majority of African American children, especially males, are identified as special education students, a designation in which they are overrepresented (Graves, 2010; Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014). Conversely, Black males are underrepresented in gifted educational programs (Jackson et al., 2014; Milner, 2013; West-Olatunji, Baker, & Brooks, 2006).

Educational researchers and scholars focus on this Black male crisis and offer a number of options to address this issue. For example, in elementary and secondary education, culturally relevant curricula can improve the educational experiences of Black males in K-12 (Kunjufu, 2010; Palmer et al., 2014). Also, there are programs that can support Black males in their

educational endeavors. In high school and postsecondary education, programs such as the Brotherhood, Project: Gentlemen on the Move (PGOM), Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) and other pre-college and college mentoring programs can help increase the academic success of young African American males, which in turn can encourage success as they pursue a college education (Cuyjet, 2006; Palmer et al., 2014).

Postsecondary Education

More recently, the narrative has begun to change. The literature now includes a focus on the successes of Black males in higher education. However, even though African American males are experiencing successes, they still face challenges with transitioning to an environment that is unfamiliar and has a student population with few students that look like them. Black males experience marginalization on college campuses (Anumba, 2015; Brooks et al., 2013; Brooms et al., 2018; Bush & Bush, 2010; Butler et al., 2013; Cuyjet, 2006; Davis, 2013; Harper, 2014; Harper & Davis, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Howard, 2014; Palmer et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2007; Sinanan, 2016; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010; Wood & Palmer, 2015). Consequently, when combined with being first-generation students who are adjusting to their first year in college, the challenges for Black males can be even greater.

In postsecondary education, Black males have the lowest percentage of graduation rates among all racial populations, including Black females (Brown, 2013; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper & Wood, 2016; Palmer et al., 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2015). Davis (2013) reported approximately 65% of Black males enrolled in college drop out before completing the requirements for an undergraduate degree (p. 54). According to the National Center of Education Statistics' 2007 report, Black males had the lowest performance on standardized tests of academic achievement. Howard (2014) reported that according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau

2008 report, 58% of African American students who graduate from high school have a lower probability of going directly to college than their White counterparts.

Once Black males matriculate into a college or university, support mechanisms should be in place that can encourage academic success. Brooks et al. (2013) note in their study that institutions of higher education need to provide students with (a) an environment that has high academic expectations; (b) a clear understanding of curricular requirements; and (c) academic, social, and personal support. Institutions also need to make students feel welcomed and valued on campus, as well as establish a climate that fosters learning. Many other scholars echo the need for colleges and universities to improve the environment for students of color, especially African American males (Anumba, 2015; Brooks et al., 2013; Brooms et al., 2018; Bush & Bush, 2010; Butler et al., 2013; Cuyjet, 2006; Davis, 2013; Harper, 2014; Harper & Davis, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Howard, 2014; Palmer et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2007; Sinanan, 2016; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

Many first-time freshmen in college face challenges and opportunities in transitioning and adjusting to college life. Some of these challenges and opportunities include establishing new relationships with peers, dealing with feelings of loneliness and anxiety, adjusting academically, and navigating the unfamiliar landscape of higher education that has its own culture (Harper & Newman, 2016; Shim & Ryan, 2012). Harper and Newman (2016) and Wood and Palmer (2015) cite numerous studies concerning adjustment issues for students of color, especially Black males at predominately White institutions (PWIs), which include high levels of racial stress, lack of validation regarding educational competence, alienation, unsupportive relationships with faculty, and challenges related to social and academic adjustment.

7

Given the extant literature regarding the challenges that first-generation students of color face in their first year of college, one can imagine the situation for African American males is even more challenging, given they are the most marginalized population of students on predominately White college campuses (Anumba, 2015; Brooks et al., 2013; Brooms et al., 2018; Bush & Bush, 2010; Butler et al., 2012; Cuyjet, 2006; Davis, 2013; Harper, 2014; Harper & Davis, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Howard, 2014; Palmer et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2007; Sinanan, 2016; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010; Wood & Palmer, 2015). In order to better understand the phenomenon from the African American male perspective, this research will explore the lived experiences of five first-generation African American males who attended a Middle Atlantic PWI during their freshman year.

Problem Statement

In regard to academic achievement, Black males disproportionately lag behind all other racial and ethnic categories of male students who are currently enrolled in K-12 and higher education in the United States (Howard, 2014; Toldson, Brown, & Sutton, 2009). They also lag behind the percentage of African American females who graduate from postsecondary institutions (Dancy & Brown, 2008; Palmer et al., 2014). According to Howard (2014), Black males comprise approximately 7% of students in K-12 but make up a disproportionate percentage of students in special education, attending alternative schools, or enrolled in remedial courses. Additionally, unsuccessful or negative schooling experiences have a high correlation with dropout rates and incarceration (Howard, 2014, p. 50). Encouraging African American males to pursue a college degree is one way to reverse this trend. Not all Black male students struggle with their educational pursuits. Many are able to navigate and deal with the expectations

for academic success. However, for those who cannot, it is important for colleges and universities to have the proper systems in place to support this population of students.

Many African American students require postsecondary remediation in order to be admitted to colleges and universities. Davis and Palmer (2010) report African American students are twice as likely to require remediation than White students. In their research, they reported that approximately 68% of all American students are underprepared when they leave high school. Of that population, about 80% of African American students are not prepared for college-level work (Davis & Palmer, 2010). Without remediation programs, a disproportionately high number of Black students would not have access to higher education.

First-generation students (i.e., those whose parent(s) have not obtained an undergraduate degree) face numerous challenges as they transition into postsecondary education. First-generation students, the majority of whom come from low-income households, are most likely a racial minority and are usually academically underprepared as a result of their schooling in below average urban school districts. They are also often unprepared for the culture of a postsecondary institution or how to navigate it. This population of students has a more difficult time adjusting to college than non-first-generation students. Trying to become acclimated to the college environment while attempting to be academically successful during the first year in college can be overwhelming (Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014; McCoy, 2014).

Understanding the needs of first-generation African American males in higher education, based on their unique life experiences, can provide postsecondary institutions with practical solutions that can improve support systems for these students. Dancy (2013) notes:

Effectively identifying and resisting the cultural reproduction of educational inequities, helps disrupt trends (i.e., hypercategorization as discipline problems, underrepresentation

9

in college) that challenge African American males in the education pipeline. Inequality

and inequity are reproduced when education leaders fail to address diversity issues

concerning decision making, allocation of resources, and power distribution. Thus,

education leaders must be unafraid to speak about what matters. (p. 19)

Purpose of the Study

Bell (2015) maintains there is a scarcity of research that addresses how Black males feel

about their educational experiences. Additionally, Harper and Newman (2016) state there are

minimal studies on the transition experiences of Black males during their first year of college.

Turner (2015) supports the fact that there is limited research that gives voice to Black males and

their first-year college experience. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate

the lived experiences of first-generation African American males who attended a predominately

White mid-Atlantic institution during their freshman year. The overarching goal of this research

is to understand their transition to college as it relates to their level of preparedness for college,

educational adjustment, social experiences, and the support systems they had during their

freshman year and if these impacted their academic experiences. Rowley and Bowman (2009)

suggested it is not enough to study the plight of Black males and create policies to help make

improvements for them; it is important that "we listen to what they are telling us about who they

are, what they think, and what they hope to achieve" (p. 318). Bell (2015) cited the work of

James E. Davis, who indicated in his research that minimal research exists that describes the

feelings of African American males regarding their schooling experiences. It is important to

understand how Black males feel about their educational experiences. As such, qualitative

research is the most effective way to explore their experiences as it allows participants to share

their experiences from their perspective and in their own words (Bell, 2015; Howard, Douglas, &

Warren, 2016). The results of this phenomenological study will contribute to the limited existing body of research that specifically focuses on first-generation Black males in their first year of college at a PWI, and offer insights into their lived experiences in transitioning and adjusting to their life as a collegian.

Significance of the Study

Based on the research for this study, there is a gap in the literature that specifically focuses on first-generation African American males in their first year of college from their own perspective. Brown and Dancy (2010) state that the existing body of literature about African American males and their participation in postsecondary education has not positioned these men in the center of the inquiry. Due to the paucity of literature focused on the voices of first-generation, Black male freshmen who attend PWIs in the U.S., this study will contribute to the body of research that focuses on the experiences of these students from their perspectives.

Additionally, this study does not focus on African American males in college from a deficit model. A great deal of the literature over the past 20 years presents the educational experiences of Black males in higher education from a negative frame of reference. This study focused on the experiences of first-generation students from a viewpoint that was not positive or negative, but rather from the point of view of what was.

Finally, this study provides implications that educational leaders at postsecondary institutions may find beneficial to positively impact the experiences of future Black male students who decide to enroll in their respective institutions. Also, recommendations for future research are outlined.

Theoretical Framework

  African American male theory (AAMT) is the theoretical framework that was used in this study to assist in making sense of the racial disparities Black males experience in postsecondary education. AAMT is a complex, meta-level theory developed by Lawson V. Bush and Edward C. Bush in 2013. The theory consists of six tenets that comprise the guiding principles used to explore the experiences of African American males. AAMT builds off of Ladson-Billing and Tate's critical race theory (CRT) and off of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bush & Bush, 2013, 2018).

  Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that has been used by numerous scholars as a lens for examining the experience of underrepresented populations, especially Black men and boys. CRT grew out of the broad-based literature in the fields of law, sociology, history, and ethnic and women's studies as a way to account for the role of race and racism in education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate IV first described CRT in education in their 1995 article titled, "Toward a Critical Race Theory in Education" (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Savas, 2013). Savas (2013) cited Ladson-Billings and Tate IV's argument indicating "endemic and ingrained racism exists in American life and that this pervasive racism damages the educational outcomes of students of color" (p. 509). Numerous scholars have used the tenets of CRT in their research on the education of African American males (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Howard, 2008; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Parker, 2015; Savas, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT can be used as a methodology in counter-storytelling and as a theory to analytically and conceptually frame qualitative research studies (Parker, 2015).

  According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002),

Critical race theory in education is a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives,

methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and

cultural aspects of educating that maintain subordinate and dominant racial position in

and out of the classroom. (p. 25)

Although CRT provides a framework to analyze African American males, Bush and Bush (2013,

2018) believe it provides a narrow-focused point of view of this population. As such, they

developed AAMT as "a more dynamical lens" borrowed from Bronfenbrenner's ecological

systems theory, "which allows for more fluid interaction and juxtaposition of abstract and

concrete concepts, environments, time periods, and other phenomena" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p.

1).

Bush and Bush (2013, 2018) believe that African American boys and men need their own

theoretical framework because their life experiences are particularly different based on pre- and

post-enslavement experiences. While they unequivocally agree with the tenets of CRT, Bush and

Bush find it "limiting and myopic"; their aim is to provide a much broader theoretical and

analytical approach to studying Black men and boys. CRT does not allow for the considerations

of studying cultural, spiritual, and social practices of African Americans (Bush & Bush, 2013,

2018; Enyia, Watkins, & Williams, 2016; Parker, Puig, Johnson, & Anthony, 2016; Wood &

Palmer, 2015). Other theories that influence AAMT include African-centered theory and

womanist theory (Bush & Bush, 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2015). Bush and Bush (2013) cite the

writings of Joseph and Elizabeth Pleck in their 1980 book titled *The American Man* in which

they state the advent of male studies was influenced by three social movements: the women's

movement, the gay liberation movement, and the men's movement. Bush and Bush add

additional movements that they say also influenced the study of male sex-roles, manhood, and

masculinity, one of which is the moral majority movement. They further contend that the Black Power, Civil Rights, and African-centered movements as well as African American male studies and the hip-hop culture have influenced the current and ongoing study of Black males (p. 2).

AAMT is comprised of six tenets. The first tenet suggests, "The individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events, phenomena and trajectory of African American boys' and men's lives are best analyzed using an ecological systems approach" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 6; 2018, p. 2). Bush and Bush identified Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of human development to be an appropriate framework to describe this tenet (Bush & Bush, 2013, 2018, p. 3). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory demonstrates how environmental systems influence the development of human abilities. Family economic conditions, parent involvement and availability, and even the amount of television that children watch influence academic achievement (Ream & Ryan, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's theory consists of five environmental systems: (a) microsystem—the setting in which a person lives (e.g., a person's immediate environment includes family, home, neighborhood, etc.); (b) mesosystem—the relationships between the microsystems (e.g., family and church experience or a child's experiences with their peers); (c) exosystem—people indirectly involved in an individual's development who do not have an active role in the setting (e.g., parents' employers or administrators at a child's school); (d) macrosystem—the cultural and economic conditions in which an individual lives; and (e) chronosystem—sociohistorical conditions, events, and transitions that occur over the course of an individual's life (e.g., parent's divorce and lasting effects on a child; Leonard, 2011; Santrock, 2011; Sigelman & Rider, 2015). According to Bush and Bush (2013, 2018), the intersections of the different systems as described in

Bronfenbrenner's theory are what shape the lives of African American boys and men (Wood &

Palmer, 2015).

e.g.
desegregation/segregation
change in family structure

e.g. unknown
non-matter

e.g. unemployment rate
smog
urban/rural
access to healthcare

e.g. cultural hegemony
and racism
 hip-hop youth culture
Patriotism
Black Nationalism
Laws/policies

Subsystem

Chronosystem

Macrosystem

Exosystem

Mesosystem

Subsystem

Microsystem

Inner Microsystem
e.g. biology
African male
personality
sexual orientation
beliefs and perceptions
intellect

Interactions
between the:
Subsystem
Inner Microsystem
Outer Microsystem

Outer Microsystem
e.g. family and extended family
home, peer groups
neighborhood, church, school

e.g. supernatural
and spirit
collective will and
unconscious
archetypes

Figure 1. African American male ecological systems model for African American Male theory.

Adapted from "God Bless the Child Who Got His Own: Toward a Comprehensive Theory for

African American Boys and Men," by L. V. Bush and E. C. Bush, 2013, *The Western Journal of*

Black Studies, *37*, p. 1. Copyright 2013 by the Board of Regents, Washington State University.

Adapted with permission.

In AAMT, Bronfenbrenner's microsystem is divided into two categories: the inner

microsystem (consists of a person's biology, personality, perceptions, and beliefs) and the outer

microsystem (includes family, home, peers, and neighborhood). Bush and Bush (2013, 2018) expanded the mesosystem that creates links between the environment, inner microsystem, and outer microsystem, and included a new system they labeled the sub-system which acknowledges the supernatural, spiritual, and collective unconscious of Black men and boys. The sub-system represents the unknown or things unexplained (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 7; 2018, p. 3; see Figure 1).

The second tenet of AAMT states, "There is something unique about being male and of African descent" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 8; 2018, p. 4). This tenet recognizes that African American men and boys live unique lives, have unique experiences, and have specific perceptions of their experiences which inform their view of the world and how they interact with society. This is not to say other races and cultures do not have unique experiences; AAMT provides the lens to specifically examine Black males for a deeper level of understanding of the historical, psychological, and social contexts in which they have lived (Bush & Bush, 2013, 2018; Enyia et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2016; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

The third tenet of AAMT asserts, "There is a continuity and continuation of African culture, consciousness, and biology that influence the experiences of African American boys and men" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 8, 2018, p. 4). Bush and Bush (2013, 2018) concur with other scholars who believe African culture and consciousness influence Black males, i.e., studying Black men and boys should be connected to Africa. There is a uniqueness of being male and of African descent (Bush & Bush, 2013; Enyia et al., 2016). Furthermore, African American culture, spirituality, and biology are linked to pre-colonial Africa (Bush & Bush, 2013; Enyia et al., 2016; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

The fourth tenet indicates, "African American boys and men are resilient and resistant" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 8, 2018, p. 5). Bush & Bush (2013, 2018) contend Black males are born with an instinctive desire for self-determination, morality, and intelligence (Parker et al., 2016; Wood & Palmer, 2015). AAMT connects resilience and resistance, focusing on ways in which African American males reject conventional White cultural authority and oppression. This tenet has a foundation of educational resilience, which is the ability to succeed academically despite difficulties, risk factors, and challenges in life that one may face (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

The fifth tenet of AAMT is, "Race and racism coupled with classism and sexism have a profound impact on every aspect of the lives of African American boys and men" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 9, 2018, p. 6). It is with this tenet that AAMT and CRT are the most similar in that they see racism as a pervasive factor of society, a force that is omnipresent. This tenet focuses on how racism impacts the lives of African American males and helps one to understand what it is like to be Black and male in America. The priority of this tenet is the intersectionality of gender, race, and class (Bush & Bush, 2013, 2018; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

The sixth and final tenet of AAMT states, "The focus and purpose of study and programs concerning African American boys and men is for the pursuit of social justice" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 9, 2018, p. 6). Research and practice that is relevant to the lives of African American males should be social justice oriented. This tenet suggests that research should investigate, expose, and correct practices, policies, programs, systems, concepts, and institutions that promote racial oppression (Bush & Bush, 2013, 2018; Parker et al., 2016; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

Relative to this qualitative study, AAMT provides the historical context and theoretical framework to analyze the educational experiences of first-generation African American males in their first year of attendance at a mid-Atlantic PWI.

Research Question

Framed through the lens of Bush and Bush's African American male theory, this study seek to answer the following overarching question: What were the lived experiences of first-generation African American males who completed their freshman year of college at a rural, mid-Atlantic PWI in regard to their transition to the college environment as it relates to their level of preparedness, adjustment, persistence, support systems, and racial experiences on campus? Specific semi-structured questions to help provide guidance and make sense of their experiences can be found in Appendix A.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study only focused on the experiences of five first-generation African American male students during their first year of college at one mid-Atlantic PWI. The study purposely focused on first-generation students as opposed to non-first-generation students; non-first-generation students are likely to have "social and cultural capital," i.e., support students get from parents or others who aid them as they navigate the college experience (Whitehead & Wright, 2016). The study also focused specifically on freshmen during their first year of college.

Limitations of this study related to participants and the qualitative methodology employed for the study. The study focused on African American males at one institution in a rural, mid-Atlantic town. Findings from the study should not be generalized to other first-generation, African American males in their freshman year at other PWIs in the mid-Atlantic area or beyond.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the problem of educational disparities in minority communities in the United States (U.S.). An overview of scholarly research that documents this problem, especially concerning African American males in K-12 and postsecondary education was provided. The problem statement highlighted the disproportionality of educational achievement between Black males and all other racial and ethnic categories of students in K-12 and higher education in the U.S. The purpose of the study is to investigate the lived experiences of first-generation African American males during their freshman year at a rural, mid-Atlantic PWI. The significance of the study is that a gap exists in the literature that specifically focuses on first-generation Black males in their freshman year of college from their own perspective. Additionally, this study does not focus on this population of scholars from a deficit model.

The theoretical framework used in this study is African American male theory (AAMT), developed by Lawson V. Bush and Edward C. Bush in 2013. This theory is comprised of six tenets that allows one to specifically study African American males and make sense of their experiences. The overarching research question for the study was to inquire about the lived experiences of first-generation African American males during their freshman year regarding their transition to college as related to their level of preparedness, persistence, support systems, and racial experiences on campus. This study focuses on five first-generation Black males who completed their freshman year at a rural, mid-Atlantic PWI.

Chapter 2 is a comprehensive literature review that begins with a sociohistorical perspective of inequalities that African Americans have experienced since pre-slavery and the impacts on education. Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative methodology used in this study. Chapter 4 presents an overview of the institution, the rural town in which the institution is located, and an

introduction of the study participants. Chapter 5 details the identified themes of the study and the

lived experiences of the respondents. Chapter 6 provides the summary and conclusions of the

study, details of the study through the lens of the theoretical framework, the implications of the

findings, and recommendations for educational leaders and future studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Sociohistorical Perspective

The inequalities in education for African Americans in the United States have existed since slavery; the literature is replete with scholarly research that documents these disparities. Many scholars have examined the sociohistorical perspective of the struggles African Americans, especially males, endured in order to attain education. This was mostly due to repressive legislation in the South prohibiting assembly and the education of Blacks (Dancy 2013; Fultz & Brown, 2008; Palmer et al., 2014). Boskin (1966) stated education was considered a way to create order or pass on culture to future generations. It is important to highlight the development of African American male identity throughout history to recognize what generations of Black males have endured over time and to make sense of how they are currently served and underserved in education. Howard (2014) asserts that current day portrayals of Black males stem from slavery and a long-standing history of racism. Black males have been characterized as subhuman, criminals, absent-minded, buffoons, ignorant, docile, and groveling. Howard also suggests there are five portrayals of images of Black males that have shaped the public perception of them as (a) a physical brute and anti-intellectual, (b) shiftless and lazy, (c) hypersexual, (d) criminal-minded, and (e) slickster-pimp/gangster. These depictions have significantly contributed to the physical, psychological, emotional, cultural, academic, and spiritual beliefs of Black men and their families (Howard, 2014, p. 31).

Dancy (2013) describes how Slave Codes that were developed by White enslavers, affected every aspect of life of enslaved people, including their education. The result was psychological, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional oppression of enslaved men and women (Dancy, 2013; Palmer et al., 2014). Africans were brought to America solely to function as

21

laborers. Jenkins (2006) provides examples of laws enacted to govern and prohibit slaves from certain actions. Such examples included the Virginia law of 1662, which declared children of slaves would inherit the mother's status; the 1702 New York act that prohibited actions such as meetings of more than three slaves and trading with other slaves. The South Carolina Negro Act prohibited slaves from "freedom of movement, assembling, raising their own food, earning money, learning to read English, and restricting them to low quality, inexpensive clothing" (p.131). Another example was the 1857 *Dred Scott v. Sanford* case in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that slaves, ex-slaves, or descendants of slaves could not be considered U.S. citizens and that Congress did not have the authority to forbid slavery in the territories (Jenkins, 2006). These are a few of the examples of the oppression that slaves and their offspring endured for decades.

Boskin (1966) summarizes four different works that address the origins of American slavery: "The Origins of the Southern Labor System" by Oscar and Mary F. Handlin; "Black Men in a White Man's Country" by Carl N. Degler; *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* by Stanley M. Elkin; and "Modern Tensions and the Origins of American Slavery" by Winthrop D. Jordan (p. 125). Each work addresses the social and economic condition of the 1600s. Education was considered a way to create order, enculturate, and propagate English culture and Christianity. Education was also considered a way of assimilation in order to avoid the ways of the savage (Boskin, 1966). Boskin reported there was no evidence of documented legislative provisions for the education of slaves. Additionally, the terms Negro and slave were "conspicuously missing" in the existing education statutes of that time. However, that terminology was included in ordinances concerning taxes, defense, sex, and religious ordinances (Boskin, 1966). Africans and Indians were considered infidels, heathens,

and savages by Englishman. However, unlike those for Africans, the education of Indians was encouraged in education-related statutes. The English believed Africans, who were considered uneducable, "had to be assimilated into, or accommodated by a culture which possessed definite ideas of God, family, manners, morals, male-female relations, and which further prided itself on a high degree of accomplishment" (Boskin, 1966, p. 130).

In their research, Fultz and Brown (2008) provide a thorough historical perspective on the education of African Americans through the early 20th century. They reported Black men were exploited for centuries during the Atlantic slave trade as the primary means of labor. During the early 19th century, with the growth of the cotton industry, Black males provided the slave labor that drove the industrial revolution, creating profits in England and the United States. In the southern states, anti-education and anti-assembly laws were declared as a way to prevent slave revolts. Fultz and Brown as well as other scholars, highlighted the writings of Carter G. Woodson, who documented the repressive legislation of the southern states during the beginning of the 19th century that placed restrictions on the education of the slave population (Dancy & Brown, 2008; Fultz & Brown, 2008). In the northern states, education of African Americans was widely opposed through the antebellum period (Dancy & Brown, 2008; Fultz & Brown, 2008). However, philanthropically funded African free schools, Black churches, and privately funded schools provided education to Black children (Fultz & Brown, 2008). Both African American and White reformers believed there needed to be representative Black men to demonstrate they were educable and were fit to be free men. During the 1770s and 1780s, in Philadelphia and New York, schools were developed for Black males, but by the turn of the century, the schools became coeducational because of the changing view that women should also be educated. White reformers and African Americans were primarily focused on educating males "to develop a well-

educated core of 'representative' Black men" (p. 857). However, some White philanthropists wanted their schools to focus on educating Black youth as a social control to prevent disorderly behavior (Fultz & Brown, 2008). During the latter part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, discrimination against African Americans worsened. Although slavery had ended, constitutional protections for Blacks were not developed until after the Civil War. Also, progress in developing public schools in the South was short lived. Sharecropping exploited Blacks economically; civil rights safeguards of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were undermined by the U.S. Supreme Court. Also, de jure segregation intensified, lynching increased significantly, and funding for education was diverted at the county level. It was clear that racism and discrimination was on the incline (Dancy, 2013).

Dancy and Brown (2008) provide a historical overview of the educational challenges at the collegiate level that African Americans endured from the pre-Civil War era through the 1970s. The article highlights landmark legislation that had a tremendous impact on the education of African Americans in the United States. They report that although free African Americans attended White colleges in the north, there was no access to college for African Americans in southern states. Missionaries from the northern states, abolitionists, and educators established postsecondary institutions for Blacks. Three institutions in the North were established specifically for Blacks. In 1837, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, first known as the African Institute (Cheyney University, n.d.) and then the Institute for Colored Youth (Lovett, 2015) located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was the first Historically Black College or University (HBCU) chartered for African Americans. It was renamed several additional times between 1913 and 1983 when it became Cheyney University of Pennsylvania (Lovett, 2015). Lincoln University for Negroes, located in Chester County, Pennsylvania, was chartered in 1854 as

Ashmun Institute. It was renamed Lincoln University in 1866 to honor the late president,

Abraham Lincoln. The third institution, Wilberforce University, located near Xenia in Green

County, Pennsylvania (now Wilberforce, OH), was founded in 1855 (Lovett, 2015). By 1890,

more than 200 HBCUs were established (Dancy & Brown, 2008). Enrollment changed after

1960 due to desegregation. In the 1970s, HBCUs began admitting students of all races (Brown,

2010). As of 2016, there were 102 HBCUs in 19 states, Washington D.C, and the U.S. Virgin

Islands; 51 are public and 51 are private, non-profit institutions (National Center for Education

Statistics, 2017).

Landmark Legislation and Court Cases that Affected the Education of Blacks in America

United States legislation has had major impacts on the education of Blacks dating as far

back as the mid-1600s. The following is a chronology of legislation related to education in

America as it pertains to African Americans.

The Morrill Act of 1862. The Morrill Act of 1862, signed by President Abraham

Lincoln, provided funding to states for higher education institutions. The purpose of the act was

to establish land grant colleges and universities throughout the United States. Under this act,

each state received 30,000 acres of land per each senator and representative based on the 1860

census (Safransky, 2010).

According to the act, states had to use the grant for

the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object

shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to

teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts…to promote

the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions

in life. (Safransky, 2010, p. 318)

Justin S. Morrill of Vermont, who served as a U.S. Representative for 12 years and a Senator for 31 years, wrote the act. Ironically, Morrill had to leave school at age 15 and never attended college. He was an entrepreneur who was involved in agriculture and various other businesses. Morrill was also involved in the development of the Library of Congress and the Washington Monument (Safransky, 2010).

The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments and higher education. In September 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which was mostly a political and military strategy and, to a lesser extent, a humanitarian gesture. Effective January 1, 1863, slaves in all Confederate states would be considered free. Although Lincoln delivered this directive, slaves were not actually freed because the Confederacy was not under Lincoln's authority. In 1865, just before the end of the Civil War and after the assassination of President Lincoln, Congress approved the Thirteenth Amendment. It required ratification by three-fourths of the states in the union. Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's successor, secured the passing of the amendment on December 18, 1865, finally abolishing slavery throughout the United States (Appiah & Gates, 2004; Lindsey, 2008).

During the Reconstruction period, in March 1865, Congress instituted the U.S. Freedman Bureau (officially titled the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands) to aid freed slaves and impoverished Whites with social services, food, medicine, employment, landownership, and education. General Oliver O. Howard was the first commissioner of the Bureau, which was headquartered in Washington, D.C. It did not have its own budget; resources were provided via the War Department. Although the Bureau received significant political opposition, it provided critical relief and food distribution to Blacks and impoverished Whites. Its most impactful accomplishment was the promotion of education and establishment of schools

for former slaves. By 1869, the Bureau created more than four thousand schools for Blacks, including the establishment of Hampton, Fisk, and Howard Universities. In 1869, Congress took action to restrict the activities of the Bureau, especially in regard to promoting education. Unfortunately, all operations were ceased in 1872 due to the lack of continued funding (Palmer et al., 2014; Robertson, 2010).

In 1866, a year after the end of the Civil War, the Fourteenth Amendment of the U. S. Constitution was passed. The amendment abolished the political and economic structure that was based on the ownership of slaves and granted slaves citizenship. It also guaranteed that no citizens could be denied life, liberty, or property without due process of the law. In 1868, Congress ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, two years after it was passed as a law. The amendment contains Due Process and Equal Protection clauses to protect individuals from unfair and unjust treatment regardless of age, gender, race, or religion. Although the Fourteenth Amendment was passed to ensure fair treatment for Blacks in America, during the late 1890s the Jim Crow laws and Black Codes that were ratified in southern states resulted in mandatory segregation of Blacks in all public places including institutions of higher education.

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890. Justin Morrill was influential in the development of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 (also known as the Second Morrill Act and the Agricultural College Act of 1890), which provided funding to create colleges for former slaves who were unable to enroll in colleges and universities established for Whites only. The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 allowed for the establishment of 17 historically Black land grant colleges in the former Confederate states, which generated both support and opposition (Dancy & Brown, 2008; Brown, 2010). Under the grant, each state was required to provide education for all races. One of the unintentional repercussions of developing institutions specifically for Blacks

27

was how this led to racial segregation in higher education. Southern states that established

institutions for Whites and separate institutions for Blacks had to admit Blacks to the already

established colleges or universities, or establish new institutions expressly for Blacks (Safransky,

2010). The curricula for these institutions focused on agricultural and mechanical education. The

curricula for institutions that were established under the land grant, which are called A&M and

A&T colleges and universities, focused on agriculture, science, and teaching. Alcorn State

University in Mississippi was founded in 1871 and was the first agriculture land grant institution

established under the Morrill Land Grant Act (Brown, 2010).

Two prominent African American scholars, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois,

had opposing opinions about the education of Black males. Washington was in favor of land

grant institutions as they provided a way for Blacks to learn a trade and accumulate wealth. On

the contrary, DuBois, who was the first African American to earn a doctorate from Harvard

University, was opposed to such institutions; he believed Blacks should not pursue a trade, but

rather focus on leadership (Safransky, 2010).

During the antebellum period, the first three institutions for African Americans in the

United States were established. Two were located in Pennsylvania: Cheyney University (1837)

and Lincoln University (1854). The third institution established during that time was Wilberforce

University (1855) in Ohio. Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) established

after 1865 were the result of African American benevolent societies, especially Baptist and

African Methodist Episcopal churches, northern White benevolent and denominational societies,

and wealthy corporate philanthropists. These institutions were either religious or training

institutions that initially required students to be advanced in elementary education. However, in

later years, students were required to have secondary education (Brown, 2010). As of 2016, there

are 102 HBCUs in the United States, 19 of which are land grant institutions. Of the existing

HBCUs, 51 are public and 51 are private, non-profit institutions (National Center for Education

Statistics, 2017). In 2016, enrollment in HBCUs totaled 292,083 students. The total enrollment

of Black students was 223,515 or 76.5% of the total student enrollment. In regard to Black

student enrollment, 85,155 or 38% were Black males (National Center for Educational Statistics,

2017).

 Plessy v. Ferguson is another 1896 landmark Supreme Court case, ruled by Justice Henry

Billings Brown, that systematized Jim Crow segregation laws that supported the notion that

"separate but equal" was constitutional. The case pertained to the Louisiana Separate Car Act of

1890 and passengers traveling on railway systems, and it led to the establishment of state

customs and practices of segregation with enforced separation of Blacks and Whites. The

separate but equal doctrine was in place for nearly 60 years until it was overturned in the 1954

case of *Brown v. Board of Education* when the color line was erased legally, but not socially.

Supreme Court Justice John Harlan was the sole non-conformist in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case;

he foresaw what affect this legislation would have over time concerning the rights of African

Americans. Justice Harlan stated, "Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor

tolerates classes among citizens" (Brown, 2013; Lopez & Burciaga, 2014; Patton, 2010; Palmer

et al., 2014; Schaefer, 2008).

 In regard to Blacks and higher education prior to 1954, Supreme Court cases such as

Berea College v. Kentucky (1908), *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State*

Regents for Higher Education (1950) challenged the Jim Crow laws established in the late

1890s. The rulings in *Plessy v Ferguson* as well as these cases were integral in *Brown v. Board*

of Education (1954) (Aiken, Salmon, & Hanges, 2013; Dancy & Brown, 2008; Dorsey, 2010; Fossey, 2010; Palmer et al., 2014; Rumple, 2010).

Berea College, founded in 1855, has educated Whites and African Americans equally since its origin. In 1904, the legislature of the state of Kentucky passed the Day Law that prohibited African American and White students from being educated in the same schools or in schools that were less than 25 miles apart. Since Berea College was integrated, it was found in violation of the Day Law and fined $1,000. Berea College appealed to the Kentucky Court of Appeals. The Court decided to uphold the Day Law to prevent racial uprisings and interracial marriage. In *Berea College v. Kentucky* (1908), Berea College appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which upheld the decision of the Kentucky Court of Appeals. Justice John Marshall Harlan vehemently opposed the decision, arguing that the Day Law, which was originally titled "An Act to Prohibit White and Colored Persons from Attending the Same School," was obviously meant to segregate students based on race. Harlan cautioned the courts that upholding Kentucky's Day Law would open the door to other regulations such as preventing Blacks and Whites from worshiping together. Nearly 50 years later, the *Berea College v. Kentucky* decision played an integral role in *Brown v. Board of Education* (Rumple, 2010).

Sweatt v. Painter (1950) was another landmark case that had a great impact on higher education for African Americans. In this historic 1946 case, Herman Sweatt applied for admission to the University of Texas Law School and was rejected based on the fact he was an African American. As a result, Sweatt filed a lawsuit against the university. The court acknowledged that Texas was in violation of Sweatt's Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection. Instead of requiring that the University of Texas Law School grant Sweatt admission, the court held up the case for more than six months to allow the State of Texas enough time to

establish a law school for African Americans. In 1947, Texas State University was established

for the sole purpose of providing a separate but equal law school for African Americans;

however, Sweatt refused to enroll. In a state trial, the court ruled that Texas State University's

Law School was equivalent to University of Texas Law School, therefore Sweatt's request was

denied. In 1948, Sweatt appealed to the Texas Supreme Court but his case was denied. He then

appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Chief Justice Frederick M. Vinson wrote a decision that

was unanimously approved; the Supreme Court reversed the Sweatt ruling, stating the State of

Texas had not provided Sweatt "with opportunities to study law that were 'substantially equal' to

those afforded to White students who were eligible for admission to the University of Texas Law

School" (Fossey, 2010, p. 446). The decision was based on the differences of faculty, courses,

size of the student body, opportunities to specialize, the quality of the library, and more. The

University of Texas Law School was considered superior to Texas State University Law School.

Since the findings showed inequality in the educational opportunities for Sweatt, the Supreme

Court ruled that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment allowed Sweatt to be

admitted to the University of Texas Law School (Fossey, 2010).

  McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (1950) is another case that

had an impact on higher education. George McLaurin, a 68-year-old Black male, applied to

University of Oklahoma to pursue a doctorate in Education. He was denied access based on race.

Oklahoma statutes, like many other states, made it illegal for African Americans and Whites to

attend the same universities. McLaurin filed a complaint in district court alleging the actions of

the University of Oklahoma violated his constitutional rights. In addition, the Oklahoma statutes

deprived him of equal protection as permitted by the Fourteenth Amendment. The district court

upheld the law that the state of Oklahoma had a constitutional duty to allow McLaurin to be

educated with other groups. As a result, the state of Oklahoma amended the statutes to allow African American students admission into colleges and universities to which White students were admitted if the institution offered courses that were not offered at African American institutions. McLaurin was granted admission to the University of Oklahoma but was given a set of restrictions for attendance. Specifically, he was not allowed to sit in the same classroom with White students; he had to sit on the side of the room separated by a rail, he was assigned to a secluded area in the university's library, and he had to eat in the cafeteria at a different time than the White students. McLaurin went back to district court and filed a case requesting a modification to the restrictions. The district court maintained the restrictions did not violate McLaurin's Fourteenth Amendment rights. As a result, McLaurin filed an appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court regarding relaxation of the restrictions. Just prior to the Court's ruling, the University of Oklahoma relaxed some of the restrictions; McLaurin was allowed to sit in the classroom, but in a designated row, eat at the same time as the White students, but at a designated table, and study at the same table with other students on the main floor of the library. Even though the modifications were made, the Supreme Court still overturned the lower court's decision, citing the restrictions deprived McLaurin of his right to equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment. Further, the unequal treatment would have a negative effect on McLaurin's educational leadership that could have a negative impact on the students who McLaurin would train (Thompson-Dorsey, 2010). All three of these court cases concerned violations of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The rulings for these cases had an impact on and preceded the most influential landmark case in the United States concerning education: *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka (1954). One of the most significant cases that addressed equality in education in the United States, *Brown v. Board of Education*, became a notable catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement. *Brown* was the result of the Topeka school board's refusal to allow a Black girl to attend school near her home. The case was actually a class action lawsuit of five combined cases with more than 200 plaintiffs. A strategic decision was made by its attorneys to name the case after one of the plaintiffs, Oliver Brown, to have male representation for all the plaintiffs of the case. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sponsored the case and Thurgood Marshall was chief counsel. The argument for *Brown v. Board of Education* was first heard in court in 1952. In 1953, there was a re-argument of the case that focused on the Fourteenth Amendment, specifically that it was unconstitutional to enforce educational differences based on race. The Supreme Court's final decision was rendered on May 17, 1954. The Court voted unanimously that "separate but equal" could not be applicable in public education as African American and other minority children would not have equal educational opportunities (Asante & Mazama, 2005; Cesario, 2008; Palmer et al., 2014).

Brown v. Board of Education (1955). From 1955 through 1960, more than 200 hearings were heard in federal court concerning school desegregation. After the 1954 ruling, northern states celebrated the decision while southern states showed obvious opposition; mob violence and other forms of resistance occurred throughout southern states. White Citizens Councils vowed to defend segregation. Republicans and Southern Democrats issued the Southern Manifesto in 1956, which defended southern states' rights to uphold segregation (Aiken et al., 2013). Some school districts created "splinter districts" of new all-White schools. Although the Supreme Court made its ruling, it had very little impact on halting segregation in schools.

Additionally, there was no timeline established for dismantling segregation, which consequently resulted in this being a very slow process. There was so much animosity about the decision that the violence toward Blacks surged in the form of beatings, murders, assaults with firearms, and bombings (Asante & Mazama, 2005; Cesario, 2008; Palmer et al., 2014).

In the *Brown v. Board of Education II* (1955) decision, schools were directed to be integrated "with all deliberate speed," a court mandated instruction that had no legal definition; segregationists interpreted it as meaning never (Bell, 2004, p. 18; Dorsey, 2010; Lopez & Burciaga, 2014). Nearly 10 years later in 1964, the Supreme Court forced the movement of desegregation by allowing lower courts to require county supervisors to levy taxes against public school districts that did not have desegregation practices in place (Bell, 2004, p. 96).

In their article titled "The Troublesome Legacy of Brown v. Board of Education," López and Burciaga (2014) reflected on *Brown v. Board of Education*. The year 2014 marked the 60th anniversary of the landmark court decision. López and Burciaga posited a different approach than a discussion about the progress made toward resolving issues of racism and inequality in education. Rather than asking if racial equality was achieved in the United States, they proposed that a different set of questions needed to be considered. Such questions included "What social, institutional, judicial, and ideological factors prevent us from arriving [at racial equality]?"; "Why do we continue to believe in integration as the primary indicator of equality?" and "Why do we still have faith in the efficacy of our governmental institutions to address issues of inequality, when all the indicators seem to show that we are still separate and unequal?" (Lopez & Burciaga, 2014, p. 808). Their belief is by asking this specific set of questions, we can begin to have a fundamentally different discourse concerning the shortcomings, promises, and future of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Lopez & Burciaga, 2014).

Particular to African American males, Gooden (2013) argued that more than a half century after *Brown v. Board of Education*, Black males continue to have a difficult time negotiating their way through schools that do not have the necessary resources to help them succeed academically.

The New Negro Movement and the Civil Rights Era

During the New Negro Movement in the early 1900s, African American men strived to develop industry and to achieve economic growth in their communities (Dancy, 2013). From 1915 through the end of the 1920s, a movement referred to as the Great Migration took place. Well over one million African Americans moved from segregated southern states to more northern and western states in search of better wages, the freedom to vote, less violence from Whites, and in some cases, better schools for their children (Appiah & Gates, 2004, p. 188). Some men made political and financial gains while others did not, which resulted in a division of class and the emergence of a Black middle class. In order to further solidify their male identity, African American men developed fraternal organizations such as the Prince Hall Freemasons and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The Prince Hall Freemasons attracted African American men who wanted to define themselves as political, economic, and social leaders and who ideologically became the bourgeois for African Americans. UNIA was a secular organization that began with a small group of Jamaican men and women who shared similar beliefs about self-reliance and racial purity and rejected European colonialism. The organization was led by Marcus Garvey, its chief philosopher and president-general. Members of UNIA were known as Garveyites because they believed in Garvey's ideology of entrepreneurship as a means of manhood development and racial advancement (Dancy, 2013).

Both organizations were attractive to African American men because of the bourgeois ideologies of manhood: wealth, social respectability, and political power. Also, gender, class, status, and age were highly influential during the New Negro Movement Era. UNIA shared similar ideologies with the Prince Hall Freemasons; they strived for economic empowerment for African Americans with restaurants, clothing stores, factories, financial institutions, and more. During this time, the idea of an African American middle-class was an important part of the construction of manhood, a construct distinct from women as well as African American men who were not members of these organizations (Dancy, 2013).

During the Civil Rights Era, the economic climate in America shifted, which resulted in drastic changes in the identity of Black males. Dancy (2013) cites the work of W. E. Perkins who identified changes such as (a) deindustrialization, job loss, and economic changes in African American working-class and underclass households and (b) the increase in the number of unwed mothers that tripled between 1940 and 1957, after World War II. The increase in births resulted in an increase of many Black families being dependent on welfare. As dependency on welfare increased, the number of African American middle-class, more-educated families declined, while the number of less-educated, lower class African American families increased. While racial segregation had an impact on this trend, the gender relations between African American men and women also had a significant impact. (Dancy, 2013). In the south, "separate but equal" laws were in place; in the north, Blacks worked the worst jobs, lived in the worst neighborhoods, and were restricted from moving to White neighborhoods. Across the country, if African American men could secure employment, they were relegated to the dirtiest, lowest-paying jobs which resulted in their families having to live in crowded and unhealthy conditions. African Americans were forced to live in urban neighborhoods that became known as "ghettos" as that was all they

could afford. This phenomenon contributed to the disenfranchisement of the Black male. In addition, Black females began to develop their own constructions of womanhood, which brought about changes in the African American family. Women became the primary caretakers of the family while men disregarded responsibility for their families for a newfound freedom and a "cool" manhood (Dancy, 2013).

In regard to education, since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1955), the number of African American males that enrolled in colleges and universities increased significantly. Brown and Dancy reported in 1955 that of the African American population of undergraduate students enrolled in colleges and universities, 55% were male and 45% were female. However, between 1976 and 2000, the number of males dropped considerably; in 2010 only 37% were male, while 60% of the African American undergraduate population were female (Brown & Dancy, 2010). Brown and Dancy also reported that since 1977, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Black males increased by 52%; however, the number of degrees awarded to Black females increased by 112%. This huge disparity has had significant implications for African American communities.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. During the 1950s and early 1960s, the racial struggles in the United States continued to increase. There were numerous mass protests in northern African American communities and southern states for equality. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy, who consistently championed equal rights, began working toward the development of a civil rights bill. Five days after his assassination, on November 27, 1963, Lyndon B. Johnson, Kennedy's successor, called for the passage of the Civil Rights Act (Aiken et al., 2013; Dorsey, 2010). It was not until July 2, 1964 with the ratification of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that discrimination in the United States was prohibited. The Civil Rights Act prohibited

discrimination based on race, color, national origin, and gender in public accommodations and programs that received federal funding (Banks, 2012) and was the landmark legislation that changed the trajectory of education for African Americans in the United States. Under the Act, all schools and educational institutions were mandated to enforce the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education 1954* and *1955* (Cesario, 2008; Lundy, 2005).

There were two statutes of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that were directly related to education: Title IV, the Desegregation of Public Education statute, and Title VI, the Nondiscrimination in Federally Assisted Programs statute. Title IV allowed lawsuits to be filed against school districts that refused to comply with the court order. This title also authorized the U.S. Commissioner of Education to provide funding and technical assistance to school districts, school boards, and state agencies. Title VI prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in the distribution of benefits for programs and activities receiving federal assistance. Based on Title VI of the Civil Right Act, if institutions continued to ignore the mandate in any program, they would not receive federal funding (Starsky &Williamson-Lott, 2012; Van Patten, 2010). In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was enacted, which authorized the payment of billions of dollars in federal funding to local school systems that were in compliance with the ruling (Bell, 2004, p. 97; Lomotey, 2010).

From the time of the passing of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1955) through late 1968, although school desegregation was mandated, there was still great opposition to integration in school districts and universities. For example, in the early 1960s, southern White school administrators ordered public schools to be closed and established White private schools in order to circumvent court ordered desegregation. In 1963, the Alabama National Guard was needed to escort two African American students at the University of Alabama after Governor George

Wallace ordered the doors of the institution be blocked. To address the continued disobedience, in 1968, the Supreme Court ordered states to dismantle all segregated schools (Donnor, 2010).

African Americans and education post-Civil Rights Act of 1964. Educational opportunities for African Americans increased after the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Government funded programs were developed to support students whose goals were to attend college. In 1964, as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, Congress implemented TRIO programs, funded under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, to help low income students have access to and be successful in higher education. College readiness programs, which are authorized by states, were another way for minority students to gain access to postsecondary education. These programs provided remedial courses to underprepared students in order to decrease academic deficiencies through academic support such as tutoring, counseling, and study skills programs (Palmer et al., 2014). These programs also addressed social, economic, academic, and cultural factors that made the transition to postsecondary education difficult for students who were first-generation college students (Palmer et al., 2014). Initially, TRIO, a term coined in the late 1960s, consisted of three different programs: Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services. Upward Bound was developed from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 in response to the nation's war on poverty. In 1965, Talent Search was developed as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The third program, Student Support Services (SSS), which was authorized by the Higher Education Amendments, was originally known as Special Services for Disadvantaged Students. Over time, additional programs have been added to the TRIO programs. As a result of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972, a fourth program known as the Educational Opportunity Centers was added. Training Programs for Federal TRIO Programs were authorized from the 1976 Education

Amendments; 1986 Amendments resulted in the Ronald E. McNair post-baccalaureate Achievement Program. In 1990, the Upward Bound Math/Science program was created to address the need for instruction in the areas of math and science. More recently, the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2001, an amendment to the SSS program, provided funding for direct financial assistance for SSS participants who are recipients of Federal Pell Grant funds (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; Mireles, 2010).

Affirmative action is another government program developed and implemented in the 1960s by President John F. Kennedy. It afforded underrepresented minorities and women access and equity in programs receiving federal funding in the areas of employment, education, and contracting opportunities. In regard to education, postsecondary institutions have used affirmative action to increase access to women and minorities. Unfortunately, affirmative action has been challenged over the years as evidenced by landmark Supreme Court cases such as *University of California Regents v. Bakke* (1978), *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), and *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2013). States that have abolished the use of affirmative action include California, Washington, Florida, and Arizona; Colorado, Missouri, and Oklahoma are in the process of obtaining the right to prohibit it (Palmer et al., 2104; Patten, 2010; Beh, 2014). While affirmative action can benefit underrepresented minority populations by allowing them access to postsecondary institutions, there can be disadvantages if it is utilized for purposes other than what it is intended, such as solely to increase minority enrollment to obtain funding for programs that require a certain percentage of minority involvement.

Brown and Dancy (2010) reported that after the Civil Rights movement, scholars and researchers began to focus their work on students of color, especially African American students, enrolled at PWIs. More specifically, they concentrated their research on why Black students

experienced difficulty learning, adjusting and remaining enrolled at PWIs. Some studies identify how some students have succeeded in their postsecondary endeavors. Brown and Dancy (2010) cited the seminal research of Jacqueline Fleming in her 1984 book, *Blacks in College*, where she suggests African American males who attend PWIs felt detached from the institution because they were fewer in number, had a self-perception of being inferior to other students or had low self-image, felt they were less significant, were less engaged in the educational process, and experienced a loss of intellectual motivation, all which resulted in higher attrition rates. Much of the research since that seminal article support Fleming's findings. For example, Wood and Palmer (2015), Amechi et al. (2016), and Brooms (2017) reported on the existing literature that Black males at PWIs are academically underprepared, have disproportionately higher attrition and lower graduation rates than other student groups, are disengaged and experience alienation, and do not have supportive relationships with faculty, many of whom have low expectations and stereotype Black males concerning their intellectual abilities. Further, Black male collegians have difficulty developing coping strategies to help them fit in and be academically successful.

African American Males and K-12 Education

A number of scholars have researched the experiences of African American males in K-12 and higher education, specifically concerning the sociological, psychological and anthropological perspectives of their experiences. Schools are failing African American males by not meeting their social and developmental needs (Bell, 2015). Dancy (2013) suggests the manner in which the identities of Black males developed parallel the development of sociopolitical, cultural, and economics in America. As such, the economic, cultural, racial and social differences in this country result in inequalities in the educational system; privileged communities offer more educational resources to children whose families are of higher

socioeconomic status (Dancy, 2013). Poor social and economic conditions have plagued African American urban communities for decades and numerous scholars have described the plight of persons of color in their research (Brown, 2013; Dancy, 2013; Harper et al., 2009; Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2010; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Palmer et al., 2014; Savas, 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

The achievement gap. There is an abundance of scholarly literature that addresses the achievement gap in education. Helen Stiff-Williams (2007) defines the term "achievement gap" as the many interrelated differences in the academic performance of a subgroups of students (e.g., male and female, Black and White, urban and suburban). The gaps are identified by data that measures the differences between the groups (Stiff-Williams, 2007, p. 2). Numerous scholars address this issue when discussing education in the United States. The causes of the achievement gap date back to slavery and the laws that prohibited educating Blacks. After the ratification of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, educational opportunities for African Americans increased significantly. Even so, the consequences of children being educated in impoverished schools is the greatest contributor of gaps in academic achievement for persons of color.

Stiff-Williams (2007) suggests based on extant literature, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that the African American achievement gap is rooted in poverty. She goes on to state that

> factors such as the high mobility or the transience of families, lack of developmentally appropriate cognitive experiences, excessive television watching, and the "summer effect" in which students lose academic ground during the summer months, [sic] are all directly related to conditions of poverty in which too many African Americans exist. The research has established that conditions of poverty and discrimination limit the

opportunities of many African Americans and reduce opportunities throughout the

educational process. (p. 15)

Palmer et al. (2014) report that Black males are raised in chronic poverty, are overrepresented in

underfunded schools, and experience persistently higher employment rates, higher rates of

incarceration, poorer health conditions, and lower life expectancy than any other large racial,

ethnic, or gender group in the United States.

Federal legislation and mandated programs have attempted to address the educational

achievement gap over several decades since the passing of the Civil Rights Act. In 1965, with the

passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, funding was provided for school

districts serving children who were low achieving and living in poverty. In 1981, the National

Commission on Excellence in Education, which was appointed by Terrel Bell, Department of

Education Secretary, was charged with providing a report on the quality of American education

by 1983. In the report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, the Commission

recommended the creation of performance standards and expectations for students in elementary

and secondary education so to maintain the nation's place in the world of economic growth and

to remain globally competitive (Mindes, 2016; Palmer et al., 2014). In 1989, the National

Council of Teachers of Mathematics and other professional curriculum-focused associations

developed standards to guide K-12 teaching (Mindes, 2016). Also in 1989, an educational reform

program, Goals 2000, the Educate America Act, was proposed by President George H. W. Bush

and the governors from all 50 states as a solution to failing public schools. It was later signed

into law by President Bill Clinton in 1994 (Lassonde, 2010). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind

Act (NCLB) was developed and required regular testing of all public school children, especially

those in low-performing schools, starting with the third grade, in the subjects of reading and

math. NCLB was the reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and required increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools. In 2009, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association began developing Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in the areas of English language arts and math. All of the aforementioned programs had the goal of addressing K-12 remediation, college-readiness, and career-readiness for students wishing to enroll in postsecondary institutions or those wishing to join the workforce after graduating from high school (Harrison-Jones, 2007; Mindes, 2016).

Of all of the aforementioned programs, the NCLB Act is probably the most criticized due to its far-reaching impact on students who attend schools in poverty-stricken school districts. Harrison-Jones (2007) reports one of the main criticisms of NCLB was that there was not enough funding to fully implement the act. Another major concern was the narrow-focused curriculum on student achievement in math and reading rather than a broader, rigorous education. In regard to Black student achievement, Harrison-Jones (2007) reported that based on the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress, while reading and math scores for 9-year-old African American and Hispanic children were at an all-time high, achievement gaps in reading and math between White and Black 9-year-olds and between White and Hispanic 9-year-olds were at an all-time low. Rowley and Wright (2011) analyzed test scores of 8,315 tenth graders from schools across the country in their research. Based on their findings, which supported the research of other scholars, Rowley and Wright indicated the socioeconomic status of the family was the best predictor of test scores. White students were in the 55th percentile, while Black students scored in the 28th percentile. The results indicated the NCLB Act did little to decrease the achievement gap between Black and White students, with Black and low-income students being left behind (Rowley & Wright, 2011).

In their research, Thompson and Allen (2012) explained four major effects of the high-stakes testing on African American K-12 students as a result of NCLB. The four effects included (a) African American students not receiving a quality education, having lower graduation rates, and higher high school dropout rates; (b) students becoming more apathetic because teachers were "teaching to the test" rather than teaching a curriculum that was more creative and interesting to students (This factor also led to disgruntled teachers and decreased job satisfaction.); (c) school districts adopting severe "test-driven" discipline policies resulting in more students being suspended from school, which especially affected African American, Latino, and low-income students; and (d) the United States education system wanting schools to "look good" even though students were not learning anything that could help them improve the quality of their lives (Thompson & Allen, 2012). Thompson and Allen (2012) went on to make suggestions to policymakers for improvements in K-12 education. First, policymakers needed to focus on what was best for U.S. K-12 students, especially underrepresented populations, rather than focus on how students in other countries were doing academically. Secondly, policymakers needed to provide adequate funding for programming in school districts that serve African American and other low-income, underserved populations of students. Thirdly, funding needed to be provided for teachers for much needed professional development. For example, development for teachers to strengthen classroom management skills and to address their preconceived stereotypes about students of color could result in a decrease in the number of Black students, especially males, who were viewed as discipline problems, in turn lessening the number of Black males suspended, expelled, and/or eventually ending up in the prison pipeline. Finally, they indicated policymakers needed to accept the fact that assessment measures should

address the quality of schools, effectiveness of teaching staff, and student achievement (Thompson & Allen, 2012).

Two of the most recent government funded programs to address the educational achievement gap for African Americans were launched during President Barak Obama's administration. Educational Excellence for African Americans was launched in 2012, and My Brother's Keeper was launched in 2014. Educational Excellence for African Americans was a White House initiative developed to improve educational opportunities for African Americans of all ages from early childhood education through adulthood (Barnett, Carolan, & Johns, 2013). My Brother's Keeper is a coordinated Federal effort developed to specifically address the educational and employment gaps experienced by males of color to help them reach their full potential. According to President Obama, the purpose of the program is "helping more of our young people stay on track, providing support they need to think more broadly about their future…", (Obama, 2014, p. 8).

Microaggressions. Experiences in K-12 education can positively or negatively affect a student's decision to pursue postsecondary education. Numerous scholars have researched the negative experiences that African American males have in elementary and secondary education (Brown, 2013; Hotchkins, 2016; Harper & Wood, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nadal, 2017). Some of these experiences are considered racial microaggressions and can have a great impact on whether a student decides to pursue a college degree. Jackson (2017) cites the 1978 seminal research of Chester M. Pierce and colleagues who coined the term racial microaggressions. Jones noted racial microaggressions are defined as "commonplace verbal and nonverbal slights that communicate denigrating or demeaning messages to people of color based on their racial group membership" (Jackson, 2017, p. 1181). In 2007, the terminology was also

applied to lived experiences of people of color, women, and gay and lesbian populations (Jackson, 2017). Microaggression theory suggests these groups experience microaggressions at work, at school, in the community, and in media. In addition, racial microaggressions are presented in various forms. In general, microassaults are intentional negative comments (e.g., a White student calling a Black student a racial epithet) whereas microinsults (e.g., a White student asking a student of color how they got into a gifted program) and microinvalidations (e.g., a Black student is told he should not "be so sensitive" to a racial joke) are unconscious comments that are more difficult to identify. Microinsults are unintentional insensitive and disrespectful verbal or nonverbal messages that are racially demeaning. Microinvalidations are verbal or nonverbal messages that disregard the psychological thoughts or feelings of a person of color. An example of an environmental macromicroaggression is when all campus buildings are named after White males (Henfield, 2011; Hotchkins, 2016; Jackson, 2017).

Hotchkins (2016) also cited the research of Chester M. Pierce et al. in their article "An Experiment in Racism: TV Commercials," where they investigated racial microaggressions in television commercials and found "subtle offenses that constitute a verification of Black inferiority based notions of White superiority" (Hotchkins, 2016, p. 4) as evidenced by the lack of images of Blacks in positive situations or in positions of power or influence, which if unchallenged, perpetuate stereotypes and racial bias. Hotchkins stated that more recently, the definition has been expanded to include "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile derogatory or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Hotchkins, 2016, p. 4).

Microaggressions are commonplace in K-12 settings usually in the form of discipline policies and practices as they relate to African American males. For example, African American male students face expulsion from school or are labeled deviants for violations of dress codes and truancy while their Caucasian counterparts do not receive the same punishments for the same behaviors (Brown, 2013; Gooden, 2013; Hotchkins, 2016; Howard, 2014; Wallace et al., 2008; Warren, 2016). Also, African American males frequently endure adversarial relationships with White teachers and administrators who have deficit perceptions of them. White teachers frequently apply deficit thinking to Black students. Deficit thinking is a form of microinvalidation that White teachers and administrators oftentimes have toward Black males. The assumptions are minority families are the reason for poor academic performance because students do not have the normative cultural knowledge and skills and parents do not support or value their child's education. (Hotchkins, 2016). Black males in K-12 are almost always taught by White females who expect them to perform below expectations academically, be disruptive, not care about learning, and drop out of high school (Harper, 2009).

Henfield (2011) conducted a qualitative study of young Black males attending a predominately and traditionally White middle school in the Midwest. He identified three significant themes of microaggressions that the study participants perceived. The first theme was an *assumption of deviance* in which some of the study participants believed their behaviors were assumed to be deviant based on teachers' opinions and actions that the students had a "blatant disregard for classroom rules and learning." The second theme was *assumed universality of Black culture* in which study participants perceived White students viewed them as "rappers and gangbangers," and students who excelled in sports. The final theme was *assumed superiority of*

White cultural values and communication styles in which the study participants perceived the middle school as having a White-dominated culture (Henfield, 2011, pp. 151-153).

According to the literature, early during their education, African American males develop coping mechanisms in order to deal with the racial microaggressions they experience. One study frequently cited to explain this phenomenon is the 1992 work of Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson which introduced the concept of "cool pose." "Cool pose" is a social-psychological theory that suggests Black male students demonstrate a façade of being emotionless or fearless or other masculine behaviors to present themselves as calm and invulnerable. They suggest students act a particular way to present themselves as in control to counter their feelings of anxiety or a fear of failure. This behavior becomes pathological over time as it is used as a coping mechanism (Brooms, 2017, p. 123; Brown & Davis, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Davis, 2013; Fultz & Brown, 2008; Harmon & Ford, 2010; Harper & Davis, 2012; Palmer et al., 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

Another study is the 1986 work of Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu, which introduced the concept of "acting White." Fordham and Obgu's oppositional culture theory of "acting White" describes a cultural tendency that, due to the history of racial discrimination in the United States, some African American students equate with academic achievement and "selling out" or rejecting their African American culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Harmon & Ford, 2010; Palmer et al., 2014; Stinson, 2011). To counter "acting White," Black male students may adopt the behavior of "cool posing" in which they act aloof, emotionless, and detached in the way they speak and walk. "Cool pose" is also expressed by Black men in how they dress, wear their hair, and shake hands. This behavior is adopted by Black males as a way of balancing social and academic capital (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Howard, 2014; Ransaw, Majors & Moss, 2016;

Wood & Palmer, 2015). Unfortunately, such behaviors are considered negative, are unwelcomed in a classroom setting (Harmon & Ford, 2010), and are regarded as antagonistic (Ransaw et al., 2016).

In recent years, both theories have been challenged by various scholars. Howard (2014) suggests that, based on his research, the racial abandonment equated with "acting White" was not an issue for Black males. Rather, based on their experiences, academic success was more equated with being effeminate, or considered gay or "acting gay." He posits that Black male identity is complex and to capture the depth and breadth of Black male experiences requires consideration of race as well as masculinity and gender.

Stinson (2011) challenged Fordham and Obgu's theory of "acting White," cautioning scholars of the various interpretations and oversimplification of the theory. They posit that African American student underachievement should not be blamed on the student, but rather focus on the U.S. educational system, a system that is predicated on the hegemonic discourses of Whiteness (i.e., maleness, middle-class-ness, Christian-ness, and heterosexual-ness) that are the foundation of the structure of the U.S. educational system.

In regard to cool pose, Wright (2009) suggests instead of this behavior being looked at as a maladaptive behavior, educators should recognize it as valuable and look at it as a unique strength that some African American males possess. Cool pose can be a catalyst for student success if educators pay close attention to the social, personal, and emotional development of Black males and understand the role race and gender play in promoting or inhibiting their academic achievement.

Teachers and mentors. Several scholars have studied the impact of non-parental relationships on African American males. Howard (2012) studied the impact of relationships

with African American male teachers in regard to the academic and identity development of African American male students. The findings revealed what has been consistently stated in the extant literature concerning teacher and student relationships; positive interactions with many of the teachers in the study allowed the students to develop meaningful relationships that positively impacted their academic success. When students are supported academically, emotionally, and socially by teachers, students tend to connect and build trust with the teacher. Students are also more likely to engage in learning activities and demonstrate positive academic development with teachers who demonstrate an ethic of care and who have high expectations for student success (Howard, 2012).

West-Olatunji, Baker, and Brooks (2006) conducted a study to determine the attitudes of African American adolescent students regarding their school experiences. Their study confirmed that within the teaching and learning environment, Black male students have a need to be respected by their teachers and peers. When students feel valued and respected, hear positive affirmations on a regular basis, and have role models who are integrated in their learning environment, they become more involved in their learning. Finally, the researchers noted that study participants had perceptions that students in more wealthy schools were getting better teachers, had access to better resources, and had better learning experiences in the classroom. (West-Olatunji et al., 2006).

Bell (2015) conducted a qualitative study of 18 African American male students in Grades 6 to 8 to understand how they felt about their experiences in school. The results of the study indicated two major themes: how the students felt about school and how they felt about their teachers. The students had positive feelings about the educational and social aspects of going to school. However, their teachers' mostly negative reactions to them caused them to feel

disrespected and not valued in the classroom, which in turn resulted in an overall negative feeling about their teachers and the school. Bell concluded that if African American males have positive schooling experiences, they will likely remain in school. If students believed their teachers viewed them more favorably, they would develop academically. Positive experiences would likely help them persist to graduation from high school and move on to postsecondary education (Bell, 2015).

Brown (2011) conducted a qualitative study of five African American teachers to illustrate how their varied life experiences, pedagogical approaches, and philosophical visions differ in working with African American male students despite their common goal to change the educational conditions for their students. According to the findings of the study, the teachers formal and informal affiliations with various institutions shaped their philosophies, stories, histories, and practices; these experiences and personal narratives helped to inform their instructional practices, something Brown referred to as *pedagogies of experience*. The findings of his study also illustrated that culturally responsive teachers do not always use the same pedagogies and philosophies when teaching Black male students (Brown, 2011).

Brown (2011, 2012) challenged the assumptions that African American male teachers are best positioned to teach and guide African American male students. He argued that this assumes Black teachers possess a common wisdom, a common belief system, and common pedagogical practices. There is a belief that African American men are monolithic role models and can provide fatherly guidance to African American male students. Also, there exists an assumption that Black male teachers are best suited to teach Black male students based on their physical stature as an imposing force in the classroom. Brown suggests teacher education programs and school districts should thoughtfully consider what roles Black male teachers can assume other

than role model, disciplinarian, and social coach. Educational policy makers, practitioners, and scholars must be careful not to incorporate a one-size-fits-all mindset when considering how to meet the educational needs of African American male students (Brown, 2011, 2012).

In their research, Butler-Barnes et al. (2013) stress the importance of teacher training workshops that address diversity, discrimination, and oppression in order to foster a positive educational environment for students of color. Milner (2013) suggests all teachers need to be better prepared to teach and empower Black males regardless of their racial or ethnic background. Teachers often have low expectations of African American males, and therefore "teach down" to them. He posits there are three important principles for teachers to remember in regard to educating African American males:

> (1) teachers must remember the importance of identity in education; (2) teachers must deeply understand and remember the social context of their work; and (3) teachers must remember the interrelated nature of the "mind and heart," i.e., be mindful of the realities of Black males to provide experiences that are rigorous and challenging to prepare them for academic success and developing and demonstrating a deep level of care to want these students to succeed just as they would their own children. (p. 74)

Mentorship is a crucial support mechanism for African American males. The literature confirms that male role models can have a significant impact on students of color and their persistence in education (Barrett, 2016; Brown, 2012; Howard, 2012; Jackson et al., 2014; Wyatt, 2009). Barrett (2016) indicated mentorship, as defined by the National Mentorship Partnership, is "a structure and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the

competence and character of the mentee" (p. 110). She further noted that mentorship can have a lasting effect on individuals who are unaware of their own worth (Barrett, 2016).

Several scholars support the need for African American male teachers in K-12 education to serve as role models and mentors. They report minorities represent only a small percentage of the teaching force across the nation (Brown, 2011, 2012; Lewis, 2006; Pabon, Anderson, & Kharem, 2011). It is not unusual for students of color to go through their entire K-12 education without ever having a teacher of their same race and gender or of a different minority. Kunjufu (2010) reported that approximately 6% of teachers across the nation are African American, and, of that population, only 1% is male.

Jackson et al. (2014) conducted a phenomenological study of Black and Latino males who were part of an all-male, in-school mentoring program (Umoja Network for Young Men) at an alternative high school. The purpose of the study was to investigate how, through *reciprocal love* and the *ethos of care*, students experienced their participation in the program, and what aspects of the program contributed to their academic, social and emotional growth. The authors defined reciprocal love as "a deeply rooted interest in and concern for community that extends personal well-being to communal sustenance" (p. 399). Further, it is "an understanding that a love for the self is inextricably linked to a love for others" (p. 399). Ethos of care is "an intangible spirit of personal interest in and responsibility for others" (p. 399). This means "an individual's success can only be measured in relation to the success of his or her community" (p. 399). The mentoring program focused on the development of the academic success and social/emotional well-being of the students. The results of the study indicated that through mentoring with the ethos of care as the underlying principle, the young men in the study developed commitment to themselves, to each other, and to their education. The mentoring

program helped them to develop a positive disposition toward their lives. They developed a sense of unity and trust that allowed them to have open dialogues about their lives, and in turn they developed reciprocal love for each other. The author suggested when schools develop mentoring programs for men of color, they should do so with the ethos of care as the guiding principle (Jackson et al., 2014).

Family involvement. In addition to teacher and mentor support, parents, family, and friends can also encourage and support African American males to achieve academically. Parent and family involvement are integral to the success of African American males in K-12 and in higher education. Researchers have found that parental involvement from early elementary has a positive effect on the development of academic skills, social competence, and psychological and behavioral adjustment (Toldson, Fry-Brown, & Sutton, 2009).

Herndon and Hirt (2004) state that parents or guardians are the primary source to develop a student's capacity for learning, set boundaries for standards in the home environment, and explain the meaning of life and the world. Parents or guardians also influence the way students view education. Partnerships between families, teachers, and administrators also influence academic achievement. In regard to Black families specifically, Herndon and Hirt share characteristics of Black families that are important in helping support academic achievement. Black families value extended kin relationships (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles) and fictive kinship (neighbors, church members, and friends). These relationships can be an important part of the lives of Black male students. The parenting style of many Black families (e.g., authoritarian) is also impactful. Finally, resiliency is a "hallmark trait of Black families" (p. 494) in that they have developed the ability to endure and survive crises and adversities (Herndon & Hirt, 2004).

55

Graves (2010) conducted a study on parental involvement and expectations of African American males and females during elementary school. The results of the study showed there were gender differences in parental involvement. During kindergarten, there was more involvement for African American male children than females. During first grade, there was more involvement with female students. In regard to expectations, there were no gender differences during kindergarten. However, by the third grade, parents had higher expectations for females than for males. Parental expectations decreased for males through elementary school but remained relatively constant for females. The author suggested additional research is needed to better understand why parent expectations decrease for African American males, especially considering that third grade is when children are usually identified for special education. More investigations are needed to focus specifically on parent-child interactions as parent support is critical for children, especially Black males, during their K-12 education (Graves, 2010).

Wilson (2009) studied the relationship between parental factors and academic achievement of African American youth in an urban area. More specifically, he wanted to determine students' perception of parental monitoring and school achievement. Wilson found that students performed better in school if they were monitored or thought they were being monitored closely by their parents (Wilson, 2009).

Trask-Tate and Cunningham (2010) conducted a study of 206 high achieving African American high school students (135 females and 71 males) who attended a large, southern, urban public school to examine how perceptions of school support and parental support are associated with future academic expectations. Many of the students who participated in the study were from families considered "working poor"; 50% were from single-parent households. The results of the study revealed that the students experienced moderate to high levels of support from teachers,

administrators, coaches, and other staff, which indicated they felt a sense of belonging and encouragement in their educational environment. The students also reported having future academic expectations of obtaining at least a college degree. In regard to parental involvement, females who perceived low levels of parental involvement had lower future academic expectations; females who reported higher levels of parental involvement had higher future academic expectations. Therefore, it was surmised that high parental involvement is a critical component to African American females' development of high future academic expectations. The results of parental involvement for African American males differed slightly in that there was a minor decrease in future academic expectations, although most students reported they expected to attend college and or graduate school (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010).

Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) conducted a study of 153 Black males in the 11th and 12th grades to determine possible relationships between parenting styles and academic achievement. Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework including the structure of the family, church attendance, and parent monitoring was also explored. The findings of the study indicated parenting styles had little impact on the academic achievement of the participants. However, family structure, i.e., two-parent homes, and fathers' educational backgrounds, had a positive impact on the academic development of the students. Fathers' expectations were a negative predictor of GPA. This result could be related to the relationship between African American fathers and sons if the son has a negative perception of the father's expectation. This explanation would require further exploration. The results of the study strongly suggested that an African American father's educational background, expectations, and family structure play an integral role in the development of African American males (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013).

Based on the scholarly research presented above, it is evident that supportive parents, guardians, family members, and other kinship relationships can have a positive influence on the educational achievement of Black males.

African American Males in Higher Education

Given the numerous challenges and varying experiences that some students of color face during their primary and secondary education, the decision to pursue a college degree can be overwhelming. Many of the same challenges and negative experiences identified in elementary and secondary education persist in postsecondary education. This is especially true for African American males. Bush and Bush (2010) state that Black males on college campuses bring a different set of experiences than any other student population. Unlike other students, they have the most difficult time with engagement and access. The results of their study of African American males at a two-year college indicate the participants perceived the campus to be discriminatory, faculty and staff to be racially biased, and in-class experiences to be negative (Bush & Bush, 2010). These results are consistent with the extant literature concerning Black males in postsecondary education, regardless of whether it is a two-year or four-year institution (Anumba, 2015; Brooks et al., 2013; Brooms et al., 2018; Bush & Bush, 2010; Butler et al., 2013; Cuyjet, 2006; Davis, 2013; Harper, 2014; Harper & Davis, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Howard, 2014; Palmer et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2007; Sinanan, 2016; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

Brown and Dancy (2010) suggest the experiences that African American males have in elementary and secondary school can indeed influence their decision to pursue postsecondary education. They cite the work of Vernon Polite and James Davis who assert Black males learn early in their educational lives to demonstrate behaviors that would interfere with their

58

educational and social gains and prevent them from engaging at the collegiate level (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

In regard to postsecondary education, there is a plethora of scholarly discourse about Black males in higher education. Although Black males have a desire to pursue a college degree, many face major obstacles that prevent them from achieving their academic goal(s). In his book titled *African American Men in College*, Cuyjet (2006) suggests that in order to help African American males succeed in higher education, it is important to focus on the environment of colleges or universities that Black males are attending and assess how the environment impacts their lives (pp. 24-40).

Many scholars have reported the academic and social struggles as well as the marginalization that Black males endure on some college or university campuses. Others have reported how these men have overcome obstacles and succeeded. Whether positive or negative, the literature is replete with scholarly research concerning African American males attending colleges and universities. Conversely, there is a shortage of studies that document the lived experiences of Black males and their schooling from their point of view. Bell (2015) maintains there is a scarcity of research that addresses how Black males feel about their educational experiences. Haywood and Sewell (2016) conducted a study of 10 low income African American male students at a southern predominately White institution who did not succeed academically during their first year of college to determine their experiences and how to improve their academic success. Most of the participants reported that a lack of family and institutional (faculty, staff, and other students) support impacted their first-year experience; some did not receive support from anyone. The results clearly indicated that African American males need support and assistance as they transition from high school to college. Because of the lack of

support, some of the participants felt unmotivated and did not care if they passed or failed. In addition, Black males needed to develop empowerment strategies so they could overcome the psychosocial challenges they faced in higher education institutions (Haywood & Sewell, 2016).

The body of literature concerning African American students on campuses of predominately White institutions indicate they encounter a variety of negatives experiences, including microaggressions and racial tensions, high levels of stress, adjustment issues, and unexpected academic expectations. Palmer et al. (2014) outline the scholarly literature that illustrates the experiences of Black males at PWIs. Their perceptions, experiences, feelings of not belonging, discomfort, perceived competitive nature of the academic environment, and stress resulted in student attrition (Brown & Davis, 2010; Harper, 2009; Palmer et al., 2014; Sinanan, 2016; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). Smith et al. (2007) refer to such social-psychological stress responses as racial battle fatigue which can be detrimental to educational goals of students of color, especially African American males.

Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) conducted a study of Black male collegians in leadership roles in student organizations related to their major or in an extracurricular activity (i.e., not connected to race) at predominately White institutions. Although the students were elected or appointed to a leadership role by the organization's membership, they still experienced microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, and other stressors. Their perceptions were primarily caused by exchanges with White peers, who they perceived as usurping their authority during meetings and organizational events.

Brown and Dancy (2010) highlight the historical context of minority students in postsecondary educational institutions in regard to the relationship between academic achievement and retention. Black males have the lowest enrollment and the highest attrition rates

of all students enrolled in colleges and universities, oftentimes due to the inability to integrate into the campus environment (Davis, 2013; Harper, 2009; Sinanan, 2016). After the civil rights era, college enrollments by students of color increased significantly; there was a major influx of students of color at predominately White institutions. From 1960 through 1970, African American student enrollment increased from 3,000 to 98,000 at southern predominately White institutions (Sinanan, 2016). Unfortunately, a number of these students had difficulty learning and adjusting in these environments

The literature suggests that one reason African American males struggle academically at colleges and universities is because they do not access the services that could help them succeed. Also, they do not interact with their professors inside or outside of the classroom mainly because they perceive the institution as being non-supportive. One of the ways institutions can address the disconnection between African American students and faculty members is to increase the number of African American faculty on staff. Also, faculty can adjust their teaching styles to support the needs of Black students (Bush & Bush, 2010). Dancy and Brown (2008) suggest faculty-student interactions can help to improve the collegiate perceptions and experiences of Black males. Faculty should consider providing safe spaces for African American males to share personal experiences. They should also promote the understanding of difference and offer opportunities to explore Black manhood issues in order to improve in-class experiences for this population of collegians. Black males consider supportive faculty as those who genuinely demonstrate interest in their concerns and angsts (Dancy & Brown, 2008).

Improving the experiences of Black males at the collegiate level can have a positive effect on an institution's retention rate. More importantly, this can encourage the enrollment of

African American males in the future. Students who develop supportive relationships on campus are more likely to be satisfied and persist to graduation (Harper, 2009).

Brooks et al. (2013) conducted a study evaluating the effectiveness of a retention program for Black males who successfully completed their first year of college and how various interventions contributed to increased persistence and academic achievement. They cited the seminal work of Vincent Tinto on student retention which is defined as "the condition of keeping, [which] focuses on maintaining several factors including a welcoming environment, high member morale, and organizational processes" (p. 206). They went on to report there are three categories related to retention: (a) meeting social-emotional needs, (b) concerns related to a sense of belonging and happiness, and (c) concerns about students performing at acceptable achievement levels. The results of their study indicated retention programs had a positive impact on academic achievement and increased grade point averages. More specifically, the participants reported they had strong relationships with mentors, adjusted well to the culture of the university, and experienced positive social integration into the university environment (Brooks et al., 2013).

Black male enrollment in higher education institutions. The literature is replete with scholarly research reporting on the disproportionate enrollment rates of White males compared to African American males in higher education. In regard to undergraduate college student enrollment, based on the most current data, NCES reported that in 2017, 8.9 million students were White and 2.2 million were Black or African American. Males comprised 44% of total undergraduate enrollment. Out of the total population of males enrolled in undergraduate programs at degree-granting, postsecondary institutions in the United States, nearly five times more Caucasian males were enrolled in undergraduate programs than African American males; 54.2% White males were enrolled compared to 11.3% Black males. Out of the total number of

African American students enrolled in 2017, only 38% were male and 62% were female (NCES, 2018).

Brooks et al. (2013) reported statistics from the 2009 *Chronicle of Higher Education*. In 2007, nearly 91,000 African American females received undergraduate degrees compared to 46,400 African American males. The number of females pursuing a college degree has been on the incline since the 1970s. Some researchers believe that this disproportion results in Black females seeking mates who have lower earning potential, which negatively affects the socioeconomic standing of African American families and their communities (Brooks et al., 2013).

First-year students. As students make the transition from high school to a college or university, the environment and academic expectations change considerably. Some may leave their small communities and transition to a large public institution or leave a rural community for an urban environment. Adjusting to a new environment, expectations of faculty, learning to manage out-of-class time, and adjusting to living and learning with others different from them can be incredibly overwhelming. Whatever the situation, students will experience significant adjustments to their new environment. Shim and Ryan (2012) conducted a study of social achievement goals of first year students as they transitioned to campus during their first semester. Their study supported the literature that while many students thrive during their first semester in college, others are overwhelmed and have a difficult time fitting in and adjusting, which affects academic outcomes and overall well-being.

In his book, *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action*, Vincent Tinto (2013) reports that for four-year colleges and universities, attrition rates are usually the highest in the first year of a student cohort. In order to retain these students, institutions need to focus on

supporting student success in three areas: students being successful in the institution as a whole, students being successful in their program of study, and students being successful in their courses. In regard to first-generation students, administrators should ensure student support activities are available to help them safely navigate their way through the institution (Tinto, 2013, p. 97).

According to the literature, adjusting to college can be particularly challenging for some African American males. Additionally, very little research has been conducted on the experience of African American males in their first year of college. Harper and Newman (2016) suggest few articles have been published that specifically examine the experiences of Black males during their first year in college. In response, they conducted a study that focused on first-year adjustment experiences of Black males to understand how the students who struggled were able to overcome their challenges and persist to graduation. They utilized Meryl Reis Louis's 1980 model of surprise and sense-making in their study to interpret the experiences of Black males who shared their first-year college experiences as newcomers to college. Participants included 219 Black males from six different types of institutions. They found that while some of the participants struggled academically, many experienced anxieties about attending institutions that were "racially homogeneous." However, as the students became socially engaged on campus and took advantages of support services, their transition was much easier (Harper & Newman, 2016).

First-generation college students. A number of researchers have defined or cited definitions of first-generation college students including (a) students whose parents have a high school education or less (Shelton, 2011; Whitehead & Wright, 2016), (b) students whose parents have had no college (Padgett et al., 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004; Shelton, 2011), (c) students whose parents have had some college (Whitehead & Wright, 2016), and (d) students whose

parents do not have a bachelor's degree (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Owens et al., 2010; Padgett et al, 2012; Shelton, 2011; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014; Whitehead & Wright, 2016). Whitehead and Wright (2016) suggest first-generation students have been and remain poorly defined due to the complications and ambiguity involved with considering the level of schooling, socioeconomic status, race, and other at-risk demographics of the parents or guardians.

Numerous scholars have cited the body of literature that describes the challenges facing first-generation college students (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; McCoy, 2014; Owens et al., 2010; Padgett et al., 2012; Palmer et al., 2014; Pascarella et al., 2004; Shelton, 2011; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias, 2012; Stephen et al., 2014; Whitehead & Wright, 2016). Oftentimes, first-generation students have limited knowledge of what to expect at an institution of higher education. Many first-generation students face a number of challenges even before they step onto a college campus.

First-generation students are usually minority students who are unsure of how they will fund their college education as they usually come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. They are usually educationally underprepared and have little to no peer, parental, family, mentor, or role model support. They experience a disconnect between the culture of their community and the culture of higher education, i.e., not "fitting in" to the campus environment and feeling as if they do not belong at the institution. Finally, this population of students is less likely to persist to degree completion. Palmer et al. (2014) reported that overall, approximately 67% of African American males enrolled in college are first-generation students.

Typically, first-generation students are unfamiliar with admissions and other college processes. Many first-generation students lack the social and cultural capital that is important in navigating their way in the collegiate environment. Shelton (2011) goes on to add first-

65

generation students are less likely to meet with advisors, participate in study groups, spend time with college friends, or join student organizations and clubs.

Padgett et al. (2012) conducted a study of incoming full-time, first-generation, first-year freshmen undergraduate students at 19 two- and four-year colleges and universities from 11 states across the country. The findings of the study support the idea that first-generation students are at an academic disadvantage compared to non-first-generation students. Also, first-generation students are underprepared to interact with faculty; when they do, they oftentimes experience a level of discomfort and intimidation which can be overwhelming. Finally, first-generation students have a difficult time with peer interaction and developing personal networks (Padgett et al., 2012).

Academic preparedness is a primary concern for first-generation students. As many first-generation students are from low socioeconomic areas, it is likely they attended schools in poor school districts which result in students being academically underprepared for college and having little confidence in their abilities. Being a first-generation college student also has added pressures for some because they do not want to let their family members down by being unsuccessful. Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) posit being a first-generation college student can create uncertainty, internal conflict, and guilt because the student was able to earn the opportunity to attend college where others in the home could not. They cited the work of Geraldine Piorkowski, who argued that first-generation college students experience survivor's guilt in that they feel proud of their academic success but are concerned about how going away to college will impact their family. They conducted a study of first-generation and continuing generation college students and found that ethnic minority college students experienced more

family achievement guilt (i.e., surpassing the achievements of family members) than continuing generation and White college students (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015).

McCoy (2014) conducted a phenomenological study of first-generation students of color to understand their transitional experiences from a racially diverse urban area to an extreme predominately White institution. The institution was considered extreme as people of color were grossly underrepresented at the institution (i.e., administrators, faculty, and students) as well as in the local community (i.e., 90% White residents). Findings of the study revealed the participants experienced expected and unexpected challenges. Students and their families were not prepared for the complex admissions process. They experienced "culture shock" due to the lack of cultural diversity at the institution and in the surrounding community; students turned to faculty and administrators of color to help them deal with and adjust to the environment. Institutions that create inclusive campus communities can help students of color have more positive transitional experiences.

Summary

Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive review of scholarly literature that began with a sociohistorical perspective of inequalities that Blacks experienced from slavery in the United States through post-Civil Rights Act of 1964. Black males were considered brutes, subhuman, shiftless, lazy, and other derogatory terms. Slave codes developed by White enslavers caused psychological, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional oppression of Blacks. During the beginning of the 19th century, southern states prohibited the education and assembly of Blacks. In northern states, education was considered a way to create order, assimilation, and propagate English culture and Christianity. Black males were the primary means of labor. During the late 1700s,

schools were created by Black and White reformers to demonstrate Black men were educable and fit to be free.

Landmark legislation had significant impacts on higher education for Blacks in America including the Thirteenth Amendment that abolished slavery and the Fourteenth Amendment that provides due process and equal protections against unfair and unjust treatment of Blacks. In the south, Jim Crow laws and Black codes were ratified and resulted in segregation. The Morrill Acts provided for land grant institutions of higher education and the establishment of historically Black land grant institutions. Other landmark legislation that significantly impacted education for African Americans include *Plessy v. Ferguson* that supported "separate but equal," Brown v. Board of Education 1954 and 1955, that mandated schools be integrated "with all deliberate speed," and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a watershed moment in American history that provided equal rights for minorities. During the period immediately post-Civil Rights Act 1964, governmentally funded TRIO programs were developed to support students who wanted to attend college.

Schools are failing African American males in K-12 education because of failure to meet social and developmental needs or to address economic, racial, cultural, and social differences that result in educational inequality. The achievement gap in the United States is rooted in poverty, underemployment, malnutrition, crime in urban areas, and poor health care. A number of educational reform programs have been developed over the last 30 years including Goals 2000, the Educate America Act, No Child Left Behind Act, and Common Core State Standards, all with the intention of improving education in public schools. Educational Excellence for African Americans, launched in 2012, and My Brother's Keeper, launched in 2014, are the most

recent government funded programs to address the educational achievement gap for African Americans and other students of color.

Racial microaggressions are commonplace in urban K-12 settings and have a negative impact on African American males. White teachers and administrators often have deficit perceptions of Black males and expect them to perform below expectations academically, be disruptive, and not care about education. Mentorship can have a positive impact on the academic success of Black males; students are more likely to engage in learning if they feel supported by teachers and administrators. Family involvement can also have a positive impact on the academic achievement of African American males.

African American males continue to have similar challenges when they transition to higher education institutions. They bring a different set of experiences than any other student population. Numerous scholars posit that Black males face major obstacles academically and socially, especially at predominantly White institutions. First-generation and first-year students also face numerous challenges, such as adjusting to a new environment, meeting the expectations of faculty, handling time management, and learning to live and learn with others. Additionally, first-generation students, who usually come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are educationally underprepared, and have little family support, often experience even more challenges because they lack the cultural capital that non-first-generation students may possess.

Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative methodology used to conduct this phenomenological study of the lived experiences of first-generation African American males at a rural, mid-Atlantic PWI. Ethical consideration and confidentiality measures taken are presented. Research design, data collection methods, and data analysis are also discussed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Study Design and Type

   Qualitive research. Qualitative research is a primary research method to inquire about
and understand life histories, personal experiences, and human phenomena (Bell, 2015;
Krathwohl, 2009, p. 235). It allows one to explore and understand the meaning people and
groups attribute to a social problem (Creswell, 2009). This method of research is not based on
philosophical or theoretical assumptions, but rather is a way of gaining information and
understanding lived experiences of study participants (Bell, 2015). The purpose of this
phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of first-generation African
American males who attended a predominately White mid-Atlantic institution during their
freshman year.

   Creswell and Poth (2018) assert, "Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the
use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing
the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem." They go on to add that
in qualitative research, data collection should occur in a natural setting sensitive to the people
and place where the study is taking place; that data analysis should be inductive and deductive to
determine themes or patterns; and that reporting should include the voices of the study
participants, reflexivity of the researcher, description and interpretation of the problem, and the
contribution to the body of literature or a call for change (pp. 42-43).

   Phenomenology. A phenomenological study is a qualitative research method that allows
for the investigation of the meaning of lived experience of a small group of individuals;
researchers can focus on what experiences mean for study participants who have had those
experiences and can comprehensively describe them (Creswell, 2009; Schram, 2006, p. 98).

Seidman (2013) outlines four phenomenological themes: (a) temporal and transitory nature of human experience, i.e., human experiences are bound by time and are, therefore, fleeting; (b) subjective understanding which is the participants' point of view of their experience; (c) lived experience as the foundation of phenomena; through reflection, trying to make what "was" as close to what "is"; and (d) emphasis on meaning-making by having a contextual understanding of human experiences. These four themes provide the justification for the framework, method, and approach to analyze, interpret, and share information in a phenomenological study (pp. 16-19). Further, Seidman states, "the method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions give enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (p. 59). Lester (1999), states

Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore at challenging structural or normative assumptions. Adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research, enabling it to be used as the basis for practical theory, allows it to inform, support or challenge policy and action.

Counter-storytelling. The use of counter-storytelling was also utilized in this study. Counter-storytelling is a critical race methodology of Critical race theory (CRT). It allows participants to share their stories and lived experience in their own voices and allows for in-depth inquiry of participant experiences and critical self-reflection by the researcher with the goal of providing a conceivable understanding of the world for participants (Howard, 2014, p. 55). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) described the critical race methodology of counter-storytelling as

a theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However, it also challenges the separate discourses on

71

race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it views these experiences as sources of strength; and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand students of color. (p. 24)

The theoretical framework of African American male theory (AAMT) was the lens through which this research was conducted. As CRT is the foundation for AAMT, it is appropriate to use counter-storytelling as a research tool. A number of scholars have used counter-storytelling to inquire about the experiences of students of color in higher education. Howard (2014) described how critical race theorists in education anchor their examination of racism in four ways, one of which is the use of counter-storytelling. Harper (2009) described three different types of counter-narratives identified by Solórzano and Yosso (2002): personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories. Harper used composite stories in his research as it involved relying on data collected from a group of students of color who experienced a certain phenomenon or similar experiences. Wagaman, Obejero, and Gregory (2018) used counter-storytelling in their research to explore the marginalization and oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identified (LGBTQ) youth. Finally, Hubain, Allen, Harris, and Linder (2016) used counter-storytelling as a methodology in their examination of the racialized experiences of students of color in a higher education and student affairs (HESA) program.

All the above scholars and researchers used counter-storytelling as a means of providing students of color the opportunity to share their experiences in their own words, to unsilence those who have experienced racial discrimination. Howard (2014) used this methodology to allow Black males the opportunity to "shed light on their experiences in schools" (p. 60). Further,

> counter-storytelling…gives agency to African American males to offer narratives that can counter many of the rhetorical accounts of their identities that frequently describe them as culturally and socially deficient, uneducated, unmotivated, prone to violence, and anti-intellectual. (p. 65)

As AAMT is a framework that provides a broad approach to studying Black males, I believed it was appropriate to use counter-storytelling as a method to allow the participants in this study to articulate their personal experiences.

Ethical considerations. The National Research Act 93-348 of 1974 was enacted by the U. S. Federal government to provide regulations in ethical matters as it relates to human subject research. An integral part of human subject research is obtaining informed consent (Krathwohl, 2009, pp. 207-209; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p. 312). My study required the use of human subjects; therefore, in order to attend to the moral, ethical, and legal issues in regard to my research, I was required adhere to the Human Subjects review process. An application was submitted to the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee (UHSRC), which is the university's institutional research board (IRB) that oversees human subject research for the protection of the human subjects (Eastern Michigan University, n.d.-b.). Upon approval from UHSRC (Appendix B), an informed consent form was developed (Appendix C) to distribute to the study participants prior to conducting any research activities. The consent form was formatted based on the UHSRC template (Eastern Michigan University, n.d.-a.).

Prior to conducting interviews, each study participant was asked to review the consent form. Afterward, this researcher reviewed the consent form with the participant to ensure the understanding of the parameters of the study. Each participant was asked to sign and date the form and was provided with a copy consent form via email.

Confidentiality. To ensure confidentiality in this study, each respondent has been assigned a pseudonym that will be used to discuss the results of the study. During the recorded conversations, the legal name of the respondent was not mentioned. Their initials and the date of the recording were used to create a file name so that I could identify one recording from another. During the focus group, tent signs were created with the first and last initials of the study participants legal names. Each study participant had their respective tent card placed on the table in front of them during the focus group session. They were asked to say their initials before responding to a question so it would be easy to identify them during the transcription of the digital recording. Each respondent followed the instruction as requested and no one's legal name was revealed.

Signed consent forms, digital recordings, and transcribed data are only available to the dissertation chairperson and researcher. All documentation (written and recorded) is stored in a locked file cabinet in the home office of the primary investigator. Digital recordings are stored on a password protected computer.

Data Collection and Research Instrumentation

Focused, in-depth structured interviews using open-ended questions were used as the primary research tool for data collection. Seidman (2013) indicates in-depth interviews in phenomenological studies allow the interviewer to explore complex issues by examining the experiences of people and the meaning their experiences had for them. The semi-structured

interview questions can be found in Appendix A. The questions used during the focus group session can be found in Appendix D.

  Purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling, also known as purposive sampling (Daniel, 2012), was used in this study. According to Patton (2002), "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases ($N = 1$), selected purposefully." This sampling method is often used in qualitative research in order to obtain information that focuses on the parameters of the population being studied; it forces the researcher to carefully choose and think critically about the population being studied (Daniel, 2012, p. 88; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p. 166). Krothwol (2009) states a purposive sample can include people, documents, situations, events, processes, times, or other types of information that could provide better understanding one's research (p. 277). Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to acquire rich, thick descriptions of the data from study participants (Parker et al., 2016). Using rich, thick descriptions can help provide readers better connect to the setting and shared experiences (Creswell, 2009).

  Initially, my study was focused on first-generation, African American male freshmen at a four-year, midwestern, urban PWI. However, after several months of working with my contact at that university, I was unable to acquire study participants. My contact attempted several times to encourage his colleagues to reach out to African American males who met the criteria of the study but was also unsuccessful. I also attempted to obtain study participants who were enrolled at other urban colleges or universities in the area through snowball or chain sampling, a method used by asking well-situated individuals if they know of someone to contact about potential informants (Patton, 2002); however, I was still unsuccessful. Many of the students I was able to contact did not meet the study criteria of being first-generation students.

During the time that I was trying to secure participants for my study, I was in the process of beginning a position at a four-year university. After I began working at the university, I contacted my dissertation chairperson regarding making changes to the location in which I would conduct my study. Upon her approval, I made the necessary modifications via the IRB, and was also approved, to conduct my study at the university located in the small, rural, mid-Atlantic town in which I am now employed.

One additional change I made from my initial study proposal was that I increased the incentive from $25 per participant to $50 per participant. Even after making that adjustment, it still took a great deal of effort to recruit my study participants.

Unlike my experience at the initial midwestern urban PWI, within three months of being at the university, I was able to identify my five study participants. Criterion sampling was conducted to identify study participants. Criterion sampling is a strategy in purposeful sampling in which the researcher reviews cases of individuals that meet predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2002). Using this sampling method, I was able to obtain detailed demographic data of the African American males who participated in the study.

The participants consisted of five first-generation African American males of traditional college age (19-23), who completed their freshman year of college at the PWI located in a small, rural, mid-Atlantic town. The sample size was limited to five participants to allow for in-depth interviews to capture rich, thick descriptions about their experiences. Students were selected with the assistance of university personnel. A report from the university's student record database was used to select study participants. The report identified various demographic data such as student name, gender, ethnicity/race, age, academic standing, attempted credits, earned credits, term credits, admission term, enrollment status, email address, and phone number. After sorting and

reviewing the data, I was able to identify approximately 45 students who met the study criteria. An email explaining the study and criteria (Appendix E) was sent to each student inviting them to participate in the study. Within two weeks, I identified four of the five student participants. The fifth study participant was referred to me by a colleague. Interested participants contacted me by phone call or text message. I screened the students based on five criteria for my study (Appendix F).

Data gathering occurred via in-depth interviews using the semi-structured interview questions (Appendices A and D) as well as other questions that arose during the interview process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each individual participant and with a focus group consisting of the same five study participants. Interviews were recorded via a digital voice recorder. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to ask specific open-ended questions, but also allows for probing, deeper understanding, and clarification of the responses from the study participants (Glesne, 2011, p. 134).

After the five participants were secured, I scheduled individual interviews in my office on campus at a time that was convenient for the students. Upon their arrival, we talked for a few minutes which allowed me to establish a rapport with the them. Afterward, I thanked each one for agreeing to participate in the study. Before I began the interviews, I provided the student with the consent form to review and allowed time for him to review it. I subsequently reviewed the consent form with the student and answered any questions. Finally, I asked the student to sign and date the consent form. Only one student was concerned about the interview being recorded. However, once I assured him that I would be the only one to listen to the recording and where and how it was going to be stored, he was fine with the interview being recorded.

Note-taking was used during the interview process. Follow-up interviews occurred either in person in the same location or via phone with responses being digitally recorded. I also kept journal notations of how the interview session went and my thoughts about the session.

After all interviews were completed, a focus group session consisting of the same five study participants took place in order to gather information that was used in data triangulation. A different set of questions were used for the focus group (see Appendix D). A focus group usually consists of six to 12 people and is a relatively homogenous group that represents a target population (Krathwol, 2009, p. 304; Lewis, 2016). The focus group also took place in my office. The focus group session lasted approximately 60 minutes; I was the sole facilitator.

At the end of each individual interview, I presented each study participant with a $25 gift card. I also gave each student a second $25 gift card after the focus group session along with my business card. I informed them they could call or stop by anytime if they had questions concerning the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis that transforms data into findings (Patton, 2002, p. 432). In thematic analysis, the researcher focuses on searching for themes, categories, and patterns in the data (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). Pattern recognition, a key competency in thematic analysis, is the ability to see patterns in random information (Patton, 2002, p. 452). According to Patton (2002), inductive analysis consists of identifying patterns, themes, and categories in the data. Deductive analysis is used to analyze data according to an existing framework (p. 453). In this study, inductive analysis was used to discover patterns and themes. Coding is the process of noting interview data that is interesting, labeling it, and putting it into categories.

Each recorded interview was transcribed in its entirety. I listened to the recordings and reviewed the transcripts multiple times. I used thematic analysis and coding to analyze the collected data to identify emerging themes. Constant case comparison was also used. In that process, the researcher looks at each case for differences or similarities in things such as events, participants, settings, or word choices (Glesne, 2011). The focus group session was also transcribed and analyzed in the same manner. The data collected from the focus group session was also analyzed for consistency and similarity in participant responses. In this study, I considered differences or similarities related to race, preparation for postsecondary education, transition to college, and socialization.

After transcription was completed, each participant was asked to review the transcript of their respective interview for clarification and accuracy in meaning. The individual transcript and focus group transcripts were emailed to each student. I asked each to review the transcripts for accuracy. The email contained language indicating that if I did not receive a response by a certain date, I would assume the transcript was accurate. After sending the initial email asking for feedback, a week later I sent a second email reminder. I received three out of five responses from the students via text message indicating the transcripts were accurate. After receiving approval of the transcripts from the study participants, I began the analysis to identify patterns and themes.

Data source triangulation. Triangulation is the process of using multiple sources to confirm information; it uses purposive sampling in order to establish the validity of data and bias. There are four types of triangulation in qualitative research: (a) data triangulation which uses multiple sources of data across time, space and individuals; (b) investigator triangulation, which uses multiple investigators; (c) theory triangulation, which is the use of multiple

perspectives to interpret data; and (d) methodological triangulation in which multiple methods are used to study a single problem (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe & Neville, 2014; Creswell, 2009; Krothwol, 2009, pp. 285-286; Patton, 2002, p. 247).

Data triangulation was used in this study. Using multiple methods to gather data in qualitative research can increase the validity of the findings, identify bias, and result in a broader understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Carter et al., 2014; Creswell, 2009; Jonsen & Jehn, 2009; Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006; Patton, 1999; Renz, Carrington & Badger, 2018). Patton (2002) states triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods (p. 247). Glesne (2011) cites the research of Graham Gibbs who suggests there are two good reasons to use triangulation; one reason is the possibility that misinterpreted data can result in having a different view of what is intended. The other reason is to determine if what someone says is different from what they do (Glesne, 2011, p. 47).

In their article, "The Use of Triangulation in Qualitative Research," Carter et al. (2014) discussed the use of in-depth individual interviews and focus groups as an example of using data source triangulation in qualitative research. They suggest that using both focus groups and individual interviews could result in a broader understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Also, using both methods increases the validity of the findings of the study. The researcher must be sure to describe how the data was collected in each method, compare the results of each method, and illustrate how the data was integrated to produce the results of the study. In this study, data was gathered from the five study participants via individual in-depth interviews. Then data was gathered from the focus group session, which consisted of the same five participants. During the data analysis process, the data from the individual interviews was integrated with the data from the focus group session, resulting in the seven themes that were identified.

Role of the researcher. In qualitative research, the researcher is often considered the research instrument. According to Creswell (2009) and Creswell and Poth (2018), the qualitative researcher is the instrument as they collect the data, examine documents, observe behavior, and interview participants. Also, they may use a questionnaire of open-ended questions designed by themselves (p.43). Glesne (2011) suggests researchers need to understand that they have different roles. One role is as the researcher; as you take notes and talk to participants, observe your own behavior and the behavior of the study participants. Another role is researcher as learner, where you learn from and with your research participants (pp. 59-60). Patton (2002) states human beings are the instrument in qualitative methods; they make observations, take field notes, ask interview questions, and interpret responses. As such, self-awareness can be an asset in fieldwork and analysis (p. 64).

Because of the roles of the researcher in qualitative research, it is imperative that the researcher can remain neutral. According to Patton (2002), neutrality allows for credible research; the researcher must be able to "carefully reflect on, deal with, and report potential sources of bias and error" (p. 51). Using techniques such as systematic data collection procedures, multiple data sources, and triangulation allow for high-quality data that are credible, trustworthy, and authentic (Patton, 2002, p. 51).

In relation to inquiry during interviews and the focus group, I took special precautions to avoid asking guiding questions due to personal biases based on the topic, thereby allowing participant responses to reflect their experiences instead of any preconceived opinions or responses. In order to remain as objective as possible, I made it a point to listen to the responses of my study participants objectively without any preconceived ideas of how I thought the students would respond to the semi-structured questions used in this study. As a trained

counselor, I have the ability to listen objectively without making subjective conclusions, i.e., to listen to the words that are being spoken without judgement or assumption.

Researcher bias/reflexivity. The subject of this study was established based on my son's experiences, and some of his friend's experiences in K-12, particularly high school and how those encounters impacted their college experiences, both positively and negatively. Reflexivity, as defined by Patton (2002), is "a way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective" (p. 64). It involves self-understanding and self-questioning, i.e., what I know and how I know it. The qualitive researcher must be aware of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of their own perspective, of the study participants, and the audience of readers. Considering my own biases about how Black males experience education in this country, I wanted to examine how young Black males who attended college in a different environment from that which my son attended, experienced their freshman year of college.

Me as novice researcher. There were a lot of lessons that I learned during this research study. I thought it would be easy to identify five first-generation African American males for this study. However, that was not the case. During my search for study participants, I discovered that quite a few young men with whom I made contact did not fit the study criteria because they were not first-generation students; their mother and/or father had completed at least a bachelor's degree. I was pleasantly surprised by this fact, but it made my search for participants more challenging.

During the interview process, I made several observations about myself as a novice researcher. During the interview sessions, I learned that I needed to be mindful of how I responded to students when they asked for clarification of a question, to avoid leading their

response with examples of how they could respond. I also learned that there were opportunities during the interviews where I should have asked additional or more probing questions. As I continued through the interview process, my secondary questioning improved. However, I found it necessary to follow up with some of the study participants for clarification of responses and to obtain additional information.

One other lesson learned was that when planning to interview college students for a study, timing is key. Due to my inability to secure study participants during the summer or at the beginning of the semester, I interviewed my study participants late in the semester, a couple of weeks before final exams. While I was able to conduct all five individual interviews and the focus group session, it was difficult to get the students to respond to text messages and emails because they were focused on finishing up their semester.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the qualitative methodology that was used in this phenomenological study. Qualitative research is the primary research methodology used to inquire about human phenomena. Phenomenology allows the researcher to investigate the lived experience of a small group of individuals. The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived experiences of first-generation African American males who attended a rural, predominately White, mid-Atlantic institution during their freshman year. The overarching research question for the study was to inquire about the lived experiences of first-generation African American males during their freshman year regarding their transition to college as it related to their level of preparedness, persistence, support systems, and racial experiences on campus. Counter-storytelling was used in this study to allow study participants to share their stories in their own voices and to allow me to understand and critically reflect on their world and experiences.

83

Requirements for human subject research as set forth by the National Research Act of 1974 and Eastern Michigan University's institutional research board were carefully followed by use of a consent form. The confidentiality of each study participant was maintained throughout the study, with signed consent forms, digital recordings, and transcribed data maintained by the researcher.

Purposeful sampling was used to identify the study participants. The criteria for the participants were to be first-generation African American males who completed their freshman year at the university. The university's student records management system was used to identify potential candidates, who were contacted by email. Students who were referred by staff members were also contacted by email. Five African American male students between the ages of 19-23 agreed to be study participants. Each respondent received a total of $50 in gift cards for their participation.

Data collection occurred via individual in-depth interviews and a focus group session using semi-structured interview questions. Digital recording and note-taking were used to document interview sessions. After data collection was complete, the recordings were transcribed, and the transcripts reviewed multiple times using thematic analysis to transform the data into findings. Data triangulation was used to increase validity of the findings between the individual interviews and focus group sessions.

Chapters 4 and 5 are a two-part discussion of the data analysis. Chapter 4 will provide an overview of the institution, the rural town in which the institution is located, and an introduction of the study participants, while Chapter 5 provides the thematic analysis of the data provided by the study participants from their point of view.

Chapter 4: Their Stories, Their Voices—Part I

The Town

The University is located in Indiana, a borough of Indiana County, Pennsylvania, in the foothills of the Alleghany Mountains. Incorporated in 1816, Indiana's claim to fame is that it is the birthplace of actor Jimmy Stewart (Borough of Indiana, n.d.). According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2019 the population of Indiana was approximately 13,078. The demographic breakdown of Indiana as it relates to race and ethnicity is 86.1% White, 6.4% Black or African American, 2.7% Asian, 2.4% Hispanic, 0.3% Native American, and 0.1% Pacific Islander (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

The Institution

The rural, mid-Atlantic PWI, which will be referred to as the University, is a public research institution that was founded in 1875 as a normal school. In 1920, it became a state teacher's college. Then in 1959, it was changed to a state college. In 1965, it became a university and offered its first doctoral programs (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, n.d.-a). The University is one of the largest institutions in the state's system of higher education. It currently has 10,636 students enrolled at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The University has nearly 140 undergraduate degree programs and 70 graduate level programs. Regarding the makeup of the total student body, the University is a predominately White institution with 7,677, or 72.1%, students who identify as White; 1,144, or 10.75%, African American or Black; 453, or 4.25%, Hispanic; 450, or 4.23%, Multi-racial; 179, or 1.68%, Other; 135, or 1.26%, Asian; 14, or 0.13%, Native American; and 2, or 0.01%, Pacific Islander. The University has 58.9% of students who identify as female, and 41.1% who identify as male (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, n.d.-b).

Overview of the Participants

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of first-generation African American males during their freshman year at a rural PWI in their own words and from their point of view. Each student participant identifies as a first-generation African American male. The students in this study all began their freshman year in Fall 2018 and are now in their sophomore year of college. During their freshman year, they were traditional college age students (18-22) with a median age of 19. All of the students were full-time students, taking a minimum of 12 academic credits per semester during their freshman year. Additionally, all five students moved to the small, rural town in which the University is located from an urban city: two from Pittsburgh, PA; two from Philadelphia, PA; and one from York, PA, which is a city approximately 25 miles south of the state's capital Harrisburg, PA. All five students lived on campus during their freshman year. None of the students had met before. Table 1 provides an at-a-glance summary of the five study participants.

Table 1.

Overview of Student Participants

Student	Age	Major in College	City of Origin	Family Structure	Type of High School Attended	GPA at end of Freshman Year
Brandon	19	Biology/Pre-Vet	Philadelphia, PA	2-parent home	Magnet – STEM-focused/college prep	3.4
Cameron	20	Marketing	Pittsburgh, PA	2-parent home	Magnet – International Baccalaureate	3.7
Jeremiah	19	Public Health	Pittsburgh, PA	2-parent home	Magnet – Performing Arts/College Prep	2.5
Malik	23	Accounting	York, PA	Single-parent with Mother	Traditional high school	2.4
Xavier	19	Art	Philadelphia, PA	Single-parent with Mother	Magnet – Art and Culture/College Prep	2.3

The following is a narrative summary of each study participant.

Brandon. Brandon is a 19-year-old biology/pre-veterinarian major from Philadelphia, PA. He was raised in a two-parent household. Brandon reported he attended high school at Science Leadership Academy (SLA), which is located in Philadelphia's downtown Center City district. SLA is a science technology engineering and mathematics (STEM) high school that is part of a partnership with The Franklin Institute, Philadelphia's Science Center. According to the school's website,

> Developed in prior partnership with The Franklin Institute and its commitment to inquiry-based science, SLA provides a rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum with a focus on science, technology, mathematics, and entrepreneurship. Students at SLA learn in a project-based environment where the core values of inquiry, research, collaboration, presentation, and reflection are emphasized in all classes. (Science Leadership Academy, n.d., para. 1)

Brandon stated he was an honor student and always performed well academically in high school. He reported he usually maintained a 3.8 or 3.9 grade point average (GPA). His parents had high expectations of him academically and "getting far in life." Brandon shared that he always wanted to make his parents proud, so he made it a "personal thing" to do his best and "get good grades in school."

Brandon decided to attend the University because of the distance from his home, it has the major/program he was seeking, and it was "pretty cheap compared to other colleges" that he considered. He also noted that his decision to attend the University was predicated on the fact that he was a Promising Scholars recipient. Promising Scholars is a scholarship program offered by the University to minority high school students. According to the University's website,

The Promising Scholars Program at IUP allows the Admissions Office to give

exceptional incoming students who reside in Pennsylvania priority consideration for one

of the most rewarding scholarships available at the university. Students compete for the

Board of Governors Scholarship, with award amounts ranging from $2,000 to full in-state

tuition every year. (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, n.d.-c, para. 1)

Xavier. Xavier is 19 years old and also from Philadelphia, PA. He is currently an art

major whose goal is to be an animator. Xavier comes from a single parent home but was co-

parented by his father during some of his elementary years.

Xavier was interested in art during his elementary years in school. He stated he

participated in art-focused youth programs through the YMCA, where he took courses on the

weekends at Villanova University. He also participated in a program called *Artology* at LaSalle

University. Xavier was also involved in a learning scholar program through Drexel University.

He stated faculty from Drexel would visit his school and tutor the students in art. Students would

also visit Drexel on Saturdays and take classes.

Xavier attended high school at Franklin Learning Center (FLC), which is also located in

downtown Philadelphia's Center City district. FLC is a magnet high school. According to their

mission on their website,

FLC is a magnet school committed to providing rigorous academic and professional

readiness programs through interdisciplinary study and close-knit learning communities.

FLC provides opportunities for students interested in professional careers in visual arts,

business technology, computer science, public health, performing arts and college

preparatory study. FLC students engage with the cultural heritage of Philadelphia and the

world at large. (Franklin Learning Center, n.d., para. 1)

Xavier reported that in middle school, he had good grades. He disclosed that he had behavioral problems but maintained an A average. When I asked if he was a problem student, he shared, "More like smart kid, wrong place, wrong time… don't know how to get out of trouble when it comes towards it. I learned how to deal with that like more as I grew up." Xavier stated he had to have good grades to get into FLC.

Xavier stated his freshman and sophomore years in high school were not as challenging as his junior and senior years. He had an opportunity to go into the art curriculum at FLC. He stated, "I always knew I wanted to be an artist, but I wasn't really like feeling their art curriculum there. So… so they just put me in college prep if you don't really know where to go." In the college prep curriculum, he took honor and advanced placement (AP) courses in which received mostly B and C grades. He shared he did not pass the AP tests. Xavier explained,

I don't think I passed any of the AP tests, but it's more like I did more like understanding of like what the class taught me and taking that into account rather than like learning what's on the test and trying to memorize that. Especially with classes like AP history (inaudible) it was literally impossible for me to memorize all those things and stuff.

Xavier shared that he wanted to attend Pratt Institute, a private art and design college. However, he decided to attend the University instead. He stated,

I was originally going to go to an all art school … Pratt University in New York. Well… my mom was really pushing IUP because my cousin went here previously and so did my sister. … I was kinda against it, but I was like I'll try it out for my first year and after, I kinda like got attached to it. Plus, I like … maybe it would be better if I like go to a non-like art school rather than like an all art school because like… I'm just like different varieties and stuff like that. I might be an art major, but somebody could like be computer

science and help me out with that cause I had a lot of computer science friends in high

school to actually helped me with uh… like learning like animation stuff and all that.

Jeremiah. Jeremiah is 19 years old and from Pittsburgh, PA. He is an only child and was

raised in a two-parent home. Jerimiah stated his parents enrolled him in private schools

throughout his elementary and middle school education. Jeremiah reported he attended Sacred

Heart Elementary School, a private Catholic school for kindergarten and the first half of first

grade. His parents moved him to Falk Laboratory School, a school affiliated with the School of

Education at the University of Pittsburgh, from the second half of first grade through the eighth

grade.

Jeremiah indicated he attended Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) 6-12, a

magnet school, from the 9th grade through 12th grade. CAPA is located in Pittsburgh's downtown

cultural district. In 2019, according to *US News and World Report*, CAPA was ranked number 20

in the state of Pennsylvania and number 773 in the national rankings (US News and World

Report, n.d.). According to the Pittsburgh Public School district's (n.d.-a) website,

> The mission of Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12 is to provide every student in grades 6-12 with a
>
> comprehensive academic program rooted in a superior quality arts education experience
>
> that encourages excellence and success in their personal development as artists and
>
> cultural leaders. CAPA 6-12 offers a challenging and integrated curriculum that equally
>
> provides world-class preparation for college and university study, and conservatory level
>
> preparation for artistic careers. (para. 2)
>
> The environment at CAPA 6-12 is enhanced by partnerships and collaborations with local
>
> and national cultural organizations and universities that provide opportunities in which to

explore the relationships between school, family and work. In 2014, US News and World Report named CAPA in the Top 20 of Best High Schools in Pennsylvania. (para. 3)

Jeremiah stated he was interested in music and art in elementary through high school. He learned to play the piano when he was five years old. Jeremiah stated he had to audition to get into CAPA. However, his focus changed from the arts while he was in high school. He stated,

So, for the longest time, I was debating on, you know, what I want to be when I got older. And it was between pediatrician and architecture [*sic*]. So, I was always into building stuff when I was younger, but then I was always into helping people the same time. So, once I got into my junior year of high school, that's when I like made my mind up and said, "Okay, I'm going to go into the medical field, but not pediatrician like I want to choose a different field." So, that's when I decided to go into public health.

Regarding his academics in high school, Jeremiah took AP courses in the 11th and 12th grades. He shared, "to prepare myself for those, because I've heard how they can be, so I took AP workshops in summer before I started those classes. So, I just walked into it like it was nothing."

Malik. Malik is 23 years old and from York, PA, a city that is approximately 25 miles south of the state capital, Harrisburg, PA. He comes from a single parent home. Malik's story is a quite different from the other students I interviewed. Malik attended William Penn Senior High School located in York, PA. I asked Malik to tell me about his academic experience in high school. He described his high school experience as "fun" as he shared,

I'm not gonna lie. It was fun because like I was with friends you know. And sometimes I was able to focus, do work, not goof around in class and stuff and then there was other

92

times where, like I just didn't feel like doing anything and I basically do whatever I want. But I still graduated got my diploma.

Malik admitted he did not perform well academically in high school; he was in and out of trouble a lot. Malik stated he was capable of learning but was not focused. During his freshman year, he was frequently suspended for "being a class clown." In his sophomore and junior years of high school, he attended a placement school for juvenile delinquents. Malik reported,

Those two years of high school actually turned out good, like I got good… I was able to catch up on my grades, I was able to focus more 'cause it was like it wasn't the same environment as a regular high school. So, like it was more disciplined. Then my senior year in high school I only did maybe one marking period there because I got in trouble when I was still a teenager. And from there I didn't get to graduate with my class like at high school, so I had to wait another year to actually graduate.

Malik disclosed he was incarcerated during his senior year of high school. He stated,

So, I didn't graduate from, um… my regular high school. I had got incarcerated when I was 17, so my senior year. And so, where I was incarcerated at, I was able to get caught up on my credits and still obtain my high school diploma through the state.

Cameron. Cameron is a 20-year-old marketing major, also from Pittsburgh, PA. He is an only child who, for most of his childhood years, was raised in a two-parent home. Cameron stated he was a good student in middle school. He shared, "From what I can remember, I always had good grades in middle school, and then I took a test to get into Obama and once I got in, that was pretty much the start of it."

Cameron attended Pittsburgh Obama Academy 6-12, an International Baccalaureate (IB) school. IB schools are recognized worldwide for the rigorous education they provide. According

93

to the Pittsburgh Public Schools (n.d.-b) website, "All 11th and 12th grade students at the Obama Academy are enrolled in IB Diploma Program classes, which are college level classes taught over a two-year span" (para. 1).

Cameron took an entrance examination to get into Obama Academy; once accepted, Cameron and his parents decided he would go there. He stated,

> I had another option of going to Allderdice, but I didn't want it to be like middle school Part 2, 'cause like everybody from my middle school was going to that high school. So, I chose Obama because I knew a lot of people wouldn't be there and most of the students there are already going there through middle school. I kinda just chose a different environment, plus it was right down the street from my house. …coming out of middle school, I didn't like the middle school environment of the same students, so I wanted a different environment; a chance to kinda restart just everything. A chance to meet new people, which I did and stuff, and get to, you know, do different things besides the same trends that I've been continuing since middle school. I knew that it was a better school academically, so that was another reason. I wasn't too inclined on you know, trying to play sports at a high level. It was more like what can I get out of my academic side of school that I can do.

Cameron performed well in high school in the ninth and 10th grades. However, his last two years of high school were quite stressful and tumultuous. During the 11th grade, sadly Cameron's father passed away from cardiac arrest, which he shared he witnessed. Then, during his senior year in high school, he broke his arm in two places which resulted in him having to have multiple surgeries. He stated,

And then when 11th and 12th grade came around, that's when I started to struggle more

with my grades, and I dropped to like a 2.2. I mean I was dealing with my father passing

away so that kinda was the major reason why I kinda slacked. So, I dropped down to 2.2

and brought it back up to a 2.7 by the end of senior year. So after that, I took a year off

from school and that's whenever, after a year of just figuring out myself, that's when I

decided to come to IUP.

Cameron also shared later during our interview,

High school kind of like pushed me over the top to where like I was… it was bad. It got

really bad, like just mentally trying to balance everything. So, going through that allowed

me to prepare for college much differently than if I had come out of a traditional school.

Like I've heard a lot of students say that college is much more work than what they've

done high school, but for me it's completely opposite; college is much less work as long

as I stay on top of what I gotta do and stay on time with everything.

Cameron stated he was accepted to a number of colleges and universities. He explained,

So, during my gap year, I thought about all the other schools, but then I had bought my

first car and that played a part in where I wanted to go. Because I originally had

scholarships to Tuskegee, and other HBCUs that I was really thinking about going to. But

at the last minute, I realized that if I go out of state the first thing I'm going to have to do

is lose my Pittsburgh Promise, which is the Pittsburgh school district scholarship for

attending school from at least ninth grade and up. But since I went from elementary, I had

the biggest reward for that. So, I didn't want to give up that. That's about like $7500 each

year. So, I really didn't want to give that up. Um…along with the FAFSA, so that's

another $6000 that I didn't want to give up each year. And my car was the last thing that I

didn't really want to give up. I had to go far enough, and I didn't want to, you know to constantly drive 12 hours or more to go home.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided an overview of the institution, the small, rural town in which the institution is located, and an introduction of the five participants of the study. Each student shared information about their K-12 experience leading up to enrollment in the institution. Table 1 provided an at-a-glance overview of each study participant. All five students were of traditional college age (19-23) and grew up in urban areas in Pennsylvania; two in Philadelphia, two in Pittsburgh, and one in York. Three of the five students grew up in two-parent homes, and the other two grew up in single-parent homes with their mothers. Regarding their high school education, four of the five students attended magnet schools, and the other one attended a traditional high school. At the end of their freshman year in college, their GPAs ranged from 2.3 to 3.4.

Brandon is a 19-year-old biology/pre-veterinarian major who was raised in a two-parent home in Philadelphia, PA. He stated he was an honor student and always performed well academically. Brandon attended a STEM-focused high school.

Xavier is a 19-year-old art major who was raised in a single-parent home by his mother in Philadelphia, PA. He was interested in art during his K-12 education. His career goal is to be an animator. Xavier reported he had good grades in middle school but had behavioral problems in school because he did not know how to avoid getting into trouble. Xavier was in the college-prep curriculum of the art and culture magnet high school he attended.

Jeremiah is a 19-year-old public health major who was raised in a two-parent home in Pittsburgh, PA. He attended a private school in kindergarten and the first half of first grade. He

then attended a tuition-based school that is affiliated with University of Pittsburgh from the second half of first grade through eighth grades. Jeremiah was in the college-prep curriculum of the performing arts magnet high school he attended.

Malik is a 23-year-old accounting major who was raised in a single-parent home by his mother in York, PA which is approximately 25 miles south of the state capitol city of Harrisburg, PA. Malik attended a traditional public high school. He stated he that although he was capable of learning, he was not focused. Malik was frequently suspended from school for behavioral issues. He attended a special school for juvenile delinquents during the 10th and 11th grades. Malik was incarcerated during his senior year of high school, where he completed his high school requirements and obtained his diploma.

Cameron is a 20-year-old marketing major who was raised in a two-parent home in Pittsburgh, PA. He stated he always had good grades in school. He attended an International Baccalaureate magnet high school. Due to a few stress related incidents that occurred in high school, Cameron decided to take a gap year before enrolling in college.

Chapter 5 will provide the findings of the thematic analysis of the data provided by the study participants from their point of view.

Chapter 5: Their Stories, Their Voices—Part II

Analysis and Findings

Given the voluminous amount of existing literature on the disparities of Black males in higher education, I wanted to investigate whether the experiences of the study participants were consistent with the existing body of literature. This study allowed me to learn about the lived experiences of five, first-generation African American men at a rural, mid-Atlantic PWI during their freshman year. The data presented in this chapter is in their words, from their perspective. The method of counter-storytelling allows the study participants to share their experiences in their own words, in their own voices. Howard (2014) used this methodology to allow Black males the opportunity to "shed light on their experiences in schools" (p. 60). Further,

> Counter-storytelling…gives agency to African American males to offer narratives that can counter many of the rhetorical accounts of their identities that frequently describe them as culturally and socially deficient, uneducated, unmotivated, prone to violence, and anti-intellectual. (p. 65)

The following thematic analysis provides a thorough account of the study participants' K-12 educational experiences as well as their experiences in transitioning to the college environment, their academic experiences, and their social integration during their freshman year of college.

Themes

This phenomenological study examines the lived experiences of first-generation African American males during their freshman year at a rural PWI. In qualitative inquiry, phenomenological methodology allows researchers to focus on exploring how people make sense of experiences (Schram, 2006). In phenomenology, researchers focus on the experiences of

an individual or group of people: "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p.104). Data collected from the persons who experience the phenomenon are then analyzed, to understand and explain their experiences. From this analysis, themes emerge. In thematic analysis, the researcher focuses on searching for themes, categories, and patterns in the data (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011). Constant case comparison (Patton, 2002) was used in this process. When using constant case comparison, the researcher looks at each case for differences or similarities in things such as events, participants, settings, or word choices (Glesne, 2011; Schram, 2006).

Each recorded interview was transcribed in its entirety and reviewed two to three times. Afterward, the data was coded to identify emerging themes. In my thematic analysis, I used coding to categorize the collected data. Coding is the process of noting interview data that is interesting, labeling it, and putting it into categories, which become the emerging themes (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011). This chapter describes the themes that emerged after conducting a thorough thematic analysis.

The seven themes that were identified authenticated the lived experiences of the respondents in this study. The identified themes were (a) preparedness for college, (b) adjustment, (c) motivation and persistence, (d) challenges, (e) support systems, (f) social integration, and (g) microaggressions. The following is an accounting of the experiences of the study participants from their perspective, in their voices.

Theme 1: Preparedness for college. The first theme was based on how each study participant described their opinion about whether they believed they were prepared for college. According to the literature, many first-generation college students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are usually educationally underprepared, and lack the social and cultural capital

that is necessary to be successful in college (Palmer et al., 2014; Whitehead & Wright, 2016). Brooms et al. (2018) state some of the key factors that students of color in higher education contend with include academic preparedness, access to college information, financial aid, mentoring, and family support. Each study participant was asked if he believed his K – 12 educational experience prepared him for college. All five students reflected primarily on their high school education since it was the most recent and relevant.

Brandon is a bio/pre-veterinarian student who attended a STEM magnet high school in Philadelphia, PA. He stated he consistently maintained a high GPA in high school, usually between 3.8 and 3.9. He took several AP courses in the 11th and 12th grades. When asked if he felt his K-12 education prepared him for college, Brandon responded,

Middle school, not really but my high school definitely did prepare me a lot for coming to college 'cause they always prided themselves in being a college preparatory school. They had curriculum that was somewhat similar to the stuff here. And a lot of the different assignments that I did back in high school, I can see reflected off of like… the study process and homework doing processes that are here at this school. So, I definitely would say that my high school definitely did prepare me well enough for the vigorous studies and homework of college. … a lot of the stuff that we would go over has come up again while being here.

I asked Brandon to expound on his statement about middle school not being a part of his college preparation. He stated,

Well (long pause) … well, maybe a little bit but not as much as high school did. In terms of like knowing how to practice time management and because a lot 'cause like the work in middle school was pretty easy for me growing up. And even in middle school, I was

still an honor student, so like getting a lot of those assignments done wasn't always too much of a hassle. I would need help here and there, but like other than that, I was pretty good middle school.

Brandon stated he was very prepared for his first year in college. Based on responses, it seemed clear to me that his middle and high school educational experiences had a positive impact on his level of college readiness. He had a 3.41 GPA at the time of our interview, and a 3.10 at the end of the fall semester.

Xavier also attended a magnet school in Philadelphia, PA. He stated it was a school for which students had to take an examination to be admitted. He did not report what his high school GPA was, but he did state, "It was one of those schools that you actually had to have good grades to get in." Xavier took AP courses in the 11th and 12 grades but did not pass the exams to receive college credit. When asked if he thought those courses prepared him for college, Xavier shared,

> Oh, definitely because AP courses were definitely was more difficult and more like this is what the professor… the professor at a college would teach you. Plus, I kinda had already took some college level courses as being… like trying to be an artist.… I was in a program during the YMCA where I went to Villanova on the weekends and basically, I just went there and took a couple of classes, mostly art classes and stuff.

Although Xavier stated he believed that his high school education prepared him for college, based on the information he shared with me concerning his freshman year, he was not as prepared as he needed to be. At the time of the interview, his grade point average was 2.33. At the end of the fall semester, his grade point average dropped to 2.0.

Jeremiah attended high school in Pittsburgh, PA. He reported that he attended a public performing arts high school located in the cultural district of downtown Pittsburgh. Jeremiah said about the high school, "So, it wasn't like your traditional high school experience. It kinda had some little flavor to it. But as far as academic-wise, they really did push me there." When asked if he thought his K-12 education prepared him for college, Jeremiah stated, "Yes, I do. Especially when high school hit. Because I thought that, you know, I thought I'd get a little leeway 'cause it wasn't a traditional high school, but nope, I thought wrong." Jeremiah stated he took AP courses in the 11th and 12th grades that were a lot more demanding than some of his other classes. Taking the summer preparation courses helped him do well in his AP courses in junior and senior year of high school. Jeremiah stated he graduated from high school with a 3.0 GPA. At the time of our interview, Jeremiah reported with confidence that he had a 3.0 GPA. However, that was not the case; his GPA was 2.53. At the end of the fall 2019 semester, his GPA was 2.52.

Malik attended a public high school in York City School District in York, PA, located about 25 miles south of Harrisburg, the state's capital city. He stated he did not do well in high school. Throughout his high school years, he was either suspended from school, had to attend a specialty school for juvenile delinquents, or was incarcerated. I asked Malik if he thought his K-12 education prepared him for college. He responded, "I feel like I wasn't prepared the best. But I still made it, pushed myself to finish, graduate, and come to college. So, it's like all up to me to be honest."

Although Malik did not have a positive high school experience, and he admitted that he was not prepared for college, he still persevered to obtain his high school diploma and to enroll in college. His motivation to enroll will be discussed later in Theme 3: Motivation and

Persistence. At the time of the interview, Malik's GPA was 2.4. However, at the end of the fall

2019 semester, his GPA plummeted to 1.28.

Cameron attended Pittsburgh Obama Academy 6-12, an International Baccalaureate (IB)

school. IB schools are recognized worldwide for the rigorous education they provide. According

to the Pittsburgh Public Schools (n.d.-b) website, "All 11th and 12th grade students at the Obama

Academy are enrolled in IB Diploma Program classes, which are college level classes taught

over a two-year span" (para. 1).

Due to the untimely passing of his father and suffering a broken arm which required

several surgeries, Cameron decided to take a "gap year." When asked if he believed his K-12

education prepared him for college, he indicated it did, but he was not ready to attend college

immediately after high school. He shared,

> Considering having the gap year, I was well more prepared and well more motivated for
>
> what was to come. I kinda came in, you know, hopped in running. I didn't like you know,
>
> slack around or anything like that. I kind of just… I went in and said I'm going to bust
>
> out these four years, five years and just get it over with. And that was like my mind set
>
> coming in.

Based on the educational experiences that Cameron described, and despite the major life

changing events and academic struggles that he experienced during his last two years of high

school, he persevered and did extremely well during his first year in college. At the time of our

interview, his GPA was 3.7, and at the end of the fall semester, his GPA was 3.41.

Four of the five students (Brandon, Xavier, Jeremiah, and Cameron) believed they were

academically prepared for their freshman year of college. However, Malik indicated he was not

prepared for college. The same four study participants attended magnet schools and took AP

courses while in high school, whereas Malik attended a traditional public high school and did not take any advanced level courses. Palmer et al. (2014) state that African American males are least likely to enroll in AP courses and pass them. That was not the case for these students.

Theme 2: Adjustment. First-generation college students have limited knowledge of what to expect at an institution of higher education. They lack the social and cultural capital that is important in navigating their way in the collegiate environment (Whitehead & Wright, 2016). First generation college students are typically unfamiliar with different college processes such as academic advising, registration, and securing financial aid. It is not unusual for first-generation students to experience a disconnect and feel like they do not "fit in" to the campus environment. (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; McCoy, 2014; Owens et al., 2010; Padgett et al., 2012; Palmer et al., 2014; Pascarella et al., 2004; Shelton, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012; Stephens et al., 2014; Whitehead & Wright, 2016).

The scholarly literature concerning transition to college indicate freshman, first-generation, and especially African American males typically have difficulty and challenges to adjusting to college life. According to Turner (2015), "The first year of college is critical to the academic success, social integration, retention, and persistence of students in the institutional environment" (p. 10). Tucker (1999) conducted a study in which he highlighted how "sense of community" impacted freshman transitioning to college. He described sense of community as any phenomena that made students feel like they belonged in a new educational environment. Students who experienced the greatest sense of belonging had a much easier time transitioning to their new environment. Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods (2009) conducted a study to examine the effect on student persistence. The results if their study, which are consistent with a

large body of scholarly research, indicate that sense of belonging has a direct positive effect on student persistence.

When asked to describe his transition to campus, Brandon shared that having an established social network, friends, and a family member who also attended the university made it easier to adjust to college life. He did indicate that being in a small rural town was a bit of an adjustment for him. Brandon stated,

> It wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. Like when I first came here, it was pretty easy going because thankfully I didn't come here not knowing anybody. Like my cousin goes here and along with her, two other people from my high school came up here as well last year. So, I kind of had an established group of friends that I knew already, so that that was a big help in terms of just like adjusting to college life and being able to know people and not feel alone.

When asked if he felt welcomed on campus, Brandon shared,

> Yeah… everyone was definitely welcoming then and now. And I didn't feel like uncomfortable at all. I guess the only thing that I missed from home was not only my family, but just like the city environment. 'Cause my high school was within the city, like Philadelphia Center Central City. And just like coming up here where it's just like a rural town and you don't really see skyscrapers or anything like that was definitely a big change 'cause I'm a city boy. I'm used to being in the city and stuff like that, so being up here was just like very quiet and not as exciting as the city life is.

Regarding Brandon's academic adjustment, he stated the only thing he really needed to get adjusted to were lecture courses. He stated,

And in terms of classes, I think I did do pretty well in my classes and … nothing really felt too unfamiliar 'cause a lot of the way we did work in some of the classes were touched on a little bit in high school. So, I already had a set mindset on how to go about doing certain assignments and also knowing how to study certain topics. I guess one adjustment was just like lectures I would say. I'm a Bio/Pre-Vet major and that involves having to go to biology lectures and stuff like that. And that was definitely a big bit of adjustment because I had to…(pause)… really for most of my freshman year for biology class was studying the slides and memorizing certain concepts for exams and stuff, and I definitely had a little bit trouble with that just 'cause like I was still trying to figure out how to prepare myself for exams like that. And that involved like a bit of trial and error, whereas I would first try out just looking at the slides and going over them over different days. And then I moved to trying out rewriting everything I looked at on the slides to see how that will work. And that ended up helping a lot and getting me good grades for those classes.

Overall, Brandon had a positive opinion of the University. He mentioned he was happy that the school was not the "party school" that it was rumored to be. He stated,

A lot of people just …when people heard the term IUP, all they thought was party and that they weren't really that good of a school. And it didn't really discourage me because most of the people who said it never even been to like tour the campus or anything. So I had that in the back of my mind of like them not being a good college in general while coming up here, but then once I got to fully experience like being a student here, I realized that like a lot of people's perceptions of the school actually are wrong. And then

this is a pretty good institution in terms of just providing quality education for their students.

I asked Xavier to tell me about his transition to college. He stated,

It was different, because IUP is like extremely small compared to other college campuses… but just like compared to what I'm used to in general. So, it's like you really can't go anywhere unless you have a car (inaudible) and it's definitely really different like seeing how it is predominantly White and stuff and all that.

Xavier talked about physically navigating the campus as part of his adjustment to the University. Like many freshmen, he found finding his way around campus challenging. Xavier shared,

Well, first I was like really just finding out where everything is on campus 'cause I'm mainly an art major and I usually only have to go to like one building. But anything else, I'd kind of like had to Google® it and it's like, at the time I don't think Google® Maps was up to date with IUP. (we both laughed) So, it was like it wouldn't show where the buildings where. It would show the general area in between the streets or what not and there's like not street signs here, so I would kind of have to like actually like ask a local or try to like figure it out with my GPS even though like my personal GPS is not like out there.

I asked Xavier if he was comfortable asking for directions from other students or people on campus. He stated he did not have a problem asking for directions:

I felt like I was making everybody uncomfortable because of like just like how just forthcoming I was. Like I would just ask them like "Hey like, do you know where this is?" So, I kind of didn't have the luxury when I was like, "Dang…class starts in like 15 minutes!"

Another adjustment that Xavier spoke about was his adjustment to living on campus with a roommate with whom he was not acquainted. He stated,

I don't know. It was definitely a different experience like living in a dorm. That was like very interesting. Like having a roommate or what not and you know, just like cooperating with them…you know… and like just like figuring out like, "How do you like the air? How do you like the temperature?" or what not or other stuff like that. Like it was pretty like interesting like to have an actual roommate like for more than a week.

Xavier said about having a roommate, "It was okay." He alluded to his thought of requesting a different roommate but chose not to: "I could request (inaudible), but I was like nah." Xavier was not completely satisfied with the dormitory to which he was assigned. He explained because he was an art major, he expected to be assigned to a different dormitory. Xavier shared,

I don't know like… just enrolling was also a challenge as well. Uh, I was really supposed to be in the art building. Yeah, I was supposed to be in Putt but it's just a lot of stuff like, "Yeah… Putt don't got any more rooms." or what not and all that. And apparently that wasn't true, so whoever gave me that information didn't tell it right. So, like they put me in Pratt or whatever which was annoying because you know that's where they usually drink or what not. And like Pratt is kinda like the worst one you can ever be in because like where they … it's where the upperclassmen usually drink and what not. So, it's usually like always loud and all that and I was like on the 1st floor so it's like… it was always loud and what not. And I lived like underneath like a room full of like females and like all that. It was horrible.

Xavier experienced adjustment issues in the classroom as well. He shared,

108

So, like usually like nine times out of ten, I was usually stuck in an art class being like the only Black person in the class. So, it was a different experience and kind of a little bit overwhelming at first.

When asked to elaborate how long he felt overwhelmed, Xavier responded,

A little bit more like the first couple of weeks. Yeah… I adapt pretty fast, but it was like I didn't like… I don't know… It just felt weird like being the only one in class. So, it was like, "How do I like…?" You know like the teachers would like want you to get in groups and stuff and like actually like get to know each other, but like, you know, "What were we supposed to talk about?" (laughs) Yeah, it's like you know I don't like know how to connect with other people like that, especially like if they're like not from my background, my culture. I don't know how to like reach out to them. But I started to get more comfortable as well. Especially cause my friend Khalil was here during freshman year. He was the only other Black guy in the class with me. So, I was like, "Yeah, I can talk to him." But I did like branch out and start talking to a lot of other students and all that, learning different techniques and you know, stuff like that as an artist and you know just you know connecting with them.

Xavier talked a little about how he struggled academically in his art-based courses. He had not learned how to use different materials to make art, which was a significant adjustment for him as an art major. However, this was one of his most significant challenges during his freshman year. Although Xavier shared that he participated in youth art courses and took other art courses throughout his K-12 education, he was not familiar with various art-based skills, techniques, and processes that he needed to know, which created challenges for him. I will discuss these more in-depth in Theme 4: Challenges.

Jeremiah reported his transition and adjustment to the campus environment as "really smooth." He stated,

> I just want to say it was really smooth. Like I thought that, you know, being a first-time freshman or first-time college student in general, because I'm an only child and I really don't… didn't have that much advice from the people in my family that did go to college. So, it's just like a lot of stuff that I had learn on my own. But as soon as I got here, it was just really easy once I got the hang of it. I was like that summer before, I was just like preparing myself like… "Okay, understand that this is gonna be a whole lot more than (inaudible) in high school. No one's going to hold your hands through this. Like you're an adult now. You gotta do this and see things out on your own." And that's what made my freshman year like, really smooth.

During the focus group session, Jeremiah shared that his father was a "big help" as he transitioned to the University. He shared,

> My father… um he definitely was a big help, especially during my freshman year because it was all new to me, it was new to him, having a kid in college. So, like there were certain assignments that, you know, I could just call him on the phone and he could help me with. Even just like some financial parts too. Like if I had an outstanding balance with the Bursar, he would just like kinda reassure me that like everything's going to be alright, or just like, "Even if I have to take out a loan…", 'cause like there were times where I was like, am I gonna be able to finish.

When asked about his experience on campus, Jeremiah shared,

> My experience on campus, I would have to say, it was pretty good that year. Um… I felt right at home. I mean… kind of weird at first. It was like a whole different setting 'cause I

grew up in the city, now this is small town. Way more quiet. A bit…way smaller. But I

have to say it like… it didn't make me feel uncomfortable or out of place. Like I just was

able to gravitate, and people gravitated to me, so it was just really smooth, really nice.

Jeremiah had mostly positive things to say about his transition and adjustment to the

campus environment. I asked him about his perception of the campus environment. He stated he

was aware of the reputation the University had as being a "party school." He shared,

I have to say, so far… um… you know, I know the school has a little reputation. Like it's

either a party school or this student was acting out, that student was acting out… So far, I

haven't seen any of that. I'd say so far, it's been good to me.

During the focus group session, Jeremiah shared,

I definitely do feel welcome especially since I was recruited in high school and I got like

an admission offer on the spot, so that made me feel relief. And then, like the first time I

came up here was during like multicultural weekend. So, there were definitely a lot of

people of color up here, so I definitely did feel like I was at home. ...Like I want to say

like I didn't really feel out of place or what not until like first couple weeks of classes like

when I had my first interaction with like you know, the professor.

Malik described his transition as different because he had never been on a college

campus. He also shared his opinion of the university's environment as it related to his freshman

year. When asked about his experiences, Malik stated,

Yeah so when I first got here, I was like I was happy, and a lot of the other people were

happy too like friends and family because, I have a lot of friends that they come home

from jail and they go right back. You know, they come home and to the same stuff that

there were doing and go right back. And I used to be like that too. So, for me to be

111

released and then end up going to college that was like a big step in life for me. So, when

I got up here, I like… I wouldn't say like I was uncomfortable because I felt like I

wouldn't fit in or anything, because I always been good with school. So, I know like I

could do good. But the transition was different because I never actually like been to a real

college campus, so like actually to live on campus, go to school on campus, you know,

interact and you know, get to meet new people. It was a good thing. I felt like I needed

that. I was so used to the environment that I was in before this so like it opened my eyes

up and made me realize like I can finish school. I could like move on in the future to do

bigger and better things.

Malik said about living on campus,

The dorms… um…(laugh) I loved it actually. I kinda wish I still did live in the dorms,

but it's just too expensive. Yeah so I have like my own apartment now is better 'cause it's

like half price. But living in the dorms was fun because I met a lot of friends. I like,

connected with a lot of new people at the beginning of my first year here. So, I was able

to meet new people… you know, make friends and hang out with people. I was involved

in like different activities that were going on around campus. I ended up joining the SAA

which is the Student Accountant Association last year.

I asked Malik to share his experiences with his transition as related to his classwork. His

responses reflected his experiences during his freshman year as well as this year. He shared,

So far as like my classes and stuff, that was different for me because you know like in

high school you basically start at the beginning of the day and just go to each period after

that. Whereas in college, you make your own schedule and you pick like what the times

of what classes and stuff you want to go to. So, that was different from me. I like it like

112

that because like I make my own schedule, you know, going to different class there's

different professors that teach… they have different teaching methods. Um, so like that

in-class type of experience such as doing the work on the computer all day. I felt like it

was a good experience. Like, I learned more my last year… way better than this semester

is going so far.

Malik stated one of the things that he had to adjust to the different teaching methods that his

professors had. This indicated to me that perhaps Malik had difficulty with how the material was

delivered. He shared,

Like what I noticed so far from being up here is that a lot of the professors have different

teaching methods. Um, you know some professors are like… they just go right through

their lecture. They don't really stop and take the time out to explain what's going on. They

feel like we should already know what's going on and study whatever and then there's

some professors that actually take the time to like explain their lecture and help kids who

like might be lost or don't know what's going on.

Malik reported that although he "partied a lot," he was still able to complete his coursework. He

said,

I partied a lot 'cause it was like, you know… every new student that come to college their

first year and this is a party school. I partied a lot so that's how I was like very social with

people cause I'm like friendly and stuff. So, I mean that's how I made a lot of new

friends… like going out and meeting people. But last year I was still able to like do my

work and focus and study and stuff like that. I have friends that I will go study with;

friends that would like help me with stuff.

113

Malik shared more of his current struggles during our interview, which will be reported in Theme 4: Challenges.

Cameron described his transition to campus as "nerve-racking." He reported that he did not have any assistance with figuring things out. He said,

It was kind of nerve-racking at first because I had no one else to help me with it. Nobody in my family went to college, so nobody knows what actually is going on. I can't call anybody for any like help for classes or anything like that. I mean I realize there's tutors and stuff for resources, but I don't think any student is going to ever like just jump onto a tutor. That's kind of like a mental thing that you just have to get over before doing that. So, at least to me it is. So, I kinda didn't go to tutors and anything like that, but once I realized that it was manageable, I kinda (pause) figured out how things were going to work, and then it's just kinda flowed right in and kind of worked perfectly.

During the interview, Cameron stated that taking a gap year made it easier for him to transition to college. When asked what happened during that year that made it easier, he replied,

First thing was I gained motivation over that time. And that was the biggest factor in going to school was having motivation because high school felt like it was just a drag and especially with senioritis…that hit me harder than I believe anybody else in the school. So, it kinda was just like finish, and then just drop everything and just relax. So, after I got the relaxing out of the way, and like I knew I wasn't going to be ready for school right out of high school so… I really needed that time to relax. And after that relaxing was over, I kind of re-prepared myself to get back into the work and get back into motion of like what school feels like.

Cameron shared that a major adjustment for him was getting used to 8:00 a.m. classes. He stated,

Academically, the first thing I learned was I do not like 8:00 a.m. classes. Coming in, I

didn't know what classes to pick. I was at orientation just picking the classes that they

told me to pick. I didn't think about professors like the way I do now or anything like

that, or the time scheduling. Like I thought getting up at like 6:30 or 7 for high school

would be like much harder than getting up for 8:00 AM for college, but it's tremendously

harder.

When I asked why he thought it was harder, he replied,

I think one of the factors was the professor that played a main role into that and also the

lack of, I guess you can say, you know… straight responsibility like if you don't go, no

one is going to say anything to you. So that was like another thing that kind of helped me

ease back on not going.

Regarding his academic adjustment, Cameron went on to share that he performed well

academically during his first year, despite having a professor who he had difficulty

understanding. He finished his first semester with a 3.81 GPA which gained him entrance into

the business honors program. Cameron shared,

And for rest of my academic classes, I end up getting all As, so I ended up passing with a

3.81 and making the Dean's list. And that got me involved with this one National Honor

Society on campus. I can't remember the name exactly. I also got recruited into the

Eberly Business Honors program, so now I'm a part of that too.

Cameron shared his experiences in most of the courses he took during his freshman year. He

stated that the courses he took in high school really helped him to excel in his college courses:

So, the math portion of coming in here, it was easy because they started me off at Math

100, so I kind of flew through that class like it was just nothing. And it was kind of like a

115

break in a sense. it was kind of like a free class. And I didn't have any English classes starting off, so that was another pet peeve that was gone that I didn't have to worry about until the next semester. Psychology - that was probably one of the most challenging classes, but I was able to put a lot more focus into it because I didn't have any other challenging classes, or at least to that extent. I was able to focus on that and pass that class with an A. I also had a science lab, more it was just kinda of a one credit class, same exact professor and everything, and that was way easier than actual class. And it kind of helped me figure out what's going on in a regular class because it kind of followed the same curriculum of what the discussions in class were surrounding. I also had an economics class, of which I had no prior experience in so I kinda was just walking blindly hoping for the best. It turned out that I picked one of the best professors, so that kind of helped me get through that. And that was a really easy A. …Oh…it was history. That was my last class. That was also really easy because my history class in high school was just like way harder, way more extensive, like way more detailed. So it kind of felt like a 8th grade history course, to me at least.

Cameron's second semester was a bit more challenging for him. He stated,

And then my second semester, I had my first English class which I was really like trying to avoid as long as possible. And I don't know why, but I just don't like writing and all of my teachers say that I'm good at it, but it's just I just don't like putting in that time to sit behind a computer and type. So, I was really avoiding English class but, once I got into it, it became a lot easier. I think it was way high school worked with English class. It was like much more… a lot of projects all the time and then college English class was nowhere near compared to that. It was just like way simpler assignments, maybe one

paper in there, for like two to three pages, which isn't that bad. So, I had passed that class

with an A. And then I also had philosophy, which was a real interesting good topic for

me. I chose the contemporary moral issues because I like to debate and wanted to see

what, you know, what people were going to say about certain issues that were, I guess

you can say, socially important. So, I kind of thought about that and then it turned out it

wasn't even all about those type of topics. It was just random topics of like ethics and

morals and I kind of enjoyed that class and passed it with an A. Yeah, so another class I

had was computer literacy which was just going into class, sitting on the computer, and

following what the professor had you do, so that really wasn't much. And then you could

do more if you finish your assignments outside of your class, if you wanted to on your

own computer. So that was really easy to complete. I had my second economics class,

which was microeconomics. That one was much harder, like crazy hard. I don't know

how I picked the best professor and everything but like the professor didn't matter at this

point. I struggled a lot throughout the entire semester and then I took advantage of the

professor giving us a study guide that had the exact questions for the exam and kind of

just memorized the answers. So, I ended up passing my last exam with a 93 which

brought my grade up to a B. I mean I really didn't learn it, I just rememberized [sic] it for

the test and just walked out hoping for the best for that one. So, it kinda was a rerun of

the first semester but then I knew that I was in the business honors, so that was a little bit

more responsibility that I was taken on the second semester.

Overall, Cameron's first year in college was very positive academically and in terms of this

transition to the college environment. However, social integration for him was a bit different than

the other study participants which will be discussed in Theme 6: Social Integration.

All five young men shared experiences of what it was like for them when they transitioned to campus. Contrary to the extant literature about African American males at PWIs, all five respondents indicated they had positive experiences adjusting to campus life. For some, the first few weeks were a bit distressing. However, once they settled in and learned how to navigate the unfamiliar territory, they were much more comfortable with their new surroundings. Tucker (1999) conducted a study to determine what made the participants' transition easy or difficult. Sense of Community is one of the nine themes that he identifies as experiences that make students feel a sense of belonging to the campus environment. Factors that contribute to the sense of belonging include peer relationships, living arrangements, and feelings about the physical environment. Students who had a greater sense of belonging had an easier time with transitioning to the college, much like the students in this study.

Theme 3: Motivation and persistence. Campbell (2019) conducted a study on African American male athletes at a PWI. According to Campbell, persistence is defined as "a student's continuation behavior leading to a desired goal; in this instance the goal is graduation from a four-year institution of higher education" (p. 272). Further, factors that affect persistence include cognitive (intellectual) and non-cognitive factors (motivational) as well as environmental (internal and external) factors (p. 272). Although none of the students in this study were athletes, Campbell's description of motivation and persistence pertains to the students in this study.

All the respondents shared their personal experiences that demonstrated their respective levels of motivation to attend college and persist academically. Each shared information about their life goals and determination to reach those goals. Whether it was a goal set early in life or one that was set when they arrived at the University, each student had a plan, and a college education was part of that plan.

Brandon shared he had a desire to be a veterinarian at a young age. During middle school, he learned that a college education was part of that goal, and he began to prepare for that academically. He stated,

> Ever since I was younger, I've always wanted to work with animals. And then toward the end of middle school, I learned about the profession of a veterinarian. So, I did more research on to that and learned about the different processes and steps it takes to reach the status of veterinarian and college is part of that. So, that's why I wanted to attend college so that I can prepare myself for…it's just another step in my long process of becoming a veterinarian.

I mentioned to Brandon that there are not very many African Americans in the field of veterinary science. He responded,

> Yeah, I definitely took that into mind and fully realized that fact when I'd done a summer volunteer internship at U Penn where they have a summer Vets program that basically took you through like the different classes and shifts that go on at the U Penn Vet School and hospital. And when I was there, I was the only Black kid within the group. So, yeah. I used that opportunity as a way of like… at first, I did feel a bit weird 'cause I felt like an outcast, but then I realized that this was an opportunity to be that representation within this medical field.

Brandon has not let the fact that there are few African American veterinarians dissuade him from his goal of pursing a degree in veterinary medicine. He has maintained a solid academic history since elementary school through his first year and a half of college.

Xavier's story is quite different from Brandon's. His desire is to be an animator. However, his academic journey has not been as successful as Brandon's has been thus far.

119

Throughout the interview, Xavier shared his struggles with various college level art courses. He shared his experiences of taking art courses during his elementary and secondary school years. Xavier took courses via summer youth programs and also in high school. However, when he began taking courses at the University, he struggled with course content. Xavier shared,

Mainly it was just like learning… like being as an art major, like "How do I like do this? How do I implement that?" It was like there's no specific directions of what I'm doing, so I have to actually use like creativity or what not… or just seeing like how do I uh, adjust the curriculum here? …

I asked Xavier if he took art courses in high school. He responded,

Yeah, I took art classes even though I wasn't an art major. …I felt like the way he was trying to address like art majors there was more like art history based. It was like, "Let's teach you this, this and that…" rather than teaching actual skills. And like even when they did teach you drawing, I guess it would be considered a studio there… When they did like studio type classes, it was more like they were trying to teach us how do they do certain things, rather than like showing you actual technique.

Given Xavier's academic challenges, which will be detailed more in Theme 4: Challenges, he continues to be motivated to become an animator. He believes he is becoming a better art student.

Jeremiah's parents enrolled him in private institutions in elementary and middle school. He reported he was a high-achieving student in K-12, taking AP workshops during the summer and AP courses during the 11th and 12th grades in high school. In regard to his career goals, he determined in high school that he wanted to go into the field of medicine because he liked to help

people. Initially, he was unsure in which area of medicine in which he was interested. Before graduating from high school, he decided he wanted to become an epidemiologist. He expressed,

So, for the longest time, I was debating on, you know, what I wanted to be when I got older. And it was between pediatrician and architecture [*sic*]. So, I was always into building stuff when I was younger, but then I was always into helping people at the same time. So, once I got into my junior year of high school, that's when I like made my mind up and said, "Okay, I'm going to go into the medical field, but not pediatrician. I want to choose a different field." So, that's when I decided to go into public health.

…Epidemiology.

Jeremiah demonstrated he had a consistent interest in his academic standing during his first year of college. He disclosed that he spoke with his professors frequently about his status in his courses. He stated,

I had a few, you know, that seemed like they cared about my grades as much as I did, especially when I tried to reach out to them. So, they really just showed that same dedication that I did, and that's how I was able to excel, you know, in the class. It's like, I'm coming to you asking for help because I want to learn this, especially since… you know, I want to improve my grade.

Jeremiah shared a positive comment about one of his professors. He stated,

…my professor… he was very engaged just as much as I was. And he even signed me up for this little organization for Epidemiologists last year, and I'm still in it, so I really appreciate that. And it kinda opened my eyes, you know, to the health field. Like I never knew any of this…

121

All of Jeremiah's interactions with his professors were not as positive. Those interactions were major challenges for him, which will be detailed later in Theme 4: Challenges.

Another way Jeremiah demonstrated his level of persistence and motivation was in seeking tutoring. He did not hesitate to seek tutoring services to help improve his grades. He said,

> The tutoring was helpful a little bit. But, it's like when I applied it to class, it just felt completely different. Like in tutoring, I was grasping and understanding it, but as soon as I get to class, it's just like all that I learned in tutoring just went away, and now I'm sitting here clueless. …I went to tutoring in the library a couple times a week, and what I learned in there, just some of the basic terms, like I wasn't grasping them… When I got to tutoring, and they broke it down to a point where I could understand. I was like, "This made it sound so complicated and here, you're breaking it down from me and it sounds simple!"

Malik realized his goals while incarcerated during his senior year of high school. He stated once he successfully passed a couple of college level courses in a special program offered by the University, he decided he would continue with his college education. He stated,

> So, when I was locked up, um… they started this program for IUP through the jail that I was locked up at Pine Grove which is actually here... So, I was able to get my diploma in there. I finished and then the principal of school there - he was telling me about the program he was starting for IUP. So, I signed up for it and passed like all the tests and stuff and I got in and I started taking courses while I was still incarcerated. And once I was released, I came home and I already had it in my mind that since I already have

credits, I might as well finish it out and actually go. So, I came that next semester and I

started at IUP.

Malik also stated,

Um, so when I got up here, I like… I wouldn't say like I was uncomfortable because I

felt like I wouldn't fit in or anything, because I always been good with school. So, I know

like I could do good. …It was a good thing; I felt like I needed that so because I was so

used to the environment that I was in before this. So, like it opened my eyes up and made

me realize like I can finish school. I could like move on in the future to do bigger and

better things.

Regardless of his previous life circumstances, Malik realized that attending college was a

way to change his path or life circumstances. At the time of the interview, he stated that last year

he was very focused and able to study and do well. However, this year he has not been focused at

all; he was very distracted by a couple of situations with which he is involved. During the time

this chapter was being written, I learned that Malik had failed all of his fall sophomore courses;

he reenrolled in all of the same courses for the spring semester.

Cameron reported that he was always a high achieving student. He stated, "From what I

can remember, I always had good grades in middle school, and then I took a test to get into

Obama and once I got in, that was pretty much the start of it." Cameron attended Obama

Academy, an International Baccalaureate high school, which is much more academically

challenging than a traditional high school. However, while in high school, he experienced some

unexpected challenges. Cameron faced a life-changing situation during his junior year in high

school when he witnessed his father have a fatal heart attack. Then, during senior year, he broke

his arm in two places, which required several surgeries. Cameron reported,

So, I went to high school at Obama Academy in Pittsburgh. And like throughout high school, it started with 9th and 10th grade, I was like doing really good, probably like a 3.4 or higher. And then when 11th and 12th grade came around, that's when I started to struggle more with my grades, and I dropped to like a 2.2. I mean I was dealing with my father passing away so that kinda was the major reason why I kinda slacked. So, I dropped down to 2.2 and brought it back up to a 2.7 by the end of senior semester.

He added, "High school kind of like pushed me over the top to where like I was… it was bad. It got really bad, like just mentally trying to balance everything." Although Cameron experienced numerous adversities during his high school years, he did not give up on pursing a college degree, a requirement set by his parents when he was a child. He stated, "Well it was kind of a requirement set by my parents when I was growing up that I was going to get to college and get through it".

Cameron's level of persistence has not waned since enrolling in college. He has maintained a high GPA since freshman year. He is disciplined and has a self-awareness about his weaknesses; he pushes himself to be a better student. Cameron shared,

If I get behind in a class or I don't understand something, like one time or at least for a week worth of classes, from that point on, it's just like downhill. So, I kind of try to just keep everything sharp from the start, so I don't have to worry about studying or have to worry about catching up on missed information. I'll get distracted in a heartbeat trying to do anything else that's around me. So, I just try to get it done the first time around. That was always a problem for me, all through high school and stuff. And like I kinda didn't want to fall into that pattern of slacking off and doing work later and stuff like that.

Because I knew that once I get caught up with other people doing stuff, then like there is

no chance of me breaking out of it and going back to my work.

Reeder and Schmitt (2013) investigated the differences between academic achievement

of African Americans at PWI and those at HBCUs. They found that African American students

can excel academically at PWIs, but it takes additional effort, ability, and willingness on their

part. As long as they are well-equipped to handle situations that can occur in a college context

and are motivated to proactively learn and seek opportunities, they can do well at a PWI. Also,

African American students who know what they want from college, who are highly motivated to

obtain a college degree, and who can make academic and life decisions can do well at a PWI.

The results of Reader and Schmitt's study are consistent with the experiences of the students in

this study; these students are making the effort and are motivated to learn to reach their goals.

Theme 4: Challenges. According to the large body of scholarly research, freshman

college students, and especially first-generation students, experience a myriad of challenges

during their first year of college. For first-generation African American male freshmen, the

challenges can be even greater. For instance, Harper and Newman (2016) conducted a study that

focused on first-year adjustment experiences of Black males to understand how the students who

struggled were able to overcome their challenges and persist to graduation. They utilized Meryl

Reis Louis's (1980) model of surprise and sense-making in their study to interpret the

experiences of Black males who shared their first-year college experiences as newcomers to

college. Each student in this study described very different types of challenges they experienced

during their first year at the University. Some were academic challenges, while others were

social or personal challenges.

Brandon identified two primary challenges: (a) learning how to study for certain courses and (b) establishing new genuine friendships. Brandon stated,

I guess one of the challenges was just like, as I said before, figuring out how to study for certain classes, specifically biology. And just navigating the different methods on how to retain the information for exams and stuff like that. And even now, I'm still like practicing ways in which I can better understand the content for (inaudible).

Regarding establishing new friendships, Brandon shared,

And I guess another challenge is probably trying to establish genuine friendships outside of the current group I was already with. Just so that I knew other people outside of them. That was definitely a challenge and I probably didn't establish a separate friendship from them until like my second semester of freshman year.

He indicated he was not sure why making new friends was difficult. When asked why he thought establishing new friendships was a challenge for him, Brandon replied,

I don't know. It's just like um… (pause) like a lot of people that I may want to be friends with like we may have not had the same classes. And that prevented like us from like running into each other or just hanging out just 'cause like we have two separate schedules and stuff like that. And even in the classes that I did take, meeting friends in that would sometimes be hard to just 'cause like it's such a big class and you don't even know if they want to even be friends like that anyway.

Xavier had a few different challenges that he faced in his freshman year. Some he identified himself, and others that he did not mention, but seemed obvious to me. More specifically, Xavier had difficulty getting enrolled and he struggled academically, mostly in his art-based courses which caused challenges with faculty. While he did not specifically identify

financial challenges, based on information he shared during the interview, it was clear that he had financial needs that were not met.

Enrollment and financial challenges are not uncommon for first-generation college students. According to the existing literature, first-generation students typically come from low-income households, and usually do not know or understand enrollment processes (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; McCoy, 2014; Owens et al., 2010; Padgett, et al, 2012; Palmer et al., 2014; Pascarella et al., 2004; Shelton, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012; Stephens et al., 2014; Whitehead & Wright, 2016). If it were not for the secretary in the Art Department helping him, Xavier may have had even more challenges. He stated,

> …And like the secretary in the art department actually like really helped me a lot because like when nothin' else got done she actually like kinda just helped me like… She didn't have to, but like she helped me like when everybody else, they didn't know what to do.

Xavier went on to say,

> Like my FAFSA didn't get turned in and all that. My transcript didn't get turned in apparently. It was sent in like four times already… through this system and what not. She emailed them a couple of times; it didn't happen. She faxed it to them and like they could not get my transcript. And my FAFSA was not going in through them, and so they didn't know how to do that. It was just like a lot of problems and stuff, and she was like the only one who actually know what she was doing apparently.

In regard to course selection, he stated,

> And then Nate H. actually… yeah…he's pretty cool. He helped me set up my classes and stuff when I didn't have an advisor for a while. 'Cause I don't know… I think…I just did not have an advisor for some reason. …I don't know like just enrolling was also a

challenge as well. I was really supposed to be in the art building. …And apparently that wasn't true so whoever gave me that information didn't tell it right.

Regarding his financial challenges, Xavier had difficulty getting his Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completed in a timely manner. It was obvious that his financial aid award did not cover all his expenses. Xavier shared,

Yeah, I usually like always try to like get my art supplies, so usually that always involves me having drop classes. Especially for some studio classes, you actually have to pay money for access cards rather than get the art supplies. …So, usually I make those my primary focus. And sometimes I do have to like drop like math courses or what not because I cannot afford them. Yeah… it's interesting. I kinda wish that wasn't the case. And I wish it was like more like we just had to pay for supplies and books, and you know, and we just didn't have to pay for room and board. Yeah…it definitely doesn't help a lot when most of the classes that uh… most of the core subjects that you just have to take regardless of your major or not usually require a website or a book or what not. And like that's really like expensive, especially when you're already like paying for college yourself and all that.

At the time of our interview, Xavier stated he was not sure of his GPA because he had an outstanding tuition balance and there was a hold on his record. Consequently, he could not access his records.

Xavier's most significant challenges were related to his academics. He lacked confidence and continues to lack confidence in his skills and abilities as an artist. Xavier did not know how to use certain art materials or tools or perform various processes. Regarding learning skills and techniques, Xavier stated,

Mainly it was just like learning… like being as an art major like how do I like do this? How do I implement that? It was like there's no specific directions of what I'm doing, so I have to actually use like creativity or what not… or just seeing like how do I adjust the curriculum here? That was more like what it was and that was my biggest problem I believe.

Xavier admitted that college level art courses were much more challenging for him. He indicated that the professors were teaching skills, but initially, he did not grasp them:

Yeah…they were teaching them; I just wasn't understanding at first. Yeah, especially when you have to use certain technical skill in art or whatever. Like you had to learn how to hold a pencil a certain way to get this certain angle and stuff. It's just like using the like pencil like I write. I do write differently than most people. I write closer to the page so my drawings will come out like darker and stuff or what not, where it's supposed to be like really light. … Just like learning like different materials for art and what not, like how dark is dark it is or how light is light, what type of like materials, stuff like that. It's pretty cool. I'm also learning how like you could just like get your own supplies or what not and like you know, just actually like… I don't know…I feel like I have to think more like other artists and not a student.

Xavier went on to say that his art courses continue to be challenging for him. So much so, one of his professors suggested he change his major; something to which Xavier was opposed. He disclosed,

Definitely challenging for the full first year… probably still challenging even now. I'm just like still like thinking more about artists of like, "How can I contribute to my art project like outside of what I'm given from the professor?"

129

During the focus group session, Xavier shared he felt other students had experience in actual art courses, which was different from his experiences. He shared,

Like what I talked to you about before. Like me being an art major is kind of like hard like trying to contemplate what everything is in class or what not 'cause everybody has that past experience like they went to an actual like art school or whatever and studying all that, and I'm just like…I don't understand anything I'm doing right here. Like when I take sculpture classes and stuff, they have us working with like wood and metal, and I have no experience with that and it's like, this is your project… like "How do I do this?" And everybody else is jumping in like they already know what they doing, and I'm like I don't know. So usually when I need help on an assignment, I don't even know what to do or what not. So, it's kind of like (inaudible) or what not. On my first project, I didn't like really do too well and like professor actually was like, "I don't even know if you should stay in this class. You might wanna change your major." … or what not…and all that… At first like that… we didn't like really kick it off and all that because of that but, I eventually like talked to him and all that and actually like started learning how to use the materials and what not better and actually got better.

Regarding the suggestion the professor made to him about to consider changing his major, Xavier stated,

Because I was being stubborn, 'cause after you tell me that, I'm really not inclined to really want to talk to you or what not. But yeah, I started talking to him more or what not because I was mostly talking to my advisor. And he was like you should still like try to talk to him 'cause he's like the best like in graphic design or what not. So, I still talk to

him and all that and like we got a better relationship of like how my study or course is going to like be more gradually becoming better.

Also,

Yeah…the only one I like really had like trouble like talking to was Andy. He was a 2D teacher and I was taking that because I had to take that if I was going to do animation. And one of my projects weren't like as good as the rest of them. It was kinda messed up mostly because I didn't understand how to use some system and stuff and what not. And basically like…it was a little harsh word with like saying like, "You shouldn't be like trying to get into graphics right now. You should probably stay here." … and what not. I understand what he was trying to say, but at that time I was kind of like a freshman being a freshman saying like, "Yeah, you shouldn't even be an animator." Like but later on like I understand what he was saying. Like I should understand how to use the tools better or what not. He's more like one of those teachers you need to take his class so like you will actually know how to do it rather than it being an intro course.

Given all of the challenges Xavier has faced with not having the requisite skills to excel in his art courses, he is determined to continue as an art major. He shared that he feels he has grown as an artist and as a student. He stated,

Definitely like grown just as a student… just trying to learn stuff and all that. I don't know… I just took like in account that I can't really change like the grades that I'm already just failing so… Usually I don't really drop a class if I'm really failing. I'll just drop it if I don't understand it, because even if I'm failing the class like… I'm most likely failing math right now, but that's fine because I feel like I'm still learning like from math so that's probably the only reason why like I'm really staying in there.

Regardless of the numerous challenges he has faced academically or otherwise, he continues to persist toward his goal of becoming an animator.

Jeremiah reported his challenges during his freshman year were primarily with faculty. While he stated he had positive experiences with some faculty, he also had negative experiences. His main frustration was when faculty were not responsive to him when he needed information or their assistance. Jeremiah stated,

And then there were some that…when I tried to reach out… it's like… just go figure it out on your own. Like they tried to help a bit, but it wasn't to the point where I could like grasp and hold on to that information. And it's like they didn't really make much of an effort to like…it's like "I'm coming to you asking for help because I want to learn this, especially since… you know, I want to improve my grade. But I don't see you making that same effort to make sure that I do understand this so I can do better on future assignments."

In his biology course, Jeremiah felt the professor was non-responsive. He stated,

And as far as biology, every time I like reached out, or like even went to my professor at the end of class and just ask her some like simple questions like, "My grade hasn't moved since you put this assignment in" or "Did you put this assignment in?" or "How do I complete this assignment?" It was just the same answer every time, or just like a simple answer. Like no dedication, no real information, like it's literally you're just repeating the same thing over.

Jeremiah believed the professor "kinda just go lazy with our grading" based on conversations he had with other students in the class. He stated,

And we always talked about it like how, "Did you turn this assignment in?", "She hasn't graded it." or "She did grade it, but my grade hasn't moved" or "I got a grade that I thought I didn't deserve." …And I was curious as to why, 'cause like in the syllabus or even in class when she explained it, she says that, you know, "this will improve your grade by so many points" and I see that my grade is just frozen, and here I've done everything I could to make it move up.

Jeremiah also shared his experience with an online course he took during the summer after his first year at the University. He stated,

That one…(pause) that really had to be my worst experience. So, I get that, you know, it's far away from campus. I'm at home. It's summer vacation. But, it's still class, I still registered, and I still paid for it. And every time I reached out to that faculty member by email, when I had a question about the assignment, or my grade, I never got a reply. …And I sent him emails and I even showed my mother like… like "Mom, I sent my professor an email this day, that day, that day 'cause I had a question about this and that and still no response." Like our last homework assignment at the end of the course, the online system kind of glitched and instead of making that homework assignment still as a homework assignment, he made it an extra credit assignment, but it wasn't until after I emailed him. But he never reached out. That's the thing. So, like when I… the main thing of me reaching out is to know that I'll have that reassurance that I can do better. Because when I don't hear from that faculty member, you know I'm like I'm sitting here confused, like can my grade improve or can it not? How am I going to understand this and material within this short amount of time?

Malik did not share any significant challenges during his first year at the University. The challenges he reported were characteristic of freshmen and first-generation students. Malik stated,

> Some of the biggest challenges I had last year, to be honest, was just in the beginning of my first semester. Like finding out all the different resources on campus like where everything was, where to go to get help for a tutor, which building is which. But, I learned, like I caught on to everything fast. So, like after I knew where everything was located at on campus, after I knew like who was who, where I can go to get help, it was fine.

While Malik did not report challenges during his first year, he shared numerous challenges that he was experiencing during this current academic year. He disclosed,

> Like, I learned more my last year way better than this semester is going so far. This semester… I feel like start off bad, like I don't know. This is one of the worst semesters I've had. I thought this semester was going to be better than like my first two semesters but it's not. I've just been so unfocused, so unmotivated…to like some days get out for class, so the work, study and a big part of that is due to like personal issues right now like I'm currently dealing with, so…Yeah, it's been a bad semester for me this semester. … So, I need to clear my mind. You know, take more time off for myself, um… just get motivated till I actually do the work and go to class and study 'cause I need to.

One of the challenges for Malik could be attributed to an adjustment to different teaching styles of his professors. While he did not specifically say that was a challenge for him, he alluded to it when he stated,

Yeah, like what I noticed so far from being up here is that a lot of the professors have

different teaching methods. Um, you know some professors are like…they just go right

through their lecture. They don't really stop and take the time out to explain what's going

on. They feel like we should already know what's going on and study whatever and then

there's some professors that actually take the time to like explain their lecture and help

kids who like…might be lost or don't know what's going on.

Malik is a very social person, which will be discussed in more detail in Theme 6: Social

Integration. It is possible that he relied on group work in his freshman courses to help him

understand course content. He went on to say,

Last year, a lot of my classes though was like a lot of group participation, a lot of like

peer interaction with people. So, I don't know if last year because there was more

students here or there were different students here than there is this semester.

Instead of seeking help from his professors or tutoring, Malik tries to figure things out on his

own. He stated,

I mostly try to figure stuff on my own but… like… I noticed that I do need help with

things. It's just like how my schedule is, I never have time to actually go to the library.

And a lot of my classes don't have tutors for the courses I'm taking right now, so it's hard

to get help if I do need help. Um… so I try to figure everything out on my own and then I

always end up getting too overwhelmed. Like I can't do it and just end up dropping it. So

that's like a big problem for me to fix.

Instead of Malik addressing his problems with his courses, he seemed to avoid them hoping they

would go away. When asked if he was comfortable seeking help from his professor, he stated,

Yeah, I'm comfortable with that. I just don't do that. Like, I don't know why. Yeah, to be

honest I'll be like..., 'cause so much stuff be going through my mind like, I might be in

class struggling and I just be thinking like I'm just ready for his class it be over so I can

leave and go on with my day. And that's been like my mindset a lot throughout this

semester. So that's what I need to fix.

At the time of our interview, Malik's GPA was 2.4. At the end of the Fall 2019 semester, his

GPA dropped to 1.28.

Cameron reported that his biggest challenge was getting used to an 8:00 a.m. class that

was taught by a foreign-speaking professor. He shared,

But another factor, like I said, was the professor. I couldn't understand a word the

professor said, so it was kind of like why am I coming to class if I like I can't even sit

there with my notebook and try to write anything 'cause I don't know what they're

saying… They were Asian and had a heavy accent. So, like I mean, I still passed with a B

because took two chemistry courses in high school and I kinda just went off of that. But

that was probably the biggest challenge I had.

The other challenge Cameron shared was about him not being social with people that he did not

know. He stated, "I'm not a social butterfly. I don't really talk to people unless they talk to me."

More about this particular challenge will be detailed in Theme 6: Social Integration.

According to the literature, it is not unusual for students to experience challenges in their

first year of college, especially first-generation African American males.

Theme 5: Support systems. The literature states that oftentimes first-generation college

students have little to no parental, family, mentor, or role model support (Irlbeck et al., 2014;

Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; McCoy, 2014; Owens et al., 2010; Padgett, et al., 2012; Palmer

et al., 2014; Pascarella et al., 2004; Shelton, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012; Stephens et al., 2014; Whitehead & Wright, 2016). Scott, Taylor, and Palmer (2013) conducted a study that examined the challenges college-bound African American males face. Results of the study indicated parental involvement and mentorship programs, along with other factors, could help students better handle challenges they may face in college.

Each study participant was asked if he had a support system, and if so, to describe how their support system helped them during their freshman year. Each student identified a person or group of people who they felt supported them during their first year in college.

Brandon shared that his mother, father, grandparents, and some friends of his friends from his high school who also attend the University were his primary support system. He stated,

My family because like they always checked in on me and I always checked in on them just to like talk to them since I'm so far away from them and all that. Just talking to them gave me a sense of clarity. Just like the fact that even though were far away, we're still connected and all that. And for friends, I may have mentioned before, but I came into the freshman year with my cousin and two other people I met from my home high school. So, I had them as like my first group up here. And that was also helpful like being in a new space where I didn't know anything or anyone, really except for them. So, at times like that where I felt like I was just alone and like not like knowing about this new place that I'm in.

Regarding a mentor or role model, Brandon shared,

In terms of that, I had my dad who… like I didn't usually go to him for like academic advice in like terms of how to do a certain assignment, but like his just work ethic and drive just like inspire me to like keep hustling and getting my work done because it's

137

what he does like every day for work in terms of like owning his own business. And another role model was Donovan D. He's like one of the people who works for the Promising Scholars group that I'm a part of and one of the reasons I'm up here. Because he came to my school back in like senior or junior year and talked about the scholarship with me and like that's how I like was able to go further with it and be able to um…get some of the money for the scholarship to come here. And, I definitely went to him on one occasion where I had to make a decision about if I was going to take this summer class to like trying forward myself from having to stay next semester. And he was definitely a big help in that in terms of like guiding me to the right sites and like giving me some advice on how to go about doing that.

Xavier did not mention family members as part of his support system. During the individual interview and the focus group session, Xavier shared,

Actually, the person that really helped me during freshman year actually wasn't a male. It was the secretary of the art department. She actually helped me a lot… …she was like the only one in the art department that actually tried to actually help me or what not. Or whether I was struggling in classes or what not, she would like always like try to find different connections and stuff or what not that like try to help me and like just let me like know the technology better or how to reach my professors and this and that. And like even when I was having trouble just like trying to sign up for next semester, she helped me. She was trying to help me find scholarships and what not and all that, job opportunities a lot and all that. And it was like pretty good especially since like a lot of people in the art department wasn't like really giving you the time of day. And I guess like for a male role model, it would probably have to be my advisor, especially after like

138

incidents like with my teachers and stuff and not like actually like disagreeing like on

whether I was changing my major or not. He was actually like pretty helpful …helping

me or what not and all that stuff. And it kinda like boosted my confidence and all that.

And it kinda like was an intriguing encounter because like before, I never like really had

like a male role model, 'cause like I didn't really like grow up like with my dad my entire

life or what not. And I never really like got along with my mom's boyfriend, so it's like I

never had that like connection or what not.

Xavier also identified friends and his bible study teacher as part of his support network. He
noted,

I do go to like the Victory Church so like I'm definitely supported there. That's been a

church that's like my family was supported with for a while. And definitely my Bible

study teacher Albert is actually pretty cool. He's from a different branch. At the time,

during the freshman year, he was not a pastor. …he's pretty cool and what not. And like I

would say he probably became a little bit more than that. It's like I would even go as far

as to say that he has become a bit of a mentor as well.

Jeramiah reported that his support system consisted of his parents, a faculty member,
friends/peers, and extended family. He stated,

So, first my family, obviously my parents. Whenever I ran into a problem, I always called

them, and they would give me good advice. And then I would also go to this faculty

member, and they would help me. And then sometimes I would ask a peer, you know a

friend, if they took that course. And then, I would also… even like tutoring in the

library… like if I still couldn't understand it and I just needed that little extra reassurance,

then I would just go there. So, I would have to say finding a support system, that wasn't

really a problem for me. In fact, I think it's growing. So, like I have family, friends, even some of my friends I made at work, and even some of my extended family that took these courses back in the day. So, sometimes they would give me some of their notes they still have, which is really helpful. Or they just broke down the terms for me.

During the focus group session, Jeremiah shared,

So, my father - he definitely was a big help, especially during my freshman year because it was all new to me, it was new to him, having a kid in college. So, like there were certain assignments that, you know, I could just call him on the phone and he could help me with it. Even just like some financial parts to like if I had an outstanding balance with the bursar, he would just like kinda reassure me that like everything's going to be alright, or just like, "Even if I have to take out a loan…", 'cause like there were times where I was like, "Am I gonna be able to finish?" And then like more academic wise, my other cousins who like just finished school or are almost finishing school, some of the classes I'm taking are courses they took. So, like sometimes they would lend me their old notes that's like relatively similar to what I'm taking up here so that definitely helped me excel in some of my classes.

Malik reported he did not have much family support. He stated,

My biggest support system was my mom, which she has been whole life. She helped me like a lot like getting me stuff that I needed. If I run out of money, to like make sure I had food and stuff. … I really don't lean towards nobody else but my mom because like that's like really the only person that's going to be there for me at the end of the day. And my family… like far as my family, like friends and stuff…like they just tell me they're happy for me that I'm in school and not in the streets doing bad stuff, so that type of motivation

is good too. Far as faculty, there was one lady in the financial department who… she was

like my advisor, my financial advisor, my mom all in one. … I called up here one time

and I spoke to a couple different people before her and then one day I just spoke to her.

And the way like she was explaining stuff to me, and like breaking stuff down to me and

talking to me she like…she helped me and we like talked for literally for almost an hour

and a half. She like helped me through the numbers and everything will cost. She helped

me like not stress about stuff. She told me different ways I can go about things so that I

would be successful, and it worked. She's like a big reason why I got into IUP.

Although Malik identified the staff person in the financial aid office as someone who supported

him when he first enrolled, it did not seem to me that she was someone providing ongoing

support. Malik mentioned faculty members who were supportive and instrumental in

encouraging him to attend the University, but there was no mention of an ongoing relationship.

During the focus group session, Malik reported, "My first year, I really didn't have like a role

model or like a mentor I could like turn to. Far as like classes and getting help and stuff, it was

like more peer support."

Cameron reported that he did not need a great deal of support when he came to the

University. He stated,

I mean yeah… like family would you know check in on me and stuff like that and was

financial support if I really needed it. But other than that, I mean I didn't need too much

support to begin with. So, it wasn't like I needed support and didn't have it. It was just I

really didn't need it, so I didn't go seek more support. So, I kinda was fine… I was

content with the amount of support I was receiving.

When I asked Cameron about his mother supporting him, his explanation was more about her adjustment to him being away from home. He stated,

> Yeah, I mean at first her adjustment was me not being in the house even if like… 'cause I will always be out working anywhere, or I was out hanging out at home. It was still a matter of me being in the house at nighttime, so if that was even being around, being present. So once she got adjusted to me being a school, everything kinda calmed down with her side, I guess you can say. But she would always be there to check on me, and make sure I got enough money, or everything's going good, or I got enough food and stuff like that.

During the focus group session, Cameron shared,

> Since I came up here, I really haven't had a mentor, anyone to turn to for like direct support. I mean I always had family support and stuff like that, but I never had anyone I can go to ask questions, especially relating to college. So, I kinda just, you know, took that stance that I'm independent so I gotta do it all by myself and that's how it started from me applying here all the way until today. So it's (inaudible) all independent, but I feel like the more… the closer I get to graduating and getting more into the real world, the more questions I have and the more I feel like I should have somebody to ask questions to. So, I'm kind of being more into it 'cause like I said, I felt like I chose to embrace independence so I kind of sheltered away from even trying to find someone to talk to. So, but now I feel like my mind is starting to change about that, and I need to start asking questions. 'Cause I learned a lot without… like on accident from hearing people talk. So, I'm like, okay well maybe there's a lot more I don't know.

Although not all of the study participants had family members or friends as their main support system, they at least had someone they felt they could go to or speak to if they needed assistance. Three out of five of the young men identified family members, while the other two identified faculty and staff members, rather than family members. During the focus group, I asked the participants if they had anyone who was a mentor or role model for them that they felt helped support them during their freshman year. Four of the five respondents indicated they had someone they considered a role model. Interestingly, the student who stated he did not have a mentor or role model is excelling academically. However, he does recognize the importance of having someone who functions as a mentor or role model as part of his support system.

Theme 6: Social integration. First-generation college students, and especially, African American males, oftentimes have difficulty with socializing at PWIs during their freshman year. According to a vast amount of literature concerning Black males who are first-generation college students at PWIs, social integration is one of the most significant factors for their success on college campuses (Brooms, 2017; Bush & Bush, 2013, 2018;Haywood & Sewell, 2016; Howard, 2014; Palmer et al., 2014; Turner, 2015). The five respondents shared their experiences with "fitting in" at the University. All five students shared mostly positive experiences with social integration which either helped or hindered their academic achievement. An interesting point to note was that most of the students stated that the University had a reputation of being a "party school." However, those who were aware of that reputation did not find that to be true.

Brandon shared that he had an established group of friends and family when he came to campus. However, he found it difficult to make new friends. He stated,

I didn't come here not knowing anybody. Like my cousin goes here and along with her, two other people from my high school came up here as well last year. So, I kind of had an

established group of friends that I knew already, so that that was a big help in terms of

just like adjusting to college life and being able to know people and not feel alone.

When asked if he made any new friends during his first year at the University, he shared,

A little bit. I don't know why, but like for me trying to make… meet new people was way

harder than it was in high school, were high school I like I have a ton of friends and even

when I go back on breaks, I always hang out with them and stuff like that. But here it can

be weird 'cause it's just like if you make friends with somebody, they may not always be

in your major so it's like you may not always get to see them like that or establish like a

stronger friendship per se. But I have met a little bit more people outside of my current

group.

Brandon joined a few organizations during his freshman year. He stated,

Yeah, freshman year, I did join the NAACP and I met a couple of new people in that

group and it was good going there to know a lot more Black people on campus than I

had when I first came here. So, it was good to know that there was a pretty good amount

of us here at a PWI. And another thing I joined… I think that was the only club I joined

during freshman year, but I tried the Biology Club but I only joined it to see like how it

would benefit me as a Bio/Pre-Vet major, but I didn't really get too much out of it so I

left it. And I joined two more groups this semester during my sophomore year. And one

of them was the national Society of Honors and Leadership, I believe it's called. It's

basically like an honors fraternity, as they put it… but it's more so just like a way to be a

part of an academic group. And I met a few people in that, and then I also joined the

skateboard club as well just to like… I always wanted to like try skateboarding and just

pick up a new hobby, so I just chose that. And now I'm a part of that. I met a lot of

friendly people in that group too that were very welcoming.

Finally, when asked if he prefers to interact with any specific race or culture of people, Brandon

said,

> In terms of friendships, I don't really have like a specific set of people rather be friends
>
> with. I like to try and meet as many different people as I can. And, that would involve
>
> meeting people that are a different race than me.

> Xavier reported he experienced social awkwardness when he first arrived on campus. He

especially felt that way during the first few weeks of class because he was the only Black student

in his class. Xavier stated,

> I adapt pretty fast, but it was like I didn't like… I don't know… It just felt weird like
>
> being the only one in class. So, it was like, how do I like… You know like the teachers
>
> would like want you to get in groups and stuff and like actually like get to know each
>
> other but like, you know, what were we supposed to talk about? Yeah, it's like you know
>
> I don't like know how to connect with other people like that, especially like if they're like
>
> not from my background, my culture. I don't know how to like reach out to them. But I
>
> started to get more comfortable as well. Especially cause my friend Khalil was here
>
> during freshman year. He was the only other Black guy in the class with me. So, I was
>
> like, "Yeah I can talk to him." But, I did like branch out and start talking to a lot of other
>
> students and all that, learning different techniques and you know, stuff like that as an
>
> artist and you know just you know connecting with them.

Xavier did not socialize a lot during his first year on campus. He stated,

145

I mean nothing too much. Like I hang out with a couple of friends and what not. I did

join… like I was part of Anime Club for a while and what not. I was interested see how

other people have the same interests as you and what not.

I asked Xavier if he found the campus to be a welcoming environment. He responded,

I think it's like a pretty normal type of welcoming, you know. Like you feel uneasy at

first but, like the more you get into it, like it's okay. Like there are some people like you

just can't not get along with, but at the same time there are more people that you can get

along with, in my experience.

During the focus group session, Xavier shared,

I definitely felt like extremely awkward like first like coming here, especially like uh, like

during like orientation and after orientation like going into like class work first time. Like

you know like the teacher tells everybody to take a seat usually and all that. I would sit at

a table like and I would just be at the table by myself like they did literally try to avoid

me, like sit at other tables together or what not. And like definitely felt like I was being

avoided and what not, uh especially like even like a couple weeks into class where the

teacher's always and stuff. And I tried to ask one of my peers for help or what not. It was

like they seemed like slightly frightened or what not and stuff. … usually like they divert

their eyes a little bit or what not, or like they'll slightly move away or stuff like that.

Jeremiah reported he has made a few new friends. He stated, "I have made some friends

and continue to make new friends, so it's really nice… nothing to complain about so far."

Jeremiah joined one organization last year. He said, "My professor… he was very engaged just

as much as I was. And he even signed me up for this little organization for Epidemiologists last

146

year, and I'm still in it, so I really appreciate that." Finally, Jeremiah stated he does not "hang out and party"; he focuses on his education.

During the focus group session, Jeremiah stated,

I definitely do feel welcome especially since I was recruited in high school and I got like an admission offer on the spot. So, that made me feel relief. And then, like the first time I came up here was during like multicultural weekend. So, there were definitely a lot of people of color up here, so I definitely did feel like I was at home. Like, even just like (inaudible) even though like the surroundings or like since not everybody was up there during that time. Like I want to say like I didn't really feel out of place or what not until like first couple weeks of classes. Like when I had my first interaction with like you know, the professor.

Malik, by far, was the most social of all the young men who participated in the study. Although he participated in his courses, his focus seemed to be on having a good time, much like it was during his high school years. When asked about his transition to campus, Malik shared,

I like, connected with a lot of new people at the beginning of my first year here. …So, when I first got up here… (pauses) I like (laughs) I was happy 'cause I saw like a lot of pretty girls and stuff. So that was like a big thing for me. I was like, alright there was a lot of girls up here and you know, I might meet somebody. That wasn't my main like focus and the reason for coming to this school, but me being like, a single straight male, that's a good thing. Like I was just eager to meet new… make new friends. And I did and I'm glad that the friends that I did meet last year, I'm still close with them now. And we have like good connections and stuff. So, that was a big part of it that was good for me because before I came to school, like living in York city, I was like just so used to doing the same

147

stuff every day, going to work, going out on the weekends doing the same thing over and over.

Part of Malik's social integration was joining a student organization during his freshman year. He stated,

> So, I was able to meet new people… you know, make friends and hang out with people. I was involved in like different activities that were going on around campus. I ended up joining the SAA which is the Student Accountant Association last year. I've noticed that they actually changed it from SAA to something called Black Student Accountants. I guess they made a new organization to like, for students are Accountants that are like African American on campus.

Regarding friendships that he established last year, Malik stated some of his friends from last year were no longer at the University. He shared, "Yeah, well last year, there were more students than this year. There were a lot of different students. Like a lot of kids that I met last year aren't here this year." Malik also disclosed,

> As far as the peers, a lot of like, I noticed this whole semester, a lot of the other students like, it seems like once classes start everybody's like anti-social for real…just trying to listen to the teacher and hear what's going on. In a couple of my classes, I noticed like the teachers ask questions and everybody is like quiet. Nobody wants to answer or anything. Last year in a lot of my classes though was like a lot of group participation, a lot of like peer interaction with people. I don't know if last year, because there was more students here, there were different students here than there is this semester. Um, maybe that could be the reason. I felt like this semester has been bad for a lot of people 'cause I hear that a lot.

When asked about living on campus, Malik stated,

> The dorms… um…(laugh) I loved it actually. I kinda wish I still did live in the dorms,
> but it's just too expensive. Living in the dorms, it was like I was so close to everybody
> else. So that's why as opposed to this year, I live off of campus now and I barely come to
> campus unless I'm going to class or coming over here to work.

At the end of our individual interview, Malik seemed like he wanted to share something with me.
He stated,

> There's something that we haven't discussed that you didn't ask, but I wouldn't talk about
> it 'cause it's kind of like (snickers) a little inappropriate for this. Like how do I want to
> say it? But…(snickers) I don't know if it's appropriate. It's like (pause) just me like
> interacting with like different females and stuff like that.

After the recording ended, Malik shared that he was sexually active with a number of female
students as well as other personal information. He disclosed, "I was a 'ho' my first year. I slept
with a lot of girls." He talked about what was causing him to be so distracted this year. One thing
had to do with his mother not being able to support him financially as she did during his
freshman year. Also, because of his lack of motivation, he was not showing up to work on a
regular basis and was in danger of losing his job. The other major distraction was that he was
expecting two children by two different women at the same time back in his hometown. I
suggested Malik seek counseling in the Counseling Center, but he declined. He stated he needed
to focus on completing his courses.

Cameron was the least social of the study participants. He was very focused on
completing his degree as quickly as he can. Cameron shared,

I kinda came in, you know, hopped in running. I didn't like, you know, slack around or anything like that. I kind of just… I went in and said I'm going to bust out these four years, five years and just get it over with. And that was like my mind set coming in.

Cameron's description of himself demonstrates a level of self-awareness and self-discipline. He stated he usually keeps to himself and describes himself as "a bit of an introvert." Cameron shared, "I feel like I don't fit in anywhere. My mindset is different than most people, especially Black males." When asked to elaborate more, he stated,

I tend to isolate myself, so I don't really engage with peers a lot. From my first year of college, I was trying to be more outgoing, but that kind of didn't work out too well. But I noticed that like people around me would (pause)… choose to go do other things before getting their work done. And like I kinda didn't want to fall into that pattern of slacking off and doing work later and stuff like that. Because I knew that once I get caught up with other people doing stuff, then like there is no chance of me breaking out of it and going back to my work.

Cameron stated he did "hang out" at times, but his focus during the week was on his studies. He shared, "But the weekends… I kind of you know, laid back and partied and stuff. But during the week, I kinda just avoided interacting with anybody. I didn't find any gain in going out to have fun during the week." He joined a club on campus called Creating Higher Standards (CHS) but stopped attending after a while. He shared,

That was the one club that I decided to join and to stick with that was by choice with no benefit involved really. It kind of was just another group of minorities, mostly African American, students who kinda just came together to talk about what needs were or what people needed as support, or how everyone's doing in school, and if everyone was going

to classes and all that. Just making sure like the Black community is staying together and pushing each other to keep moving forward instead of slacking off. … I started with it at the beginning of the semester and then slowly faded out 'cause I found less and less benefit. They tried to, you know, set guidelines and making an official program and the leaders of the program fell back on those requirements. Like for example, they were talking about meetings start at 7:00, but the organizers wouldn't even show up until 7:15 or 7:30. That just felt like it wasn't no actual benefit. I kind of felt like they were just winging it to just have some type of organization to say they were doing something instead of actually doing it for the benefit of the other students to make sure that they were.

I asked Cameron about his interactions with other students on campus. He stated,

I mean, most of the time I tried to join clubs. I tried to become socially active, I tried to break out of the habit of just being to myself all the time, but that… like I said didn't really turn out well. So, for the most part, I would only come out of my dorm to just like go eat, or if it's the weekend. So, I really didn't put too much time and focus into socializing with other people or trying to make friends or anything like that.

I asked if he was the same this year. He stated,

Yeah, this year I'm even more introverted than before, so I'm kinda just really in my dorm. I either play video games or do homework. Just sticking it out until the semester is over. …I've actually partied a lot less this semester too. I've been going home to Pittsburgh a lot. So, I've been going back and forth, or I'll go to Philly or just, you know, I've been traveling a lot more.

After transcribing the interview with Cameron, I felt I needed to probe a little more about his decision to keep to himself. I decided to reach out to him again to ask why he chose to isolate himself from other students. He explained,

I feel like I don't fit in anywhere. My mindset is different than most people, especially Black males. It's kind of like… well, I had a girlfriend too, so that kind of stops the friend thing from happening, in most cases. And the guys like… the guys that I know, and always knew like their focus is on the social highlights of college, which I can't really, you know, participate too much in that to same extent because I'm in a relationship. So, that kind of like drew me away from that. I didn't want to be a part of that, just constantly having to be around that. And then I would just be sitting there. And I could have fun all the way up to that point and it's just like, what's the point in being here if you can't, you know, have the full experience of fun? And I couldn't meet anybody that wasn't about trying to do that. So, like after parties they were like trying to like hook-up with of other females, and like I can't do that (chuckling). And then female friends kinda just had to go because, you know, just how relationship was working, I guess. …There's no such thing as a friend, female friend especially like in this hook-up culture, so I kinda didn't wanna… I knew that I can hold a boundary, but you know just the general idea of it, as I would agree most males wouldn't hold that boundary. …Yeah, I just really don't fit in, so that's how I feel.

However, Cameron did say that the situation was beginning to change; he has made some friends who are like-minded. He went on to say,

I'm starting to again… I finally met someone who is more about their education. I'll put it like that. And not all about that. And they have a girlfriend too, so it's kind of like, okay

152

then we can be cool. And they have a little friend group, so…That might be a start of something, but other than that, it's mostly… I get most of my social interaction on Xbox. And then like that's kind of like my peaceful place where I forget about school, I forget about everything. I just play the game and like relieve stress and stuff.

The University has a Center for Multicultural Student Leadership and Engagement (MCSLE) whose purpose is to provide programming and inclusive student services between diverse student populations and recognized student organizations. During the focus group session, I asked the students if they were familiar with the center and if they were involved with any of the programs offered by MCSLE. All of the respondents were aware of the center, but none of them had any involvement. I also asked the students if they thought the University should provide programming to make African American males feel more welcomed on campus. Some of the participants indicated they felt welcomed on campus. In regard to special programming aimed at Black males, I received mixed responses. Cameron stated,

> I don't think that there should be anything extra for Black males to feel more welcomed, in terms of the admission process. I feel like everyone being treated the same does enough for you to feel the same. And that's kind of like the end goal is to just be equal. I feel like if you try to do something to support Black males or minorities in general, like you know it's kind of like you're pointing out the obvious and it's kind of counter or doing opposite of what you really want it to. It's kind of pointing them out rather than including them. I understand you know, it's always been more for White people, but I still don't think that you should counter that and start making more for Black people like all the time. I don't think it should be like, "Oh hey, Black people… come do… like this is for you." Like I don't think that's how it should be. So to answer if there's anything else

153

IUP should be doing, the only thing I would suggest is more openness to the culture, and

what I mean by that is like we only get like one event… like the concert for us to

experience and to enjoy truly from like you know, just our general culture and stuff like

that. We don't really get too many other Black individuals or just you know, Black

popular people coming to campus. But like all the other sub-events throughout the year

surround predominantly like White culture, whatever that means. But like everything is

not meant for Black people like for example the one concert… I can't remember his

name… the entire Oak Grove was just lined up with a whole bunch of White girls.

Yeah… like they had Jason McCartney, David Dobrik. …well-known people in the

White community. So, I feel like there should be more well-known Black people coming

here to talk. Not just artists… people, so…That's the only other suggestion I would have.

Jeremiah shared,

I definitely do feel welcome especially since I was recruited in high school and I got like

an admission offer on the spot. So, that made me feel relief. And then, like the first time I

came up here was during like multicultural weekend. So, there were definitely a lot of

people of color up here, so I definitely did feel like I was at home. Like, even just like

(inaudible) even though like surroundings or like since not everybody was up here during

that time. Like I want to say like I didn't really feel out of place or what not until like first

couple weeks of classes. …far as program-wise like me personally, didn't seek anything

out. Like um… when I was up here for multicultural weekend, they were promoting a lot

of programs that they did have and a lot of resources too.

Xavier had a different experience. He stated,

I definitely didn't like… I definitely felt like extremely awkward like first like coming

here, especially like uh, like during like orientation and after orientation like going into

like class for the first time. Like you know like the teacher tells everybody to take a seat

usually and all that. I would sit at a table like and I would just be at the table by myself

like they [White students] did literally try to avoid me, like sit at other tables together or

what not. And like definitely felt like I was being avoided and what not, uh especially

like even like a couple weeks into class… I tried to ask one of my peers for help or what

not. It was like they seemed like slightly frightened or what not and stuff. …usually like

they divert their eyes a little bit or what not or like they'll slightly move away or stuff like

that. …I don't see it like how IUP can actually do anything about that 'cause it's more

like just a student-to-student social type of thing… just like getting to like feel more

comfortable around people.

Malik shared,

I feel like, IUP besides like the education aspect of IUP, it's a business also because they

are making money off all the students. So, like you know like when you apply for… and

with any school or any other PWI too, you know like how you apply and then they send

you brochures and tell you all the good stuff about it. Like they don't… I don't feel like

because all of us got accepted, they sent all of us stuff through the mail. It's not like they

tried to send only the White students' stuff. So, it's basically like a business thing like

they're making money off of us, so they don't really care. There can be more programs

and stuff set up up here for like minority students to like interact more with everybody.

That's just what I feel like. They don't really care because they're making money off of

everybody. It's higher than that then a racial thing. But there can be like more programs

155

and stuff set up in institution for minority students and stuff like that. But overall, I feel

like this school is better… is good though because this school has like a lot of more stuff

throughout the semesters for all students to interact with each other and then other

schools I hear about. Like they just had a spa day and stuff like that for the end of the

semester. They do that every year, every fall, I think. Just little stuff like that that's good

for the students to interact. And like he said, IUP can't really do nothing about that. It's

based on everybody inside… like the students and stuff, just be more social and decide if

they want to interact with people or not, friends and stuff like that. It's really based on

yourself for real.

Xavier agreed with Malik's point of view about the University being a business. He stated,

I want to touch on what he was talking about…basically about the programs with stuff

and all that. And like I feel that like school like is a business. Basically, that goes for like

a lot of schools or what not. So, I just feel like IUP… like they try to like to do program

stuff. I don't know if ya'll see those emails and stuff where they be having those little

meetings and what not. And like they talk about what should we do for this or that. And I

feel like that is productive in a way because like students get to say like what happened to

the school. But at the same time I feel like it's counterproductive because like it's not

enough like people like who actually know business or stuff and all that, that's like really

trying to like implement those ideas into what they are. …And I think that goes for

programs as well for like minorities or not. 'Cause like as much as like we'll try to get

them, there's nobody to implement that and try to like make that a actual thing for people

like us to be a more community-based than academic and financial.

Brandon indicated that he felt welcomed when he first encountered a staff member prior to going to campus. He shared,

>I guess that kind of goes back to when I was mentioning Donovan D. when he came to my school. Just seeing like someone who… just seeing another Black person come represent IUP at my [high] school definitely did make me feel comfortable 'cause it made me feel like it wasn't… maybe the school wasn't entirely PWI. And just like having him there just to like help me understand like the scholarship and just like IUP in general was helpful. And it did make me feel a lot more welcome coming into that school. I think in terms of like the Promising Scholars, they played a big part in making me feel welcome here 'cause that scholarship group is made of a lot of people of color, and most minorities in general are in that group. And just like some of the other organizations on campus like the NAACP, that also helped as well.

Regarding programming for African American males, Brandon stated,

>I agree that there probably could be more programs than that and more programs that can be like promoted more, as opposed to like some of the other things on campus like other fraternities and all that. And just like other groups that aren't really focused on like the minorities of the school. So, I guess there could be like more promotion of things like that so that people can know more about what else this the school can offer in terms of making them feel more involved.

All of the young men shared their experiences of social interaction on campus during their freshman year. While two of the five young men found it more difficult to make new friends for different reasons, all of them shared positive experiences. Additionally, all of them

157

joined different groups and organizations which is contrary to what the body of literature reports concerning first-generation African American males.

Theme 7: Microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are defined as "commonplace verbal and nonverbal slights that communicate denigrating or demeaning messages to people of color based on their racial group membership" (Jackson, 2017, p. 1181). According to microaggression theory, people of color and other minority groups experience microaggressions at work, at school, in the community, and in media. Racial microaggressions are presented in various forms, including microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Henfield, 2011; Hotchkins, 2016; Jackson, 2017). During the focus group meeting, I explained what microaggressions were and asked the students if they experienced any types of microaggressions during their first year at the University. Four out of the five students shared experiences in which they felt uncomfortable because of their race or experienced some sort of microaggression.

Jeremiah shared he felt there was racial tension between himself and some of his professors:

> Last year, there was actually some tensions between like me and certain professors. Like for certain assignments, if I was confused, I felt like they would just give me that look as if I was like stupid or what not for just going up to them and asking something, when in all actuality like another student [White student] would come up and basically ask verbatim what I just ask the professor. So like I feel like I have to work, you know, twice as hard as that student and like teach myself the material in order like have one up because I just want to like be secure in my words and I don't want them to like go and pull something where like they would give me a grade where I didn't deserve.

Regarding a different professor, Brandon shared,

The professor was decent. Like, I'll say it's like one of those professors that's like a good

people person but not good like teaching wise. So, whenever I go like that at the end of

class or even like reach out by email, I'm just getting like not even an answer to my

question.

I asked Brandon if he thought race had anything to do with the interaction he had with the

professor. He replied,

I think it did. Because like I would see certain students go up at the end of class, talk to

this professor, and then he seems more dedicated to helping them. But then when it's my

turn, and I'm showing like hey, I want to grasp and keep this material, it's just like he

thinks I'm joking.

He also shared that he felt disrespected by his academic advisor. He shared,

So, I didn't have this problem with the professor in a class; it was actually with my

academic advisor, who I really want to get away from. Because when I selected my

program… first of all I'm a public health major…and that's still relatively new. And I

was like informed that I was like the only African American, especially a male, going

into the major too. …So, I already did feel some type of way like, "Wow. I am the only

African American going into this field." …So, like when my advisor… picking out

certain classes or even the classes I had last year too that I didn't do so good in 'cause of

like professors that didn't feel as engaged as I was… It was like, her whole demeanor,

like just like her body language whenever she was talking to me. Like staring at me with

those piercing blue eyes, just making it seem like, again like I feel stupid, but I'm like at

the same time, you wasn't in those classes with me, you didn't know how the coursework

was or even like how that professor basically tried to downplay me. And she didn't have

159

to say like an actual term like, she would say like, "Oh the class… that wasn't so good, huh?" And then like sometimes I feel like she's trying to like make me change my area of concentration because like my area concentration requires a lot of mathematics and science. So, I feel like she's trying to like get me to shift from that or even like change my whole major completely. …I'm like, no I've been dedicated to this field since I was in high school so, I'm not letting anything get in the way that or make me think otherwise.

Cameron reported that he did not feel racial tension on campus until he joined the business school's honors program. He stated,

At first, it really wasn't like too much racial tension or like any like type of feelings like that. But after I had joined the business honors cohort, I walked in and realized I was the only Black male. And after that, once I started taking classes with them, that's when racial tensions started like kicking in more. 'Cause there was only one other minority at first. And then eventually we had a Black female come in, but like still is like everyone's like wondering why you're there. And it's just like, it's honor so it's just like do you really deserve to be here, or it's like… I mean once I got to know them more, that kind of changed, but it's still the same for like some people. But I still feel like they look at me like what are you doing here? But other than that, I mean I haven't really had too many other kind of like thoughts about not feeling good enough or any insecure thoughts about being at a PWI.

Brandon identified with what Cameron shared. He stated,

I'm a bio/pre-vet major and there aren't too many like people of color within that major. It's usually just non people of… like White females for the majority and like some White males. But overall, it's like very few people have color within a major like that. And

160

maybe at first, I felt a little bit like out of place, just 'cause like I didn't see much

representation of me within the major, even like within the teachers. But I just took it as a

way to like forward myself and just like be able to be that difference and be that

representation. That way I didn't like have to feel out of place, but like be able to feel in

place 'cause I made a place for myself.

Xavier also identified with their points of view. He stated,

I kind of like feel that as well, like sometimes like you gotta like find your like place and

that. 'Cause like, when I first started, I was the only like Black person in the class period;

like there was nobody else. And like being an art major already like you already like not

have (inaudible) with other people around you 'cause it's mostly females more than it's

males anyway. So, that's already like a discomfort in like, you're the only Black person

here so there's not much that you can do. And like most of those people come from like

those small towns like hour or what not away, so they already like have like their little

groups and stuff and all that...

As part of our conversation about microaggressions, we had a candid discussion about the use of

the "N word" on campus. I asked the group how they felt about people, specifically White people

saying it. Xavier shared,

Definitely during my first year. ...my roommate and I went to a party one time, a couple

of times, and a lot of times, usually enjoying the music or whatever. I do like here them

[White students] like saying the N word and stuff and what not. I usually ignore them

because it's not like pertaining to me. I usually don't like try to take offense to it

especially being up in like a site where it's like, this ain't really where I'm from, so

there's no point in even acting out like that.

Malik shared,

> I see it all the time, even now like when White kids go to parties and stuff, they play
> Black music and they're comfortable with saying the N word. Like they just say it 'cause
> it's comfortable. Not all of them though. …There are some White kids up here, like they
> won't say it around another Black person. And then there are some, they just say it
> because the music is like… They listen to the same music as us, so they hear everybody
> else saying it, and they just think it's okay for them to say it too. …To be honest, I mean I
> like (pause)… I know that they're just… most of the time they're drunk, but they're just
> listening to the music just like everybody else. … I don't think nobody's bold enough to
> just to (chuckles) come out and say it or just some racial slurs towards one of us.

Brandon challenged Malik's point of view. He shared,

> I feel like in a situation where it's like in a party setting, I really felt awkward 'cause it's
> just like there's so many things that take place. Because like when… like you can't really
> just like stop the party and be like you can't say that because like so much going on. But
> then it's just like… people are pretty capable of like not saying it. So, 'cause like you can
> sing a song without saying certain parts of the song, so it's really just like a choice. An
> even if there's the excuse of them possibly being drunk, like that just really reveals like
> the true you in a way, in like your words are just like not filtered anymore, so you're just
> saying whatever. …So they're using the excuse that that they were drunk and that's the
> reason why they did it kind of doesn't help in a sense because it's like basically saying…
> it's basically revealing what they really want to say.

Xavier shared,

Yeah, …like sometimes like I do like feel a little irritated when I hear that as well. And actually, there was like an incident last year. When it happened, like he was saying the N word in (inaudible) or whatever. Like he gave me like that look like 'What?' I'm like…He came to me whatever or what not… like I was like I don't know… like he seemed like really defensive or what not about it and I wasn't like paying it no mind, but at the same time it's like (inaudible)… You know like it does show like your true self, but then it shows like… 'cause you're so defensive about it, like "You know like partly what you're doing."' …And like that upsets me even more a little bit. …I don't know… It just really just gets on my nerves especially like when they was like trying to like provoke you or what not 'cause they just think that your like just going to like act out and just like swing on them. And I'm just not going to feed into all that…

Cameron shared an experience he had in class with a White, female professor actually saying the N-word in class. He shared,

Malik kind of covered all the like the social aspect of like what I agree with. However, like academically, up here I really haven't experienced too much microaggressions like directly toward me. It's more like when I step off campus around here is where more microaggressions… like I see it more. When I interact with people who have nothing to do with IUP or anything like that. I remember this time when someone rode past me and said something like the N- word or something, just riding in her car. It was a little kid. I was like, "Are you kidding me?" It was a 10-year-old, like screaming out the window while someone was driving. I've been watched at Walmart at the self-checkout, like all the time. I guess that can count too. …In the classroom, I'd say the worst like experience, in terms of like… I mean I don't know if you would consider it a microaggression

163

considering context…But my history teacher used the hard R in class while talking about like… you know like slavery and stuff like that… and African American history. So, I kind of felt like that wasn't necessary, especially being a White teacher. That was pretty much one of the only cases where I just was like shocked as soon as it happened. I was never going to expect it… I've never ever thought the teacher would even have the guts to say that. So, that was probably the biggest thing.

I asked Cameron if he thought the professor said it for shock value. He responded,

I don't know. I guess it was to make it more powerful, but I guess… I mean I feel like history would be… I mean the knowledge would still be the same if you used "N word" compared to the hard R.

Malik stated he did not experience any racial tension or microaggressions during his freshman year. He shared,

For me, like last year, like interacting with different professors and stuff, I've seen it like firsthand with some like minority students that would just like… they weren't treated as good as like White students, but that's with certain professors though. But I didn't have that problem. I felt like all of my professors were… mostly all my professors were foreign anyway. I only had like one Caucasian professor last year, but I heard stories about it, like Black kids and stuff struggling in classes and what not.

There was an incident that occurred shortly after the start of the fall semester in which a White male student posted a recording of himself on social media of an angry rant about African Americans, where he used a great deal of profanity and racial slurs. All of the study participants and I were aware of the situation, which was discussed during the focus group session. Brandon, who joined the NAACP during his freshman year, shared during our individual interview,

I don't know if you heard about it. It was like an incident where a former IUP student had

said like racial slurs online or something like that. Yeah it was that incident and I never

got the chance to go to those meetings where they were talking to the Board about it, but

I feel like that could have been handled better. He doesn't go here anymore, but just

'cause like he left and everything but the school themselves didn't have a hand in that.

They basically said they couldn't like expel him for that, so I think they could have

handled that more and just like considering certain rules that should be put in place to

tackle situations like this.

I asked Brandon how he thought the University should have handled the situation. He replied,

I feel like they should have had a hand in like expelling him instead of him just leaving

on his own. Because there are other schools that don't take racial issues such as these

likely [*sic*] and they will expel when something like this does happen. And the fact that

this school doesn't, just shows that there needs to be an update and like the sort of rules

and regulations that they have. Yeah…'cause this most likely will not be the last time for

this to happen and I feel like as a PWI, that doesn't just have White students, they should

have rules and regulations in place for racial incidences like this. Because that makes a

lot of people of color on this campus uncomfortable. So, if they're not properly tackling

it, then that could mean losing a lot of their diversity within this school.

Other respondents shared that they were aware of the matter, but none of them really seemed to

be bothered by it or have an opinion about how the University should have handled it.

While the five respondents shared positive experiences in their individual interviews and

the focus group session, one thing that was abundantly clear was that most of them experienced

microaggressions inside or outside of the classroom, or off campus in the community. Harper et

al. (2011) conducted a study of 52 African American male resident assistants who attended various PWIs. Results of the study indicated the students experienced psychological stress due to racial microaggressions and racial stereotypes. As a result, they limited the amount of engagement they had on campus and in campus leadership activities. Although the students in this study experienced microaggressions on and off campus, those experiences did not seem to interfere with their academics or level of campus engagement or impact their overall opinions about campus climate. However, this does not mean other students of color would respond in the same manner.

Identified Themes and African American Male Theory

AAMT (Bush & Bush, 2013, 2018) was the theoretical framework used to examine the lived experiences of the five young men who participated in this study. AAMT is a complex, meta-level theory developed by Lawson V. Bush and Edward C. Bush in 2013 (see Figure 1). I used AAMT to frame and help make sense of the experiences of the study participants and examine racial disparities they may have experienced at the University. The theory consists of six tenets that comprise the guiding principles used to explore the experiences of African American males. The following will elucidate how the themes identified in the study and tenets of AAMT intersect and make sense of the students' experiences.

Tenet 1. The first tenet of AAMT tenet informs us of who the students are, how they were influenced by the environment in which they were raised, and why they chose their individual life paths. The experiences of the study participants intersect with this tenet based on the descriptions they provided in Themes 1 (preparedness for college), 3 (motivation and persistence), and 5 (support systems).

The first theme describes the students' opinions about their preparedness for college. This theme is best analyzed from the interrelated structures of the first tenet which is the most complex of the six tenets. It states, "The individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events, phenomena and trajectory of African American boys' and men's lives are best analyzed using an ecological systems approach" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 6; 2018, p. 2). This approach is based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of human development which demonstrates how multidimensional environmental systems such as family economic conditions, parent involvement, where families live, relationships within family, and social networks interconnect and influence the lives of men and boys. This approach also involves a connection between the cultural and economic conditions of where and how individuals live and sociohistorical conditions and events that occur over a lifetime. Wood and Palmer (2015) posit the different intersections are what shape the lives of African American men and boys (p. 40).

The multidimensional environmental system informs the biological, psychological, and physical make up of each student and helps to explain how each young man is influenced by their environment and why they chose their individual paths in life. All five of the students grew up in urban areas (exosystem): two in Pittsburgh, two in Philadelphia, and one in York City, PA, where approximately 59% of the population is minority, i.e., Black or Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). A well-known fact is that most urban areas in this country have poor K-12 school districts (Bell, 2015; Brown, 2013; Dancy, 2013; Harper et al., 2009; Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2010; Palmer and Maramba, 2011; Palmer et al., 2014; Savas, 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2015). Yet four of the five students had K-12 educations that guided them to where they are now (e.g., microsystem). Four out of five of them attended magnet schools during their high school years. Jeremiah's parents enrolled him in private schools from K through the eighth grades. From the

ninth through the twelfth grades, he attended a magnet school. Brandon and Cameron attended public schools but were always exemplary students academically (e.g., inner microsystem). Both attended magnet schools: one STEM related and the other an IB school. Xavier was exposed to higher education during his elementary and secondary years in school by visiting college campuses through youth art programs (e.g., outer microsystem). Malik was the only student who did not have a positive K-12 educational experience. However, he made a decision that he did not want to continue to live in the environment in which he was raised. After being released from incarceration, he decided to move away from the area and enroll in college as a way out of what he referred to as "the ghetto" (e.g., macrosystem). Some of the students shared their parents' role in directing their paths to higher education. Brandon, Jeremiah, Xavier, and Cameron shared that their parents had an expectation that they would attend college. Xavier wanted to attend an art and design college, but his mother wanted him to attend the University with his sister. These are all examples of influence by the outer microsystem.

The outer microsystem is also connected with Theme 5, support systems. All of the young men in the study talked about family and friends who supported and encouraged them. Brandon, Jeremiah, and Cameron were raised in two-parent homes, and Xavier and Malik were raised by their mothers in single-parent homes. Brandon and Jeremiah talked about support from their parents, as well as other family members and friends. Xavier and Malik reported receiving support from faculty and staff on campus and from friends; they spoke less about receiving support from family. Xavier was the only student that mentioned a connection with his church (e.g., mesosystem) and religion. He stated that he liked reading the Bible more than listening to sermons. Also, Xavier had a mentor-like person at his church that he considered part of his support system.

Tenet 2. The second principle of AAMT is as follows: "There is something unique about being male and of African descent" (Bush & Bush, 2013 p. 8, 2018, p. 4). I believe this tenet encapsulates all of the themes identified in this study. Each of the five young men portrayed their individual selves and how they were different and unique from each other even though they are all African American, of the same generation (ages 19-23 at the time of the interviews), from urban areas in the same region of the country, and having mostly similar educational experiences.

Although the experiences of the young men in this study are similar, their individuality is apparent in their approach to life, how they present, the way they think, and how they respond to situations or the environment. Wood and Palmer (2015) suggest strategies when considering institutional change regarding Black males on campus. One of the strategies is for institutions to consider personal factors and the unique experience of Black men as filters when focusing on influencing outcomes in postsecondary education (p. 78). Additionally, it is important to give agency to this population of students by allowing them to share their experiences in their own voices (Howard, 2014).

Tenet 3. The third tenet of AAMT indicates that "there is a continuity and continuation of African culture, consciousness, and biology that influence the experiences of African American boys and men" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 8; 2018, p. 4). This tenet is mostly related to Theme 6, social integration. While the respondents in this study did not voice a strong need for the University to recognize importance of culture and consciousness with the African American population on campus, they did state it is important to have more opportunities to have persons of color come to campus for student events rather than mostly White entertainers or events that seem to be geared toward White students. This tenet functions as a reminder for scholars that the

169

study of Black men and boys should be anchored in an understanding of African culture because of the continued influence it has on them. This study did not directly focus on what being a Black male student on a predominately White campus meant to the study participants, but that topic could be part of future research.

Tenet 4. The fourth tenet of AAMT states, "African American boys and men are resilient and resistant" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 8; 2018, p. 5). This tenet suggests that Black men and boys have an innate desire for self-determination and can rise above adversity and educational challenges. Brooms (2017) conducted a study of Black male collegians and shared strategies that allowed students to be resilient and persist in college. The results of the study indicated that their resilience strategies were not only imbedded in their own individual efforts but were connected to their involvement on campus (p. 147).

This tenet and can be directly applied to Themes 3 (motivation and persistence) and 4 (challenges) of this study. The results of the study indicated that each study participant shared experience in K-12 and their first year of college that demonstrate resilience and or resistance. For instance, Cameron shared that while in his junior year of high school, he witnessed his father having a heart attack and dying. During his senior year, he broke his arm in two places and required several surgeries. Cameron also shared that he experienced a great deal of stress as a student in an IB high school. These situations combined affected his academic performance and his GPA dropped to 2.2. By the time he graduated from high school, Cameron recovered and brought his GPA up to a 2.7. After taking a gap year between the end of high school and the beginning of college, he was able to recover, regroup, and prepare himself for his first year in college. Cameron received a full ride academic scholarship, as well as other scholarships and

grants, and as a result does not have any financial responsibilities in regard to paying for college. This is a clear example of an African American male's level of resiliency.

Another example of a Black male rising above life's obstacles and adversity is Malik, who was incarcerated during his senior year of high school. He realized while he was incarcerated that he could change the trajectory of his life. Malik reported that although he was always "good with school," in high school he was not focused on his education and was frequently suspended for bad behavior. After being released from incarceration, he decided that he did not want to follow the path that many of his friends followed and become a repeat offender. This demonstrated his personal level of self-determination, motivation, resilience, and resistance.

Tenet 4 also supports the resilience the study participants showed in overcoming challenging experiences that they faced. Brandon, Jeremiah, and Xavier shared the academic challenges that they experienced during their first year of college. They decided to either seek tutoring, participate in study groups, ask for assistance from peers, meet with their professors, or adopt different study practices. Most of them did not try to resolve their issues or deal with those challenges on their own. Cameron was opposed to seeking tutoring during his freshman year; he decided to figure things out on his own. Malik knew he needed tutoring for some of his freshman courses but relied on other classmates rather than asking for assistance from faculty or university staff. Other challenges that the study participants shared were related to personal or interpersonal challenges such as interactions with faculty and making new friends on campus, or to financial challenges that they faced.

Tenet 5. This principle states, "Race and racism, coupled with classism and sexism, have a profound impact on every aspect of the lives of African American boys and men" (Bush &

171

Bush, 2013, p. 9; 2018, p. 6). Racism in the U.S. is pervasive, and it has been for centuries

(Dancy, 2013; Dancy & Brown, 2008; Fultz & Brown, 2008; Howard, 2014; Lopez & Burciaga,

2014). This tenet is directly related to Theme 7, microaggressions. Most of the participants in

this study shared experiences with microaggressions or racism that they experienced inside or

outside of the classroom. They also shared their opinions about racially related incidents that

occurred on or off campus. At the start of the academic year, the University was faced with

having to address a very public display of racism when a White male student posted a video of

himself on social media using racial slurs against African Americans. The study participants and

I were aware of the situation. Only one student shared that he felt the University did not handle

the matter well and more discussions should have happened on campus after the event took

place. The other respondents seemingly were not bothered by it. I wondered was it because

situations like that are commonplace? Or perhaps because it was not directed at any particular

person, it was just disregarded? For some of the study participants, racial experiences were

identified in Theme 4 (challenges); others were detailed in Theme 7 (microaggressions). For

example, Xavier shared that during his first few weeks in class, White students would avoid

interacting with him. It was not unusual for him to find himself sitting at a table alone. He stated,

"They're in their safe box with each other, so they don't like, feel like reaching out." Another

instance he described was when there was a discussion about a research project of background

and family history. There were only two African Americans in the class. When asked to share

information about their research, the professor made them feel awkward by telling them they

"should go deeper than that" in describing their backgrounds to include slavery, but the professor

did not make the same suggestion to the White students in the class. Jeremiah shared his

experience with his academic advisor and how he felt, based on her demeanor and her tone when

172

speaking with him, that she did not like African Americans. He also shared during the focus group that he felt racial tension between himself and a few of his professors.

Although the students had experiences that were related to race, they did not allow those incidents to interfere with why they are at the University and what they are planning to accomplish. One explanation is that they have become accustomed to these types of microaggressions and have developed coping mechanisms to mitigate them. This is yet another example of how Black males are resistant and resilient.

Tenet 6. This final tenet of AAMT states, "The focus and purpose of study and programs that concern African American boys and men should be in the pursuit of social justice" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 9; 2018, p. 6). The purpose of this tenet to is achieve social justice for Black men and boys, considering the historical and current culture, consciousness, and community in which they exist. This study did not focus on social justice, directly. However, the overarching purpose of the study was to understand the lived experiences of African American males at a PWI, which included racial experiences. By sharing racialized experiences, we can determine what types of improvements PWIs need to make so that this population of students can persist toward their academic goals. I would suggest any impactful efforts to attain equity for persons, and especially for African American men, at PWIs is supporting efforts to achieve social justice.

Summary

Chapter 5 described the findings of the study, more specifically, the lived experiences of the five young men who participated in the study. Seven themes were identified as a result of analyzing the data gathered during the individual interviews and the focus group session. The seven themes included (a) preparedness for college, (b) adjustment, (c) motivation and persistence, (d) challenges, (e) support systems, (f) social integration, and (g) microaggressions.

The experiences of each student were shared in detail. The seven themes were then connected to

the six tenets of African American male theory to demonstrate the intersections of the themes

and the tenets of AAMT. These intersections support the overall premise of the theory that Black

males need their own framework because of their unique life experiences.

Chapter 6 will provide a summary of the study, conclusions, implications, and

recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 6: Summary and Findings of the Study, Conclusion, Implications, and

Recommendations

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of five first-generation African American males during their freshman year at a rural, mid-Atlantic PWI. Chapters 1 through 3 provided a background of the problem and theoretical framework for the study, a thorough review of the literature supporting the problem and purpose of the study, and the qualitative methodology used to conduct the study, respectively. Chapter 4 provided an introduction of the University and each study participant, while Chapter 5 presented the findings of the data based on the shared lived experiences of the study participants. This chapter will provide the summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

African American male theory (AAMT) was used in this study as the theoretical lens to study the lived experiences of five first-generation African American males during their freshman year at a rural, PWI. AAMT is a theoretical framework developed by Bush and Bush (2013, 2018) to study Black males while considering the uniqueness of being African American and male and understanding the racial disparities that they may experience. AAMT facilitates an opportunity to gain a deeper level of understanding of the historical, psychological, and social contexts of the lives that African American males live.

Counter-storytelling was used in this study as a method to share the students' stories in their voices from their personal perspectives. Counter-storytelling gives agency to Black males to share their narratives that counter the deficit perspective about their identities in which they are frequently considered "culturally and socially deficient, uneducated, unmotivated, prone to violence, and anti-intellectual" (Howard, 2014, p. 65). It should be noted that Bush and Bush

(2018) recommend that scholars refrain from using deficit words such as *counter* or *other* when sharing the stories of African American men and boys. Their stories are not counter to any story; they are just their stories (p. 12).

The research question for this study is: What are the lived experiences of first-generation African American males who completed their freshman year of college at a rural, mid-Atlantic PWI in regard to their transition to the college environment as it relates to their level of preparedness, their adjustment, persistence, support systems, and racial experiences on campus? The study's five participants were all traditional college age, from 19 to 23 years old. Individual interviews and a focus group session were conducted in the first semester of the sophomore year, using semi-structured interview questions. Digital recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis of the data yielded seven themes: (a) preparedness for college, (b) adjustment, (c) motivation and persistence, (d) challenges, (e) support systems, (f) social integration, and (g) microaggressions. The themes were then analyzed through the lens of AAMT, and the intersections of the six tenets and the identified themes were discussed.

Summary of the Findings

Findings of the study illustrate that, contrary to the extant body of literature, African American males do not always have negative experiences at predominately White institutions. The young men in this study reported many experiences that are counter to what has been reported in scholarly literature. Palmer et al. (2014) report in *Black Male Collegians: Increasing Access, Retention, and Persistence in Higher Education* that Black students who attend PWIs experience a cold, unwelcoming climate and may feel alienated and have unsupportive and strained relationships with faculty. Palmer et al. additionally report that Black males are usually

educationally underprepared and have little to no family or community support. They sometimes experience a disconnect between the culture of their community and the culture of higher education, i.e., not "fitting in" to the campus environment and feeling as if they do not belong at the institution. Shelton (2011) suggests first-generation students are less likely to meet with advisors, participate in study groups, spend time with college friends, or join student organizations and clubs. Wood and Palmer (2015), Amechi et al. (2016), and Brooms (2017) report on the existing literature that Black males at PWIs are academically underprepared, have disproportionately higher attrition and lower graduation rates than other student groups, are disengaged and experience alienation, and do not have supportive relationships with faculty. Further, they find that Black male collegians have difficulty developing coping strategies to help them fit in and be academically successful.

The participants in this study indicated they felt welcomed on campus and did not feel alienated. While not every experience the students shared was positive, they reported far more positive experiences than negative ones. Four out of the five students felt prepared for college level work. They attended magnet high schools and took AP courses in a college preparatory curriculum. According to Palmer et al. (2014), few Black male students are allowed to take AP courses. While not all of the students performed well in the AP courses, some of them benefitted from the experience during their freshman year. Most of the students sought academic support during their freshman year from faculty and tutors or participated in study groups. At the end of their freshman year, two of the five study participants had GPAs in the B+ range or higher; the other three students had GPAs in the B- to C+ range. All of the respondents joined some type of organization on campus either related to their academic program or a more social organization. Also, all of the students reported that they had groups of friends and faculty members that they

felt were supportive. These are examples of how the results of the study are contrary to the body of literature regarding Black males at PWIs. The results of the study illustrate that African American men can persist and succeed academically in an environment that serves predominately White students. Given all of the positive experiences reported in this study, racial issues still exist at PWIs and in their surrounding communities. Academic leaders at PWIs that are authentically interested in supporting and retaining students of color, but especially Black males, should acknowledge what challenges these students face and focus on mitigating those challenges, whether inside or outside of the classroom.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to inquire about the lived experiences of first-generation African American freshmen as they embarked upon their journey in higher education at a predominately White institution. Much of the existing literature concerning this population of scholars is from a deficit model. However, this study illustrates that Black males can and do have positive experiences at PWIs despite what has been researched and reported in the literature. Howard (2014) states that the narrative on Black males has not changed and that "Black males are a problem" (p.111). He goes on to say that practitioners and scholars must be explicit that there are African American males who are doing well and disrupt the message that they are all struggling to get through school (p. 112). The results of this study underscore that position; most of the participants in this study are working hard to meet their educational goal(s) and, indeed, are not necessarily struggling to do so.

In 2018, Bush and Bush suggested researchers choose a different approach to studying African American men and boys by moving away from a deficit model and narrative. They cited Tyrone C. Howard (2013), who argues that researchers who are concerned with the achievement

178

and experiences of Black males in schools should shift "how Black males are viewed, studied and understood" (Howard, 2013, pp. 62-63). Bush and Bush (2018) go on to say what is essential to this paradigm shift is for Black men and boys to be in control of their own narrative. This study did exactly that by allowing the respondents to tell their own stories and from their perspectives, and therefore shifted the narrative to achievement instead of failure.

This study advances the literature on first-generation African American male freshmen at a PWI and provides insights into accomplishments and challenges of students from their own perspectives. I approached the analysis of the raw data without any idea of what would be discovered. As I conducted the interviews, it was apparent that the five young men in this study did not have experiences like those identified in the extant literature concerning African American males at PWIs. The study participants shared positive experiences about their transition to college adjusting to campus life, their academic experiences, the support systems they have, and their social integration on campus. The negative experiences that were shared were few. Racial issues and experiences with microaggressions that were shared in this study indicate this continues to exist at PWIs and needs to be addressed by campus leaders.

Implications for Educational Leaders

This study provided insight into the lived experiences of first-generation African American males during their freshman year at a rural, mid-Atlantic PWI. The results demonstrated that given the challenges that first-generation, freshman, and Black males face on college campuses, all of the young men persisted to their sophomore year, with two of the young men performing exceptionally well. At the end of their freshman year, their GPAs ranged from 2.33 to 3.7. Two of the five study participants had GPAs in the B+ range or higher; the other three students had GPAs in the B- to C+ range. Although the students in this study fared well

179

during their freshman year, as they continued to persist during the sophomore year, all of their GPAs were lower at the end of the Fall 2019 semester. Their GPAs ranged from 1.28 to 3.41. Malik, who admitted he was unfocused and dealing with a number of personal issues, went from a 2.4 GPA to a 1.28. Xavier's GPA dropped from a 2.33 to a 2.0; he was dealing with financial issues as well as not being academically prepared for some of his art-based classes. As these students continue to persist toward degree completion, additional supports will be necessary for them to succeed.

Although most of the experiences that the students shared were positive, there were still negative incidents reported that were related to race and microaggressions that occurred on and off campus. Such issues persist on predominately White college campuses; for instance, the participants discussed racially charged rant by the White male that occurred at the beginning of the semester. Although this incident occurred off campus, the White male was a student enrolled at the University. The student was allowed to withdraw from the University before any disciplinary actions were taken against him. A campus-wide meeting took place after the incident to address the issue with the campus community. A promise was made by campus leadership that additional meetings would take place to address racial issues that occur and have an effect on the campus community. No additional meetings took place afterward.

Another example of a racial issue that occurred at the University was when a White female professor used the N-word during her lecture on American History. That type of racial insensitivity is unacceptable. The incident was probably was not reported, which would not deter the professor from repeating the egregious act in the future. Wood and Palmer (2015) suggest institutions must focus on improving campus climate so African American students, especially males feel comfortable and supported as they learn and develop (p. 9). As students of color

continue to enroll at PWIs, educational leaders must address racial issues that continue to exist on college campuses and work to eradicate them.

The similarities and uniqueness of each young man in this study demonstrates why it is imperative for educational leaders who plan programming and pedagogy specifically targeted to support African American males at PWIs to recognize that a one size fits all approach is likely to be unsuccessful. The lived experiences and voices of this population should be heard and considered in the process of curriculum and co-curricular program development.

Recommendations for Future Research

This phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences of first-generation African American male freshmen at a rural, mid-Atlantic PWI. The findings of this study indicate African American males can have positive experiences during the transition and adjustment to a PWI's campus. However, this study was limited to one institution in a rural town in a mid-Atlantic state. I recommend this study be replicated in different regions of the United States to determine if the results are similar. Replicating this study with a larger number of study participants, additional individual interviews, and multiple focus group sessions could further validate the findings of this study as well as contribute to the scholarly literature that changes the deficit approach of studying the experiences of African American men and boys to a non-deficit approach. I also recommend that the study be replicated at an urban PWI to determine if African American males in an urban setting have similar experiences.

Even though the participants in this study had a relatively uneventful freshman year, it does not mean other Black males at the University, or attending any other colleges or universities, have similar experiences. Educational leaders must be careful not to generalize the experiences of a few to an entire population. The second tenet of AAMT indicates that Black

males are not monolithic; the lives, experiences, and perceptions of Black males are unique (Bush & Bush, 2013, 2018; Wood & Palmer, 2015, p. 40). If this study is replicated, the emerging themes of this study may or may not be consistent with the themes in a replicated version of this study because of the uniqueness of African American males and their experiences.

The findings of this study illustrated contradictions to the body of literature concerning African American males in higher education. I would suggest that there are possibly generational differences between Black males who participated in studies conducted ten to 20 years ago. I concur with Wood and Palmer (2015), who suggest lived experiences of African American males should continue to be studied in detail and in different contexts (Wood & Palmer, 2015, p. 40).

The young men in this study shared very different stories of their upbringing, their educational experiences in K-12, and their experiences in their freshman year from their perspectives and in their own voices. The stories of their campus experiences underscore the importance for educational leaders to listen to students about their stories in their own voices when making decisions about programs that affect students.

Lastly, this study did not include the lived experiences of non-first-generation African American males. Although the literature suggests that non-first-generation students possess cultural capital that first-generation students do not, the students in this study persisted to sophomore status. Future research could explore the experiences of non-first-generation African American male freshmen to determine if their stories are uniquely different from first-generation Black males in their freshman year of college.

References

Aiken, J. R., Salmon, E. D., & Hanges, P. J. (2013). The origins and legacy of the civil rights act of 1964. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 28*(4), 383-399. doi:10.1007/s10869-013-9291-z

Amechi, M. H., Berhanu, J., Cox, J. M., McGuire, K. M., Morgan, D. L., Williams, C. D., & Williams, M. S. (2016). Understanding the unique needs and experiences of Black male subgroups at four-year colleges and universities. In S. R. Harper & J. L. Wood (Eds.), *Advancing Black male student success from preschool through Ph.D.* (pp. 101-124). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Anumba, E. (2015). Successfully navigating through college: Voices of African American males. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership*, 6(1), 35-56.

Appiah, A., & Gates, H. (2004). *Africana: Civil rights: An A-to-Z reference of the movement that changed America*. Philadelphia, PA: Running Press.

Barrett, C. (2016). Using mentorship to transition Black males to prosperity. In T. S. Ransaw & R. Majors (Eds.), *Closing the education achievement gaps for African American males* (pp. 109-121). East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Barnett, S., Carolan, M., & Johns, D. (2013). *Equity and excellence: African-American children's access to quality preschool*. Washington DC: National Institute for Early Education Research, White House: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED555720).

Beh, E. (2014). Fisher v. University of Texas. In M. Y. Danico (Ed.), *Asian American society: An encyclopedia* (Vol. 1, pp. 382-383). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781452281889.n122

Bell, D. (2004). *Silent covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the unfulfilled hopes for racial reform*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Bell, E. (2015). Understanding African American males' schooling experience: A qualitative inquiry. *The Qualitative Report*, *20*(8), 1260-1269.

Borough of Indiana, Indiana County, PA. (n.d.). Welcome to Indiana Borough! Retrieved April 6, 2020 from https://www.indianaboro.com/

Boskin, J. (1966). The origins of American slavery: Education as in index of early differentiation. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *35*(2), 125-133.

Brooks, M., Jones, C., & Burt, I. (2013). Are African American male undergraduate retention programs successful? An evaluation of an undergraduate African American male retention program. *Journal of African American Studies*, *17*, 206-221. doi:10.1007/s12111-012-9233-2

Brooms, D. R. (2017). *Being Black, being male on campus: Understanding and confronting Black male collegiate experiences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Brooms, D. R., Clark, J., and Smith, M. (2018). *Empowering men of color on campus: Building student community in higher education*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Brown, A. L. (2011). Pedagogies of experience: A case of the African American male teacher. *Teaching Education*, *22*(4), 363-376. doi:10.1080/10476210.2011.570748

Brown, A. L. (2012). On human kinds and role models: A critical discussion about the African-American male teacher. *Educational Studies: A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association, 48*(3), 296-315. doi:10.1080/00131946.2012.660666

Brown, F. (2010). Historically Black colleges and universities. In C. J. Russo (Ed.),

Encyclopedia of law and higher education (pp. 252-259). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412969024.n74

Brown, M. C. & Dancy, T. E. (2010). African American male collegians and the sword of Damocles: Understanding the postsecondary pendulum of progress and peril. In E.M. Zamani-Gallaher & V.C. Polite (Eds.), *The state of the African American male* (pp. 249-263). East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Brown, M. C. (2013). Slaughtering the innocents: The (mis-) education of African American males. In M. C. Brown, T. E. Dancy, II & J. E. Davis (Eds.), *Educating African American males: Contexts for consideration, possibilities for practice* (pp.159-170). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Buck, C. (2008). Plessy v. Ferguson. In R. T. Schaefer (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of race, ethnicity, and society* (pp. 1049-1051). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412963879.n429

Bush, E. C., & Bush, L. V. (2010). Calling out the elephant: An examination of African American male achievement in community colleges. *Journal of African American Males in Education, 1*(1), 40-62.

Bush, L. V., & Bush, E. C. (2013). God bless the child who got his own: Toward a comprehensive theory for African-American boys and men. *Western Journal of Black Studies, 37*(1), 1-13.

Bush, L. V., & Bush, E. C. (2018). A paradigm shift? Just because the lion is talking doesn't mean that he isn't still telling the hunter's story: African American male theory and the problematics of both deficit and nondeficit models. *Journal of African American Males in Education*, *9*(1), 1-18.

Butler, S. K., Evans, M. P., Brooks, M., Williams, C. R., & Bailey, D. F. (2013). Mentoring
African American men during their postsecondary and graduate school experiences:
Implications for the counseling profession. *Journal of Counseling and Development:
JCD, 91*(4), 419-427. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2013.00113.x

Butler-Barnes, S. T., Chavous, T. M., Hurd, N., & Varner, F. (2013). African American
adolescents' academic persistence: A strength-based approach. *Journal of Youth and
Adolescence*, *42*, 1443-1458. doi:10.1007/s10964-013-9962-0

Campbell, J. H. (2019). Djangos chained: The struggle for freedom. In T. R. Ransaw, C. P.
Gause, & R. Majors (Eds.), *The Handbook of Research on Black Males: Quantitative,
Qualitative, and Multidisciplinary* (pp. 267-279). East Lansing: Michigan State
University Press.

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of
triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum, 41*(5), 545-547. doi:
10.1188/14.ONF.545-547

Cesario, A. (2008). Brown v. Board of Education. In R. T. Schaefer (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of race,
ethnicity, and society* (pp. 211-212). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi:
10.4135/9781412963879.n88

Cheyney University, n.d. The First HBCU.
Retrieved from https://cheyney.edu/who-we-are/the-first-hbcu/

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods
approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitive inquiry and research design: Choosing among
five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Cuyjet, M. J. (2006). *African American men in college* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dancy, T. E. (2013). Sociohistorical contexts of African American male education: An analysis

of race, class, and gender. In M. C. Brown, T. E. Dancy, II & J. E. Davis (Eds.),

Educating African American males: Contexts for consideration, possibilities for practice

(pp.1-21). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Dancy, T. E., & Brown, M. C. (2008). Unintended consequences: African American male

educational attainment and collegiate perceptions after *Brown v. Board of Education*.

American Behavioral Scientist, 51(7), 984-1003. doi:10.1177/0002764207312001

Daniel, J. (2012). *Sampling essentials: Practical guidelines for making sampling choices*.

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Davis, J. E. (2013). Chapter four: Negotiating masculinity in college: African American males

and academic engagement. *Counterpoints, 383*, 53-65.

Davis, R., & Palmer, R. T. (2010). The role of postsecondary remediation for African American

students: A review of research. *The Journal of Negro Education, 79*(4), 503-520.

Eastern Michigan University, (n.d.-a). Consent form. Retrieved from

https://www.emich.edu/research/compliance/human-subjects/developing.php

Eastern Michigan University, (n.d.-b). Human subjects (IRB). Retrieved from

https://www.emich.edu/research/compliance/human-subjects/index.php

Enyia, O. K., Watkins, Y. J., & Williams, Q. (2016). Am I my brother's keeper? African

American men's health with the context of equity and policy. *American Journal of Men's*

Health, *10*(1), 73-81.

Fordham, S. & Ogbu, J. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the burden of

"acting White". In J. Ogbu (Ed.), *Minority status, oppositional culture, and schooling*

(pp. 593-627). New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

Fossey, R. (2010). Sweatt v. Painter. In C. J. Russo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of law and higher education* (pp. 445-448). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412969024.n127

Franklin Learning Center. (n.d.). FLC at a glance. Retrieved February 15, 2020, from https://flc.philasd.org/about-us/at-a-glance/

Fultz, M., & Brown, A. (2008). Historical perspectives on African American males as subjects of education policy. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *51*(7), 854-871. doi:10.1177/0002764207311994

Gooden, M. A. (2013). Exploring the property rights and liberty interests of African American males in public schools: Confronting the denial of education under the guise of maintaining order. In M.C. Brown, T. E. Dancy, II & J. E. Davis (Eds.), *Educating African American males: Contexts for consideration, possibilities for practice* (pp.89-103). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Graves, S. (2010). Are we neglecting African American males: Parental involvement differences between African American males and females during elementary school? *Journal of African American Studies, 14*(2), 263-276. doi:10.1007/s12111-008-9065-2

Harmon, D. A. & Ford, D. Y. (2010). The underachievement of African American males in K-12 education. In E.M. Zamani-Gallaher & V.C. Polite (Eds.), *The state of the African American male* (pp. 3-17). East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Harper, S. R. (2009). Niggers no more: A critical race counternarrative on Black male student achievement at predominantly White colleges and universities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 22*(6), 697-712. doi:10.1080/09518390903333889

Harper, S. R. (2014). (Re)Setting the agenda for college men of color: Lessons learned from a 15-year movement to improve Black male student success. In R. A. Williams, (Ed.), *Men of color in higher education: New foundations for developing models for success* (pp.116-143). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Harper, S. R., & Davis, C. H. F. (2012). They (don't) care about education: A counternarrative on Black male students' responses to inequitable schooling. *The Journal of Educational Foundations, 26*(1), 103-120.

Harper, S. R., Davis, R. J., Jones, D. E., McGowan, B. L., Ingram, T. N., & Platt, C. S. (2011). Race and racism in the experiences of black male resident assistants at predominantly white universities. *Journal of College Student Development, 52*(2), 180-200. doi:10.1353/csd.2011.0025

Harper, S. R., & Newman, C. B. (2016). Surprise, sensemaking, and success in the first college year: Black undergraduate men's academic adjustment experiences. *Teachers College Record*, *118(6)*, 1-30.

Harper, S. R., Patton, L. D. & Wooden, O. S. (2009). Access and equity for African American students in higher education: A critical race historical analysis of policy efforts. *The Journal of Higher Education, 80(4)*, 389-414.

Harper, S. R., & Wood, J. L. (Eds.). (2015). *Advancing Black male student success from preschool through Ph.D.* Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Harrison-Jones, L. (2007). No Child Left Behind and implications for Black students. *The Journal of Negro Education, 76*(3), 346-356.

Hausmann, L. R. M., Ye, F., Schofield, J. W., and Woods, R. L. (2009). Sense of belonging and

persistence in White and African American first-year students. *Research in Higher Education*, *50*(7), 649-669.

Haywood, J. L. & Sewell, S. (2016). Against all odds: Implications for low income African American male students seeking a college degree at a predominately White college. *Race, Gender & Class, 23*(3/4), 109-128.

Henfield, M. S. (2011). Black male adolescents navigating microaggressions in a traditionally White middle school: A qualitative study. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 39*(3), 141-155.

Herndon, M., & Hirt, J. (2004). Black students and their families: What leads to success in college. *Journal of Black Studies, 34*(4), 489-513.

Hines, E. M & Holbcom-McCoy, C. (2013). Parental characteristics, ecological factors, and the academic achievement of African American males. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *91*, 68-77.

Hotchkins, B. K. (2016). African American males navigate racial microaggressions. *Teachers College Record*, *118*, 1-13.

Hotchkins, B. K., & Dancy, T. E. (2015). Black male student leaders in predominantly White universities: Stories of power, preservation, and persistence. *Western Journal of Black Studies, 39*(1), 30-44.

Howard, L. C. (2012). The schooling of African American male students: The role of male teachers and school administrators. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *16*(4), 373-389. doi:10.1080/13603116.2011.555093

Howard, T. C. (2008). Who really cares? The disenfranchisement of African American males in

PreK-12 schools: A critical race theory perspective. *Teachers College Record, 110(5)*, 954-985.

Howard, T. C. (2013). How does it feel to be a problem? Black male students, schools, and learning in enhancing the knowledge base to disrupt deficit frameworks. *Review of Research in Education*, *37*, 54-86. doi: 10.3102/0091732X12462985

Howard, T. C. (2014). *Black male(d): Peril and promise in the education of African American males*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Howard, T. C., Douglas, T. M. O., and Warren, C. A. (2016). "What works": Recommendations on improving academic experiences and outcomes for Black males. *Teachers College Record*, *118*(6), 1-10.

Hubain, B. S., Allen, E. L., Harris, J. C., & Linder, C. (2016). Counter-stories as representations of the racialized experiences of students of color in higher education and student affairs graduate preparation programs. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 29*(7), 946-963. doi:10.1080/09518398.2016.1174894

Indiana University of Pennsylvania. (n.d.-a). About IUP: Brief history. Retrieved January 29, 2020 from https://www.iup.edu/about/iup/history/

Indiana University of Pennsylvania. (n.d.-b). Enrollment. Retrieved March 22, 2020 from https://www.iup.edu/snapshot/enrollment/

Indiana University of Pennsylvania. (n.d.-c). Promising Scholars Program. Retrieved February 16, 2020 from https://www.iup.edu/promisingscholars/

Irlbeck, E., Adams, S., Akers, C., Burris, S., & Jones, S. (2014). First-generation college students: Motivations and support systems. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, *55*(2), 154-166. doi: 10.5032/jae.2014.02154

Jackson, I., Sealey-Ruiz, Y., & Watson, W. (2014). Reciprocal love: Mentoring Black and Latino

    males through an ethos of care. *Urban Education*, *49*(4), 394-417. doi:

    10.1177/0042085913519336

Jackson, J. F. L., & Moore, J. L. (2006). African American males in education: Endangered or

    ignored? *Teachers College Record*, *108*(2), 201-205.

Jackson, N. (2017). Microaggressions. In K. Nadal (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of psychology*

    and gender (pp. 1181-1185). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi:

    10.4135/9781483384269.n393

Jenkins, T. S. (2006). MR. NIGGER: The challenges of educating Black males within American

    society. *Journal of Black Studies*, *37*(1), 127-155. doi: 10.1177/0021934704273931

Johns, D. (2016). Expanding high-quality early care and education for Black boys. In S.R.

    Harper & J.L. Wood (Eds.), *Advancing Black Male Student Success from Preschool*

    through Ph.D. (pp. 1-19). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Jonsen, K., & Jehn, K. A. (2009). Using triangulation to validate themes in qualitative studies.

    Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management, 4(2), 123-150. doi:

    10.1108/17465640910978391

Kim, E., & Hargrove, D. T. (2013). Deficient or resilient: A critical review of Black male

    academic success and persistence in higher education. *The Journal of Negro Education*,

    82(3), 300-311.

Krathwohl, D. R. (2009). *Methods of educational and social science research: The logic of*

    methods. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Kunjufu, J. (2010). *Reducing the Black male dropout rate*. Chicago: African American

    Images.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, IV, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47-68.

Lassonde, C.A. (2010). Goals 2000. In C. Kridel (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of curriculum studies* (pp. 413-413). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412958806.n222

Ledesma, M. C., & Calderón, D. (2014). Critical race theory in education: A review of past literature and a look to the future. *Qualitative Inquiry, 21*(3), 206-222. doi: 10.1177/1077800414557825

Leonard, J. (2011). Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory to understand community partnerships: A historical case study of one urban high school. *Urban Education*, *46*(5), 987-1010. doi: 10.1177/0042085911400337

Lester, S. (1999). *An introduction to phenomenological research*. Taunton UK: Stan Lester Developments. Retrieved from www.sld.demon.co.uk/resmethy.pdf

Lewis, C. W. (2006). African American male teachers in public schools: An examination of three urban school districts. *Teachers College Record, 108*(2), 224-245.

Lindsey, H. (2008). Emancipation proclamation. In R. T. Schaefer (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of race, ethnicity, and society* (Vol. 1, pp. 440-440). doi: 10.4135/9781412963879.n180

López, G. R., & Burciaga, R. (2014). The troublesome legacy of Brown v. Board of Education. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 50*(5), 796-881. doi: 10.1177/0013161X14551410

Lovett, B. L. (2015). *America's historically Black colleges & universities: A narrative history from the nineteenth century into the twenty-first century*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

Lowery-Hart, R., & Pacheco, G. (2011). Understanding the first-generation student experience in

higher education through a relational dialectic perspective. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 2011*(127), 55-68. doi:10.1002/tl.457

Lundy, G. (2005). Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka. In M. K. Asante & A. Mazama (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Black studies* (pp. 172-172). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412952538.n87

McCoy, D.L. (2014). A phenomenological approach to understanding first-generation college students' of color transitions to one "extreme" predominately White institution. *College Student Affairs Journal*, *32*(1), 155-169.

Milner, IV, H.R. (2013). A talk to teachers about Black male students. In M.C. Brown, T. E. Dancy, II, & J. E. Davis (Eds.), *Educating African American males: Contexts for consideration, possibilities for practice* (pp. 89-103). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Mindes, G. (2016). Standards-based curriculum and assessment. In D. Couchenour & J. Chrisman (Eds.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of contemporary early childhood education* (pp. 1287-1294). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781483340333.n389

Mireles, L. (2010). Trio Programs. In K. Lomotey (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of African American education* (pp. 624-627). doi: 10.4135/9781412971966.n231

National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). Digest of education statistics. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_313.10.asp?current=yes

National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). Total fall enrollment in degree-granting

postsecondary institutions, by level of enrollment, sex, attendance status, and

race/ethnicity or nonresident alien status of student: Selected years, 1976 through 2017.

Retrieved on April 7, 2020, from

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_306.10.asp

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to

meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*(1), 1-

13. doi: 10.1177/1609406917733847

Obama, B. (2014). My brother's keeper. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 23*(1), 5-8.

Oliver-Hoyo, M., & Allen, D. (2006). The use of triangulation methods in qualitative educational

research. *Journal of College Science Teaching, 35*(4), 42-47.

Owens, D., Lacey, K., Rawls, G., & Holbert-Quince, J. (2010). First-generation African

American male college students: Implications for career counselors. *The Career

Development Quarterly*, *58(4)*, 291-300.

Pabon, A. J-M., Anderson, N. S. & Kharem, H. (2011). Minding the gap: Cultivating Black

male teachers in a time of crisis in urban schools. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *80*(3),

358-367.

Padgett, R. D., Johnson, M. P., & Pascarella, E. T. (2012). First-generation undergraduate

students and the impacts of the first year of college: Additional evidence. *Journal of

College Student Development, 53*(2), 243-266. doi:10.1353/csd.2012.0032

Palmer, R. T., & Maramba, D. C. (2011). African American male achievement: Using a tenet of

critical theory to explain the African American male achievement disparity. *Education

and Urban Society*, *43*,431-450. doi:10.1177/0013124510380715

Palmer, R. T., Wood, J. L., Dancy, II, T. E., & Strayhorn, T. L. (2014). Black male collegians:

 Increasing access, retention, and persistence in higher education [Monograph]. *ASHE Higher Education Report, 40(3)*, 1-99.

Parker, L. (2015). Critical race theory in education and *Qualitative Inquiry*: What each has to offer each other now? *Qualitative Inquiry, 21(3)*, 199-205. doi: 10.1177/1077800414557828

Parker, W. M., Puig, A., Johnson, J., & Anthony, C. (2016). Black males on White campuses: Still invisible men? *College Student Affairs Journal*, *34*(3), 76-92.

Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C, & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experience and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *75*(3), 249-284.

Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research, 34*(5), 1189-1208.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Pittsburgh Public Schools. (n.d.-a). CAPA 6-12. Retrieved on February 15, 2020, from https://discoverpps.org/capa

Pittsburgh Public Schools. (n.d.-b). Obama 6-12. Retrieved on February 15, 2020, from https://discoverpps.org/obama

Ransaw, T. S., Majors, R. & Moss, M. D. C. (2016). Turning negatives into positives: Cool ways to implement successful expectation violations in Black male classrooms. In T. S. Ransaw and R. Majors (Eds.), *Closing the education achievement gaps for African American males* (pp. 123-141). East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Ream, R., & Ryan, S. (2013). Racial inequality: Achievement. In J. Ainsworth (Ed.), *Sociology*

of education: An A-to-Z guide (pp. 632-634). doi: 10.4135/9781452276151.n330

Renz, S. M., Carrington, J. M., & Badger, T. A. (2018). Two strategies for qualitative content

analysis: An intramethod approach to triangulation. *Qualitative Health Research, 28*(5),

824-831. doi:10.1177/1049732317753586

Robertson, A. W. (2010a). Freedmen's bureau. In *Encyclopedia of U.S. political history* (pp. 968-

970). Washington, DC: CQ Press. doi: 10.4135/9781608712380.n257

Robertson, A. W. (2010b). Servitude, indentured. In *Encyclopedia of U.S. political history* (pp.

324-326). Washington, DC: CQ Press. doi: 10.4135/9781608712380.n91

Rowley, L. L. & Bowman, P. J. (2009). Risk, protection, and achievement disparities among

African American males: Cross-generation theory, research, and comprehensive

intervention. *The Journal of Negro Education, (78)3*, 305-320. doi:164.76.102.52

Rowley, R. L., & Wright, D. W. (2011). No "White" child left behind: The academic

achievement gap between Black and White students. *The Journal of Negro Education,*

80(2), 93-107.

Rumple, J. (2010). Berea College v. Kentucky. In C. J. Russo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of law and*

higher education (pp. 37-40). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi:

10.4135/9781412969024.n13

Safransky, R. (2010). Morrill acts. In C. J. Russo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of law and higher*

education (pp. 318-320). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi:

10.4135/9781412969024.n89

Santrock, J. W. (Ed.). (2015). The Science of life span development. *Life-Span Development*

(pp. 43-75 (15th ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Savas, G. (2013). Understanding critical race theory as a framework in higher educational

research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *35*(4), 506-522. doi:

10.1080/01425692.2013.777211

Schram, T. H. (2006). *Conceptualizing and proposing qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River,

NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Science Leadership Academy. (n.d.). Mission and vision. Retrieved February 15, 2020, from

https://sla.philasd.org/mission-and-vision/

Scott, J. A., Taylor, K. J., & Palmer, R. T. (2013). Challenges to success in higher education: An

examination of educational challenges from the voices of college-bound black males. *The

Journal of Negro Education, 82*(3), 288-299. doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.82.3.0288

Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education

and the social sciences* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Shelton, C. (2011). Helping first-generation college students succeed. *Journal of Psychological

Issues in Organizational Culture*, *1(4)*, 63-75. doi: 10.1002/jpoc.20041

Shim, S. S., & Ryan, A. M. (2012). What do students want socially when they arrive at college?

Implications for social achievement goals for social behaviors and adjustment during the

first semester of college. *Motivation and Emotion*, *36*, 504-515. doi: 10.1007/s11031-

011-9272-3

Silverman, D., & Marvasti, A. (2008). *Doing qualitative research: A comprehensive guide*.

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Sinanan, A. (2016). The value and necessity of mentoring African American college students at

PWI's. *The Journal of Pan African Studies (Online), 9*(8), 155-166.

Smith, W. A., Allen, W. R., & Danley, L. L. (2007). "Assume the position…You fit the

description": Psychosocial experiences and racial battle fatigue among African American male college students. *American Behavioral Scientist, 51*(4), 551-578. doi:10.1177/0002764207307742

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T.J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8(1)*, 23-44.

Spurgeon, S., & Myers, J. (2010). African American males: Relationships among racial identity, college type, and wellness. *Journal of Black Studies*, *(40)4*, 527-543. doi:10.1177/0021934708315153

Starsky, J., & Williamson-Lott, J. (2012). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In J. A. Banks (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education* (Vol. 1, pp. 2179-2179). doi: 10.4135/9781452218533.n689

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: How American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *102*(6), 1178-1197. doi: 1.01037/a0027143

Stephens, N. M., Hamedani, M. G. & Destin, M. (2014). Closing the social-class achievement gap: A difference-education intervention improves first-generation students' academic performance and all students' college transition. *Psychological Science*, *25*(4), 943-953. doi: 10.1177/0956797613518349

Stinson, D. W. (2011). When the "Burden of acting White" is not a burden: School success and African American male students. *The Urban Review, 43*(1), 43-65. doi:10.1007/s11256-009-0145-y

Stiff-Williams, H. (2007) The African American achievement gap. In A. Rovai, L. Gallien, &

H. Stiff-Williams, (Eds.), *Closing the African American achievement gap in higher education* (pp. 1-19). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Thompson, G. L., & Allen, T. G. (2012). Four effects of the high-stakes testing movement on African American K-12 students. *The Journal of Negro Education, 81*(3), 218-227.

Thompson-Dorsey, D. (2010). McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. In K. Lomotey (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of African American education* (pp. 425-426). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412971966.n157

Tinto, V. (2013). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Toldson, I.A., Fry-Brown, R.L. & Sutton, R.M. (2009). 75 years after the "Mis-education of the Negro": New imperatives for the education of Black males. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *78*(3), 195-203.

Trask-Tate, A. J., & Cunningham, M. (2010). Planning ahead: The relationship among school support, parental involvement, and future academic expectations in African American adolescents. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *79*(2), 137-150.

Tucker, J. E. (1999). Tinto's model and successful college transitions. *Journal of College Student Retention*, *1*(2), 163-175.

Turner, P.E. (2015). First-year experience: Engaging and supporting millennial Black males during the first year of college. In C. Spencer Platt, D. B. Holloman, & L. W. Watson, (Eds), *Boyhood to Manhood: Deconstructing Black Masculinity through a life span continuum* (pp. 5-20). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

United States Census Bureau. (2019). White township, Indiana County, Pennsylvania; Indiana

borough, Pennsylvania. Retrieved from

https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/Whitetownshipindianacountypennsylvania,

indianaboroughpennsylvania/PST045219

United States Department of Education. (n.d.). History of the Federal TRIO Program. Retrieved

from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/triohistory.html

US News and World Report. (n.d.). Education, best high schools. Retrieved from

https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/pennsylvania/districts/pittsburgh-

school-district/pittsburgh-capa-6-12-17273

Van Patten, J. (2010). Fourteenth amendment. In C. J. Russo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of law and*

higher education (pp. 186-188). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi:

10.4135/9781412969024.n61

Wagaman, M., Obejero, R., & Gregory, J. (2018). Countering the norm, (re)authoring our lives.

International Journal of Qualitative Methods, *17*(1), 1-11. doi:

10.1177/1609406918800646

Wallace, J. M., Goodkind, S., Wallace, C. M., & Bachman, J. G. (2008). Racial, ethnic, and

gender differences in school discipline among U.S. high school students: 1991-2005.

Negro Educational Review, 59(1), 47-62.

Warren, C. A. (2016). "We learn through our struggles": Nuancing notions of urban Black male

academic preparation for postsecondary success. *Teachers College Record*, *118*(6), 1-38.

West-Olatunji, C. A., Baker, J. C. and Brooks, M. (2006). African American adolescent males:

Giving voice to their educational experiences. *Multicultural Perspectives, 8*(4), 3-9.

doi:10.1207/s15327892mcp0804_2

Whitehead, P. M. & Wright, R. (2016). Becoming a college student: An empirical

phenomenological analysis of first-generation college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 1-13. doi: 10.1080/10668926.2016.1216474

Wilson, C. M. (2009). The relation among parental factors and achievement of African American urban youth. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *78*(2), 102-113.

Wood, J. L. & Palmer, R.T. (2015). *Black men in higher education: A guide to ensuring student success*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Wyatt, S. (2009). The Brotherhood: Empowering adolescent African American males toward excellence. *Professional School Counseling, 12*(6), 463-470. doi:10.5330/PSC.n.2010-12.463

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Where did you attend high school? Tell me about your experience in regard to your academics.

2. In what ways do you think your K-12 education prepared you for college?

3. Why did you decide to attend college?

4. How would you describe your transition to the campus?

5. In regard to your academic experiences during your first year at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), describe your experiences on campus.

6. Tell me about your experiences with faculty and peers in the classroom.

7. Tell me about your experiences outside of the classroom.

8. What are your perceptions of the university environment?

9. Describe any challenges you may have experienced during your first year at IUP.

10. What support system(s) did you have during your freshman year? Family, friends, faculty, others? Describe how their support helped you during your freshman year.

11. Is there anything about your experience at the university that we have not discussed that you would like to add?

Oct 25, 2019 2:31 PM EDT

Sharon Procter

Eastern Michigan University, Leadership and Counsel

Re: Modification - UHSRC-FY18-19-296 Lived Experiences of First-Generation African American Males during their Freshmen Year at a Rural, Middle Atlantic Predominately White Institution

Dear Dr. Sharon Procter:

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for Lived Experiences of First-Generation African American Males during their Freshmen Year at a Rural, Middle Atlantic Predominately White Institution.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Contact human.subjects@emich.edu with questions and concerns.

Sincerely,

Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Project Title: The Lived Experiences of First-Generation African American Males During Their Freshman Year at a Rural, Middle Atlantic Predominately White Institution

Principal Investigator: Sharon Elizabeth Procter, Doctoral Candidate
Faculty Advisor: Theresa Saunders, Ed.D., Eastern Michigan University, Assistant Professor

Invitation to participate in research

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be male, African American/Black, a first-generation student, who completed your freshman year at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Participation in research is voluntary. Please ask any questions you have about participation in this study.

Important information about this study

- The purpose of the study is to investigate the lived experiences of first-generation African American/Black males who attended a predominately White rural, mid-Atlantic university.
- Participation in this study involves one 60 to 90-minute one-on-one interview and one one-hour focus group meeting. The interview and focus group will be audio recorded.
- The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality.
- The investigator will protect your confidentiality by assigning a pseudonym (false name), storing all documents, recordings, and transcriptions containing personal information on a password-protected computer or in a locked file cabinet in the home office of the investigator.
- Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and if you decide to participate, you can stop at any time.

What is this study about?

The purpose of the study is to learn about the lived experiences of first-generation African American males who completed their first year of college at a rural, predominately White university.

What will happen if I participate in this study?

Participation in this study involves
- Each participant will be asked to participate in one 60 to 90-minute one-on-one interview that will be recorded via a digital voice recorder.
- A 60-minute focus group that will take place on campus and will include all five study participants; the session will be recorded via a digital voice recorder.

- The investigator will transcribe the voice recordings from the individual interviews and focus groups.
- The study participants will be asked to read the transcript of only their interview for accuracy.

AUDIO RECORDING: We would like to audio record you for this study. If you are audio recorded, it will be possible to identify you through your voice. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, you may not be eligible to participate in this study.

Please note: only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to audio recordings.

What types of data will be collected?

We will collect data about your experiences on campus. Demographic data about your age, where you went to high school, and where you live during the school year may be collected.

What are the expected risks for participation?

There are no expected physical or psychological risks to participation.

The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality.

Some of the interview or focus group questions are personal and may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. If you are upset, please inform the investigator immediately.

Are there any benefits to participating?

You will not directly benefit from participating in this research.

Benefits to society: The results of the study will add to the body of research concerning the lived experiences of first-generation, African American males who attended a rural predominately White institution during their freshman year.

How will my information be kept confidential?

We plan to publish the results of this study. We will not publish any information that can identify you.

We will keep your information confidential: Your information will be stored in a password-protected computer and locked filing cabinet at the home office of the investigator. We will store your information for at least 5 years after this project ends, but we may store your information indefinitely.

We will make every effort to keep your information confidential; however, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. The principal investigator will have access to the information you provide for research purposes only. Other groups may have access to your research information for quality control or safety purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, or federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research, including the Office for Human Research Protections and the Food and Drug Administration. The University Human Subjects Review Committee reviews research for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

The investigators will ask you and the other people in the group to use only first names during the focus group/interview session. The investigators will also ask you not to tell anyone outside of the group about anything that was said during the group session. However, we cannot guarantee that everyone will keep the discussions private.

Storing study information for future use

We will store your information to study in the future. Your information will be labeled with a code and not your name. Your information will be stored in a password-protected or locked file and will be stored for a minimum of 5 years.

We may share your information with other researchers without asking for your permission, but the shared information will never contain information that could identify you. We will send your de-identified information by email and only upon request.

What are the alternatives to participation?

The alternative is not to participate.

Are there any costs to participation?

Participation will not cost you anything.

Will I be paid for participation?

For your participation in this study, you will receive a $25 gift card after the individual interview, and a $25 gift card after the focus group session.

Study contact information

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Sharon E. Procter, at sprocte1@emich.edu or by phone at 313-304-3957. You can also contact Sharon E. Procter's adviser, Dr. Theresa Saunders, at tsaunde6@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-0255.

For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, without repercussion. You may choose to leave the study at any time without repercussion. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential. You may request, in writing, that your identifiable information be destroyed. However, we cannot destroy any information that has already been published.

Statement of Consent

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I give my consent to participate in this research study.

Signatures

_____
 Name of Subject

_____   _____
Signature of Subject   Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all his/her questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

_____
Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix D: Focus Group Interview Questions

1. The research that I have done so far for my study states Black males at PWIs often face obstacles such as feeling like they don't belong, that the institution is not supportive, racial tension, and high levels of stress because of these type of obstacles. **Tell me if you had any types of these experiences during your first year at IUP.**

2. Researchers have stated that during K-12 education, and in higher education, Black students, especially Black males experience racial microaggressions. Microaggressions are defined as comments made by non-people of color that can be demeaning. Examples are: A White student or teacher asking a Black student how they got into a certain educational program; a White teacher not expecting a Black student to not perform well academically in their course; or a White person calling a Black person the N word. **Tell me if you had any types of these experiences during your first year at IUP.**

3. I've asked most of you about your support systems. According to my research, having a mentor or a male role model can have a significant positive impact on Black males. **Tell me if you had anyone as a mentor or role model during your freshman year that you felt helped to support you during your freshman year.**

4. What did you think about your experiences in the classroom?

5. What did you enjoy the most and like the least about your campus experiences during your first year at IUP?

6. Is there anything you want to add about your first year at IUP?

Appendix E: Email Invitation to Potential Study Participants

Hello,

My name is Sharon Procter and I am the Assistant Dean for Administration in the Graduate School here at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). I am also a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Counseling program at Eastern Michigan University, which is located in Ypsilanti, MI.

I'm writing to you to see if you would be interested in participating in my research study about the experiences of first-generation African American males who attended a predominately White institution (PWI) during their freshman year. A first-generation student is someone whose parents did not receive a bachelor's degree.

You're eligible to be in this study if you:

- completed your freshmen year at IUP
- are African American male,
- are considered a first-generation student,
- currently attend IUP, which is considered a rural, mid-Atlantic predominately White institution

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 45 to 60-minute one-on-one interview with me and a one-hour focus group session with 4 other participants who also attend IUP. ***For your participation in this study, you receive a $25 gift card after the individual interview, and a second $25 gift card after the focus group session.*** I would like to conduct the interviews and focus group before the end of this semester.

Before the interview takes place, you will be asked to sign a consent form which describes the study and confirms you want to participate in the study. I will audio record your interview and the focus group session, keeping your name anonymous. I then will describe your experiences at IUP in your own words. Your interview and participation in the focus group will be confidential and will not be shared with anyone.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you are willing to participate or have any questions about the study, please call or text me at (313) 304-3957 or reply to this email at sprocter@iup.edu.

Sincerely,

Sharon E. Procter
Assistant Dean for Administration
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Doctoral Candidate
Eastern Michigan University

Appendix F: Eligibility Criteria for Study

Date   _____   Study participant # _____

Name _____

Pseudonym   _____

Age   _____

(1) Do you identify yourself as an African American or Black male? Y or N

     a.   If no, how do you identify your race/ethnicity?   _____

(2) Were you a first-time freshman in college at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP)

last year? Y or N

(3) Did you complete your freshman year at of college at IUP? Y or N

(4) Did your parent(s) or guardian(s) attend college and receive a Bachelor's degree?

Y or N

(5) Did you parent(s) or guardian(s) attend college and receive an Associate's degree?

Y or N